

A TALE OF TWO JOURNALS

by Kira Christensen (Editing and Publishing '25)

What does it take to create not just one but two international fiction publications? Over the course of the last few decades, dozens of BYU students with a love of story and a shared vision have established a rich literary tradition, rooted in two premiere publications: *Leading Edge Magazine* and *Inscape*. For the students working on these magazines, fiction is becoming more than just a genre—it is a meaningful part of their real-life educational experience.

Leading Edge: The Many Worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy

From Typewriters to Computers

If you want to find science fiction and fantasy published at BYU, *Leading Edge Magazine* is the place to go. Established in 1981, the magazine was created by a group of students who met in BYU's very first science fiction and fantasy writing class. "The students in that class were very enthusiastic," says Adjunct Faculty Liz Busby (English), the faculty advisor for *Leading Edge*. "They banded together and called it 'the class that wouldn't die'... The magazine has been running since then."

When *Leading Edge* launched, the staff did not even have a word processor to use; students typed the first issues by hand and stapled them individually. Thanks to the tenacity of those students and those who followed, the magazine has published high-quality sci-fi and fantasy from creatives across the globe for decades, including a number of works from well-recognized authors and illustrators like Orson Scott Card and James C. Christensen.

Student Writers, Student Editors

Busby says one of the driving forces behind *Leading Edge*'s legacy has been the sheer number of students at BYU who are interested in science fiction and fantasy. "When I

teach my regular Writing 150 classes, there's always somebody in there who says, 'I'm majoring in computer science, but I also want to write a science fiction and fantasy novel,'" she says. "Everybody's doing it."

For both the student writers who submit their work and the student editors who run the publication, the magazine is a great training ground. This is in large part thanks to *Leading Edge*'s commitment to giving authors specific, constructive feedback on the works they submit—a rarity in a world where most submissions only ever get a simple form rejection letter. "It's such a cool opportunity for students to have a chance to work on both sides of this, writing their stories and getting critiques but also practicing on the editing side," Busby says. "Behind every good author is a good editor."

Recent graduate Lenicka Lee (Editing and Publishing '25) agrees, saying she gained a lot of valuable experience from her work as a managing editor on the magazine. "I started as a deer-in-the-headlights

editor who didn't really know what I was doing," she says. "It's helped me have really good relationships with other editors in the major and gain confidence in editing, which is what I ultimately hope to be doing."

Former editor in chief Phoebe English Carroll (Editing and Publishing '25) shares that she hopes the magazine will continue to grow, bringing quality fiction to a wider audience. "I think we have a lot to give to the genre," she says. "And I hope more BYU students join us so they can gain experience in the genre in a fun and welcoming setting. It's a good place to get your foot in the door and get industry experience."

Inscape: The Beautiful and Peculiar World

Driven by a Vision

If you want to hone your abilities to see the world around you in all its beautiful strangeness, *Inscape* is the place to go. Like *Leading Edge*, the journal began in the 1980s, and its growth has exploded in the last five to ten years, starting with previous faculty advisor John Bennion's decision to involve BYU's MFA students in the journal's editorial leadership. Adjunct Faculty Cheri Earl (English), the current *Inscape* advisor, explains, "He (Bennion) decided to give the MFA students experience on a journal because most MFA programs have journals that students work on. It's been an evolution."

That evolution has been driven in large part by the innovation of the journal's MFA and undergraduate students. The journal has expanded from a publication seeking only student submissions to one aiming to become an internationally renowned publication. Staff have tightened *Inscape*'s branding, refined its mission statement, and begun hosting a yearly gala to recognize their published authors—all under the direction of its editors in chief. "Every editor who comes brings a new innovation," Earl says. "And it's not an overhaul—it's an expansion of what we've already done."

Professional Quality Learning

All this growth means that *Inscape* consistently adds new opportunities for students on its staff. The journal offers internships to students from any college on campus—not just the College of Humanities—to learn web design, marketing, podcasting, social media management, and more. This results in exceptional experiential learning opportunities, even if magazine publishing is not the career students ultimately choose to pursue.

Senior Assistant Editor in Chief Avery Dall-Hilton (Theater Arts Studies '23, Creative Writing MFA '26) says that although she does not foresee a long-term career in magazine publishing, working on *Inscape* has offered her critical career experience. "I want to get published," she says. "Having the

perspective of being on the other side of the submission email has been really good for me."

Creating a Place to Share

The driving force behind *Inscape*'s growth lies in the poignancy of its mission: publishing peculiar, gorgeous pieces that do not compromise on quality or craftsmanship. "The journal accepts pieces from people of all experiences and walks of life, seeking to celebrate and create a home for the bizarre, the believing, and the beautiful."

For Dall-Hilton, another great value-add of *Inscape* is its positive environment for the student staff. "I feel really passionate that the act of creation and creativity needs to be focused on, especially now," she says. "We sometimes forget that the end product is not to have a thing but to create the thing. I think *Inscape* is such a good example of that."

And for Earl's part, she has seen the impact *Inscape* has had on the lives of its staff and those who submit, having personally had many meaningful interactions with people outside of the Latter-day Saint tradition. "In our reaching beyond our own faith community, or even university community, I see an opportunity to collaborate in a believing way with other authors and artists. *Inscape* has provided and continues to provide an opportunity to have those incredible conversations." ■

For submissions to *Leading Edge Magazine*, find their guidelines and links at ling.byu.edu/leading-edge.
For submissions to *Inscape*, find their guidelines and links at inscape.byu.edu.

Photos by Adobe Stock

