

Brienza | Chhabra | Davies | Gorman
Lofgren | Moon | Seidel | Sullivan



THE
DEADLANDS

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a journal of ends & beginnings

cover art by Nikolina Petolas



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THE PLUTOCRACY

Maya Chhabra | Poetry

i'd rather be a pauper on earth than king of the dead,
you said, and you were right:
life above is pauper-like
compared to the riches down here

not iron and shadow, the realms below,
but gold, soft and heavy with muffled voices.

the Midas-touch is yours now.
glory in the glittering setting
for the cracked diamond of your afterlife.

but then you always wanted what was torn from you
by Agamemnon or by Hector or by the god,
death's miser king, counting his pile of souls,
the wealth of his ungiving realm.

everything turns to gold here—
kleos a mere trophy,
fame a sort of currency
not worth bartering your life for

even the beloved becomes a statue,
Galatea in reverse.

look at this fine Patroclus,
what would you pay for him?

you can't take it with you, they always said.
they're wrong. it's all you can take.





FROM THE ASHES FLEW THE LADYBUG

Alexandra Seidel | Fiction

[View Content Notes](#)

From the Thirty Years' War, sung as a lullaby to orphans:

Maikäfer flieg!

Der Vater ist im Krieg,

Die Mutter ist im Pulverland,

Pulverland ist abgebrannt.

Maikäfer flieg...

Fly, ladybug, fly!

Your father went away,

Your mother died in the pulver'ed lands,

Those pulver'ed lands have burned to ash.

Fly, ladybug, fly...



Chiron in the First House

Féli wanted the pain to end. She looked over to where the soldiers had left her mother dead, skirt torn, blood on white skin.

Féli wanted the pain to end. Why was the strange melody, that strange song, echoing around in her head? She'd heard it sung before, to a small child wrapped in dirty rags and clutched to a trembling breast.

"Ah, Liebelein." The voice was smoke, like the smoke licking the sky at the corners of Féli's vision, where something in the distance had been set aflame—a plundered house back in Magdeburg, perhaps. Sometimes, it seemed like all the world was fire. "You poor darling mine."

Voices were not like smoke, but this one was. Féli turned her head to see it, even if she hurt, even if she bled onto the dry grass that cradled her; even if she could still smell them all over her.

A man stood at the opposite corner of Féli's vision, dressed in clean clothes. He looked like he'd had enough to eat all his life, but like a man who fidgeted and never put on too much weight as a result. Féli tried to speak, but the noises came out garbled. They had beaten her when she'd resisted, and her face was blood, her teeth rattling and broken, and something was wrong with her jaw.

"Liebelein, would you like to bargain with me? I imagine you might desire vengeance." He took a step toward the center of Féli's vision and wrapped the scene in a gesture: Féli's mother, Féli herself, the broken, torn things; discarded rags, used like the axeman's block. "You cannot speak. I'll call the deal complete if you nod, and do not worry about suffering; they'll receive it, tenfold. Double that, if I am feeling leisurely."

Féli knew she was dead meat, precious meat in this time of hunger. Féli wanted the pain to end. She swallowed, tasted the color of her own blood. Behind the taste, behind the pain, Féli glimpsed a want, drawn in blood on white skin.

She nodded. His voice covered her like smoke as he sang her a lullaby.



Féli was healing. She felt her body, its bright rage at having to mend everything that had been severed, but the flesh obeyed, the bones obeyed.

Her eyes obeyed as well, and she opened them to see.

“Muhneküpchen,” said the voice of smoke. “You are back with the living.” He walked into her field of vision and filled it, just like he had done before with his smoky voice. He held a cup of wine in his hand, drank. “Well, not quite with the living. We’re in Hel, and there are few alive here, but it’ll do.”

Féli jolted upright, and the taste of color blurred her vision. Around the stranger, she saw a room, lavish, stone-cut edges whose straightness was smoothed with brocade draperies in sweet cream and chocolaty purple. The colors tasted like confections on Féli’s tongue, and the dark, green-veined stone was charred sugar with a sprinkling of salt.

This did not look like Satan’s realm.

“You’re the devil?” It came out less as a question and more as a fear. He had horns, this man who was no man. The horns coiled against his skull from under lush locks, dark and smooth as polished steel. Féli wondered why she hadn’t noticed them when she lay bleeding. “Did you cause the war?”

He stared at her, drank more wine. “I’m Zagreus. The devil doesn’t exist, but humans can worship shit like flies and act no better than worms. And this is Hel, named for the mistress of the dead, the lady whose face is half in shadow even when she walks in light. Once, she passed into this world by sacrificing seven parts of her self to open seven doors carved from bone, and now she never leaves.” He sat down on Féli’s bed. She couldn’t even remember the last time she’d slept in a bed after they had fled Magdeburg. “You remind me of her, Muhneküpchen.”

“That’s not right,” Féli said. “It’s called a Muhküpchen, and it’s not my name. And you have horns and you blaspheme, so—”

"Muhne means moon, little ladybug. And don't call me the devil because of the horns, that's offensive. Here." He handed her his wineglass. "This is divine."

Féli took the cup, and as she did, she recalled he'd promised vengeance.

"The men," she said, not sure how to speak more of them. Her body ached at just that, her body shivered. She took the wineglass to her lips and drank, and the shaking stopped.

"Come," he said. "I'll show you."



They were lying on slabs of stone like altars, naked. Féli trembled, and her heart raced. She didn't even remember all their faces properly, or remembered them too well.

"Don't fear them. They don't deserve that," Zagreus said and took Féli's hand.

"What have you done with them?"

"They are suffering countless terrors in their minds. I know they seem still and at peace, but look at their faces."

Féli did. They were edged with fear and horror. Sometimes, there was just a shadow of movement, but it was gone before Féli could be sure it had ever really been there.

"Here," Zagreus said. He held out a knife to her.

"What for?"

He shrugged. "I'm feeling leisurely. Isn't there something in that book of yours about cutting off offending limbs?"

Féli looked from the knife to Zagreus, from his handsome face back to the knife. Then she looked at the men.

"You said this is where the dead are," she said. "Is my mother here?"

Zagreus nodded. "She is with my mother, which means she is at peace. But she would not still your hand."

"I know," Féli said and took the knife and walked toward the first man. His face she remembered. His face festered like a sickness in her memory, a tumor, a blister filled with pus. Blood on white skin.

Féli hadn't died, and yet she had. The knife was steady in her hand.



Venus in Opposition

Times had changed, and the war had finally ended after three long decades, and that had been decades ago. Féli hadn't changed, at least not on the outside. Paris was a city alive with aspiration, with Louis the Beloved reigning it and all of France, and Féli loved it here, loved that she could forget how easily cities could fall.

"Lift your chin, chérie," Louis said, auspiciously named like the king. But Louis was a painter, and his studio, the tall walls and stucco ceiling, it was a palace of sorts, but not Versailles.

"You like putting me on canvas," Féli said. She lifted her chin and shifted her thighs.

