



**Magazine Report
By Patrick Trahey
December 2009**

Table of Contents

Fact Sheet	3
Why I Chose Opium Magazine	4
Comparison of Issues Over Time	5
Prose Reviews	6
Interview with Founding Editor Todd Zuniga	10

Fact Sheet**Online and Bound Journal:** Opium Magazine**Web Address:** opiummagazine.com**Address:**

Opium Magazine

586 Dean St.

Brooklyn, NY 11238

Slogan: An infinite state of total Wonder.**Founded:** First appeared online in 2001 and in print in 2005.**Founder and Editor:** Todd Zuniga.**Frequency:** Biannual print publication. Opium publishes 6 or 7 seven stories a month online, varying greatly from month to month.**What They Publish:** Fiction and poetry online. Fiction, poetry, novel excerpts and comic strips in print. Most stories have a humorous slant, but not all.**Submission Guidelines:** Opium uses an online submission management system to accept submissions for both their print and online versions. Submissions for the online publication must be 1,000 words or fewer, while submissions for the print journal must be 4,000 words or fewer.**Simultaneous Submissions:** Yes.**Contributor Payment:** Currently non-paying, but according to Opium's Web site, "We are working to change that."**Reporting Time:** Online – three weeks to three months. Print – up to six months.**Reading Period:** Always accepting submissions.**CLMP:** Yes.

Why I Chose *Opium Magazine*

I was scrounging through literary magazines in Women and Children First bookstore, and I thought most of them were ugly. Most of the literary magazines had boring, uninspired cover art. Opium's Infinity issue was exactly the opposite. It's a plain matte black with Opium's logo on it. It looked slick. On closer inspection, it appeared to have different types of ink. There were rectangles on the cover that were a slightly different shade of black. I didn't notice it at first, but when I did, I grabbed the magazine and opened it up.

The first page explained that the cover had a story, covered in ink that would degrade in UV light. Opium provides estimated reading times for all its stories. This story has an estimated reading time of 1,000 years.

The magazine is gorgeous aesthetically, but it was the stories that sealed the deal. The quirky, off-beat nature of Opium extends into its writing. The stories are whimsical, irreverent, and terse. Some Opium stories are a bit too experimental for my taste, but even in the stories that I don't mesh with, I still have a good laugh. Opium is well written, well edited, funny, and beautiful. What more could you ask for?

Issue Comparison

	Opium Vol. 7	Opium Vol. 8	Opium Vol. 9
(Genre) Prose: Poetry: Comic/Art: Novel/Drama Excerpt: Other*	17:3:1: 2:7	20:8:5:0:9	30:3:11:0:4
(POV) 1 st : 3 rd : 1 st plural	9:7:1	13:4:2:***	14****:14:2
(Length) < 5min: 5 – 10min: > 10 min	10:5:2	15:1:4	17:1:12
(Publishing Credits) Novel or Book: Magazine or Other: First Time or Not Specified	5**: 9:2	8**: 11:0	11:11:7:*****

*Other includes interviews, advice, quotes, contests, notes from Opium, and e-zine archives

** Some contributors have two stories

***One story appears in the form of a recipe

**** One story appears in a Q&A interview form

*****One story is a collaboration of several different people designed to resemble an actual film, not a script

As you may be able to tell from the graph, Opium does a little bit of everything. Stories are their bread and butter, but they always have a ton of cartoons, comics, poetry, artwork, and plenty of other great stuff to boot. Opium occasionally runs a novel excerpt, but that is rare. There was a memoir written in the form of a recipe which is something between third person and second person. There were plenty of experimental pieces: such as a story in the form of an interview, a few letter forms, and some first person plural stories. I considered weeding some of this stuff out to make the graph clearer, but the cluttered graph matches Opium’s aesthetic and philosophy.

The fact that Opium provides an estimated reading time for all of their work allowed me to categorize the story by reading time. These issues tend to sway towards the short short stories, mainly because of the contests. Opium 7 has the Seven Line contest, Opium 8 has the 500 Word Memoir contest, and Opium 9 has the 250 Word Bookmark contest. These contests tip the scales, but if not for them, the balance of short short stories to long short stories is much more even.

