

# **Specter** **+** **Literary** **Magazine**

Magazine Report

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## Fact Sheet

**About:** "Specter publishes literature, art, and photography from emerging and experienced artists alike. Launched with inclusion in mind, Specter is open to all forms, styles, and genres from all creative individuals, regardless of race, gender, sexual identity, etc. Specter was 99.99% built & promoted via social media. We continue to utilize various networks, from our [Facebook page](#) to our [Twitter account](#), to our [Tumblr](#). Please feel free to like us, follow us, and re-blog us."

**Web Address:** <http://spectermagazine.com>

**Founded:** July 2011

**Founder/Editor-in-Chief:** Mensah Demary

**Frequency:** Monthly

**Average Number of Published Pieces Annually:** 190

**What They Publish:** Poetry, fiction, nonfiction, art, photography

**Submission Guidelines:** Previously-unpublished work must be submitted via Submittable. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable. Manuscript should be formatted in Times New Roman, 12-point font, and double-spaced. Submissions must be between 50 and 3,000 words. Allows up to 5 poetry submissions with each poem filling a single document.

**Cost:** Free

**Description of website:** Sleek, minimal and easy to navigate, Specter Magazine's Web site is refreshingly organized. With years of archived work, Specter creates a plethora of prose that are accessible, logical, and crisp.

## Why I Chose Specter

For a long time I was searching for a market that captured the aura of '90s "boom-bap" hip-hop music. Artists like *A Tribe Called Quest* and *De La Sol* have influenced my writing and I knew that this same era could have influenced many other writers.

In Google Search, I simply typed: hip-hop literary magazines. One of the first results listed was a blog, Blackadelic Pop, a blog that specializes in "Black thought, hip Fiction, and pop culture" listed Specter's hip-hop issue as #10 of favorable magazines. After browsing around on the Specter site and thoroughly reading their prose and poetry, I knew that they had the vibe I was looking for. The hip-hop issue was especially hip, geared towards readers who enjoy the culture's style. Very specific types of images were published, ones that seemed to be heavily influenced by graffiti artists and Jean Michel Basquiat. Completely sold with the musically themed issue, I navigated to the archives to find another passion of mine: clean, well-organized, minimalism—what isn't there to like?

### Issue Comparison

	September '12	October '12	November '12
<b>Emerging: Established</b>	0:11	1:3	2:3
<b>M: F</b>	6:5	1:1	2:3
<b>Prose: Poetry: Art</b>	1:1:3	3:2:1	2:2:1
<b>(Prose Only) POV 1<sup>st</sup>: 2<sup>nd</sup>: 3<sup>rd</sup> Person</b>	1:0:1	2:1:1	1:0:3

*\*Each ratio is reduced to its lowest common factor; ratios should be looked at individually.*

Specter has increasingly made an effort to publish emerging writers. It can be deduced, from this data, that as the magazine became established, they began to publish writers that were unknown. In this data set, I considered emerging writers to be writers that have not had any previous work published.

The male to female ratio is balanced. Although the layout of the website could be considered masculine, the content and material are published equally.

Specter is a magazine that prides itself in publishing “all styles, all forms, all genres” and it seems that they do just that. Art, which was considered as prose poetry (poetry written in prose instead of using verse but preserving poetic qualities such as heightened imagery and emotional effects), photography, and drawings/paintings, were published just as often as the prose and poetry. In some issues, in fact, there was more art and poetry than prose.

And finally, Specter typically publishes work that is either in first or third person. This is not shocking since most writers choose to write in these points-of-view. It was refreshing, however, to see a second person POV published in the October 2012 issue. Specter is clearly willing to publish any point-of-view that a writer is willing to submit.

## Prose Reviews

*November '13*

*The Girl Who Was Allergic to Paper* by David Burr Gerrard is a plainspoken, realistic story told in a domestic setting. The first person narrator starts the piece with explaining how he first met Leah Dean, a neighborhood girl that is allergic to paper. He remembers the time Leah stops coming to school because the kids tease her about the HAZMAT suit that she has to wear. He remembers the adults of the neighborhood thinking that Mrs. Dean was fabricating the seriousness of Leah's condition but his mother still feared that if he went over to Leah's house, he could be contaminated with what she had. Fifteen years have passed and the narrator runs into Leah on the streets of Brooklyn. New technology, like apps and kindles, allow Leah to function normally in the world. At the end of their brief meeting the narrator speculates the final days of the paper book and how what he puts on paper will never reach Leah.