Louis bent past the canvas to grin at her, something roguish in his eyes. "I do. You are beautiful." His eyes dropped from her chin to her thighs, and Féli sighed. She hated that Zagreus had sent her to Louis, to help him paint, to help him reach that transcendental place in his art that he had bargained for with Zagreus.

Louis dipped his brush into green paint, and Féli could taste it, the freshness, the earthiness of the color. She could also see Louis react to her in other ways. She remembered the ease of a blade, and her heartbeat slowed again. *Decades*. Zagreus had given her vengeance for decades. But it was still there, blood on white skin.

Féli hadn't changed in all those years after she should have died, raped and left for dead.

Then again, she had.



"Come, let me show you how I see you," Louis told her as falling night bruised the horizon in the most delicious dustings of pinks and purples, berry tastes and thinned wine.

Féli reached for her robe and walked to the painter, his hands stained with all the color between mint and dust and uncooked meat.

Louis was good. After a bargain with Zagreus, there was no way he wouldn't be, but for Zagreus to bargain in the first place, there had to have been some talent there. Féli fancied that she saw it, in the lines and curves of her face, her hips, her breasts.

"Aren't you beautiful," he said. Then, as if he had a right, he put his arms around her, rested his hands on her breasts.

"Let go," Féli said. *Blood on white skin*.

She tried to shake him off, but Louis laughed in her ear. "You've been teasing me, chérie, ever since you came to me. I won't be teased anymore." One of his hands dropped from her breasts to glide down, but before he could touch her, Féli reached for what Zagreus had given her, just like she'd reached for the knife he'd offered her.

She was wild only in the sense that vines alone could hold her, and she was ruthless only in the sense that she moved as if the wine controlled her limbs.

She was faster than Louis could have been, faster than he could understand. She had claws now, and teeth, she alone could have torn to shreds any bard who came floating upward from the underworld and refused her his song. Féli tore out Louis's throat with her claws and let her voice ring through the studio like so many silver bells.

When it was done, she stood there in the taste of peeled apple skins, breathing slowly. Her robe hung open over one shoulder, and the hem trailed wetly on the ground.

"Muhneküpchen, look at you," Zagreus said. His voice was smoke, and his form detached itself from the nightly shadows that had fallen. "I had such hopes for this one to make his name known all over the world."

"He was rotten," Féli said.

Zagreus looked at her, her skin marked with the spatters of tart apple peel. He examined her, but Zagreus's eyes never looked at Féli with the wrong thirst the likes of which Louis's gaze had held.

Then, Zagreus's eyes looked to the canvas. He examined Louis's work. After a long moment, he nodded. "He was rotten. He never deserved to drink my wine. I hear there is a circus in town. Would you accompany me, Muhneküpchen?"

Féli brushed the apple taste off of her. "First, I need a bath."

She went to find a servant, and behind her, Zagreus tore through her image painted by Louis's selfish desire.



A Trine of Sun and Moon and Jupiter, the Luminaries

Féli remembered the circus in Paris while she sat in a café by the ocean with Emma. Emma didn't paint; Emma was a writer for the pictures. When Zagreus had exchanged cups with her, when he'd returned to Hel, he hadn't been able to stop himself from talking about her. If Féli didn't know better, she'd have proclaimed Zagreus in love.

"Tell me what it was like, the circus, I mean," Emma asked. She wore pants and bright red lipstick. Her nails were painted the same color, but the polish was chipped where the typewriter nipped at her fingers.

"The smells come to mind, but you cannot show them. Sweat, sun-warmed skin, beer on the workers' breath." Féli closed her eyes while Emma began jotting down notes in a small volume that went everywhere with her. "The fabrics were rough, the wood of the benches grainy. There was a ringmaster in red, wearing a fake beard, and a harlequin looked at me as if she knew me from a former life."

Féli could scarcely remember why they had started talking about the circus in Paris. Zagreus had taken Féli a few times, and Féli had thought he'd spotted something in one of the artists, but eventually, they had just returned to Hel.

"Were there lions?" Emma asked.

Féli considered this while she reached for her cup and took a sip. "There are always lions, Emma."



Emma wrote, sometimes through the night. All that she needed of Féli was conversation and that Féli be there as the ink poured out of Emma.

Féli enjoyed this part, the part where she was at the center of something that she was really no part of. The artists created, and their faces showed how the birthing of the art pained them, moved them, rattled through them like wind through dry bones. Féli was a glowing silence that did nothing while all of that happened.

Emma wrote from dusk to morning and from there almost to midday. When she was done, Féli couldn't see what Emma was typing, but Féli tasted it in the smooth, licorice-like sound of the typewriter: *THE END*.

Emma put that last page on the pile of her work and went to bed, dropped near dead from the long birth of her creation. Emma always slept alone and always wanted to sleep alone. The only comfort that she sought was perhaps Féli's arm around her shoulder, but that was as physical as her attraction to Féli—or anyone, for that matter—would ever go.

As Emma slept, Féli read the screenplay. It was called *The Lions in the Ring*. It was perfect.



Emma, who had completed over thirty screenplays before she was given suffrage, kept shelves lined with prestigious awards. *The Lions in the Ring*, the recognition it had attracted with magnetic force, had its own corner where the original leaned bound, pages yellowed with age. But recently, the shelves grew no more. Emma had not managed to sell any of her screenplays in a long time.

After the war, increasingly, Emma's sex had been judged, not her words.

"I cannot do it anymore," Emma confessed, sitting in front of the same old typewriter that had always ruined her nail polish. "I just can't. Tell him I need this to be over."

Féli rolled the black beads of her necklace, a gift Zagreus had given her, between her fingers. *A Muhneküpfchen needs her black spots, after all, enough that counting them brings luck*, he had said, and fastened the clasp under Féli's hair.

As Emma bent her head in front of her typewriter, Zagreus appeared, almost as if he'd always been there, listening from the shadows.

"I tried," Féli told him, and she had. She liked Emma, because Emma never tried to make Féli hers or make her into something that she wasn't. "I tried everything."

Zagreus nodded. He pulled open a book that appeared in his hand much like he appeared in the world, a shadow woven into reality like an afterthought of a capricious god. He made a note, the noise of pen against page smooth as silk on skin. Féli could taste the ash in the swirls of ink, the cooling cinders underneath.

"It's done," he told Emma. "Our deal is concluded."

Emma nodded and finally looked up at him. "I thought you were the devil, you know. But this—" she indicated all her achievements, all the words that bent her shelves, "—this has been the greatest time."

Zagreus smiled. "I agree."

"I have to go now," Féli said, and it was in equal parts apology and question, a plea for the contrary to be true, and a regret. But once Zagreus

made the entry in the book and marked the exchange as concluded, Féli had to leave.

The room was silent for long minutes while Zagreus stood like harvest cooling under the moon, while the writer sat and regretted how the world had changed, while Féli wanted time to stop.

It ended when Zagreus clapped his hands.