Opium seems to favor experienced writers over emerging writers. Some of the contributors that I marked as “First Time” had credits in other media, such as film or video games. While these aren’t literature, they are narrative-based media, so the contributors’ craft may be more honed than an emerging writer. The spike in emerging writers in Opium 9 is largely a result of the 250 Word Bookmark contest. Most of the writers who won the contests in Opium 7 and Opium 8 had a few literary magazine credits, but the Opium 9 contest seemed to bring in more emerging writers than the others.

fOpium has a consistent balance between first person and third person narratives. Opium 8 differs from the trend because of the 500 Word Memoir contest, which tips the scale with eight first person narratives.

Prose Reviews

Opium 7 (2008)

Viva la Revolution by Anne R. Allen is plainspoken first person narrative. The unnamed narrator is a valley girl who inadvertently starts a militia. The narrator's best friend Desiree's mom is arrested unjustly for drunk driving, even though she was sober. She gets two years in prison. The narrator and Desiree go online and post comments all over Facebook and MySpace, and soon all of L.A. is talking about it, and a "flash mob" forms. They're all pissed because normal people get such harsh jail time, while celebrities get to go "in and out of the slammer like it's Taco Bell." A bunch of guys from South Central show up with AK-47's, and the mob busts out the women held in the detention. A "wannabe rapper" named RobbeR takes over the mob by posting orders on YouTube. Things get out of control when RobbeR sets up a guillotine in a local mall and starts executing celebrities. The narrator and Desiree get tired of RobbeR's barbarism after he decapitates Brad Pitt, so they confront him at the mall. RobbeR gets killed, and the narrator realizes that the mob thing is "so last week," so she decides to call Arnold and possibly trade L.A. for San Francisco or New York.

It's important to note that the story opens with the line, "I knew we'd jumped the shark when we killed Brangelina," because otherwise the drastic plot shift would be jarring. This also sets up the denouement later on when we see Brad and Angelina get killed. This story is carried by the voice of the narrator, and the humor comes from the violence juxtaposed with the moronic valley girl dialect, such as in the line, "Angelina – maybe she deserved something because she stole Brad from that girl on *Friends* with the hair – but she also saved babies in Africastan." The story is fast paced, giving little in the way of physical description of character or setting, but enough is built into the action to see these events clearly. The only description the reader gets of the narrator is "I wish they hadn't got Julia Roberts, because people tell me I look like her when I laugh." It's not much, but it gives an image that seems natural to the narrator, and it doesn't slow down the action at all.

The Somewhat True Story of a Tree by Kristina Moriconi is a realistic, third person short story with an objective narrator. After Peter and Jane finalize their divorce, Peter marries a "pear-shaped" woman named Mary Jo. They buy three dachshunds and decide to raise them instead of children. Peter and Jane had two daughters, Izzy and Rachel. Jane has custody of the girls, but on the weekends they visit their father, where the dachshunds are treated like people, and the girls are treated like dogs. The girls tell their mother of the mistreatment. Jane fantasizes about killing her ex-husband, but instead vents her frustration by carving letters into a tree in her backyard. One weekend, while the girls are with Jane, Peter's house burns down, killing his prized dachshunds. Jane remembers what she carved into the tree, and runs outside to verify. It reads, "What goes around comes, around. What goes around..." Jane considers chopping the tree down, but decides that might be bad for her karma.

The ending is a bit abrupt at first, because Peter's house burning down seems too convenient, too easy, but it makes sense because of the title. When the reader sees Jane carving letters into the tree in a blind rage, we wonder what she's doing, and when the revelation that the house burned down because of negative karma, the ending doesn't seem jarring or abrasive. Like most *Opium* stories, this one has very little physical description, but since the domestic setting is so familiar, it hardly seems necessary. Mary Jo is described as pear shaped, and that's about it, but since she is so abrasive, she is the only one who truly needs some description.

