

Amundsen | Dunlap | Fullerton | Hernandez
Lavelle | Lingen | Smith | Wagner



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DEADLANDS

a journal of ends & beginnings

cover art by Andy Walsh



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L'HIVER EST ASSIS SUR UN BANC

Margaret Dunlap | Fiction

(avec mes remerciements à Jacques Prévert)

Winter is sitting on a bench. She is not noticed by the people passing, the children playing, the birds flying from one tree to another. She is ignored, as though she is no more worthy of note than a man with glasses in a gray suit.

She seethes with the insult but cannot move.

Every day the sun rises a little higher, a little hotter, eating at her icy flesh. She is as fixed in her place as the sun is in its course, but just because the outcome of the heavens' eternal dance is inevitable does not mean she accepts it with grace.

Winter comes later every year. Spring arrives sooner. Her time dwindles as her summer brother's grows, but there is cold left in the world yet, and while her icy heart is still frozen in her chest she will persevere.

Rage might be white-hot; hatred is cold and creeping.

Not cold enough.

Thanks to the unseasonable change in season, her facade of life is nearly gone. She looks like a snow-woman someone built on this bench as a transient art project, or perhaps as a commentary on the infrequency of bus service along this suburban route.

A week ago, her hair was an ebony cascade flowing past her shoulders. Now, it is dead grass jammed into an icy scalp. Her right breast, the one that faces southeast, is gone, the chest beneath barely concave. Her pelvis remains planted on the wooden slats, but between it and the remnants of her upper thighs she can see through to the muddy ground beneath.

Her arms have dwindled to icy points hanging from each shoulder. The right barely reaches the bottom of her ribs, although the left—shaded by the rest of her body—fares better. The stump of a wrist is tantalizingly close to the top of her leg.

If she can reach the leg, she can sacrifice the end of her arm to reconnect leg to torso. Once under her control, she can use it to stand up and balance long enough to set herself on the other as well.

It won't be pretty, but pretty is not required.

All she needs is to stand by the time the bus comes. If she is standing, she can board.

She will get on at the back, obscured by the exit of the housekeepers, cooks, and nannies who descend here to make their last mile walks to the houses where they spend their days creating the homes of others.

Once aboard, her dry, lank hair and shortened proportions mean no one will begrudge her a seat by the back door, reserved for the elderly and infirm, where the cold outside air will protect her from the suffocating heat that blasts from the engine.

No one will look at her hunched, misshapen form for long. Humans seem to believe that infirmity and death are something they can catch by looking, even though the truth is that they will catch them whether they look or not.

Humans are good at seeing what they expect to see. The commuters will not perceive her true nature as she sits among them. Neither will the parents wrangling their coat-swaddled offspring on the way to nursery school.

The children...

Children have fewer expectations. They notice what adults do not. But that has its own advantages. Children will see her true need, even housed in the rotting corpse of her icy frame.

Children can be very helpful.

She can follow them off the bus as far as the nursery school play yard. There will still be snow there, under the spreading branches of an oak tree.

There is always an oak tree, holding winter in its roots while its branches wait for spring.

The cursed early warmth means the teachers will let the children outside to play. When they are released for recess, the children can help her gather new snowy flesh for her icy bones; help her build a body strong enough to support an illusion of strength and youth, not ignominious decrepitude.

There is winter left in the world. She could have a few more weeks yet.

So little time.

Not enough.

Perhaps one of the helpful children will not return inside when the teacher calls.

Will anyone notice?

No. Human children are not a rare commodity. And even in these times, their parents know—somewhere deep—that old gods must be fed.

She will only take one.

One will be enough to see her through the hot months.

The months that are longer and hotter each year.

Two would be better.

Maybe?

Definitely.

Two.

The bus approaches.

People pass. Children play. Birds fly from one tree to another.

The bus comes, stops, goes.

Another will come.

Winter sits on a bench.

She has only to reach her leg.





ON THE MÖBIUS

Carlos Hernandez | Poetry

I won't resist. I know I can't.
I'm statue-still. I'm scentless.
Take a whiff. There's nothing left
of mind, or fear, or promises.

I'm statue-still. Of scent bereft.
I'm sea-glass tumbled smooth by salt.
I don't mind fear. It promises
to come and go and go and come and go.

I'm sea-glass, yes. Still new, still sharp.
I hate my edge. I need more time
to come and go and go and come and go
on the Möbius the dead and living ride.

I hate my edge. There was a time
I loved it—loved to kill and eat.
But on the Möbius the dead and living ride
I feast upon myself, in time,

and love it. Love to kill, to eat
the molecules over which I ruled.
I feast upon "myself"— for time
has taken all my sovereignty.

The molecules over which I ruled?
They severed all their bonds with me.
And all my former sovereignty?
I wish that none of it remained.

Sever all your bonds with me
I scream to nothing voicelessly.
I wish that none of me remained.
Wherefore this helpless qualia?

I scream, and nothing voicelessly
replies, its voice a cavern's hush,
"Wherefore this helpless qualia?"
An echo? No. The wish for one.

I am become a cavern's hush.
I won't resist. I know I can't.
An echo of myself? I wish.
Take a whiff. There's too much left.





THE CITY OF THE DEAD

Wendy N. Wagner | Non-fiction

From inside the Gardiner cemetery, the town of Gardiner, Oregon, is hidden. A row of cherry plums blocks the view to the south; a thick line of trees shuts out the lonely patch of houses to the north. The cemetery sits on a steep hill, its back to a timber plantation, its face looking over Highway 101, out across the river with its two islands, and then over the low headlands that separate the river from its ultimate destination. The cemetery, like anyone standing on the top tier of terraced paths, stares west toward the glimmering line of the sea.

We moved into a duplex just down the street from the cemetery when I was twelve years old. The apartment smelled of onions sunk in on themselves, and when you took a shower, the walls ran with yellow streams of nicotine. I could walk from one end of town to the other in about ten minutes; fifteen if I stopped at the post office to get the mail. Compared to the apartments tucked in behind the post office, our duplex looked downright luxurious.