From the beginning the stakes and interest in this story are high. How can a girl with such a rare condition survive in a world filled with paper? Gerrard tackles not only a captivating fictional piece but also the direction in which the writing industry is going. He uses language that is powerful and hard-hitting, "Certainly, Leah was being punished, if not by her mother then by a God who expressed his power through heavy books and the destruction of women." Gerrard also uses strong imagery when describing the night of Leah's accident; it proves the severity of Leah's condition and contrasts with the disbelief of the neighborhood.

*June '12*

*For Skinny Girls Who Considered Cornbread When Their Thickness Isn't Enough* by Tatiana Richards Hanebutte is a plainspoken, realistic story told in a domestic setting. The second person narrator transforms the reader into the subculture of the skinny black girl. Typically, as expressed in this narrative, black people pride in women with "curves [that] snake for miles like the Amazon River." You are constantly compared to your cousins who are full-figured and heavily desired. Strangers tell you that you need to eat cornbread, your mother doesn't press the issue, and grandmother hands you a pack of uncooked hammocks and encourages you to mix them in with your collard greens, a vegetable that you have never bought or cooked on your own. Coincidentally, that night you

go to the club. Women walk around in sparkly spandex so tight that the stretchy fabric shows the “quivers” of their thighs and breasts. Even though your skinny jeans hug your size zero frame without a single jiggle, you dance to “Baby Got Back” accepting that you will always be a skinny girl.

The voice in this piece was phenomenal. Not only was she relatable she justified the reasons why she loves her own body type. The direct address not only pulled the writer in, but also delineated her life fully. We understood why being skinny affected her, we could feel the comparison between her and her cousin’s, we knew exactly why the narrator had brought this topic up. It was relieving to read that at the end, the narrator accepted her body type even though it was constantly ridiculed. I was afraid that the narrator would try to take on the image of her more desirable counterparts, but no. In the end, she finds peace with her slim figure.

*Land of Thousand Rappers: Protagonists* by Michael Kaufmann is a poetic, experimental piece told in a domestic setting. The narrator, who seems to be writing a letter to “the then, the now, and not-yet rappers,” explains how everything he does is elevated, pushing him forward to be a future rapper, something that is “uncatalogable” but is recognized in the spheres, or hip hop ciphers, as a prophetic title. The audience knows that this rapper is different from the rest because he “gestates, mutates, and [bores] himself anew” with every rhyme or song he muses. Because he has transcended the expectations of not only music, but also his words, his lyrics produce a novelization of his song. He says that his voice is filled of many others, “an army of one,” that progresses forward without any acknowledgement of time, because time decreases the ego. Finally, the narrator explains how his transcendence has led him to be a true artist, “a non-rapper, or rather, all-rapper”

This narrative, at first glance, is troubling and convoluted. But once you allow yourself to fall into the rhythm of the words, you can very well feel and understand what the narrator is speaking of. Addressing other contemporary rappers and possible rappers who are to take the spotlight in the near future, the narrator reminisces on his own process of creating a rhyme that transcends into other forms. The sophisticated language and beating rhythm pull you into a droning song. Like reciting the ABC’s when you first learn that letters exist, this prose piece carries a tune that can help with memorization.

*October ‘11*

*Cutting* by John Luciano is a plainspoken, realistic story that is told in a domestic setting. The first person narrator writes a series of deaths that have not had much effect. He thinks about Brian Clark, a boy he sat next to in

his high school Calculus class that has passed from a heroin overdose in a hotel room. His fiancé tells the narrator it was an open casket and how Brian looked. She tells him that Brian's Mohawk had been shaved, his piercings removed, his skin shone blue under the caked foundation that was thickly applied to his skin. His fiancée tells him that Brian was also in a suit. The narrator thinks, "I never saw him in a suit," but later says that it doesn't matter because they were not friends. The narrator then moves on to remember a college friend that has also passed away from shooting himself in the head. Peter had visited the narrator's dorm room and had been ranting about how he was the answer. The narrator remembers how he politely agreed with Peter when he said that human breeding should have regulations, that recycling should be strictly enforced because of its net worth, and that humans only had thirty years left on earth. The narrator didn't disprove Peter's platforms because he realized that he didn't have the right to—they weren't really friends. Realizing that these losses are not strong enough to move him, the narrator fantasizes about his fiancée dying from pancreatic cancer. He imagines the funeral, how everyone acts as if they are religious and his fiancée, who never followed any Catholic tradition, would be let into Heaven. He imagines himself cutting because he is too afraid to kill himself. He then imagines himself cutting, an action that he gave up when he met his fiancée but since her death, has taken up again. The narrator snaps out of his daydream and watches his fiancée read a novel on their bed. He begs the reader to never show this document to his fiancée.