Opium 8: The Infinity Issue (2009)

Crossing Styx by Peter Gadjics is a plainspoken memoir, and the winner of Opium's 500 Word Memoir Contest. As a boy, the narrator was molested by a "fat, balding man with a bloated, purplish nose." He never tells his parents, and lives with the shame. As the narrator reaches puberty, he realizes that he is attracted to men, and fears that it is a direct result of his molestation. His parents reject him, and he seeks therapy to "revert to my innate heterosexuality." The narrator uses drugs designed for insomnia, and when those don't work, his therapist recommends that he keep his feces in a small vial and smell them every time he finds a man attractive. These "therapies" take their toll on the narrator, and he finds himself with a choice, not between being gay or straight, but between accepting himself or death.

This story is far from the usual comedy that drew me into Opium, yet the writing is such a high caliber that it belongs. The story has no dialogue, and no physical description, but it doesn't need any. The author did a marvelous job of dealing with the constraints of Opium's contest to tell a story that could merit an entire book. The sentences are long, sometimes only two to a paragraph, but the narrator never gets bogged down in useless detail, so every word hits home. Everything is said directly, as in "If the tiny bottle did anything, it reminded me of how often I thought of men." The subject matter and tone may not seem to fit with Opium's aesthetic, but the quality of writing and the terse style certainly do.

Unt Not Invent System by Jessy Randall is a piece of flash fiction told in the first person. The narrator, Unt, has "four wives: cook-wife, clean-wife, bed-wife, talk-wife." He was given his wives by the "system." But Unt is only interested in his cook-wife, and wants to make her into his bed-wife. Unt complains to the "authority group," but he is reprimanded, and upset that he is not in charge. "Authority group say, I always been this way, it stay this way, man have four wives, no change." Unt thinks that cook-wife loves him, but since she is not allowed to talk, he can only tell by the fact that she hugged him once and the look in her eyes. The authority group is too strong, so Unt asks cook-wife to run away with him, but there is no where to go because "No place for true love like what Unt feel. It hopeless."

This story is hilarious. Classic Opium. Terse. Direct. Nothing superfluous. I can imagine some people being turned off by it, because it has no details, but I found it too funny to not love. Unt speaks like a caveman, yet there's some kind of "system" and an "authority group," which gives the sense that this is some kind of dystopian world. My only complaint is that I want more. It left me wondering about Unt's society, but that's a different story. If the story was told in third person, it might be some tale of a harsh reality, and it certainly wouldn't be quick and hilarious. It makes sense that Unt doesn't dwell on physical description or setting, because that would be out of character. This story is first person, although we never see "I" or "me," and the short, direct sentences add to the caveman sounding voice. Unt needs to tell this story, because all the humor comes from his voice. Lines like, "Cook-wife hug Unt. That happiest day Unt's life," or "Unt say, give wives to someone else, Gant or Fint!" had me rolling on the floor, and I wouldn't want it any other way.

Tony of Seattle City by E. Loic Leuschner is first person piece of science fiction, told in the letter form. The Imperial Navy of Pulonius Snortipus has taken over Earth with its "dope and cherished star-faring vessels." The custom of all Pulonian warriors upon conquest of another planet is to send a letter to a child of the conquered species,

which is translated by a “translation algorithm.” Rhiydpus has scanned Tony’s “living quarters,” and sees that his walls are decorated with fighter planes, and becomes attached to Tony because he is “quite a war enthusiast!” He regales Tony with stories of the Pulonians conquest of species that are “losers.” It is the Pulonians manifest destiny to conquer, and it is a direct result of their evolution. They evolved from “horny” Proto-Pulonians, who ravaged rival clans with their razor sharp horns. Rhiydpus assures Tony that humanity will benefit from its conquest, like the Native Americans benefitted from European conquest. He implores Tony – and the human race – to move on, because the Pulonians do not want to change Earth customs or values, only Earth’s allegiance. He ends his letter by saying, “I want you to know that you, and your people, are valuable. Be proud. Your pal, Rhiydpus.”