Gardiner was once known as *the White City by the Sea*, and its port bustled with more traffic than any town in a hundred-mile radius. By the 1940s, it boasted a medical clinic and a state championship basketball team. One of the first novels about life in Oregon was set there. A cannery perched on the island in the middle of the Umpqua's lively estuary, shipping goods up and down the West Coast. The town had thrived once, but by the time we moved there, it had been dying for decades.

Some places become ghost towns quickly. An industry collapses and people flee, leaving their artifacts and empty buildings behind to rot. The places become fixed in time, held tight in the grip of the past. Tourists seek out ghost towns like this because they are like unstaffed museums, monuments to a philosophy or an economy that came to an end. A tombstone for a way of life.

Gardiner is a different kind of ghost town. It became a ghost before it actually died, its face looking the wrong direction even as it stumbled along in the present, and the people who found themselves there slowly turned to ghosts themselves.

I remember the TV blaring as I sat on the couch, chewing the skin off my fingers while the neighbors beat and kicked a man in our driveway.

I remember standing in my room while the woman next door screamed at her boyfriend, and I remember the way the wall shook as they threw their furniture at each other.

I remember a little girl with lice waiting on her porch for me to walk her to school while her mother sobbed on the couch in their living room.

I remember cutting my father's sandwiches into sixteen tiny pieces so he could eat something while he waited for the last of his teeth to fall out of his jaw.

It is possible for a person to turn as gray as a revenant and still live. It is possible for their cheeks to go hollow and their breath to grow so slow and still that they cannot get off the couch for days at a time. In Gardiner and other ghosting towns, this is practically normal.

To escape life at home—my mother sleeping days and working security at the paper mill by night, my father unemployed and deeply depressed—I went to the cemetery nearly every day, the one place in a town of meth addicts and retirees that guaranteed me a measure

of peace and comfort. Here there were flowers: rhododendrons and azaleas mostly, but a few roses and an entire legion of daffodils in the spring. In its headstones, history told its brighter story of prosperity and hope, art and culture spilling out from their neat engravings and charming statues. Every few years, someone repainted the flagpole a clean white that stood out in a town where the nightly fog stained everything a seaweed-y green.

At the very center of the cemetery stood an enormous headstone, four feet tall and nearly six feet wide. Gray and simple, the side it showed the ocean read only GARDINER in smug all-caps. John Gardiner probably thought it was a tasteful symbol for his life and the legacy he had created by founding a town in his own name. To teenaged me, it looked like a memorial to the dying town itself.

Gardiner's grave sat on the widest tier of the steeply terraced cemetery, but for me, it wasn't the highlight of the place. Two tiers above, a paved walkway simply ended in the open air, a metal gate marking the terminus. On a windy day, the gate would waver nearly open and then almost closed, too rusted to go entirely in either direction. It was a gate to nowhere, neither fastening shut nor presenting a barrier to a walker who might plunge four feet down onto a granite tombstone.

Who installed the gate to nowhere? What did it mean? Why did the sidewalk just stop? Every time I walked in the cemetery, I asked the same questions, and got no closer to their answers. It was a place for unanswerable questions. Why did some graves have iron frames like bedsteads around them? Unanswerable. Who shattered the tombstone for the man buried in 1896, one of the oldest graves in the cemetery? Unanswerable. How long would the stones last before the sulfurous fumes from the paper mill reduced them to lumps?

That one did have an answer. Gardiner might have been a dying town, but it was a dying town in a string of dying towns, the economy vampirized by the timber industry. Once there were no more giant trees to

cut, the lumber mills and the pulp mills began to wink out one by one. In 1999, the last of the mills that had powered Gardiner turned out its lights, and the air cleared over the cemetery.

The garden cemetery gained popularity in the United States in the mid-1800s. Landscape architects like John Claudius Loudon made their names designing cemeteries that were parklike, planted attractively and arranged for the quiet enjoyment of visitors. Gardiner Cemetery might lack the beauty of larger and more carefully planned garden cemeteries, but its design retains a certain threadbare charm. As the town has shriveled, the cemetery lost the budget for a caretaker, and the area has lost the populace to provide volunteers. The plants grow wild and unattended. The cherry plums have spread. More deer than humans browse the walkways, nibbling the weeds that grow between the strappy leaves of the daffodils. The wind blows in from the ocean, damp and salty.

As a kid, I resented the cemeteries of the American West, most of them lawn cemeteries (flat, green, and falsely cheerful) or garden cemeteries (nicely landscaped, but heavily fluffed with religious sentiment). I craved graveyards like the ones I saw in books about New England, where winged skulls and dark poetry decorated the tombstones and called to my gothic heart. I wanted to sit on a proper tomb, preferably one engraved with some kind of memento mori, and perform a séance. I wanted to believe that ghosts were real and neatly contained by the wall of death, a wall I wanted to see as impermeable and fixed, something like John Gardiner's granite headstone and not the creaking gate into nowhere. I didn't learn anything about death from walking in the cemetery. But the more I visited it, the more I found myself enjoying the cemetery as a place unto itself—a place not for ghosts, not for the dead, but for the living. It was a place where I could, at least for a few moments in every grim day, rest in peace.

As an adult, I returned to Gardiner to visit my mother. The town felt quieter, the people, if not more lively, at least more resigned to the town's desolation. There comes a time when ghosts stop rattling their chains

and settle into the walls of their haunts, content to watch the world move past them. A time when a town stops dying and becomes a ghost town, its last inhabitants aware they walk on land lost to time.

Every day of that trip, I took my baby to the cemetery to walk and play. She learned to run on its sidewalks, one hand on the line of tombstones to steady herself. She picked grape hyacinths and daisies for childish bouquets. She sang songs and tried to chase cats. We picked the cherry plums for jam.

On our last day, we made our way up to the very top of the cemetery's stairs, rows and rows above John Gardiner's headstone. The sun sank low above Umpqua Head, and the fog crept in from the north. I picked up my daughter and watched it come, quiet and cold as death, peaceful as stone. And as we walked home, it spread through the streets, unmaking the town of Gardiner both alive and dead. It made my nose run.





CAUGHT BY HER RED-STAINED HANDS

Claire Smith | Poetry

The red juice incarcerated her;
stained fingertips were her judge;
her lips dribbled with pomegranate seeds,
the jury delivering its guilty verdict.

My face plastered across bus shelter glass,
on Underground walls illustrating escalator climbs,
spread over office-block windows...

