



Paradox

The Magazine of Historical and Speculative Fiction



**A Print Magazine Report
by Kit Pleasant
May 2009**

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Fact Sheet

Magazine: "Paradox"

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What They Publish: Short stories of historical and speculative fiction, as well as science fiction, fantasy and horror with historical themes. Fiction can be up to 15,000 words in length, but 2,000 to 9,000 is preferred. Nonfiction pieces (all of which must pertain to history or historical literary analysis) must be 4,000 words or fewer.

Awards: "Years Best Collection" 2007, "Years Best Fantasy and Horror" 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, "Years Best Science Fiction" 2006, 2004, "Sidewise Award For Alternate History" 2006

CLMP: No.

Submission Guidelines: Mail a hard copy of your piece in standard manuscript format to the given P.O. Box. Providing a self addressed stamped envelope is required to receive a response. Currently, there are no guidelines or addresses for e-submissions.

Simultaneous Submissions: No.

Contributor Payment: 3 to 5 cents per word.

Description of Publication: Contributors are generally not well-known, but almost always have previous experience publishing short fiction and novels. Issues are published seasonally, at a rate of about four per year.

Prose per Issue/Amount published annually: About six stories per issue, so approximately 24 stories annually.

Why I Chose Paradox

I'm a big history buff. I am, in fact, the buy-and-subsequently-read-Western-Civilization-textbooks-for-fun sort of history buff that high school teachers love and everybody else shoots funny looks. So, when I saw *Paradox* at Quimby's bookstore and noticed how the subtitle touted it as a magazine of historical and speculative fiction, I started salivating. *Paradox* is the first literary magazine I have come across that gives historical fiction top billing. When, after reading only three issues, I found well-written examples of 3 out of 4 of my favorite history subjects, I knew that this was the perfect magazine for me.

Comparison of Issues

Twenty-two Stories Examined

	Issue 5 Summer 2004	Issue 6 Winter 04-05	Issue 7 Summer 2005	Final Count
POV: 1 st :2 nd :3 rd :	2:0:5	2:0:6	2:0:5:	6:0:16
Writers: Experienced: Emerging	4:3	6:2	6:1	16:6

In the three issues that I read, the number of experienced contributors is, on average, much higher than the number of emerging writers.

One thing that is interesting about the fiction contributions is the clear preference of third person fiction. Out of 22 stories, a mere 6 were written in first person, and absolutely none were written in second. Perhaps third person lends itself better to works of historical and speculative fiction? I suppose it would take a certain level of audacity to write a story from the POV of any historical figure.

Story Reviews

Issue 5, Summer 2004

1923 by C. Kevin Barret is a plainspoken story in a domestic setting, told by an objective third person narrator. In the year 1923, a young Adolf Hitler and his friend Hans are eating dinner at a beer hall in Munich when two separate assassins attempt to kill him. With an air of what could almost be considered boredom, Hitler easily outwits both of his would-be killers, and thinks back on the events of his life. For as long as he can remember, there have always been strangers trying to assassinate him, so many that foiling their plans has become second-nature to the young man. Though the author presents the year 1923 as the present day, he insinuates that people from the future have been traveling backwards in time in an attempt to kill Hitler before his rise to power. He also suggests that these assassins--many of which are Jewish--are the reason Hitler eventually created the "Final Solution" that led to the extermination of millions of European Jews.

This story was short, to the point, and--unlike many efforts at time-travel fiction--never over-the-top. What strikes me most is the author's utilization of research. An informed reader will be able to recognize that the date and location of the story, a beer hall in 1923 Munich, suggest that we are getting a glimpse of one of the last days before Hitler's infamous "Beer Hall Putsch." It was this kind of attention to detail that made *1923* a very enjoyable read.

Issue 6, Winter '04-'05

The Three Truths by Adam Stemple is a plainspoken story set in the historical setting of feudal Japan. Ken'ichi, the narrator, was once personal valet to the late Samurai, Takawara Shichiro. Ken'ichi recounts a morning when his master awoke to find a decapitated corpse lying in his bed. Upon further investigation, Ken'ichi and Takawara learn that the corpse was the wife of Lord Yoshimune, a powerful *Daimyo* that Takawara serves. Takawara confronts Yoshimune, who admits that he murdered his wife and commanded the Head of the Censors to leave her body in any bed in the village. Takawara, aware of the fact that Yoshimune will be killed if the truth is revealed, resolves to commit *seppuku* in order to protect his Lord. Ken'ichi does not want his master to die, and in the course of a single night, enacts a conniving plan that convinces local law enforcement that the Head of the Censors is the real murderer.