The letter form and Rhiydpus’s voice are what make this story work. The letter creates a direct sense of audience for Rhiydpus to tell the Pulonians’ story. Rhiydpus is telling this directly to Tony, but the tradition of the Pulonians gives the letter a broader scope – to all of humanity. It’s a ridiculous premise for a letter, but the Pulonians seem just odd enough for it be plausible. Leuschner highlights the Pulonians’ eccentric warrior society by describing their poetry and their evolution. These details make the story believable. The voice makes the story funny. Rhiydpus’s grandiose language, juxtaposed with his translation algorithm’s poor translations creates a classic voice. As in the line “Had your planet been sufficiently advanced, militarily or economically, you may have been able to stave off defeat for awhile. But the truth of the matter is that you suck.”

What’s This Life For? by Melinda Hill is realistic, first person piece of flash fiction. The unnamed narrator asked the question, “What’s this life for?” The answer is the band Creed. The narrator played the role of “crying motel girl” in Creed’s video of *What’s This Life For?*, in which she was imbued by Creed’s lead singer with the power to attend a Creed concert. Years later, the narrator has realized her dreams of becoming a stand-up comedian. She had a near death experience while touring Asia, almost dying in a plane crash from 30,000 feet. The narrator was scared that if she died, she would be remembered by the last thing she had written, which was “a blog post about going to a strip club,” but then she remembered her one triumphant artistic venture, playing the “crying motel girl” in the Creed video.

This story, like most Opium stories, is pretty hilarious, but it has some moments that are jarring, and ending doesn’t seem to fit. The story is jarring because of awkward transitions, like when the narrator asks the members of Creed, “Sooo... They’ve been playing your song all day. Are you guy’s sick of it yet?” This conversation transitions to another conversation that she had with a garage rocker that she was dating. The section about her ex-boyfriend does nothing for the plot, and is only there for a quick joke. After the section about the ex, the narrator begins the next paragraph with, “Years later...” Not only is this jarring, but it’s a revelation that would have been better suited for the beginning of the story. The ending doesn’t make sense either, because the narrator is concerned that she will not leave a legacy after her death, but she states clearly that she is a successful comedian. Although I’ve ripped this story up a bit, it does have some hilarious lines, and great dialogue. But if weren’t for those laughs, I couldn’t have finished this story.

Interview with Founding Editor Todd Zuniga

Todd Zuniga is the founding editor of Opium Magazine and co-creator of Opium's Literary Death Match. His short stories have been nominated for the Puschart Prize, and he also writes a sports video game blog for IUP.com.

Patrick Trahey: In an interview for the Gothamist back in 2006 you admitted that you've never tried an illicit drug, despite the title of your literary magazine, but pledged to throw a wild drug party at the age of sixty five. Can I come to that party?

Todd Zuniga: Yes. Absolutely. Only thirteen people emailed to be at that party. But yes, you can be the fourteenth.

PT: Opium Magazine has been going strong since 2001, but how did it get started?

TZ: I don't know if we've been going strong the whole eight and half years. We're going to turn nine on February fifth of 2010. When we started Opium, it was basically me and Cedric Stines (Opium's Submissions Manager) drawing on cocktail napkins in some dive bar in Wicker Park (Chicago). He kept saying "Let's do this and let's do that," but I just said, "Nah. We're not going to do any of that. We're just going to publish a story a day," because that seemed manageable. And I think that was always the key. The biggest thing about how Opium is run is that I've always made sure that I can manage it on my own. I just learned how to manage it as I went along. Now I lean on tons of people for a bunch of stuff, but when the shit goes down I know that I can pull off what we do on my own.

PT: So you figured out how to run a literary magazine on the fly?

TZ: Basically. For example, I had never done an HTML site. I didn't know how to create a Web site. There were a lot of things at Opium that I didn't know how to do, so I learned by doing it, as opposed to getting a hold of somebody who knows more than I do. Eventually I started getting other people who knew more than me to do the Web site. Right now I think we're in the second worst iteration of the site, but that will hopefully change in the next year as we get non-profit status. Philosophically the site is fine right now, but it's not good enough for what we're doing now, because we're doing so many different things.