I can't leave home without being chased by photo opportunists:
newspaper paparazzi, tourists, school children wanting a selfie.

I'd rather be an owl,

bound,

on my own,

inside a cave.





ROOTS OF LAMENTATION

Marissa Lingen | Fiction

I died in a tropical rain forest, protesting the logging industry. I didn't want to die, but I was prepared for it. I had left a will, I had talked to my family about the risks, I had meditated and read the right sorts of books. I had many thoughts about the afterlife.

None of them prepared me to go from bleeding out on the banks of the Orinoco River, lush and green and surrounded by screeching construction equipment, to a silent, frozen birch forest, with no clear transition. I died angry, not ready to be done. I opened my eyes and was somewhere else. Still angry. Still not ready.

There was still a river. It was snow-covered, solid from shore to shore. I wouldn't have recognized it as a river at all, if I hadn't gone to college in Wisconsin, where rivers got like that annually.

"What the actual," I said out loud, and I could see my breath on the frozen air. My neck was no longer pumping blood onto the ground beside me. I was dressed for the weather: jeans, boots, a wool coat, even a hat. Mittens. When was the last time I had worn *mittens*.

"This must be hell," I said out loud, and thought better of it: in hell, my mittens would have a hole in them, or one would be missing, or they'd be wet already.

I stood up.

"It's not the hell you were expecting," said an alto behind me, and I jumped and nearly slid down the snowy bank onto the icy river.

"Sorry," she continued. "I didn't mean to scare you. I'm Lydia. This is hell. But not, like, Satan's hell."

"Cora," I said, slowly offering her a mitten-covered hand to shake.

"It's the Greek hell," she continued. "Unexpected, right? Most people I meet here have thought, well, will it be Christian, will it be Buddhist, will it be, I don't know, some kind of interdenominational interdimensional woo-woo combo platter. But nope! It's Greek! Wild, huh?"

I was trying to muster a response to this news when a whooshing, hissing sound overtook us from around the bend in the river. I turned back to look. A sledge sailed past, pulled by six reindeer with glowing antlers. A man in red stood on it, cracking the whip.

"Was that—was that Santa Claus?" I said.

She stared at me. "No, just some Saami guy."

"What's he doing in Greek hell?"

"What are *you* doing in Greek hell?"

"I don't know!"

Lydia shook her head. “Honestly I don’t think that it’s hell for the Saami, I think it’s just sort of...what there is. And if you hadn’t figured it out already, it’s not the punishment kind of hell—at least not for everybody. The Greeks didn’t do that, it’s gotten tangled up with Milton and everyone else.”

“How does Milton get to influence my afterlife?” I demanded. “I don’t care about Milton, I don’t even care about A. E. Housman.”

“Of course you do. No one who doesn’t care about A. E. Housman knows the Milton reference.”

“But *you*—”

“And malt does more than Milton can, yep, I know it too.” She peered at me. “Don’t expect a great deal of malt here; if the Greeks were big on it, they didn’t import it to hell.”

I tried not to scowl. Bad enough that I wasn’t doing anything useful; worse that I wasn’t doing anything *enlightening*. I had to figure out how to get myself out of this. “I think I’m more lost than when we started this conversation.”

“I get that a lot.”

“Are you some kind of Beatrice or—”

“That’s Dante,” she said patiently. “I’m beginning to regret bringing up poets. I told you, it’s not that kind of hell. No, I’m just...I’ve been here awhile. I know the ropes.”

“So this is the Styx?” I said, looking at the frozen river. “I expected it to be...wetter.”

Lydia laughed, but not meanly. "There are five rivers," she said. "The Styx, the Lethe—those are the ones people know—and the Acheron, the Phlegethon, and this one. The Cocytus. Come sit with me, let's get comfortable so I can explain."

It was clear that Lydia knew the terrain—she chose a copse of birch trees just up the riverbank that were thick and sturdy enough to lean on comfortably, with a soft cushion of moss beneath them, shielded from the snow.

"Not that one," she said as I was about to sit down against a tree. "Here, further in."

"Why?"

"It'll be quieter." I supposed she was right. The frozen river winked and gleamed at us through gaps in the trees, but the rushing noise from under the ice was almost completely masked by the ice itself, and by the branches of the forest surrounding us.

"The Acheron is the river of woe," she said. "It's for cleansing. You go in, and the stuff you've done wrong stays there without you."

I made a face. "Must be pretty polluted. Human sins, yuck."

Lydia stared at me. "I hadn't honestly thought of it."

"People mostly don't," I said, the edge of my old organizer's anger swimming beneath the surface.

"Well. There's the Phlegethon, which is the river of fire. Be glad we're not there. It boils violent people."

"I thought that was just the Christian hell!"

"Nope, we've got one here, too, it's just that not everyone goes there. Rapists, murderers, dictators, that sort of crime. Nasty stuff. I've seen the edges of it, when I walk long enough. You don't want to, trust me."

I wondered how long Lydia had been here, how long *I* could expect to be here. But I stayed quiet and let her finish.

"Our river is the Cocytus, the home of traitors and frauds."

"Should I even be trusting you telling me this? It's sort of one of those, whatchacallit, philosophy conundrums, isn't it? You tell me you're a fraud, so...which time are you lying?"

Lydia smiled. "Sir Mix-a-Lot likes big butts and he cannot lie, Sir Mix-a-Lot's identical twin brother does not like big butts and cannot tell the truth? I don't know what to tell you, Cora. I don't think I'm a traitor or a fraud, but this is where I wound up. Maybe that's why I'm still here."

I tapped my finger on my chin, thinking. Did this mean *I* was a traitor, too—or a fraud? I gulped. Every activist had to wonder. No matter how dedicated you were—and dying for a cause struck me as pretty dedicated, thanks—there were always ways to be better. Truer, deeper, purer. There was always *someone* who was.

But that's true of whatever you are. If you're rich, you know other rich people—you know other *richer* people. You may be *other people's* richest friend, but you're almost never your own. Same thing for artistic success, beauty—or poverty, ugliness, despair. We cluster, we humans. We find others like ourselves. So activists find other activists. I was certainly the most dedicated activist my cousin Sylvia knew, but I was not the most dedicated *I* knew.

