

101 Fiction

Issue 9

September 2015

Welcome to issue 9. The beginning of our third year as a quarterly and a new round of themes. This issue we go underground.

There's a weirdness down there, below the surface. The real world, altered as it echoes through the caverns. Visions and transformations. Monsters, only some of them human. Revelations. Futures both green and desiccated. Tiny tales wrapped in the embrace of mighty Mother Earth.

Two thirds of this issue's stories are from returning authors and it's truly fantastic to host such talent, to be a place people come back to, both as readers and writers. It's brilliant to see some fresh blood in the mix too, new voices that we'll hopefully hear more from in the future. It feels like this little 'zine is building a bit of a reputation and it's humbling that other people get as excited about it as we do.

Now come follow me, down, deeper, as we travel underground.

Read, absorb, enjoy.

Within

by Robin Dunn

They went in through the back just like folks said, under the refrigerator in the 7-11, into the series of rooms that had no place in the world.

Jack had been told that he'd have a good time, and that he should get really high before he did it.

Jill got real high.

Jack and Jill. They went in, under the refrigerator, where the rooms appeared.

Out of nowhere.

But it was a quiet town.

There are a lot of reasons it could have been.

And why not?

Why not go in.

Through the door, under the refrigerator.

And in:

Author bio: Robin Wyatt Dunn writes and teaches in Los Angeles. He's online at robindunn.com and fb.com/settdigger and twitter.com/settdigger

Myrmecophilous

by Rhonda Eikamp

Ants trailed through the kitchen after the funeral. He felt too cauterized to care until he noticed they all had her face, so he followed them down, past the cabinet, beneath drywall, into doleful earth.

The queen was regal, acidic. Behind her his wife stood grub-like, features blank.

"Give her back to me."

A formic shrug. "If your trail's good, she'll follow. Don't look behind you."

He climbed. Drones blocked the exit.

"She's dead," one said. "There's nobody there." The voice came from above, disembodied. "You're dreaming."

He wouldn't believe them. His trail was good. He reared, prepared to fight.

Author bio: Rhonda Eikamp is originally from Texas and lives in Germany. Her stories have appeared in Daily Science Fiction, Perihelion and Lightspeed's "Women Destroy Science Fiction." She recently expanded her 101 Fiction flash "Frozen" into a short story, printed in Ice, from Horrified Press.

Sightless

by J.J. Jordan

The invaders somehow had sight without whiskers. Monsters. Alarming chirps filled the den.

I nuzzled my pups, brushing them all over with my whiskers – seeing them in full – and giving little kisses. I prayed, *may the Earth Mother protect them and the Death Worm never find them.*

I ambushed the invaders at the highest tunnel, bursting through, my teeth slicing flesh. Others joined me and the invaders fled, screaming.

But it was a trick, a feint, and we returned too late. The nest empty. My brood taken.

I pulled on my whiskers till they fell out. I ache forever. Blind.

Author bio: J.J. Jordan writes fantasy and science fiction out of Tallahassee, Florida. The Liars' League recently performed his short story, Life After 20, and he publishes flash fiction whenever he has the chance.

<http://www.joshuajamesjordan.com/work.html>

http://www.liarsleague.com/liars_league/2015/07/life-after-20-by-j-j-jordan.html

Deeper

by John Xero

Kilometres of rock over our heads and still we dig.

Maddie fell five cycles back. You could barely see her hair'd gone grey for all the dirt, but you could see it in her face, her eyes.

Only time I think I ever cried. Not while anyone could see, course.

Only time I ever called her Ma out loud too. Wish I'd done it while she could still hear me. Ain't no space for wishes down here though. Barely the space to swing a pick.

I asked once, "Why?"

"Dig," they snarled, spittle flying past cracked tusks. "Deeper."

Always deeper.

John Xero revels in brevity. @xeroverse & xeroverse.com

Reckoning

by John Rhea

Aaron raced through the spaceport exhaust tunnels. Footsteps echoed behind him. Antarans didn't like thieves. He'd lost a finger each time he'd been caught. Well not this time.

He zigged and zagged, careening through the shafts.

The tunnel opened up and he stopped dead. A human face, painted on the wall, towered four stories above him. Its hair faded into the darkness. Green skin. Weeping yellow eyes. Purple blood ran down its cheek. The face was giant, disfigured, grotesque, and... beautiful. Debilitatingly beautiful.

Something ripped loose inside Aaron.

As they took him into custody, Aaron knew he'd never steal again.

Author bio: John is a multi-level creative that works in design, film, apps, and storytelling. By day he builds and maintains websites, by night he tells stories as the Chief Story Scientist at Story Lab (<http://storylab.us>). He lives with his wife, three rambunctious boys, and a small army of pets near Charlottesville, VA.

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Dried

by Simon Williams

Every day Rudy and Blanco rode the gravity tunnels at dizzying speeds, dipping, swerving, missing each other and a million others by margins too small to imagine, reaching out and picking up their loads, leaning back, feet first, eyes closed, silent screaming in the heady pounding rush until they could drop what they carried. Then that day there was a tunnelsplit, a spurting leak, the worst of all they had heard of and feared for, spitting them up aboveground. Outside. Beyond the already healing split their clone comrades stepped forward to replace them. Life went on. They dried and died.