PT: According to your interview with the Gothamist, the friends who helped you found the magazine have all died of "herpes complications," but you're still doing your thing. How have you done it? And how has Opium become so successful?

TZ: We've been successful just by being excited about what we do. There's this term, "Creative Destruction," it's a methods term. The idea is that you create new things, and if they don't work you quit using them. If you create new things and they're better than the old things, you get rid of the old thing. You keep progressing. That's been a big part of Opium. We've tried a lot of different things. We're about to get back on the daily online wagon. We're a print magazine that comes out twice a year. We're a monthly event series (Opium's Literary Death Matches) in New York, and around the world. We have our contests: the 500 word memoir contest, the seven line story contest, and the 250 word Book Mark contest; and those rotate. And we have the estimated reading times on all of our published work. If you take all of those things that I just said and mix them up, that's Opium. It's a way to define us through what we do. We're about to launch an iTunes channel for Opium Live, and we're launching an iPhone application as well.

If you think we're successful it's just because we have a ton of enthusiasm. Our editors have a ton of enthusiasm, but mostly it's the writers. We have a lot of reverence for the people who have contributed. I think ultimately that's why we are where we are. We like people, and we like reading their work. We don't pay anybody yet, which is despicable, but when we become a non-profit we'll start getting grants, and we'll pay our writers.

PT: You said that the Web site is in its second worst iteration. What do you mean by that? If anything can be said about your Web site, it's that the site is beautiful.

TZ: One thing that Opium has always been strong with is our aesthetic. I'm very focused on that. The true back-story of that is that when I was in high school, I noticed that people would tag themselves. The "weird" people would wear an eyebrow ring, or black lipstick. People do these things to define themselves. I always tried to dress somewhere in the middle. Typically I'll wear a tie and a suit jacket, but I'll wear tennis shoes and jeans just to throw it off a bit. But I'm still trying to do things that are presentable, because you don't want people to dismiss you right away. Aesthetically it has always been big for us at Opium to deliver on that. Give people no excuse to dislike it right away. Once they read it and start getting involved in our events they get really excited. I don't see any reason to throw ourselves in their face, like if we said, "We wear black lip stick. This is the kind of magazine that we are." We're a lot more subtle than that.

In regards to the Web site, this our fourth design of the site. Our third design was the best because we had a cartoon and a story everyday, plus we had a space for notes. And now, that main page is for our story content, so you don't see the Literary Death Matches on that main page unless we sacrifice story space for it. You can't see our feeds or anything else that's going on. The thing that kills me is that about six months, I realized that on the right hand side, we have links like news, archives, submit, and the last one was print. The reason it was print was because of the print magazine, but it hit me after a year and a half that that could mean to anyone else "print," as in print the page. What a fuck up! In our next iteration of the site we'll have the magazine cover, or the latest issue, a story that showcases what Opium is all about. You learn things like that as you go along.

PT: Well having a great aesthetic certainly helps. The cover of *Opium 8: The Infinity Issue* is really what caught my eye.

TZ: Yeah that one sort of reset everything for us. That was a gold mine. We sold out completely in the first twenty-nine days of the issue versus what usually takes us five months to sell out. That gave us so much headway in terms of exposure. It tripled our subscription. The funny thing about that was we didn't know how we were going to publish it. We didn't have enough money. We weren't a non-profit. I thought the cover would be really expensive to print, so I waited on that idea for about three months without getting back to the artist. Finally I just said, "Fuck it. Let's do it! I'll figure out a way to pay for it." It ended up being a huge success for us.

PT: How do you normally pay for your projects?

TZ: Opium has always been paid for by me. I went through an LLC (limited liability corporation) once, and I had a girlfriend who had a lot of money at one time. There have been times when we couldn't get from point A to point B because of money, but when you don't have money it forces you to be creative. That's been a huge part of Opium. I don't care how much money we have, we have to be goofy, and creative, and fun because that's what's going to inspire people to like us.

PT: Opium accepts submission through an online submission manager. Why did you choose that system? And how does it affect how you read your submissions?