The feeling of this piece comes across explicitly through the varied diction and syntax. The narrator goes on long reveries that imply that escapism is his only hope of finding happiness. Even though death has surrounded him all his life, none of it has touched him in a way that he feels will change his life. This piece speculates the realness of imagination and what if's. It's only when he imagines his fiancé dying slowly does he feel anything, and even then he thinks of punishing himself for that behavior. The content of this piece is heavy, it explores existential questions that the narrator is not able to answer himself, so much like him, the audience is left imagining and falling deeper into his thoughts.



**Interview with Senior Fiction Editor: Rion Scott**  
*Conducted December 2013*

Ulisa Blakely: How did *Specter Magazine* come to be?

Rion Scott: The Editor-in-Chief, Mensah Demary, founded it with his, then, wife. I knew Mensah through the PANK Magazine blog where we both wrote columns. There was mutual respect. I loved a lot of what he was doing and I noticed on Twitter that he was musing about starting a literary magazine. I submitted a story for the preview issue. I had a flash in the publication after that and Mensah approached me to edit a Hip-Hop issue and that was another story. When the Fiction Editor position opened up, Mensah approached me, again, and I came on board.

UB: Do you think social media has helped Specter reach a broader audience within the writing community?

RS: Mensah, at times, has been incredible at building a community through Twitter. I met many of the writers who have become part of my network through Mensah and his efforts to establish Specter. In a lot of ways Specter is a publication built by Twitter.

UB: The narrator in *The Girl Who Was Allergic To Paper* describes how technology has allowed Leah to read— it's become accessible to her. How do you feel about technology and the direction it's taking literature?

RS: I'd much rather read literature on paper than on screen. Though I am aware that Specter probably wouldn't exist without our society's widespread access. Most of my published stories were published on the net and more people read those than if the Internet weren't the dominant force it is. I've found many authors I would have probably missed if it weren't for the Internet. I don't know if I would have ever discovered Alex Prutneau, Amber Sparks, Mensah Eemary, or other writers, who have touched me, without the Internet.

UB: Have you noticed any trends in submissions?

RS: I've noticed we're getting a lot of speculative work, which I like. Also, it feels like the quality of our slush[pile] is getting much better, which makes the process of accepting and rejecting much more difficult

UB: How do you pick the pieces published in *Specter*? What elements stand out the most – concept, voice, plot development, language, etc?

RS: I like absurdity because the world always feels so damn absurd, more so now that the Internet is constantly reporting on things that would have been hidden years ago. The world feels science-fictional. Yesterday I was watching George Jetson talk to his co-workers on a screen and now I talk to my co-workers on a screen. The world feels ominous and sinister and on the brink of some unspecified disaster. I like when an author can capture that [feeling]. But that's not the only thing that will capture my attention in the submission queue. I'm only foregrounding [it] because you mention *The Girl Who Was Allergic to Paper*, which struck me with all those qualities [listed above] very early in reading it. It was an "I-gotta-have-this" moment when I read that story. I turn away stories that may capture the world's "absurd and ominous" vibe often because the voice isn't right. I love

voices that feel effortless and inevitable. Sometimes a story is perfectly fine and another reader might get some excitement about it, but as my grandmother would have said, “My blood ain’t take it.” And then there are times when you just want to sit and puzzle over the language, like Michael Kaufman’s “Land of A Thousand Rappers” from the Hip-Hop Issue. What makes a person love a story can be indescribable sometimes. You can puzzle over it and come to some sort of conclusion as to the source of your love—and there is some value in that—but sometimes you just don’t want to ruin the mystery.

UB: To switch gears a little, how has being an English teacher and a published author influenced your work as an editor?

RS: They all influence each other in an infinite loop. My students are really sharp, it helps me as a teacher to see a little portion of the work I’m not going to encounter in literary magazines or books because they need some sort of revision/overhaul before acceptance. I can see trends and things writers often get wrong and that helps me name them when students bring them into the classroom. In my writing, it’s also helpful for me to get a sense of what’s out there as a writer. I’m inspired by many of the stories I come across, as well.

UB: As a writer, what do you expect from your editor?

RS: Mostly, I expect an editor to see the story in a way I cannot, it comes from being so close. After they’ve seen the work in a new way, I also expect an editor to help me see a story through their eyes, so I can attain that wider perspective. Writers are often pretty bad at seeing the broader implications of their work. When editors can provide that for me I’m more than grateful. I think any good writer is a mix of weird confidence and total insecurity, but just because you are weirdly confident and completely insecure doesn’t mean you are a great writer. It’s impossible to know whether what you have written will have any value to others without editors acting as a cheering squad and that is also useful.