Did that make me a fraud?

I couldn't see how. I had dedicated over a decade of my life to the cause. When the earthmovers showed up, I stood my ground. There was nothing more real than that.

So why was I in this part of hell? What sent me to an afterlife on the banks of the river of lamentations? That had never been my thing. I wore my first "Don't mourn, organize" T-shirt when I was fifteen. Surely this was not my hell. Surely this was not my river.

I never believed in a perfect universe. Maybe this was all a mistake.

Lydia was waiting patiently for me to sort my thoughts—or perhaps she was just breathing, taking in the smell of ice and trees. Just being. If she'd been in hell a long time, maybe she had learned a lot about just being.

"Thanks for telling me," I finally said. She nodded. "Is there—what else should I know? Anything?"

She sighed. "This is the worst part. It's easier to show you than to explain it. You're sure you don't want another minute to relax?"

"No. Show me."

We got up and walked back to the river, our boots crunching on a layer of snow once we were out of the shelter of the trees. I followed her around the curve of the river, looking mostly at Lydia. When I glanced at this new stretch of river, I gasped involuntarily.

There were people in it.

"Jesus Christ!" I yelled.

Lydia shook her head. "Haven't seen him." I gave her a not-funny smirk and took another step toward to the river to give them a closer look. The river had frozen around them, but they stood at varying heights

in it. Some were frozen up to their knees only, some up to their chins, some visible as dark forms under the ice. Their exposed skin was limned with frost, their hair hung with icicles. Those whose heads were above the water had frozen expressions of anguish, open mouth, closed eyes.

Not a sound came from them.

“Remember what I told you about the traitors and the frauds,” said Lydia.

I surveyed them again. You couldn’t tell by looking—of course, the frost obscured a lot. But even so, it was hard to imagine that I would know, looking into their faces, what crime had brought them to this fate.

Which returned me, annoyingly enough, to me.

Lydia and I were not submerged in the river, frozen like the traitors and frauds. And she didn’t seem surprised to see another person—like she was accustomed to all of this. “Can I...have a moment to myself? I need to think about all of this.”

Lydia shrugged. “Of course. Take all the time you want. I’ll be here, apparently.”

Apparently. So for all that Lydia was showing me the ropes, she didn’t have a complete picture. I supposed that made sense: I didn’t get a rule-book in life, why should I in death. Still, it would have been convenient. I wandered back the way I’d come, lost in thought. Why me, why here, why now...well, *now* was covered with “that was when I happened to die.”

It was suddenly hard to swallow, hard to breathe. I blinked back the tears forming in my eyes, scrubbing at them with my mitten tips. Don’t mourn, organize. Right. It was time for some literal organization.

I slammed the heel of my hand against one of the nearest birch trees in frustration and then reared back, startled. I touched again, more carefully.

The birch was wailing.

I could only hear the sobs when I touched it. The trees lamented on the inside. But once I was in contact, it came through my bones, fierce and sad and overwhelming.

The tree I'd been sitting against hadn't done that. No wonder Lydia had told me it would be quieter. Tentatively, I reached my mitten out to the next tree. The noise was fainter. Another two trees away from the river and it was gone.

The trees that were close enough to send roots into the river were in mourning.

I pondered this but couldn't make sense of it, at least not in a way that helped me. In life, I would have had the moral dilemma of how to use this to fuel people's understanding of the crisis trees faced with polluted water sources, *without* damaging the trees further. But I was not in a situation where media strategy would help, unless I wanted to harangue the people in the river. I saw no indication they could help me.

I wasn't sure anyone could.

The Saami man on the sled who had gone hurtling past: had Lydia even tried talking to him? Perhaps he was here for the same reason we were, whatever that was.

The cold had seeped through my winter clothes. It was not enough to be debilitating. It was enough to be uncomfortable. I'd left this kind of weather on purpose, and I couldn't help but think of my return as temporary. Lydia didn't seem to have housing of any kind. How could I build a life with just a river and some trees and whoever wandered by? Visits to the Popsicle people?

But if it was as simple as walking until I found an exit, I had a feeling Lydia would have tried that. She said she'd walked. I got up anyway and walked into the forest. Hell allowed it. I walked and walked among the trees. The scenery didn't change.

I turned to see what the view behind me looked like, and the river was still visible through the trees, as if I had never left.

I tried walking upriver for a long time—probably days or weeks—and then back down. It was all much the same. None of it gave me any relief, any variation, any...life. Any life at all. All of my explorations, all of my attempts to find something to push or pull or twist or bend—all of it came to nothing.

Sleep did not seem to be an option either, though in the plus column I wasn't hungry. But that made it worse somehow: an eternity without making scrambled eggs, drinking a cup of coffee, even eating an ice cream cone in the frigid weather? An eternity of icy toes never getting either dangerously cold or comfortably warm? No. No. There had to be some way out.

I'd had experiences with other people being mean and capricious, uncaring, cold. It never occurred to me to believe that the universe would be the same, and I couldn't believe it now.

Cold. Now there was something I had been accused of. For all my passion for the natural world, I had spent my life calculating how to get the most out of my activism: how to reach people, how to create actual change. And that had not always sat well with my more passionate comrades in arms, who did not always want to stop to consider every alternative in minute detail. I had always felt that my planning served us all well, but did someone—something—register it as something less than genuine?

I leaned against another tree absentmindedly, and its soft moan shook me deeply. I wanted to wail along, to pour all my disappointment at being dead at all into the bark of the tree, the moss at its base.

My scalp tingled. There was a warmth in my toes that I hadn't felt since before I'd died. I needed to use this, I needed to be at full capacity to use this. I swallowed hard, and then once more, to try to get control of myself.

My toes chilled immediately. My fingers ached again in my mittens.

Did it need my tears? Was that what I was missing?

I had lived by "don't mourn, organize." Perhaps there was room for both.

I could not cry on command, could not summon back the tears I'd so desperately tried to squash. I stood there on the riverbank, staring at its wide icy expanse, and tried to think sad thoughts.

An entire lifetime of training diverted me: where had the human Popsicles come from, was there any saving them, did Lydia and I even speak the same language or was there some kind of magical afterlife effect, what would I do if I was stuck there, could I even try to make a fire from very cold birch trees, just to improve matters, or would that send me straight to the realm of the fiery river.