Stemple does a great job of portraying what it means to be a Samurai in feudal Japan. What I really like about this story is that the author has taken time not only to do the necessary research, but also to develop characters that actually feel like they belong in this setting.

Isandhlwana at Dawn by Clyde E. Miller is a plainspoken story told in an exotic setting by an objective third person narrator. Mazimba is a seventeen year old Zulu warrior who is traveling to Isandhlwana to fight something that the Zulu call *Mchawi*, the "forever warrior" who has never been defeated by any Zulu. When, at

dawn, the “forever warrior” arrives out of the west with a weapon that Mazimba cannot recognize, readers begin to understand that *Mchawi* is actually nothing more than a British soldier with a gun. Mazimba is killed by the “forever warrior” but, as a short historical anecdote following the story explains, the skills they learn while being pitted against the British in fights will eventually lead to the Zulu becoming the most feared warriors in all of Africa.

I really liked how this story was able to maintain Mazimba’s naivety as to British weaponry without making him seem ignorant or moronic. There is only one line of dialogue in this story, “*Si-gi di...death!*” which the British soldier says to Mazimba as he kills him. Most stories would suffer from this lack of dialogue, but Miller knows that for this particular piece, one line is all there needs to be; anything else would strain the story’s grasp on reality, as it would be unlikely that Mazimba and the “forever warrior” would know one another’s language.

Issue 7- Summer 2005

The Tiger Fortune Princess by Eugie Foster is a fantastic story set in a domestic setting told in the objective third person. During her birth, a resentful soothsayer who has been insulted by the Empress puts a curse on Wen-Xiu, a Chinese Princess. She is cursed to die before she marries, thus killing her own father through heartbreak. Wen-Xiu’s mother, the Empress, attempts to avert this curse by hiding the soothsayer’s terrible fortune inside a jade tiger locket. The locket finds its way into the wedge of an apple, which is then plucked out of a river by a passing prince. The prince uses the locket to locate Wen-Xiu. The two fall in love and get married.

Foster is very good at subtly working in beliefs and imagery representative of this era of Chinese history. She describes “lucky, red fish swimming in sparkling waters and the perfect tranquility of white clouds floating in the azure sky” with a sense of poetry in her language that is evocative of Chinese art. It is clear that she has done her research in writing this story. That alone is enough for me to appreciate it.

Interview with Editor Christopher M. Cevasco

Kit Pleasant: Paradox magazine is dedicated to publishing works of historical and speculative fiction. Do you have any personal tastes within the confines of these guidelines?

Christopher Cevasco: I suppose my personal bias is reflected in the sort of fiction I read for pleasure, novels, mostly. On the historical side of things, the stuff I enjoy the most tends to be set in the Middle Ages, particularly the early period in Britain, and late Roman Empire settings, again, particularly Roman-occupied Britain. I also enjoy reading about the pre-Columbian Americas; Gary Jennings' *Aztec* is fantastic. As for speculative fiction, I definitely have a strong bias for epic fantasy over other forms of fantasy or science fiction. I also very much enjoy dark fantasy and supernatural horror.

KP: Do you allow this bias to affect which stories are accepted?

CC: I try not to let any of this impact which stories are accepted for the magazine. Not everyone shares my precise tastes, so I just focus on finding compelling, well-written tales. The wider the range of historical settings, the better.

KP: Many of the writers published in your magazine have also been published elsewhere. Does this affect your decision-making process, or are all manuscripts treated equally regardless of the writer's qualifications?

CC: All manuscripts are treated equally. Along with having published works by more established writers, I've also published several writers who were making their first fiction sale to me.

KP: Paradox's Web site has excerpts of many of the short stories found in your magazine, but you have chosen not to publish any full-length fiction online. What is the reasoning behind this?

CC: The excerpts act as teasers, which I hope will encourage people to buy the magazine to read the full-length tales.

KP: So, we shouldn't expect any online issues from *Paradox*?

CC: Back in early 2004, I toyed with the idea of publishing a yearly online issue of the magazine, but I didn't find it as satisfying as publishing a print edition. I think the main reason I've shied away from publishing any full-length fiction online is that I personally don't like reading stories online. I much prefer reading from the printed page.

