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The best way to contact the Znine staff is by sending an email to znine@uta.edu.  
Please remember that the program is student run, so give time for students to respond.

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~ Page 2 ~
Letter from the Editor

Many submissions this season had to do with relationships.

In a sense, they each show ways we try to make a home; that's why this is "The Long Journey Home" edition.

It's with a that same forward motion that I move on to the professional world, and I hope to come back and visit the site and see more students getting their work published.

Thanks for visiting.
—Richard-Michael Manuel

Znine promotes both the literary and visual arts and provides a forum for emerging poets, writers, and artists who offer a unique perspective that stimulates the imagination and often provides insight into our world.

We publish emerging writers and artists alongside established ones. Znine offers a platform through which artists of various genres may share works of creative excellence.
Paul had always loved Friday afternoons, but this one was particularly splendid. The day had been crisp with the first hints of autumn, and all afternoon the sparrows had darted from oak to oak singing the song of the season’s change.

He now walked with a skip in his step, unknowingly infected by the energy of everything around him: the sparrows sang, and Paul skipped to their beat. He was riding high, and nothing, nothing could bring him down on a day like this one.

He couldn’t wait to tell Jonathan the news.

Looking down at his watch, Paul could see that he was running a few minutes late, so he quickened his pace. He ended up being late almost every Friday. It was a trend that he was trying unsuccessfully to break. He broke into a jog.

Five minutes later, he bounded into the coffee shop disheveled and out of breath, startling and nearly capsizing an elderly woman trying to make her way through the door. He muttered an incoherent apology and made his way to the back of the shop, where he knew Jonathan would be.

As expected, Paul found Jonathan sitting in the quiet corner where they usually met for these Friday get-togethers. The little nook wasn’t quite as cheery as the rest of the coffee house, but it was much quieter, so Jonathan was partial to it. His voice was deep and didn’t carry well. As usual, Jonathan had his nose buried in some book or other. Paul sat down and said nothing, knowing
that Jonathan would acknowledge him as soon as he was finished with the paragraph he was reading. After a few moments, Jonathan lifted his eyes to look up at Paul, but he didn't lift his head away from the book. He did that a lot.

"What's the story, mon ami?" He asked. "You look like you're having a string of orgasms right now."

Paul grinned widely. "I have something to tell you," he said. Jonathan lifted his eyebrows in a way that only he could pull off, both quizzical and amused at the same time. He put the book face-down onto the table, and reclined in his seat.

"Is that so?" He asked. "Coincidences are the currency of the day, it seems. I would like to tell you something, too—but I can tell that if I make you wait, you'll actually explode, and I really don't relish the idea of cleaning your entrails off the walls. So, stop grinning like an idiot and tell me already."
Paul didn't stop grinning like an idiot, but he did tell Jonathan the news.

"He came back to me!" In his excitement, he had almost shouted the words. Several patrons looked over in the pair's direction, but Paul was completely oblivious to the commotion he had caused.

"Sam! He came back to me," he continued tumultuously. "It's been months and months and months since we last talked, but he called me out of the blue last night and said he wanted to talk. He said that he had changed, and that he really wanted me and no one else."

Jonathan's answer was slow in coming.

"I thought we agreed," he said, "that Sam was just using you. I seem to recall your calling me to come pick you up when you went over to his house to find him in bed with that . . . whatever his name was." His voice was very quiet, barely above a whisper.

"But it was a mistake, Jon! We talked and—hey, are you okay?"

"Allergies," said Jonathan.

"Ah. Well, we talked, and everything is worked out. I'm just so happy. But anyway, I know this sounds kind of mushy, but I want to thank you for being here for me all this time. You of all people know how heartbroken I've been. You're like a big brother to me, even though you're just as young as I am."

Jonathan rubbed his eyes and noisily cleared his throat.

"I'm happy for you, Paul. I haven't seen you this alive in many a week, and it's refreshing to see you so animated again. I want you to be careful, though. Sam has hurt you once, and he might do it again."
Paul smiled. "Well, I know that if he does, you'll beat the shit out of him, right?"
"Without a doubt."
"I knew I could count on you," Paul laughed. "Anyway, I need to get going, there's a study group for my trig class tonight."