TZ: The reason we chose that is because the people who designed the site fell off the map, and they didn't finish our submission system. They tried to do something really ambitious, without knowing what was necessary from an editorial standpoint. The system we have is now through the CLMP (Council of Literary Presses and Magazines). That system has the backing of people involved in the editorial process, which is what makes it great. We went with the CLMP system because it cost \$350, and we had spent \$8,000 on our failed system, thanks to my rich girlfriend. We had spent \$8,000 and didn't have a system that worked, so again we got creative, and after some frustration we went with the CLMP system.

It was only \$350, and what it gives us is the ability to pass submissions along very easily. I have submissions assigned to readers, and every once in awhile I'll jump in and read stories for a day, just because it's fun. I always love that slush pile. It's like trying to mine for gold. It just gives a lot of flexibility in terms of tracking submissions, who's reading them and who's supposed to be reading them, and that's really valuable for us because we've gotten so much bigger and so much busier. We still want to make sure we're reading and giving people personal feedback.

PT: So on a day where you don't visit the slush pile, how many readers does a story see before it hits your desk?

TZ: One. I have a pretty simple system. If it's good enough, send it up to me. I'm very editorially involved. I make the final decisions. For the online site I have two people run that independently of me, and I always say that if there's anything that's just jaw-droppingly amazing, send it up to me even if they're submitting it for the Web site, because then we'll consider it for our print magazine. I know that the Paris Review has two people read every story, and if there's a split decision in terms of rejecting a story or pushing it up the ladder, then they'll have a third person read it. I think that's interesting, and we might eventually move to that system, but for now I like the system we have.

PT: Do you get the final decision on everything?

TZ: Every once in a while Dave Barringer (Opium's Executive Editor) makes the final decision. The reason he gets to make decisions is because he knows Opium so well. He knows the aesthetic. I trust him. Sometimes he'll say, "Hey, I want to accept this story," and I won't even read them. It's fun for me, because when the magazine comes out I'm glad we included those stories. I know I should probably read everything before it's released, but I trust Dave.

PT: What are your criteria for rejecting a piece? What are some tell-tale signs of a story that isn't working, or just doesn't belong in Opium?

TZ: I love this question. Basically, I don't give a fuck about what's in the room, and I don't care what's on the wall. I want something that's immediate and active. It's frustrating for me when people think they have to set a scene, because they don't. I'm very much in the Elmore Leonard school of writing, which is start in the middle, start in the middle of a scene, and let people figure it out. You have to have something that pops. You have to have something that immediately excites you. Stories like that fit with our philosophy. That's why we have our estimated reading times. We want literature to be back on the pop culture map, alongside TV and film, so we want stories that are really exciting and well written. We want stories that are narratively intelligent, but that opening bit means a lot. A lot of stories I don't even need to read past the first paragraph, or I don't need to read past the first few sentences. One thing I'll advise all writers to do, when you finish writing your story, consider cutting the first paragraph. I find

that as a writer it's something I can never pull myself to do, but a lot of time I find it gets rid of a lot of exposition that you don't need. Be to the point. Dialogue is great, but if you use dialogue, your characters should actually be saying something. Punctuation is fantastic. I'm a big fan of punctuation. If anyone has bad punctuation I automatically dismiss them. It's rare that I wouldn't dismiss poor punctuation, because I assume that if you're not careful in that aspect, then you won't be careful with language in your story.

PT: On the flipside of that coin, what types of stories do you absolutely love to see in your inbox?

TZ: What I want to see is just great, huge, things! One thing I really love is when writers take huge narrative jumps in time. One thing is happening, and then all of a sudden its three days later, its ten days later. I just want something that's exciting, that just sweeps me through. *21 Grams* is an example of a movie that I really love because it's not chronological, but I don't think that would work as a short story, or even a book. That's something that's risk taking, but as you move through the story you're connecting dots and you're excited by things. I love things that are funny, but not jokey, because generally jokey isn't funny. Silliness and absurdity, I'm a big fan of those. Satirical is good. Things with pop! You feel after the first sentence like you're on a waterslide and you can't off. Fast paced, tele-visual style writing. Richard Price said a really interesting thing about his book, *Lush Life*. One scene is in a police station, and someone asked him why he doesn't mention anything about the police station, and he said, "Come on. We all know what a police station looks like." We've all seen *Hill Street Blues* and *The Wire*. Over the years we've been exposed to TV and movies, so we know there's a cup of coffee and a dude eating doughnuts. So why say that? Just get on with it. I think that's a really valuable bit of advice.