None of this made anything any warmer. None of it. Perhaps I was stuck. Not even thirty, and not only was I dead, uselessly, horribly dead, but I was stuck in a bleak, frozen afterlife.

The tears started to flow again.

I glanced down. Under my feet, the snow was melting.

I had another two false starts, too fascinated with the mechanism to focus on my own situation. It turned out I was too good at re-centering myself on practical details.

Perhaps I could both mourn and organize.

I took a deep breath, which hitched in my chest, and walked farther down the riverbank. I pulled off a mitten. Very tentatively, I leaned over and brushed the ice with my bare fingertips.

Tears finally came to my eyes, enough to spill over and run down my cheeks to the river below. The frozen river was colder than I remembered ice being, colder certainly than ice in a drink. It was painfully frigid, burning cold through my hand from just a fingertip touch. I made myself hold my hand there, and the ice warmed and melted as I wept. My hand sank into the warmed water almost of its own volition.

It hit me what the accident had taken from me. My life, yes; but when you are living a life, the details of what the entire thing means escape you. You know, perhaps, that you will have a finite number of times to hug your niece, or eat an apple—or swim in a warm lake. But what does it *mean*, the idea that it won't last forever? A few moments of concern, then back to the thing itself.

Being dead was something completely different. Being dead was knowing that I would never bake another Christmas cookie, never slide between cool sheets on a hot night again—that this, this frozen river, was what I had. It was all I had.

The corporate thugs who had sent me here had taken so much from me. They had taken everything but myself, and that was...remarkably different, without everything else.

The river water melted by my tears was still shatteringly cold. But it felt right to submerge my hand in it, and what was the worst that could happen? I was already dead.

I pulled my hand out of the water, scrambled to my feet, and stepped out on the river.

Though I knew myself for no traitor, no fraud, the river opened for me. It welcomed me. I could tell that I was sinking into frozen water—it was refreezing around me—and as the tears glittered on my cheeks, I let myself feel the full weight of everything I had not accomplished, and never would. I thought of the plans I had for my nonprofit, all the things they would have to scramble to do without me. I thought of my best friend Trish from college getting married with no maid of honor.

I found my ability to lament only when I was waist-deep in the river of lamentations. It didn't feel good, but it felt right, like my own internal river had finally found a channel.

A motion on the riverbank caught my eye.

It was Lydia. She stood staring out at me, her face blank, more frozen than mine.

No wonder she was stuck. She had tried to live on the banks of the river of lamentations without learning to lament.

I struggled against the ice, expecting it to be almost impossible to return to shore. Instead, the river parted for me more gently than running water would have done. "Lydia," I said. "Lydia. Come in. You have to... you have to let it out, Lydia. You have to let go. You can get out of here, if you mourn for what you've lost."

"How do you know?" she asked, her arms folded across her parka-clad chest.

And I opened and closed my mouth, and I didn't know. I didn't know how I knew. But I knew what I needed to do, all the same. The river had given me that. "It feels right," I said.

She shook her head. "Not to me."

"Try it."

"I've lived here for years. You haven't."

"You haven't either, you've just...been here. You're dead. There's no living here." I put my hand out awkwardly. I had given a few uncomfortable hugs to grieving friends in college, but bringing the food, cleaning the kitchen while the mourners rested, was more my thing. I had never said anything similar to this before, but I had to. "Come on. Weep with me for what we've lost. We've lost *so much*."

My voice cracked on the last words, but Lydia's arms crossed tighter, and she was backing away, shaking her head, even as the river pulled pulled me deeper. Welcomed me with the waves of ice that warmed, once I was under them, like plunging into the ocean on a summer morning.

"Lydia," I said, sobbing openly now, and the river sobbed with me, a nearly silent rhythm into all of my bones.

But another step back and she was gone, disappeared into the trees, and I had to decide. There wasn't much time to pull myself together—I could already feel that. Soon I, too, would be under the waters. If I was going to get her, it had to be now.

It was not.

Lydia's death, like Lydia's life, was her own, and I knew so little of it. Perhaps someday she would think of me, she would learn to mourn.

Perhaps in weeks or months or years it would be enough to motivate her to take the plunge—or perhaps despair would overtake her.

But in the meantime, this was my death, as it had been my life, and it deserved to be mourned.

Those who drank from the Lethe forgot all they had learned in their next turn of the wheel. Everyone knew the Styx; a few knew the Cocytus. No one could tell me what drinking deep from the river of lamentations would give my next life, but I had to hope that my next life would taste less of forgetfulness and more of learning. I took a deep breath and plunged my face deep into the river, letting myself feel all the weight of the lamentation I needed. I had never felt so cold, or so warm.





DID GOD SHRINK FROM ADAM SO, WHEN THE DUST SETTLED?

Kristin Fullerton | Poetry

Daydreams, fervent and vivid of
desolation, beauty, delight.
How heavily my body
is anchored, how listless
my shadow passes over cold, famished streets.

I am a gloomed man, with the rapid-
fire neurons of a lunatic, resolved
to set sail to reach the arc of eternal light.

If I fail,	<i>Star-filled sky</i>
when I fail,	<i>oceans of ice</i>
(see how my hope is already changing,	<i>the slow passage of time</i>
how my spirit wicks low),	<i>the folly of this venture</i>

may the universe unchain your fate from mine.

How strangely our souls
are built, how insensible
even our breath,
how much sweeter when
childhood hearts resembled roses in mother's garden
plucked from dark-leaved brambles
and oh, how we have lost
everything to monstrosity.





ASK A NECROMANCER

Amanda Downum | Non-fiction

Crime & Putrefaction

I was recently asked by an employee at a local bar, “How could you hide a body in here?” This was in regards to an urban legend, I hasten to add, not anyone’s plans for the weekend. It’s an interesting scenario, but I’m probably not the best person to ask. I am a Murderino, but when it comes to true crime I’m woefully undereducated. The more thought I’ve given this, the more my answer reduces to one simple piece of advice: Just don’t.