“Maikäfer flieg...” he sang with his smoky voice, and took Féli’s hand, and walked with her, toward seven gates carved from bone that stood open now for all that needed them, gates Féli could walk through when Zagreus guided her.



Saturn in the Twelfth House

In a time when air travel and space exploration had become normal, Thea was a wonder. When Féli first saw her, after the painter had finished two whole cups of wine with Zagreus, Thea tasted of fruit and bark and water and grass, because paint clung to her. Thea was never clean, and her atelier, a minimalist room with large windows and the ashen taste of white walls, was surprisingly spotless in comparison to its artist.

Thea had painted a marvel in the space of a few hours after her head was still heavy with Zagreus’s wine, after Féli had walked into the painter’s atelier.

“I call it *Shadow of Winged Insects before a Flame*,” Thea told Féli.

Féli got up from the uncomfortable chair she had been sitting in to look at the canvas. *Ladybugs and maybugs*, Féli thought, her jaw going slack in surprise.

"I don't know what came over me," Thea said. "Fuck. Has anyone ever told you how hot you are?"

"You painted ladybugs," Féli said.

"Yeah. And you're hot. Or do you not do that? Flirt with your... what am I even to you, the chick you inspire?"

"Why did you do that?" Féli asked.

"Be specific," Thea said. "And if you don't want me to keep on trying to hit on you—"

"I don't mind that," Féli said. "But why ladybugs and maybugs?"

Thea shrugged. "I was looking into your eyes."

"Will you call me Féli?" Féli said on a whim. She'd never given anyone her real name, and Zagreus had warned her about that, about tying her name to the artist's lips, the tips of their brushes, to the echoes of their hearts.

"Féli. Suits you, lucky girl. So do you want to come to bed with me?"

Féli wasn't sure she wanted to, and she wasn't sure she didn't want to. She examined the ladybugs, their dark spots like beaded luck against the fire. She decided she wanted to try.



Thea filled canvas after canvas, and she slept with the sickly sweetness and the drying salt of the colors sticking to her skin. Thea pulled things onto the canvas that Féli had never told anyone, including Zagreus, and Thea made these things real once more.

The Anatomy Lesson was the first painting that reached for too much. It showed several stone slabs, bodies on them. Bodies that had once been whole, but no more. Féli knew the scene Thea had painted, knew it intimately, because she had created it while Zagreus had been there to hold her when she shook with emotion, when she thinned the apple-peel-red taste of everything with her own tears. She had remembered it again, blood on white skin.

Thea had painted the ledge of a building, a view of a city Féli had recognized. The sight rattled Féli so deeply that she looked up Emma on the internet; the screenwriter, unable to write and no longer willing to live, had flown into the underworld from the ledge of her building, and Thea had painted the sight just before the fall.

"How are you doing this?" Féli asked one morning, dressed while Thea was still in her underwear but painting. It was a harlequin this time, and she had Thea's features under the mask of a different age, a different place.

Thea made it to the atelier only rarely these days, and so her apartment tasted of lavender and mint and coal, and the canvases kept piling up.

"Doing what?" Thea said. Before the harlequin she had just finished a painting of Féli herself, sitting on the beach, a beach Féli had visited with Emma. Next to Féli's knee on the beach towel, there lay the music box Emma's mother had given her, and as she saw it, Féli knew Emma had let it play when she prepared to jump, had wanted that melody to be the last thing she ever heard.

Maikäfer flieg...

"Thea, you shouldn't be painting half the things you're painting," Féli said.

The shadows shifted, and smoke filled Féli's mouth. "I agree," Zagreus said. He walked toward the painter as the shadows let go of him, but Thea barely even acknowledged him.

Halfway, he looked Féli up and down, then half-naked Thea. He knew the single-minded frenzy a cup of his wine could induce, and Zagreus without a doubt knew desire. Féli had no doubt he knew also what she and Thea had done all night.

"Why is she painting like this?" Féli asked. "I am not making her do it."

"No," Zagreus agreed. Then he shrugged. "You see, I am not sure, but Thea seems to know how to look at the world clearly, see the scars behind the smiles we draw to hide them."

"And what does that mean?" Féli asked.

"It means she paints what she sees." Zagreus put a hand on Thea's shoulder. "If you could stop, that would be best for you. You will exhaust yourself."

"I don't want to stop," Thea said. She signed her name to the painting and exchanged the finished canvas for a blank one. Then she picked out a brush and dipped it in a sweet caramel hue and began anew.

Zagreus sighed. "Well, this is less than ideal."

"Emma killed herself," Féli said.

Zagreus looked at her. "I know."

"And why didn't you tell me?"

Zagreus walked to her and reached for her hands. "Because you hate to see something you care about die even if you know few things will ever survive you."

"He's a beast, that one," Thea said, but Féli wasn't sure who she meant; Thea was painting lions.



Féli had convinced Thea to go to the atelier, even if Thea had been reluctant to leave her apartment for the past few weeks. Zagreus, all shadow and smoke, had followed.

The rules of the bargain were simple, yet total. Féli had to stay while Thea painted, truth onto stretched cotton, truth distorted in dried apple rinds and strong sage, in rose and rich raspberry.

"Does she sleep still?" Zagreus asked. He had brought wine. They sat on the floor in front of Thea and her canvas as she worked, drinking as the artist painted and ignored their presence.

"She doesn't anymore. What if I did this?" Féli asked.

Zagreus tilted his head, the ridges of his horns shifting the light reflected off of them. "Oh, Muhneküpchen, have you become a witch?"

Féli looked at the ground. "Zagreus, what if my loving her did this?"

He laughed, loud as bells, and the smoke of his voice filled the room. "Muhneküpchen, you are as the moon; you love nothing and no one."

Féli snorted. "Like you?"

At that, he stilled. He said nothing.

"I was just supposed to inspire her," Féli said.

"And you did." He drank more wine. "And Emma jumping was her decision. Some of us need to fly, sometimes."

"You sang to me of flying, Zagreus."

He nodded. "And I meant it, and you did. Now look at you, my ladybug. Your face has moved the ages."

"You gave them wine, because they bargained for words or the perfect picture, the perfect lick of brush against canvas."

Zagreus nodded. "And yet, they needed you to steer that, which you did."

Féli stilled. She thought about lions. "You knew what Thea could do when you gave her your wine, when you put her name in your book."

Zagreus shrugged. "I guessed."

"You lied."

"Because you hate to see things that you care about die."

"Why?"

Zagreus stood as if roused from anger, but Zagreus had never shown anger. "She bargained for her art, but she also bargained for a sturdier heart. So that she'd have more time to paint, Maikäfer. Thea was about to die when I first met her."

Thea, as if she had only now realized that things were happening outside of her canvas, got up from her stool. "I didn't want to die, but he told me he could only give me so much time." Thea pulled an envelope from the pocket of her jeans and handed it to Féli. "I wrote you a letter. As a goodbye. I wrote it a while ago." She handed the letter to Féli, who took it.

"We should go," Zagreus said.