Then, a thought occurred to him. "Wait, weren't you going to tell me something?"

Jonathan sat up from his relaxed position, reached forward, and meticulously closed his book, but not before committing the page number to memory.
"I seem to have forgotten. It'll come to me later. Get going. You'll be late."
"Well, you know, I'm always late."
"True enough, but maybe you can change that on this one occasion. Shoo."

With one last smile, Paul turned away and made his way to the exit. Jonathan's eyes followed him as he walked. He sat there for about an hour after Paul had gone, sipping his latte and attempting to finish the chapter he had been reading when his friend had arrived.

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Kyle Lee is a computer science sophomore, who enjoys writing.
He plans to graduate in 2009.
“Getting Lost”
by Misty Pegue

I could get lost
in those beautiful eyes.
Sometimes, I wonder
where they could lead;
it's frightening to think
they could lead back to me.
But then I think,
getting lost
would not be so bad-
it's getting lost on the brink
of losing myself,
losing everything I previously had.
That's what I'm truly afraid of-
knowing you
in knowing me
and what were both made of.
I don't ever want to get lost
and never resurface.
Revealing my true self
would be hard for me,
an overwhelming purpose.
And yet, still, it comes to me
every now and then:
if I never allow myself to get lost,
I'll never know the joy
of being found again.
And so, I feel
I must decide
to let go and lose everything
or hold on and find nothing.
But until I choose
and really know why,
I'll find comfort in the thought
that I could get lost
in those beautiful eyes.
“The Souls of Black Folk”
by Misty Pegue

The souls of Black folk
dancing in the wind,
singing songs of hardship-
songs that never end:
"I can't reach the stars.
I can't climb mountains.
I can't be somebody.
I can't try again."
The souls of Black folk
walking, head up high,
singing songs of courage-
"O' Black and proud am I.
I am the brightest star.
I make mountains move.
I am somebody.
I have the right to choose."
From out the depths
with mercy we spoke,
from present and from past,
the souls of all Black folk.
“Times Have Changed”
by Misty Pegue

Times have changed, people say.
All Black folks are free today.
They can work and make a living
and be thankful on Thanksgiving.
They can smile and they can laugh
and still remember slavery's past.
They can choose an education
to better their lives and situations.
Times have changed, that is true,
but freedom is still an unsolved issue.
Although we're free, we're still in chains.
Let's thank God for the progress we've made.
Living in the present, we let the past rest.
Overcoming slavery was a spiritual test.
Ignoring the past doesn't make it disappear,
but reliving it only makes it harder to bear.
Times have changed and people, too-
let's change as well and broaden our views.
We're no longer slaves, but not completely free,
yet let's not give in to the slave mentality.

Misty Pegue graduated summa cum laude in Journalism. She is a McNair Scholar
and is now seeking graduate school.
Naptime
by Melissa Patton

Ten tiny fingertips grip the sheets
he pulls himself up
with a labored “hmmmph.”
Red cheeks prove
face and tummy did all the work
A triumphant smile
pink tongue poking through freshly-cut teeth
he surveys his Everest.
Proud and amazed...as only a toddler can be.
Innocently pompous
He jumps for a while
Ouch... I’m not a pillow, Wild Child!
He laughs like only I can make him laugh.
I’m glad we’re alone,
so I can swallow it whole.
Sweaty feet slap my legs and he giggles.
I grab at his ankles in mid-air
Breathless squeals close my left eye when
I finally catch one.
A gaunt elbow to the hip bone
reminds me of our purpose
here in Mom and Dad’s big bed
Alright, munchkin. Naptime!
No, Sissa, he says
chocolate milk and French fries
heavy on his breath
He settles in protest.
Fleshy lips suck at nothing,
mourning the pacifier he fed to the dog last week
BAD DOG he screams at Daisy
anytime she’s in view.
Sharing a pillow
black curls on white linen
the sweetness makes me hum
Lazy fingers skim my mouth
I bite one salty digit with lip-covered teeth
He’s been wearing his olives again, I think!
Funny kid.
One more giggle
that shatters into drops of sunshine
coloring my world as we fall asleep.