KP: Do you feel that there's more pressure on emerging writers to create a really good story as opposed to more established writers?

CC: I do think this is true generally. More established writers might be given the benefit of the doubt when an editor is reading his/her submission, so the editor might be willing to stick with a story by an established writer a bit longer, read a bit farther through the manuscript before deciding against it (or realizing it gets better halfway through).

Ultimately, regardless of the credentials of the writer, the story must stand or fall on its own. I think I speak

for most editors when I say I'd much rather publish an amazing story by an unknown writer than a mediocre one by a big name.

KP: When you choose to accept a manuscript for publication, does a lot of work go into communicating with the writer about revisions, or are most pieces published as is?

CC: I've never published a manuscript as is—there's always at least a certain amount of editing to do, even if it's only fixing grammar and spelling, breaking up paragraphs, etc. Sometimes this can be minimal. But as often as not, more intensive edits are warranted—changes of wording, deleting unnecessary passages, etc. When these sorts of edits need to be very substantial, I have sometimes asked a writer to undertake a directed rewrite and resubmit the work. Other times I will make changes myself, sometimes after running ideas back and forth with the writer as the case warrants. But in all cases, even when the only changes amount to minor formatting, I send a galley proof of the edited piece to the writer for his/her final approval before going to print.

KP: What should all writers know before submitting a piece to a magazine?

CC: All writers should be sure to follow the posted submission guidelines of a particular magazine before submitting. Different magazines will have slightly different requirements, and it's starting off with one strike against you if you ignore those guidelines when submitting.

KP: How about your magazine in particular?

CC: A writer submitting to *Paradox* needs to be sure the piece being submitted actually has some real-world historical (or mythological) context. You'd be amazed how many people send me stories that are entirely inappropriate for the magazine—futuristic science fiction, contemporary mysteries, etc.

KP: Have you ever been selecting pieces for your next issue and found that you were blessed with a surplus of really exceptional submissions?

CC: This has happened to me often. Sometimes it is possible to hold a piece or two over to be published in the next issue, but if there is already a backlog of pieces being held and I am faced with a surplus of exceptional submissions, the narrowing down process is really very hard to define.

KP: What does a story need to have to make it through this process?

CC: Usually, it just comes down to which story grabs me more, which one resonates or lingers in my mind more than the others. Also, it often comes down to having a balanced issue- if I've already accepted a Roman piece, I will be more likely to turn down a second or third, even if it's exceptional, in favor of other subject matter. I will say it is very important to have a strong opening to a story. Stories that meander aimlessly before getting to the heart of the story and the place of conflict are more likely to lose my interest (just as they would for a reader of the magazine).

KP: Is there anything a writer can do to make their submission stand out from the rest?

CC: Really, it's only the strength of the writing that will make a submission stand out. Anything else that makes it stand out is usually something negative: failure to follow proper manuscript format, putting too much information in the cover letter, forgetting to enclose a SASE for a reply, or one of my biggest pet peeves: the dreaded piece of cardboard in the submission envelope to keep the manuscript from getting bent. Apart from the fact that paper is meant to bend, any time a writer does that, it means the envelope won't fit in my PO Box, and I have to wait in line at the post office (sometimes for an hour or more) to retrieve it. My mood after such an experience is probably not the one the writer was hoping for when he/she sent me the story.

KP: What advice do you have for emerging writers?

CC: It's cliché but true- just keep at it. Don't let rejection letters discourage you. Sometimes a piece that is totally wrong for one editor is totally right for another, and it's just a matter of being persistent enough for the stars to align. My advice would be to pick out the next place you want to submit a story even before you've heard back from the market to which you've already sent it. That way, if and when the rejection comes, you are ready to send the story right back out again that same day before depression or inertia can stop you from doing so.

KP: Paradox has been around for about six years now. What is it about your publication that has inspired you to keep pursuing it?

CC: From the start, it's been a labor of love. It's helped, along the way, that the magazine has received generally good reviews, that it has been nominated for and won some awards, that subscribers will write to me and tell me what they like about each issue... These make it easier to keep plugging away. Even without any of that, I think I would have kept it going for the past six years simply because I enjoy finding the stories, putting together the issues, and sending them out into the world.

KP: Any big plans for the future of Paradox?

CC: In the future, I envision Paradox Publications focusing more on book anthologies with historical themes. Perhaps this format will eventually even replace the magazine altogether.