"No," Féli said.

"There isn't much more time, and I need to finish the painting," Thea said, and sat back down, sticky with custard and beetroot, with rhubarb and lemon.

"No," Féli said.

"I'll stay with you, Muhneküpchen."

Féli touched the black dots of her beads, counting them, for luck. She hadn't cried in ages, and doing so now hurt. The letter in the envelope soaked up the wetness even as she bruised the paper in her crushing palm.



When Thea died, her work just barely finished, Féli raged, and Zagreus let her. Féli raged against the skin that held only death, hoping against hope that the love she had would birth another maenad from a corpse. After all, Féli had been more dead than living, and she had healed into her being. But that didn't happen for Thea. Thea was just dead. She'd broken all the fingers in her painting hand herself, so as not to leave anything unfinished, she had said, so as not to start anything she couldn't finish. Her eyes had been heavy with apology.

"Why do you call me that?" she asked Zagreus after a long silence over Thea's cooling corpse, torn by Féli's rage. By her grief.

"Muhneküpchen? Because the moon knows no pain," Zagreus said.

"You always take me back through the gates when we return to Hel," Féli said. "What if I went alone?"

Zagreus walked toward her, took her hand. "You'd have to sacrifice seven parts of your self, one thing at each gate, to make the journey. But I can't promise one of them will be your memory of her. I can't promise it won't be."

"You'll be waiting?"

"You called for me when you were dying, and I came, did I not, Muh-neküpchen? Yes, I will be waiting, if you want to walk alone this time."

Seven gates, and seven parts of her self. Féli nodded. She took the first step.



It had been only six. The last gate had been open, just a crack, open like Thea's coffin when Féli had come to say goodbye for the last time. Féli had sacrificed the letter, placed it in Thea's cold and broken hand, because she didn't need the words. Féli knew.

"You have the beads still," Zagreus had said when he had offered her his wine on that side of the seventh gate.

Féli had reached for her neck, and indeed, the dark orbs were still there. "I guess I still have my luck."

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Lighter," Féli said. "The pain of the memories is gone, even if the memories are still there." They were, red and white, but they no longer rotted inside her, no longer festered.

Zagreus nodded. "A weighty sacrifice."

"It was," she said. "One part of it on each of the six gates."

"And the largest for the seventh," Zagreus said.

"The seventh gate stood open," Féli said.

Zagreus opened his mouth to respond, then closed it, shaking his head.
"Ah, Muhneküpfchen."

Féli kissed his cheek. "Thank you," she said. Then she sang.

Féli picked her mother's tongue. She was an orphan after all, and the song hers. Hearing it no longer pained her. After all, she felt light enough to fly.

*"Maikäfer flieg,
Der Vater ist im Krieg,
Die Mutter ist im Pommernland,
Pommernland ist abgebrannt,
Maikäfer flieg!"*





DEAD MAN'S SESSION

John Paul Davies | Poetry

The dead man takes a drink
but the glass cuts his lips.
Drink slits his throat,
seethes in his stomach
like a molten tide.
Unable to feign interest
in tracker mortgage rates,
Celebrity Love Island,
Netflix potboilers
or far-flung genocide,
the dead man leaves the pub.

Drink steers his body
to streets behind streets,
dives requiring secret knocks—
no one serving
the no one drinking—
Bridewell holding cells,
lost century bordellos hiding
sick-hearted city workers,
displaced dockers, sailors
with listless blood
on permanent leave

a river that never
broke into pieces
a river that never
broke its back in places.

Drink calls Time
and the corpse crumbles.
Face left behind
in dosshouse cubicles
de-loused and needle-swept
into prestige apartments;
stairwells of fusion restaurants—
everything deconstructed;
slumped on discordant carousels
of pocked ceramic horses,
laying quayside for great-uncles,
grandfathers sea-bedded
on Merchant Navy ships,
for the dredging of the docks,
for a praying relative's rattle
of the Drowned Room door.

In condemned
shiver and gloom
bar-room glass.
Stylus slips its groove,
long-gone voice stuck
on the same line
his lips mime
in the mirror.
Rain down like slung earth
his prayers.

No such thing
as one for the road,
in the instant before
there was a goodbye uttered,
a last order sunk,
a home to go to.

Burnt malt waft
of a defunct brewery.
Drink hungering
on the next stool.





IN THE WINDOW

Patrick Lofgren | Fiction

There is a man on the porch. There is man standing on the porch in the dark, in the rain, with no umbrella. The man does not have an umbrella and he is standing on the porch in the rain but he is not wet. It has been raining for hours. Around his feet, on the concrete of the porch, there is something like the inverse of a puddle. Around his feet, the concrete is dry.

The man on the porch stares at our door. He does not move. He does not rap his knuckles against the chipping, green wood. He does not press the doorbell. He does not peer through the peephole. He does not turn his head to meet our eyes as we gaze out from the living room window. He stands on our porch in the rain.

My baby sleeps. My baby sleeps upstairs in her crib. She is seven months old. I am scared. My wife stands behind me, looking out the window with me at the man who is standing on our porch without an umbrella. My wife stands behind me and when she breathes I can feel the heavy air pass across my shoulder, brushing its claws along my neck, dissipating.

"What do you think?" she whispers. She does not whisper: "What do you think he wants?" Nor: "What do you think he'll do?" Nor: "What do you think he is?"

She whispers: "What do you think?" Anything more specific will be an invitation. Call him "it," and the world will close around us.

All I can do is shake my head. My arms are cold, stippled with goosebumps.

"Maybe we should call the police," she whispers, the steady waves of her breath cut into medallions.

"No," I say. I can feel, or maybe I only suspect, that any motion on our part will spur him into action. We are rabbits, standing still in the face of a wolf, and if we bolt it will have no choice but to chase. He will have no choice. We already have no choice. We are trapped, were trapped who knows how long ago. We should have paid attention. If we'd paid attention, we'd have seen him walk up the drive, could have opened the door and told him we're not interested, could have headed off the sale of magazines, time-shares, or Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, but we were not paying attention and we did not see this man walk up our drive and now it is not time-shares or magazines or Jesus Christ he wants to sell.

This I know. This I can tell from the way he is standing on our porch in the rain. This I can tell from the way he is not wet though it has been raining for hours and he has no umbrella. We do nothing. We stand in our living room, shivering and still. We do nothing. We can do nothing. If we do nothing, then he will do nothing. If we do nothing then it is he who is trapped, who cannot move, who cannot run, who cannot hide. If we do nothing until the sun rises, then he will evaporate, he will vanish as impossibly as he arrived.

This is the way of things. Rabbits run, wolves chase, when it rains the world is wet, when the sun is out there can be no ghosts, no gremlins, no tricksters. When the sun is out there can be only men.

There is a man on the porch. There is a man on the porch. My daughter is upstairs in her crib. My daughter is sleeping. My daughter is seven months old.

