

**Zahir – Unforgettable Tales, Issue 21**

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February 2010

Web Address: <http://www.zahirtales.com>

What they Publish: Fiction, art

Submission Guidelines: They accept simultaneous submissions but would like notification if the piece is accepted elsewhere. They will consider reprints if the author retains the rights. They do not accept multiple submissions. Submission is accepted through their online submission form but there is a \$2.50 fee. There is no fee by mail. Short Fiction is up to 6,000 words in length. Send a query letter if longer.

Description of Publication: An online literary journal that publishes three times a year. They accept speculative fiction, literary stories including but not limited to science fiction, magical realism, and surrealism. The Web site is neatly organized and has a clean aesthetic. The individual fiction pages feature an author bio and picture. They market their journal through Facebook, Amazon, Newpages.com and are a member of the CLMP. They nominate stories they publish for the Pushcart Prize and the Shirley Jackson Award.

Prose Per Issue/ Amount of Published Annually: Issue 21 contained five short stories and art from a featured artist.

Prose Reviews:

*The Blind Man Dreamed of a Vestibule* by Sarah Cornwell is a plainspoken, third person narrative set in a fantastical, but domestic setting. A blind man dreams of an entrance hall that conjures the look and feel of the Indian Ocean. He tells a friend about this dream and his friend recommends a decorator. The decorator reads through National Geographic magazines, investigates books at the library, and the constructions last for a week. The blind man invites his friends over and they say it reminds them of a lagoon at camp, the Caribbean on a honeymoon. The blind man has another dream about a room like a jungle. The greatest architects in the world converge to bring his dreams to life. When it's completed, friends, artists and writers say it is primal and Faustian. The blind man has more dreams and the house is transformed to reflect each of them. People continue to pour in to admire his home, but he always feels lonely after they leave. One day a blind woman who is a sculptor named Maria comes over. He has a dream about a room made for love and looks like the Taj Mahal. He and Maria marry in this room. The blind man stops having his dreams. He tries meditation and hypnotists to bring them back. One day while sleeping by Maria's kiln he has a dream about a little boy. He builds a nursery, they have a son, and he ceases to dream.

This piece works like a simple fairy tale. Concrete sensory details become the point of the story. "A room that is red and black like a tiger. A fireplace with flames that leap to the ceiling. Chairs and tables with claws and fur. I dreamed a jungle floor and bats among high rafters." What propels the story forward is the reader's desire to see what he will build next. The central conflict is not readily apparent, but does present itself in the beginning, "He woke alone at three a.m. with vision crackling in his skull and he wished there were a body beside him to shake awake." And perhaps the fact that the blind man wants to "see" his dreams comes to fruition but cannot truly see them adds another layer of conflict. The blind man takes solace from other people's testimonials, which demonstrate Cornwell's command of language, "It is like Joseph Conrad. It is beautiful and terrible, it is adventure."

*The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter* by Trent Hergenrader is a plainspoken, realistic narrative set at the tip of North Ronaldsay Island at the far end of the Orkneys in a lighthouse. The narrator, a 13-year-old girl named

Murel, tells about her thin and tender mother whom she hasn't seen since she was six. Her father is a mountain of a man who tends to the lighthouse on the island who never has time for a daughter. She reminisces taking trips with her father and mother into town to restock supplies, but realizes now people stared at her reclusive father and mad mother. Her father never left the mother alone at the lighthouse. Her mother takes her swimming out into the sea and sings in a language she has never heard and talks about her distant home. One day the lighthouse runs out of oil and he has to leave them to tend to the lighthouse. He makes the mother promise not to move anything in the house while he is gone. As soon as he leaves, Muriel's mother asks Muriel to help her find a shiny coat. They cannot find it before the father returns and when he does the light has gone out. While Muriel's father is berating her mother Muriel finds the coat. She gives it to her mother and her mother says she must go to a place where little girls cannot go, but will return when the time is right. Muriel goes about her life and is very lonely. When she is thirteen she gets her first period while in school. Her teacher takes pity on her and suggests that they run away together to a nearby University. He kisses her on the cheek. Muriel runs home and considers his suggestion. Her father tells her how much she looks like her mother. The lighthouse catches on fire and Muriel finds slender wet footsteps leading into the house. She then finds a coat that is just like her mother's but her size. She goes into the water holding the coat. Her hand feels warm in dry inside of it.

This story also has a fairytale feel. Even though it never directly says it is about mermaids, it seems to be about mermaids. The setting is lusciously realized with dreamy, vivid concrete sensory details, "A thick mist surrounded our peninsula so completely that we could hear the sea lapping against the rocks but could not see it." Hergenrader keeps the action thumping along by giving us a narrator who wants to know exactly what the reader wants to know: Who is her mother and where did she come from? The island and story is steeped in mystery. There are real flashes of eloquence, "The years plodded along like my footfalls on the muddy strip that links the two ends of the island." This reader would have appreciated Hergenrader to just come out and say Muriel's mom was a mermaid in the end.

Rating: #7 - This is very good publication. It is adapting to the changing market by shifting to online publication, but only time will tell how successful they are in this adjustment. They are good at promoting the actual journal and promoting the writers they accept by entering them into various contests, which is a huge plus. They accept an array of writers, as long as the writing is original. It is a very organized publication. This is a great option for emerging writers.