__________________________

UTA graduate Melissa Patton received a Bachelor’s degree
in English with a minor in writing.
Her poetry, flash fiction and essays have been accepted for publication in Crush, The
Rose and Thorn, Woman’s Corner Magazine and Expressions. She teaches
developmental writing at Cedar Valley College.
swing low
By Kristen Durham

striving never ceases
always climbing, reaching
for the next sharp rock
to grip, to pull me up
another inch further,
another inch closer
to that snow-capped summit

if you get there before I do
comin’ for to carry me home

endless bursts of grass
and burrs to snag me,
slow me down until
the tired pulses of my shoulders
crack like ice-split boulders
and tumble

swing low, sweet chariot
comin’ for to carry me home

trees no longer grow
in this forgotten place
and wild winds dig deeper
while still I reach,
while still I climb

a band of angels comin’ after me
comin’ for to carry me home
the end is cold and bare
grey stone piercing the breast
of an even greyer sky
   I'm sometimes up and sometimes down
   comin' for to carry me home
   but still my soul feels heavenly bound
   comin' for to carry me home

and from here, the valley's low
sky high yet still so low
   swing low, sweet chariot
   swing low
   swing low

"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" lyrics
composed by Harry Thacker Burleigh

Kristen Durham has a wonderfully lyric style and rounds out our winners. She will graduate in the spring with a Bachelors of Arts in English. Kristen has written poetry since she was young. Several of her poems have received awards and been published.
The Law of Fantasy
An Interview with Julia S. Mandala
by Richard-Michael Manuel

Plano writer Julia S. Mandala says fantasy and science fiction writing are her penance for her years as a lawyer.

She received a B.A. in History from Kansas State University and a law degree from Tulane University.

Her eclectic hobbies include scuba diving, middle-eastern dance, costuming and music. Her stories are equally diverse.

Her chapbooks, Four Redheads of the Apocalypse, co-authored with Linda Donahue, Dusty Rainbolt and Rhonda Eudaly, and Dracula's Lawyer, are available from Yard Dog Press. "Bubba's A Broad" appears in YDP's International House of Bubbas.

Her other short stories have appeared in The Mammoth Book of Comic Fantasy II, MZB's Fantasy Magazine and Adventures of Sword & Sorcery.

Richard-Michael Manuel: Well, I'm glad to get a chance to pick your brain about writing for a bit. What's been going on with you in this past year?

Julia S. Mandala: This year has been pretty exciting. I co-authored a chapbook (a novella-length publication) with Linda Donahue, Dusty Rainbolt and Rhonda Eudaly entitled Four Redheads of the Apocalypse, published by Yard Dog Press. Now a famous fantasy author has...
decided to option the film rights. He plans to write a screenplay and try to market it to Hollywood. It could turn into nothing, or it could be made into a movie, which would be very cool. It's been a real morale boost for all of us.

I also had a short story appear in YDP's new anthology International House of Bubbas, third in a series of humor anthologies about a future where only bubbas and zombies survive. I also sold a story to the next anthology, Houston, We've Got Bubbas, which should come out around May or June. Mostly, though, I've spent this year editing two novels, an epic fantasy that got a little too epic, and a humorous fantasy, co-authored with Linda Donahue, which had quietly grown during revisions from 100,000 words to 139,000 words. Since we were pretty sure no editor would even look at a 139,000 word light humorous fantasy, we decided to see what could come out of the manuscript and were quite amazed at how much could go without being missed.

I think self-editing is the hardest skill a writer can learn, but it's becoming more and more essential. Editors and even agents have less and less time to do major edits, and are thus less willing to. If you don't learn to do it yourself, you're just handing the editor or agent another reason to reject you.

RMM: What's that meant to your family life? How's your husband taking it?

JSM: My husband has always been very supportive of my writing. He's excited about the sales, and of course about the possibility of
Four Redheads becoming a movie. He also is reading the revised novels, both to see that the revisions read smoothly and to offer ideas.

I don't have kids, and the cats actually like it when I sit at the computer and write. The only dispute they have is who gets to sleep in my lap while I'm working.

**RMM:** What do you think is the next step for you artistically?

**JSM:** Once I get these books sent to publishers for consideration, I will start another. I'm still waffling on what I'll write about, but I have a couple of months to decide while I'll finish revisions on both books. When an unagented book goes to a large SF/Fantasy publishing house, it can easily sit there for years. So you can't wait around to hear whether someone wants to buy it before you start another one, or you'll write very few books.