"We should call the police," my wife says, the words as clipped as fingernails. One hand releases its grip on my shoulder. One hand releases its grip on my hand. The warm river of her breath recedes, and the gravity of her presence diminishes. Floorboards creak with her passage.

The man on the porch turns his head to look at me.

As a child, the neighborhood kids and I played by the quarry. You could swim out into the clear water and you could see the stones beneath you as clear as if you'd held a magnifying glass to them. Only when you swam out to the middle of the great open space did they dim, but the blackness of the water beneath you was not the product of algae or the sky's reflection, but of the depths beneath your feet, a great absence in the Earth whose mouth you now paddled so tenuously above.

The man on the porch turns his head to look at me, and I am more afraid even than when I treaded water as a child over that abyss. There is a deeper absence to his gaze.

The man on the porch turns his head to look at me, and his arm moves. His hand closes around the door handle like a flower blooming in reverse.

It will be okay, I think. The door is locked.

The door is locked. When the man on the porch turns the handle, it does not turn. There is a man on the porch, nothing more.

I turn away, looking into the kitchen to where my wife has gone to call the police. I look into the kitchen and the phone is still on the receiver. I realize I have not heard the words: "911 what's your emergency?" Nor have I heard: "Yes. There is a man standing on our porch."

I look back out the window, and the man on the porch is gone. My car is in the driveway, the streetlamps illuminate the rain so that it looks like

an endless swarm of fireflies diving perpetually in place. The lights of the other houses are dim. I can see myself in the window.

There is no man on the porch. The front door is open. The floorboards upstairs creak. My daughter is upstairs in her crib. I am afraid, but my fear no longer surrounds my self. My self is a dead thing. My fear is with my daughter.

I run up the stairs, expecting the man's silhouette to bar my passage at their peak, or around the corner, or in the door to my daughter's room, but the way is clear. I do not have to charge forth, I do not have to scream, I do not have to tackle anyone or anything. I reach for the sill of the door and sling myself into my daughter's room. She's still in her crib, beaming up at a spinning mobile of the solar system, though Deimos is missing. I hear the sound of a door shutting and turn to go back down the stairs. There are no pictures on the walls.

The front door is closed. The bolt is locked. In the kitchen, the phone is on the receiver.

I go to the living room, expecting the man will have left, whatever this is will be over, but he's there. He's standing on the porch. He is dry. He does not move. He does not turn his head to meet my gaze.

Beyond him, a woman is walking in the street. She is walking in the street, and she pushes a stroller in front of her. In the stroller I catch the barest glimpse of tiny feet. She walks up the street and pushes the stroller, passing through the columns of light cast by the streetlamps. She pushes the stroller down the street, and they are out of sight.

Footsteps roll down the stairs. I look and my wife is standing there, holding our daughter.

"Everything okay?"

I look back out the window. There is no man on the porch. There is only the street. My car is in the driveway. The streetlamps illuminate the rain. The lights of the other houses are dim. I can see myself in the window. I see myself in the window.





NEARLY NEW ROCKPORTS

Anita Brienza | Non-fiction

Some time ago, a Reuters/ShopSmart survey said the average woman (the average middle-class woman in a first-world country, I'm guessing) owns nineteen pairs of shoes and buys four new pairs per year. A few years back, a sports industry analyst calculated that Nike was selling twenty-five pairs of shoes per second. Fashion business network Common Objective said if the footwear sector were a country, its economy would slightly eclipse Hong Kong's. My father owned two pairs of shoes: run-down brown plaid fleece-lined slippers and sturdy black leather World Tour Classic Rockports. When he died, the \$100 Rockports were nearly brand-new, a miscalculation on my father's part, because he was a pro at calibrating his belongings down to their last vestige of usefulness.



Most people aren't buried with their shoes on. In a natural or green burial, there's no embalming, and the clothing, shroud, or casket used must be biodegradable, nontoxic, and of sustainable material. So—no shoes, because they won't break down and they can leak contaminants into the soil. Usually the no-shoes burial happens because the bottom half of the casket is closed for viewing, but sometimes the feet change shape after death and it's hard for the funeral home folks to wrestle on a classic pump or a traditional wing tip. In the mid-twentieth century,

the Columbus, Ohio-based Practical Burial Footwear Company made slippers for the deceased that looked like shoes from the front, but laced up the back for more flexibility. Some of them even stretched like a silicone cover for a mixing bowl so they could fit an unwieldy foot.



I've seen morticians joke online about tying the shoelaces of the dead together, "just in case." (In case of a zombie apocalypse, or to make re-emergence even harder on a person buried alive?) As my father got older and unable to bend and tie his shoes himself, I'd kneel to do it for him, talking rapidly with each shoelace loop so that he didn't feel awkward having his adult daughter tending to him like a child. At some point he realized he could leave his shoes tied and use a long shoehorn to push into them or take them off. He was pleased to reclaim that tiny morsel of independence, but I missed the intimacy of those shoe-tying moments.



In the Middle Ages, shoes were so costly it was wasteful to bury them with their owner, and they were passed on to others. I'm sure my father didn't know this, but that's what he decided to do, too. He managed his death from the moment he told my three sisters and me he was going to stop dialysis, and we knew he'd die within weeks. He asked us to check around and get the best price on cremation. He wrote instructions on a yellow legal pad about who to call, how to stop his Social Security payments, what to do with his car and his body after he passed, and when to pay the taxes on the house if it wasn't sold by June. He insisted on getting fully dressed every morning until he was no longer conscious, even when the toxins started to build up and he was shaky and disoriented. As he lay in bed looking down at his feet, he said, "Don't let them take me out of here with these shoes, because they're practically brand new, and someone else can use them."



There's a memorial in Budapest called "The Shoes on the Danube Promenade" that sits beside a stretch of the Danube River. In the winter of 1944-45, the Arrow Cross Party militiamen murdered sixty Hungarian Jewish men, women, and children near that river. But first they made them take off their shoes. The installation is a heartbreaking row of 1940s-era footwear, sculpted from iron, that look as if their owners just stepped out of them: kicked off after school before making a snack; absentmindedly removed by a woman leaning one hand on her kitchen wall as she stood on one leg, then another before putting her groceries away; unlaced by a weary day laborer and left on the front porch so he wouldn't bring any dirt into the house. The memorial is shocking in its simplicity, in the disturbing absence of the wearers. Shoes always remind me of the person who wore them. My father's shoes were sensible. Straightforward. They were built to last. Except he didn't.



It was common practice for early Egyptians to be put to rest with food, water, and wine for their journey to the afterlife. Some families also placed their deceased's most valuable possessions in the coffin; things like jewelry and weapons, and a beloved cat or two. If they were royal or wealthy enough, thrones and chariots were included. Pharaoh Khufu was buried with a 144-foot boat that now is on display at the Giza pyramid complex in Cairo. My father was cremated in khakis, a navy Chaps shirt, compression socks, and the Marines baseball cap that never left his head. I keep some of his ashes in a miniature peacock-blue urn on my desk. It's so small it fits in the palm of my hand, and on a hard day, I wrap my fingers around it like a hug.