The death itself might go unnoticed; loud music covers a multitude of sins. Considering that people slumped unconscious in corners (possibly purging) aren’t unheard of in bars, and neither is someone being carried to a friend’s car, you could probably Weekend at Bernie’s this situation, especially if you had an accomplice assistant.

But when it comes to long-term corpse storage: Don’t. The smell, my friends, the smell. The smell is real. It is pervasive. It will be noticed. And as bodies deliquesce, they eventually reach a state my coworkers and I have affectionately called “maggot soup.” I’m sure many readers are coming up with counterarguments and solutions right now, and I wish them all the best in their future criminal enterprises. I, however, ascribe to Claudia’s golden rule: Never in the house.

Not in your hall. Not in your walls.
Not behind a door. Not under the floor.
I would not shove it in a crawlspace.
I would not tuck it in the fireplace.
You cannot hide it in a casement.
You ought not dig beneath your basement.
It simply will not work, my dear.
Do not stash that corpse in here.



Scott asks, “*Have you seen The Godfather?*” Specifically referring to the opening exchange between the undertaker Bonasera and Vito Corleone which contains the line, “Some day, and that day may never come, I’ll call upon you to do a service for me.” Of course Chekhov’s favor is eventually cashed in, when Don Corleone arrives at the funeral home with every embalmer’s favorite surprise, a fresh corpse. “I want you to use all your powers and all your skills. I don’t want his mother to see him this way. Look how they massacred my boy...”

What do you, an undertaker in the 1940s, do when a body is brought to you after being mowed down by tommy guns?

I’m going to leave out the temporal element for my answer. I don’t know how techniques and materials have changed in the past eighty years, but I suspect the principles are much the same: dental floss, wax, and patience.

From the neck down, it’s simple. All that matters is that the holes don’t leak. If you’re lucky, the bullet wounds will be small enough that you can seal them with trocar buttons—plastic plugs that screw into punctures. If a hole is too big for that, then you stitch it up.

The head is trickier. That’s the money shot.

When I embalm a gunshot victim, it's very likely that they've come from the medical examiner and have been autopsied. This has its own ups and downs, but in the case of skull fractures, it's handy to be able to fold the scalp back and use clamps, glue, and putty to fit the cranial pieces together. In the case of skull fractures sans autopsy, you just have to be very careful with the alarmingly squishy head. Sonny Corleone was not taken to the authorities for a postmortem examination.

Bonasera likely prayed as I would pray in such a case, that by some miracle circulation to the head isn't too disrupted, and injecting the carotids will get fluid into the face. If that doesn't work, then it's a hypodermic needle, carefully angled so you don't leave lumps.

Once you've finished injecting, then you get to stitch. For facial injuries, I use dental floss (mint is fine, but I wouldn't recommend green thread) and the smallest needle I can find.* Then I pull up a stool next to the embalming table and get ready to sigh and curse. The goal here is to use an intradermal stitch to close the edges of the wound without excess puckering. The more ragged the edges, the more you will curse.

Bonasera's hands were cramping for days.

After the sewing project is finished, make sure nothing is leaking, then cover the lacerations with wax and apply cosmetics. Your work will be graded by a grieving and homicidal crime lord. No pressure.

* I'm thankful at times like these that PPE is required, and I'm used to wearing a mask at work. If my face were uncovered, I can guarantee I would put that thread in my mouth at least once before I remembered why I shouldn't.



We in the underworld wish all the living a festive holiday season. Please take care of yourselves. We especially implore you not to drink and

drive, stab any relatives with a pie server during a heated political debate, or otherwise do things that will increase the workload of your local mortuary. Do, however, feel free to bring up the topic of death with your relatives, even if you're not a goth teenager who would prefer to be left alone. Death acceptance is something our culture needs more of, and being able to discuss it with loved ones is important. If you or your family members have questions for the necromancer, submit them through the website at **thedeadlands.com** or ask **@stillsotranger** on Twitter.





LIKE A SURGEON, WITH HER TEETH

Erik Amundsen | Poetry

When she was three, they left;
oak-leaf leather hugged the walls,
and her finger, sore, turned red,
turned black, the green.

The woods brushed against the edges
of the neighborhood surging invisible
against invisible doors, ready to burst.

The vixen came in first.

Latches fell open at the press of fox-nose,
whiskers like glass cutters
opened the window, oak-leaf leather
scabbed over the insides, skin of the wood.

And the vixen, she scented sickness,
found the girlchild feverish.

Like a surgeon, with her teeth,
chewed short to the end
of the straightest path from the heart,
sutured with a patient tongue, fox-spittle.

She took the finger to the edge
the road where oak-leaf acids
dissolved the tarmac, finger in mouth,
pointed the way to where a child slept,
ring finger stump scabbed like oak-leaf leather,
and a cool brow.





THE AFTERTASTES

Daria Lavelle | Fiction

When you arrive in the Afterlife, you eat and you drink.

Pomegranate seeds, the arils like edible jewels, sweet and tart and bitter, garnet beads that burst as you chew.

Fungi you know—Porcini; Portobello; Oyster; Straw—and some you don't—violet Amethyst Deceivers and nubby Dead Man's Toes—the taste of the things they've fed from, the things they've consumed, lingering long after you've swallowed.

Blood-red wine, Cabernoir and Burglio, Malfleur and Grandegrís, underground varietals so deeply dark they're nearly black, sediment staining glasses, teeth, and tongues, the vintages fermented in the gods' own barrels.

You eat and drink because, to enter the kingdom, you must first forget the world you've come from, and the food of the dead unspools living memories.

At least, it's supposed to.

Sometimes, memories won't let go, won't give way to the victuals of a spotless mind. Taste is the very last sensation to fade, and some taste memories are so potent that they become more than thoughts or sparks or ether.

These aftertastes linger in the mouth, in the spirit, in the soul.

They become tethers.

These are tastes that, if tasted again, from beyond, can cast back a line, an artery, a road to travel. A way, briefly, to cheat Death.



Jolene's is a rice cake with a teriyaki chicken center. It's salty-sweet on the inside, sticky around that, robed in sheets of seaweed that stay impossibly crisp between layers of plastic which—in a feat of Japanese engineering—come apart by pull tab, and, as if by magic, wrap the seaweed back around the rice patty when you're ready to eat. It's not that Jolene likes rice all that much, or seaweed, or even the cachet of a cellophane compartment. It's that she'd been on the Tokyo-Kyoto Shinkansen, had been wolfing down a rice cake just like that one in an immaculate, high-speed rail car, when in walked Akira and time stopped and her heart hammered and she fell in love with a stranger, with a language she didn't speak, with a country she barely knew.