The big thing for Opium is just take risks. A lot of times we get stories where something super crazy is happening, because writers think they need an idea that's completely insane to engage the reader, and that is fun sometimes, but for the most part the risk taking just means do something different. Read and do something different. A lot of times, especially when I was younger, I would read something and I would want to challenge that. I think short fiction is a huge conversation. Someone writes a short story, and I write a short story which is basically a response to that, and it's this back and forth. It's like a long conversation. I think that's something writers should take to heart. Find a story that inspires you, and write around that.

PT: You've mentioned your estimated reading times a few times. Where did that come from? And why is it important?

TZ: I thought it would be funny. I thought about it the night we decided to create the magazine. It was just me being silly, but ultimately it made a statement. Basically it's acknowledging that there's all this competition. There's TV to watch, there's long walks to be had, so where do you fit literature into all of it? To me it was a joke. It was me saying, "Haha. I'm aware that you have better things to do with your time." We don't want you to waste your time, so we're only going to ask this much of you. It really worked out. It sets the tone. It's like an immediate joke, but it does have some resonance.

I think it helps people read. The idea is that if you read a thirty second story, then maybe you'll read a ten second poem, then maybe you'll move onto a three minute story, and then you'll read a five minute story. We have some stories on our Web site that are twenty one minutes or twenty eight minute reading times. The goal is to spur people through those shorter stories along the way to the longer stories, and let them know, yes, you're being taken care of.

Our editorial division is crisp, and there's reason to be reading these stories. And when you get to twenty-eight minutes you're like, "Oh shit. That was a cool fucking read."

PT: That goes along with your whole philosophy. You said in your interview with *The Gothamist* that *Opium Magazine* should be viewed as entertainment, compared to television, film, music, and video games, rather than being thought of alongside literary journals. Why the distinction?

TZ: It's really just a competition for time. Nowadays, your email is just as important. That's a time-suck. There are so many time-sucks. Going to work is a time-suck. So when you finally have time to be entertained, what are you going to choose? That's why *Opium* is the way it is, because we want to be chosen. Ultimately we want people to be reading. It's just so dumb to be competing against another literary magazine that sells 10,000 copies or 4,000 copies.

PT: You're the head honcho at *Opium*, you coordinate *Opium's* Literary Death Matches around the world, and you write for *1UP.com*. Do you ever take a break?

TZ: Before starting the non-profit process, I would do an issue, and then have a two-month break. Then I would jump into the next issue. The death matches became the thing I latched onto that I thought could generate money for us. I love traveling, and I have friends all over the world. I have friends in Paris, and Beijing, and I'm driving to Portland right now.

It's getting really tough this year, because I wrote a book last summer while I was staying in France. I wrote a book in a month. That one's nonfiction. I have a novel going through my agent, and I'm about to start writing a new novel. I'm taking off December and January to give myself that creative freedom. The magazine is fine, and we're working on the non-profit thing right now. I can lean on other people to handle that for a little while.

PT: Please share some words of wisdom with emerging writers.

TZ: Always write. Always keep writing. Writers look back and they see stories that are no longer good, but the more you write, the less and less that happens. The story you just wrote is so much better than your last story, and it's so much worse than your next story. Just have fun with it. Just keep writing. There will be a point where all the stories are good.

Be patient. I know we live in era where we see everything is such a hurried rush. People feel like the written word is going extinct, or that no one is buying books, but that's bull crap. People who are going to compete and push into the next generation are people who understand that the written word will never die.

Don't be in any hurry to submit. Keep editing the story. When the story is ready, don't be afraid to submit. Be patient when submitting. When you get rejected, take the story and fix it.

And be nice to your editors. We hate jerks. Be nice.