I've held onto his Rockports for two years. They're in my closet on a shelf between my leopard-print flats and my grey Ann Klein kitten heels. When I see them, waiting for me to complete his request, I recall my sisters and me as little girls, singing the Marines' hymn about his shoe size. He wore a 9EEE then, and we'd sing "From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of

TRIPLE E," hitting hard on the last words and pointing at my father's feet. I need to find a place to take them, maybe a place that will help another former Marine with small wide feet and lively little daughters who will love him every second of his life, and well into the afterlife.





THE SAUSAGE MAKERS

Amelia Gorman | Poetry

A red brick box that smells like smoke,
meat, and blood. The institution where
all your grandmothers' grandmothers
learned their cuts on the town's sharp edge.

There are three lessons to making a life
here. Everyone takes a factory job,
some lucky ones make it out later.

Your first teacher grinds her teacher
with a silver crank, out come worms
of flesh. Something new from the old
religion. Some filler, some breadcrumbs
to follow. This is the start of a life.

The second old woman stuffs casings.
She decides how long to make the links
where to twist and not to overfill
one body with too much life.
Intestines stretched think until
they are as translucent as her teeth
or the nicotine windows.

And the last crone divides the chain
into links. Cuts and ties the guts at the end
of the chain. Piles them high
in the cart for the butcher.
He comes at the end of the week.

Orange smoke in the winter air.
A red brick box where you begin and end.
The town's sharp edges shrinking.





I HAD NEVER BEEN A CANDLE

Freydís Moon | Fiction

On a Tuesday afternoon, I was sifted into a terracotta urn hand-painted by my mother. I watched her from the center shelf above the sink, dipping her coarse brush into acrylics called *sunshine* and *tangerine*, and wondered if she'd ever known my favorite color was turquoise. I had never been a candle until right then, listening to the sink run and bristles scrape clay, but the wax warmed in silvery sunlight, and I quite liked how the wick fit against my soul's incorporeal backbone.

"I bought you a casket, mijo," she said, suddenly, to no one and to me, to an empty house and to the orange-breasted finch pecking at the window. "When this is all over, I'll make it right."

I'd never given my casket much thought. I would've been happy with oak or chestnut, maple or walnut, pine, maybe, like an American soldier. I'd never given death much thought, either. But when it'd come upon me, I'd had no time to think about which box I'd be buried in, or who would attend my funeral, or how far I'd have to walk from Hanan Pacha or crawl from Uku Pacha to find my way back to Písac. In the end, my lungs tried, but they stopped, and my heart tried, but it stopped, too, and I became another body that needed burning. The government called it safer—*see, the virus still lingers beneath his fingernails*, they'd said, *still clogs his sinuses and clings to his windpipe*—but my Catholic mother knew better, and she grieved for me. She embellished my little vase, and

prayed that my ashes would become bone, and my bone would grow new skin, and when God snapped his mighty fingers, the dead would rise again, and I'd rise, too.

Ah, Mama, I wanted to say, put my ashes in the mouth of a jaguar and let me return as a child of Inti. Put my ashes behind the teeth of an anaconda and let me return as an incarnation of Yacumama.

Before this, she would've laughed and swatted my rear with a spoon. Now, she rubbed the sore spot on her wrist and painted a smiling ocelot on the lid of my urn. I had never been a candle until after I died. I had never been a shoe, either. But yesterday, I'd fit myself into the rubber sole on my mother's sandal and went with her to the garden. The day before that, I'd decided to be a curtain, billowing as my father carried a newborn lamb through the living room, and before that, bundled wool my sister had crocheted into a hat.

For a long time, I thought death meant waiting for another chance at life. I was wrong.

My mother tucked away her paint-tubes and placed my urn on the shelf next to me. *How strange*, I thought, *to share space with elbow and ankle, collarbone and condor nose*. I remembered myself, somehow. Shape after shape, I was still Emilio who manned the Saturday market, selling vegetables to locals and trinkets to tourists. Emilio who carried albuterol, always. Emilio who made ceviche at cookouts—lime, mango, more lime, shaved onion, sea bass. Emilio who was born on a full moon, who died on a full moon, too. I was Emilio. I would always be Emilio.

I slipped into many hollow places in my familia's house, but most of the time I decided to be the candle. In the kitchen, my mother fixed arroz and braised beef and chicken stew; propped on the counter with her back to the cabinet, my sister dogeared pages in an English romance novel; each night at the wobbly table, my father read from Genesis. He prayed for me, for our village, for Peru, for the world, and I wanted to

tell them how the first breath and the last weren't much different, how I'd never met God but I myself had become a shapeshifting miracle, how the world might've gone quiet yet life was still loud. Still heaving and thrumming. Still beginning and ending. *I've seen the future*, I wanted to shout, *I've seen us start again*.

I sat beside my painted urn, voiceless and impatient, and waited.

When I wasn't the candle, I was a doorknob, holding fast to balmy warmth after being grasped. I was loamy hay, spread beneath our livestock in the pasture. I was my mother's dainty crucifix, my father's Saint Christopher pendant, my sister's river pearl necklace, memorizing heartbeats. Sometimes I was the chilly handle on a pitcher of sour lemonade, or the metal mouth on a shovel, or the loose button on a coat. Sometimes I listened to my sister talk to herself, to me, to the stray dog on the empty street outside her bedroom window. Sometimes our neighbors shooed the loneliness with song, a chorus rising like rainfall. My mother delivered sticky picarones and jerky to the young couple down the street, and my father strapped a scarf to his face and ventured across town to fix a broken hinge on my abuelo's screen door. I was the basket on my mother's arm, the hammer in my father's hand, but when the future I'd prophesied came to fruition, when the world began to turn anew, I was once again the candle.

"Don't let it burn," my mother said, batting my sister away from the oven.

They frosted the baby bread with rosy cheeks and etched the shape of a horse into a caramel cookie. Sizzled duck breast in a hot pan with onion, raisins and wine, and set an overflowing plate next to me, Emilio, the candle, the ash. They wept, and I wish they hadn't. Wish they'd heard my laughter in the popping wick, in the bustling market, in the spring wind, in the *puedo abrazarte* and the *es tan bueno verte de nuevo*.

My mother held me. Her baker's fingers, with their grease-scars and dough-ripened skin, clutched tight to white wax I'd come to call *me* and

mine. She shielded my flickering flame with her palm and sang in the crowded street, sandals kicking dust, brown-brimmed hat settled over fishtail braids, beckoning the moon to light our way on the cusp of Día de los Difuntos. People danced, polleras twirled, children grinned and hollered, and prayers filled the evening laced with names never forgotten. María. Alejandro. Jacob. Matthew. Diego. Fernando. Emilio, my mother said. Emilio, my sister said. Emilio, my father said. I wanted to tell them I loved them, but I burned brightly instead. It was all I could do, burn and listen, burn and understand, burn and begin again.