I tried to get an agent for both novels, but it's pretty hard to get a quality agent these days. Many publishing houses will now only look at agented submissions (unless you get to know an editor and he invites you to send your manuscript). That has moved the "slush pile" to the agent's desk. Most agents require you to send a query letter before sending the manuscript, and they're getting a lot more selective about what projects they are willing to look at, let alone represent.

**RMM:** I know that you work with a writer's group—I just joined it last spring and sorry for missing the holiday party. Where did you get the idea to work in a group, for writing?
**JSM:** Linda Donahue, Kathy Turski and Chris Donahue started the group. Linda and Kathy had been taking a Science Fiction writing workshop, and I think the instructor suggested writing groups—I'm not sure. Anyway, I just got lucky—very lucky. Linda saw one of my stories in Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine and saw in my bio that I lived in the Dallas area. She sent me a letter inviting me to join the group.

**RMM:** Would you say that the group has had any affect on your success?

**JSM:** Most definitely. They keep me motivated to write, especially when I'm working on a novel.

    I try to hand out a chapter at every meeting, which keeps me working. We meet every three weeks, so it's not an unreasonable goal. In fact, I try to get ahead, partly so I can start revisions while the group finishes critiquing the book and partly in case something comes up and I can't write for a while—I have chronic fatigue syndrome and sometimes the flesh is weak and the brain is foggy.

    The group is also helpful in pointing out logic flaws in my plots, character inconsistencies and sometimes just adding a cool new idea that I didn't think of. We're all happy to throw out ideas for others to use. It's a big help, because even if you don't use that particular idea, sometimes it sparks another idea that fits better with your story concept.

    The moral support and camaraderie is also a huge help. Writing is a solitary experience for the most part. Also, with the market being this frustrating, it's good to have a place to vent.
RMM: Is there anything that you think contributes to the effectiveness of a group that anyone interested in forming a group should watch out for?

JSM: First, I think you ought to have a definition of what the group will critique. It's very difficult to have a group that's just open to "writing." A person who writes only mysteries will not be able to critique a fantasy story as well as someone who writes—and/or reads—fantasy.

The reverse is, of course, true. Each genre of fiction has its own tropes, requirements and expectations. Also, the readers of each type of fiction already know certain things that you don't have to explain to them, but a non-reader of the genre will want those things explained in detail. This can cause the writer to receive bad advice.

Sometimes you can easily tell when advice is bad, but sometimes it's harder. Also, you hate to make someone spend that much time critiquing on an issue, only to be told that readers in the genre expect this or understand it.

Size is another important factor—yes, size matters. When we had about eight people in the group, we had to limit all critiques to 15 minutes. And the writer didn't get to respond or ask any questions until the end. The larger the group, the more formal your rules have to be.

At one time our group was down to four writers; I wouldn't get any smaller, if you can help it. We got very free-form then. We kind of go page by page, with everyone throwing out their comments, and the author can ask questions if he or she is confused. Sometimes, if the story has a major issue, we stop and brainstorm how to fix it. This has been very satisfying, but obviously wouldn't work with a larger group.
It's important to teach the group constructive criticism skills. It's no help to the writer to say, "this character is stupid." It's much better to say, "this character is acting stupid by going off alone when he knows there's a psychotic killer on the loose."

Finally, you want to find people who are dedicated to writing and are willing to make the commitment both to submit work to the group and to do a thorough critique.

Most writers don't realize how much they will improve their own writing by critiquing others' works. Many times I have been raking someone over the coals—constructively, of course—only to realize I do the same thing in my own work.

The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America has some good guidelines for critiquing groups on their public Web site.

RMM: I know different artists have something about their work that stands out. Is there anything about your style that you think makes your voice, yours alone?

JSM: I'm a big believer in humor, even in non-humorous stories. People like characters with a sense of humor, and it's reasonable to believe most characters would have a sense of humor. In a story full of dire situations, it's easy to forget to have your characters laugh now and again. Yet most of us find a way to laugh at dire things in our lives, if only as release of fear or stress.

Richard-Michael Manuel is a journalism senior, who minors in Communication Technology and English. He is currently Znine editor-in-chief.