They spent a decade together—not enough, not nearly enough, a scant helping of time. They had a daughter, a cat, a cottage by the sea. They ate their way through Japan and China, Thailand and Malaysia, tasting things far more delicious than train-station onigiri, but it's still the rice cake that's her ticket back to him. It's not difficult to figure out, once she thinks it through, but though Jolene tries and tries, she never finds the right stall in the Food Hall to taste it again. That is, she's found onigiri, a booth and cart and food truck that all serve it, but never the right kind. Once, it's filled with ahi tuna, another time with barbecued brisket, another still with—inexplicably—jelly bean puree.

There's no map of the Food Hall, and, like the Afterlife, it's infinite, so she wanders the endless aisles, asking strangers for directions. She figures that either she'll find the right eatery or Akira will die and find her,

though those years—he's just thirty-six now—will feel interminable, and she worries he'll spend them alone. Jealously, she watches other souls—ones with closure—board the golden trains and travel on, unhindered, to where she's not yet able to go.



Kent is an accountant by trade, a calculated man, and he tells anyone who stands still long enough that he's solved it, that his is black Beluga caviar on a still-warm blin, a whisper-thin spread of butter, chased by a coupe of '96 Dom Perignon. He ate this once at his firm's holiday party, a course in a tasting menu they'd arranged for the partners, and he is convinced that he's right—that this was the best thing he'd ever eaten—because his interpretation of best is finest.

What he doesn't tell anyone is how many times he's tried eating black Beluga caviar on a still-warm blin, with and without various quantities of butter, with alternating years of Dom Perignon, at a thousand different Food Hall establishments, and how many times he's screwed up his eyes in anticipation, braced himself for the journey back, only to be met with bitter disappointment.

His aftertaste isn't fine dining at all; it's a Whopper, the kind from Burger King. Extra pickles. It's what he'd been eating at his desk, hunched over a pile of late-night paperwork, when Ingrid called to tell him she was pregnant with Shane. It was the happiest he'd ever been, but *happiest* and *best* never equate in his accountant's mind, and all the whispers about aftertastes—the hushed conversations, the barstool speculations—said he had to discover the *best thing he'd ever eaten*, and eat it again to go back.

Kent is desperate to return; he has to tell Ingrid how sorry he is to have wasted all those years behind a desk, to tell his boy—a young man now—that he was always first on Kent's list, the firm be damned. He knows exactly what he'll say, the words he'll use. He's thought of nothing else since the moment he died, and failure is not an option. And so,

Kent spends day after day ordering blini—the restaurants and stalls and cafés that serve them appearing obligingly before him in an endless lane—each futile bite bringing him no closer to his wife and boy.



Mercedes knows—like *really* knows—the dish she has to eat to return. Or—dishes. It's between two: the chateaubriand from her wedding (later annulled), or the ceviche from that girls' trip to Vegas (what happened there stays there). Okay, *three* max. The chateaubriand, the ceviche, or that cherry strudel she had with her brother Malcolm the week before she ODeD at Burning Man.

At first, she favors her grandmother's meatloaf, but when that busts she starts thinking about her ex, wondering if it really had been love, and then she's *all chateaubriand, all the time*, at least until she remembers the ceviche. She briefly flirts with the idea of cotton candy—there's a breathtaking Candyfloss Corner in the Food Hall—but there's only so much sugar she can eat before feeling sick, so pass. There's also a week she spends focused on brunch—quiche and eggs Benedict and mimosas—but that turns out to be nostalgia for her day-drinking days.

Anyway, now she's sure. Two options, maybe three. All she's gotta do is eat.

The nice thing is that the Food Hall obliges all of her whims; whenever a new idea pops into her head, it's like the Hall reads her mind and rearranges itself accordingly. It's just a matter of time before she finds the right restaurant. This place is designed to help her, isn't it? And she has to see Malcolm one last time, to tell him not to screw up like she did, make sure he doesn't follow her into an early grave.



For each Jolene and Kent and Mercedes, there are countless others, more arriving every moment, all unsettled, all searching, all roaming the aisles of the Food Hall nibbling and noshing, scarfing and swallowing,

hoping and praying. They are each so focused on their Sisyphean task that when The Chef shows up, no one so much as blinks.

At first, he stumbles about like the rest of them, heavy with his own baggage, dining in and out, trying to understand why nothing he puts into his mouth here tastes quite right. Slowly, he learns the game—the chase for the aftertastes; the search to identify, seek out, and consume them; the souls' driving desire to return and settle their business. He also learns the catch—that no one he's spoken to (or anyone *they've* ever spoken to, not a single soul in deathly memory, in fact) has ever actually succeeded in going back. Most give up and force themselves to move on before they're ready, winding up—rumor has it—reincarnating back as something sad and unfulfilled, like East Coast oysters or stand-up comics.

The Chef quickly sees that they're getting taken, and though he has no desire to return—he'd stay here forever if he could, had chosen this rather than the insatiable hunger he felt while he was living—he feels compelled to help the others. Being a culinarian, he understands food, the way the raw ingredients feel in his palms, the slippery glide of uncooked chicken or shrimp, the earthy grit of an unpeeled potato, the anointing power of fat, of extra virgin or schmaltz or butter. He also understands how food can change, how service and setting and ambience can transform what you eat, elevate or debase it. He understands that sometimes it's not the food you're relishing when you think back on a meal, but the company, the event, the moment that seems too big and beautiful to believe, and the food is just *there*, a happenstance you popped into your mouth at the right time to manufacture a memory.

And so The Chef, never one for rules, decides to change them. When he first opens his stall—*Some Reservations*—he has to convince souls to dine. By his second week in operation, there is an infinite line out the door.

It isn't only that he makes their food—this he does, with flawless execution and otherworldly skill—but that he helps them understand what's been eating at them, and what they need to eat to make it stop. Like all good

cooks, he is part therapist, a nourisher of soul as well as body, and in time the Food Hall itself takes notice, and shrinks, dwindling from an immeasurable gallery to one supersized café, serving coffee and donuts, whiskey and wine, comfort foods to everyone waiting on The Chef's long queue.