Author bio: Simon lives in Edinburgh and writes very short stories, many of which can be found on simonsalento.com. He tweets at [@simonsalento](https://twitter.com/simonsalento).

Seeds

by A V Laidlaw

The seeds wait in the belly of the earth, in its darkness and warmth. Above them, cities grow from mudbrick and stone until vast and towering with glass and concrete. But the seeds are patient. They have lain buried deep in the darkness for millennia, ripe with memories of carboniferous swamps and ancient insect-haunted forests. With time, glass will shatter and concrete crumble to dust. Then the seeds will crack open a thin sliver of white flesh. Roots will dig down for clean water and pale naked shoots grope upwards through the soil. And the cities will be forests again.

Author bio: A V Laidlaw lives in the UK, in a house built entirely from books, but dreams of one day moving into a cosy hobbit hole. He writes fiction, occasional poetry, and tweets at @AvLaidlaw.

Safe

by Elliott Dunstan

She'd forgotten what she was hiding from. She supposed enough time had passed that it was reasonable, after all, for her memories to be fuzzy – funny, though, how she couldn't quite place that, either. All she knew was that the tall columns of stalactites and stalagmites kept her safe. From – something. Someone. It didn't matter. Safe. She was safe. And she didn't particularly care to wander, anyway. She remembered nothing of the upper world, except how the scent of blood had filled her lungs and made her mind spark and rage, and how the orange sun had burnt her skin.

Author bio: Elliott Dunstan is an Ottawa-based young writer of poetry, fiction and non-fiction with a taste for feminist mythology, gruesome stories and tales that inspire more questions than they answer. They post ramblings, thoughts and the occasional unrefined work at their blog, moonlitwatersunnyriver.tumblr.com.

Misguided

by Kymm Coveney

Because the only direction led under cover – deeper, darker, warmer – it never occurred to us that getting lost would be an issue. As a trickle of gentle rain dripped its lullaby onto the soft dirt, ghosts of leaves melted against the soil, which gave way, sucking in a tide of humus. Like clicks of shivering teeth, pebbles showered down around us. Hellfire and brimstone thundered past, announcing the arrival of the encroaching pile of earth come to fill itself back up.

We considered digging as an option, of course we did, but we dithered, stifled by a lack of direction.

Author bio: Born in Boston, Kymm Coveney has lived in Spain since the 1982 World Cup. Links to poetry, flash fiction and translations are at BetterLies, where she does her fiction practicing.

@KymmInBarcelona

<http://betterlies.blogspot.com.es/>

Comrades

by Voima Oy

She was holding the book when she heard from Marcel, warning her of the impending raid. All she had was in her black bag – the book, a pen, a sweater, ID cards.

No, don't think about the sunny little room, the bookshelf, the begonia in the window, sharing coffee with Andrea. All that was gone, smoke and rubble in the street.

Andrea was waiting at the coffee shop, Marcel at the safe house. Friends would help them out of the city, through the sewers, past the border guards. She had everything she needed. They would write their own future, together.

Author bio: In real life, Voima Oy lives on the western edge of Chicago, near the elevated line and the expressway. She writes about all sorts of things.

Twitter: @voimaoy

Derelict

by Madeline Mora-Summante

The house, like an unwanted dog, squats on the outskirts of town, whimpers in abandonment. Clarice pushes inside, out of the rain. A burnt odour, old and alone like Clarice herself, licks at her wrinkled face, snuggles under the greasy gray strands of her hair. She shrugs. As long as it's dry.

Clutching her sodden bag, she walks five steps before the house gulps her down its throat. She lands hard inside its bowels, moans, broken.

A giggle. "Got another one."

Clarice looks up. Children grin down from above.

One douses her with gasoline. Another lights a match.

Clarice screams.

*Author bio: Madeline Mora-Summante is a writer and a reader, a beach-comber and a tortoise-owner. She is the author of the flash fiction collection, *The People We Used to Be*.*

<http://madelinemora-summante.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.amazon.com/People-We-Used-Collection-ebook/dp/B00G7QXOKO/>

Fallen

by John Xero

My candle flickers lonely in the dark, like my faith. The wavering light casts leering shadows on the rock walls, cavorting imps conjured to accompany my rough passage below the earth.

I am cast out from the world that was. Wars, hatred, politicians, thieves and whores. Paradise, compared to what came next: demons, descending from the heavens, driving us down to this new hell.

I may be the last free human alive, deserted by God and man alike. I haven't seen another in weeks, and of him, heathen as he was, I have barely a few strips of meat left.

Author bio: John Xero is a flickering spark wandering the dark caverns of his mind, studying the shadows cast and capturing them in ink.

Listen for echoes: @xeroverse | Explore the terrain: xeroverse.com

Thanks for reading.

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