Wooden crosses speared the sky in the cemetery. Celebration chimed like a church bell, echoing between headstones littered with votive candles and sweet treats, covered in lace and liquor. Vendors sold doughnuts and skewered meat, vibrant bouquets and droopy balloons. Puppeteers made skeletal marionettes dance in the dirt, and the thin, mountain air rang with cries of hope and vindication. Souls dangled from keychains, wrapped tight around shoulders, clung to wrists and necks on chains and rope, and we spoke gently to each other. *What will become of us? Do you smell that? Praise God, who is almighty. Is your family inoculated? Cuidate. Our ancestors are waiting.* There we all were, carried and cradled, lovingly placed in gravesite shadow boxes alongside photographs and wildflowers.

My mother upturned my terracotta urn into a casket—cherrywood, polished—and said a prayer over the powdery ash settled atop cheap satin. That night, I left the candle and drifted into the box. Watched the sky slip away as the lid was shut and buckled. Listened to my people cheer and mourn and sigh, relieved. I waited until the silence came, until the footsteps ceased, until the world began anew, and then I slipped through the wood, and eased into the dirt, and made my way to the mouth of a jaguar, the teeth of an anaconda.

Emilio, someone said, *this way*.





ASK A NECROMANCER

Amanda Downum | Non-fiction

A Brief Anabasis

This past weekend (mid-October for you living readers—time flows differently in the underworld) I attended Austin's ArmadilloCon, where I experienced something very rare for necromancers: a live audience. It was lovely to be among the quick for a change, and I was delighted with how many curious souls turned up to ask questions. I'd like to recap a few of those questions in greater detail for you, dear readers.



So I should put it in my will...

This comes up frequently when discussing final disposition. If you have strong feelings about what you would like to happen—to your body, at least—after you die, discuss it with your loved ones. But do not put it in your will: wills are frequently not read until after funeral services have taken place. When you die, your legal next of kin will have the right of disposition for your remains. The order is generally spouse, adult children, parents, and then other relatives. If you have separated from your spouse but not officially divorced, they will still have legal precedent. If you are estranged from your family, or believe they won't honor your wishes, you may appoint an agent to control disposition of remains. This is *not* power of attorney.

I am not a lawyer and can't walk you through this process, but I encourage you to research laws and legal forms in your place of residence if this is a concern of yours. If you're financially comfortable doing so, you can also make pre-need arrangements so a funeral provider will have all your wishes in a contract on file.



What is alkaline hydrolysis?

I brought this up as an alternative means of disposition, and then blanked on useful details. Alkaline hydrolysis, aka aquamation, liquid cremation, and various other terms, uses a mixture of 95% water and 5% potassium hydroxide or sodium hydroxide which is heated to around 160°C/320°F, pressurized to prevent boiling. Over several hours this mixture will reduce a body to liquid and bone. The bones will then be pulverized like cremated remains and rendered into "ash." The liquid contains amino acids, peptides, sugars, and soap. It's nontoxic and can be disposed of via sewage systems. I don't know how these facilities handle the disposal of liquid remains—I've heard at least one anecdote about a person watering their garden with a dead relative.

Like any new method in a traditional field, the process is controversial and faces opposition, mostly because humans are prone to maligning what they don't understand. Most states have yet to pass laws regarding alkaline hydrolysis, and fewer still have facilities available. It's considered a "green" alternative to traditional burial or cremation, but cost and logistics may make it impractical for many people. States where alkaline hydrolysis is currently available include Florida, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, and Oregon.



Do certain body systems break down first?

Yes, absolutely. The correct order may be a question on the National Board Exam for Funeral Services, even. So of course I answered it slightly incorrectly. When referring to body compounds, the correct order is: carbohydrates, soft proteins, fats, hard proteins (connective tissue and cartilage), bones.

In this case, the word *carbohydrates* refers to stored glycogen, which breaks down via fermentation. The final products of this breakdown are carbon dioxide and water. The process doesn't alter the overall alkaline environment in a dead body and doesn't produce any of the unpleasant smells associated with decomposition.

Protein decomposition is called putrefaction. During putrefaction, amino acids break down into amines, including ptomaines such as cadaverine and putrescine. These ptomaines cause the distinctive smell of rot. They also contribute to the odors of living fluids such as urine and semen. Sex and death—hopefully—don't smell the same, but there are some similar notes, and yes, sometimes this is noticeable.

The other answer, which is probably what the querent intended but what I didn't get into, is the order in which viscera (internal organs) break down. That order, roughly simplified, is:

1. The lining of the trachea and larynx; or, if present, an infant brain or gravid uterus;
2. The stomach, intestines, spleen, and liver;
3. An adult brain;
4. The heart, lungs, kidneys, and bladder;
5. Large blood vessels or a nongravid uterus.

Because those large blood vessels remain intact well into the decomposition process, embalmers are sometimes called upon to inject a body that even zombies wouldn't pick for their dodgeball team. It's our job to honor the

family's wishes as best as we can, but when a corpse has reached the green-and-sloughing stage, I do beseech you to consider cremation.



When does rigor mortis set in, how long does it last, and how do you get rid of it?

Rigor mortis, or postmortem rigidity, is generally said to set in around two to four hours after death, peak around twelve hours, and dissipate after forty-eight hours, assuming a corpse is left at ambient temperature. My personal experience is that the duration of rigor varies dramatically, based on a number of factors, including muscular build and temperature. Because my clients are kept in refrigeration (between 38° and 44°F, ideally), rigor tends to last longer.

Rigor begins in the muscles of the eyelids, jaw, and neck, which contributes to the difficulty I've previously mentioned when it comes to closing eyes and mouths. The muscle tension of rigor can also put pressure on blood vessels, which affects the distribution of embalming fluid. Embalmers break rigor by flexing limbs and massaging muscle tissue. We massage toward the point of drainage—usually the jugular vein—pushing settled blood out and making room for fluid.

That massage is one of the little intimacies that immediately struck me the first time I set foot in the prep room. It has a purely practical purpose, but there's a kindness in it too.

Rigor mortis also has a burlier cousin—cadaveric spasm, aka death grip. Cadaveric spasm is a stronger stiffening of the muscles associated with violent deaths or deaths involving extreme emotion or struggle. It's usually found in the muscles of the hands and forearms. This stiffening is much harder to break than that of rigor. I see it most in bodies that come from the medical examiner, unsurprisingly. Because these were more often younger, healthier people, breaking cadaveric spasm can be

an arm-wrestling match with someone who has thirty pounds of muscle on me. These are the rowdy corpses who like to toss instruments around and grab me or smack me while I'm trying to embalm them.



Do you practice necromancy?

I refer to myself as an agnostic pagan and a witch. Caring for the dead provides a personal fulfillment that I consider spiritual. However, I do not technically practice divination through spirits of the dead. Or, in the modern application of the term, I don't raise or control the dead. Yet. I frequently ask my clients for things—usually to stop knocking my instruments on the floor, or to just sit up and put their own pants on. I have yet to have anyone listen, but I haven't given up hope.



Who would win in a fight, you or Caitlin Doughty?

Though I sometimes volubly disagree with Doughty's opinions on traditional funeral services and embalming, I am a huge fan of her writing and her ethos, and she's been an inspiration to me for years. Also, she's taller than I am and a couple years younger, so I'm going to assume she'd have the edge in a fight. Age may bring cunning, but also habitual back pain.



If you have questions for the necromancer, don't be afraid! Look into a black mirror by the light of black candle...or use the submission form at **thedeadlands.com**. From the practicality of home funerals to fun facts about corpses, no subject is too silly or too serious.





MOONWALK ON A NIGHT SKY

Nwuguru Chidiebere Sullivan | Poetry

You like me when I smell like the moon, glazed
with gunpowder & November dust. Look at

the galaxies—a canopy of angels. Here's
a night sky: a dimmed mirror blue-fleshed into

a shack of stars. The auditioning of the blue-eyed
trinket peeling itself into wonders have begun. We'll

wait to carry it on our arms. Do you wish to
contend an altitude with the sky? Scrub your toes

well enough, there's going to be a walk for us
on the moon. This is about your fluorescent body

where fireflies gallop into shooting stars from a night sky.
This is about a portal of glittering louvres washing into us

from an effervescent cloud. *Binye*, like the moist silence
of a ghost, we're capable of jumping into a

moving cloud, I swear we'll not drown in a pageant of
skeletons—we can just be another moon with

ripe footprints that are worthy of lunar eclipse—where
a honeycomb of miracles shades us from the ruins of the earth.





AUTHOR BIOS



Maya Chhabra is a poet. She is also the author of a middle grade novel, *Stranger on the Home Front*, and the forthcoming verse novel *Chiara in the Dark*. Her work has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *PodCastle*, *Daily Science Fiction*, and other venues. She lives in Brooklyn with her wife.

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Alexandra Seidel writes strange little stories while drinking a lot of coffee (too much, some say). Her writing has appeared in *Future SF*, *Cossmass Infinities*, and *Fireside Magazine* among others. You can follow her on Twitter @Alexa_Seidel or like her Facebook page (facebook.com/AlexaSeidelWrites),

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John Paul Davies is an exiled Scouser now living in Navan, Ireland. A blow-in to *The Deadlands*, his work also appears in *Apex*, *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, *Banshee*, *The Pedestal*, *Southword*, *'Influenced'* (Muskeg Press) and has been dispensed by Short Edition's machines. Favourite cemetery:

Certosa di Bologna. Sometime Twitter skulker: @johndavies1978.



Patrick Lofgren is a speculative fiction writer and holds an MFA in Writing from Sarah Lawrence College. He is an enthusiastic member of the Clarion West Writers Workshop class of 2017 and has previously published a short story in the anthology, *The True History of the Strange Brigade*.

He lives in Salt Lake with his extraordinary wife, two ferrets, two lizards, and an axolotl.



Anita Brienza is a Maryland-based communications consultant and creative writer. Her previous work has appeared in *Mobility*, *Tiny House*, and *Sammiches and Psych Meds*; forthcoming essay in *Washington Family Magazine*.



Amelia Gorman is a recent transplant to Eureka, California, though “The Sausage Makers” is much more a tribute to the Midwest cities she floated between while growing up. In her free time she enjoys exploring tidepools and redwoods with her dogs and foster dogs. You can read more of her recent poetry in *Vastarien and Liminality Magazine*, and some of her weird fiction in *Nightscript 6*. Her first chapbook, *Field Guide to Invasive Species of Minnesota*, is available from Interstellar Flight Press.



Freydis Moon (they/them) is a diviner and creator with an affinity for quirky, speculative storytelling. A lover of culture, mysticism, history and poetry, they constantly find themselves lost in a book, trying their hand at a new recipe, or planning a trip to a faraway place. Find them on Twitter @freydis_moon.



Nwuguru Chidiebere Sullivan (he/him) is a keen writer of Izzie, Abakaliki ancestry; a Medical Laboratory Science student whose works have been nominated for both Forward Prize and Best of The Net Award. He was the winner of 2021, WAN–Cookout Journal Poetry Prize. He has works at *IS&T*, *The Shore Poetry*, *B’K Mag*, *The Fourth River*, and elsewhere. He is fond of his poorly lit room from where he tweets @wordpottersull1.



STAFF BIOS

Deadlands



Sean Markey publishes websites for a living, and has always dreamed of publishing a magazine (about Death). He lives with his wife, Beth, in central Vermont. Follow Sean on Twitter @MarkeyDotCo (if you want).



E. Catherine Tobler is a writer and editor. You might know her editing work from *Shimmer Magazine*. You might know her writing from *Clarkesworld*, *Lightspeed*, and *Apex Magazine*. A trebuchet and Oxford comma enthusiast, she enjoys gelato and beer in her free time. Leo sun,

Taurus moon. You can find her on Twitter @ECthetwit.



Sonya Taaffe reads dead languages, tells living stories, and loves the spaces in between. Her short fiction and poetry have been collected most recently in *Forget the Sleepless Shores* (Lethe Press) and *Ghost Signs* (Aqueduct Press) and her film criticism is funded by patreon.com/soyay. She

lives with one of her husbands and both of her cats and remains proud of chthonically naming a Kuiper belt object. She can be found online at sonyataaffe.com.



inkshark is a scandalously queer illustrator, author, and editor who lives in the rainy wilds of the Pacific Northwest. He enjoys exploring with his dogs, writing impossible things, and painting what he shouldn't. When his current meatshell begins to decay, he'd like science to put his brain into a

giant killer octopus body with which he promises to be responsible and not even slightly shipwrecked. Pinky swear.



David Gilmore is a writer, reader, and editor out of St. Louis, MO. His work has been featured in *The Rumpus* and at Lindenwood University where he also received his MFA. He lives with his wife and son and spends his free time manning a stall in the Goblin Market selling directions to various

Underworlds in exchange for rumors and information on where he can find his muse.



Amanda Downum is the author of *The Necromancer Chronicles*, *Dreams of Shreds & Tatters*, and the World Fantasy Award-nominated collection *Still So Strange*. Not content with *armchair necromancy*, she is also a licensed mortician. She lives in Austin, TX with an invisible cat. You can summon her at a crossroads at midnight on the night of a new moon, or find her on Twitter as @stillsotrane.



Laura Blackwell is a freelance editor and Pushcart-nominated writer. Current and upcoming publications include *Chiral Mad 5*, *Pseudopod*, and 2016 World Fantasy Award-winning *She Walks in Shadows*. You can follow her on Twitter @pronouncedlahra and visit her website at pronouncedlahra.com.



R J Theodore (she/her) is an author, podcaster, and graphic designer. Her work has appeared in *MetaStellar*, as well as the Neon Hemlock Press anthologies *Glitter + Ashes* and *Unfettered Hexes*. She lives in New England, haunted by her childhood cat. Find her at rjtheodore.com.



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