When Jolene goes back to Life, she finds Akira sitting alone at a table in their old haunt, an izakaya a few blocks from their home. He's reading a manga—so absorbed that he doesn't notice the beautiful woman at the next table, reading the very same one. Jolene knocks the woman's Sapporo into her lap, which causes her to swear, which causes Akira to look up, which causes their eyes to meet, all seemingly by chance.

When Kent returns, Ingrid and Shane are out, and so is Ingrid's old typewriter. He blows the dust off its keys and hammers out a message, one painstaking letter at a time, pouring his heart out with the kind of courage and candor only the dead and dying can wield. He finds a pen on the kitchen counter and signs it in his handwriting so they'll know it was really him, not *Kent Langford, CPA*, but *Dad*.

When Mercedes reincarnates—with, of all things, a Hot Pocket—she finds Malcolm staring into the bottom of a bottle, a dozen pills littering the table beside him. She gets to work flipping switches and messing with speakers, enveloping him in light and song—harsh fluorescents and the theme to *The Golden Girls*. It takes him a moment to understand, but Malcolm believes in ghosts, has always believed, and catches on quick. *Mercy?* he whispers, *That you?* When she materializes in his kitchen, hands him the number for a hotline, and tells him not to be an idiot, he smiles and says, *You always did know how to make an exit*.



Otto goes back, too. And Luz. And Charlie.

All six-thousand, five-hundred and forty-two Jims.

Shruti and Sergei, Madeleine and Muhammad.

Eloise.

Dean.

Kristos, Jesus, Jesse, Wild Thing.

Tim and Robin.

Apple and Eve.

Juan. Caesar. Alexander Hamilton. Bill Shakespeare.

Prince. Diana of Wales.

The guy who invented zippers.

The Chef serves them all, so many souls he loses count.

But someone else keeps track, and one day, he calls the next number in line, wipes down the counter, and in glides Death, a night-colored cloak billowing behind him, a starlight scythe twinkling in his hand.

It's time, Tony. His voice is air being let out of a tire.

The Chef wipes his hands on his apron. *No thanks, Pal. I'm not going back. None of that reincarnation shit.*

Not back, Death clarifies. *Just not here. You've interfered enough in the Food Hall.*

Where else is there?

Forward. On. You'll get to forget, and be forgotten.

And if I'd like to be remembered?

If you wanted that, you should've left a legacy.

I thought I had— The Chef protests, but Death only laughs, the sound the rattle of dry peapods.

Food is fleeting, He hisses. *Its pleasures momentary. Plus, it rots.*

Okay, well, what about them? The Chef nods toward the window, at the snaking queue of patrons all waiting their turn to dine.

What about them? You're not doing them a service, Death tells him. *It's kinder to set them free than to help them hold on to illusions.*

Illusions? The Chef scoffs. *That's your game, not mine. You weren't letting them go back; not a chance. No one even got close before me. This whole thing,* he gestures out, to the Hall, *was just one big illusion.*

Naturally. Death doesn't flinch at the accusation. *But the point was never the return. The point was to sever ties. The more they eat, the less they remember. The Hall helps them move On.*

At this The Chef actually laughs. *Bullshit. You might be serving up amnesia with a side of fries, but you fed them hope. And they'll never forget that, not in a million years. It's what people cling to, the only thing that makes life livable.*

I wouldn't know, Death says slowly.

There's a gleam in The Chef's eye. *Have a seat,* he says.

The Chef makes the dish by intuition; it's not something he's cooked before. He combines incongruous things: the fleshy shoots of fledgling trees, ancient microbes clinging to life, a first kiss, nervous laughter, salt and fat and acid, the moment someone topples into love, touch, heat,

sadness and oxygen, swimming in the ocean, wishes upon stars, casting out a fishing line, disappointment, a pinch of cayenne, a leap from an airplane, the death of a loved one, Tahitian vanilla, the will to live. The Food Hall delivers these ingredients into his kitchen the same way it does poultry and produce, and when The Chef has stewed them all together, he plates the dish on a silver platter.

When Death tastes hope, He actually smiles.

I can see, He says, why they enjoy this illusion.

Or maybe, The Chef replies, hope is real, and dying's the illusion.

And maybe outwitting Death will let you live forever, Death teases. But, alack and alas. Your time's up.



As the gilded train pulls away from the station, The Chef watches the Food Hall rearrange again, the stalls giving way, the myriad eateries collapsing into a wide, brilliant expanse. A table appears, boundless as a horizon, and the souls swarm around it, covered cloches appearing at their places as soon as they sit down, illuminated glass every color of the rainbow, steam brewing inside.

What gives? he asks Death. Done with the restaurant game?

A new menu, Death replies. Something to entice them into their next life, instead of holding them to their old one. Your recipe. Hope.

The way He says it, smug, it almost sounds like He thinks He's won a wager, bested The Chef, skipped out on the bill. But as The Chef watches countless souls tuck into his dish, savoring possibility, tasting tenet, he grins wide, understanding what Death cannot, about the ties between living and memory, memory and food, food and feeders. Where they're

going, he might forget, but he won't be forgotten. He'll endure every time someone eats what he's created, reincarnation by recipe. That's what recipes are, after all, what they've always been: relivable memory, something someone once made, bequeathed, inherited, recreated, tasted again. A way to leave yourself behind, to never really die.

What's that you were saying, he asks Death as the train changes course, gains speed, climbs, the table and Food Hall shrinking below them, thinning, receding, becoming a dark, unsavory hair in a bowl of bright chowder, *about living forever?*

*For Anthony Bourdain,
who I never met in this life,
but hope to run into in the next.*





AUTHOR BIOS



Margaret Dunlap sold her first short story to *Shimmer* back in 2013 and is delighted to be part of *The Deadlands* family. In the years since, she has written more than a dozen published short stories and novelettes in addition to her work in television and new media, which includes the Emmy-winning *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance*. Margaret lives in Los Angeles where there are very few creepy snow-people, but she keeps an eye out just in case. Find her on the web at margaretdunlap.com or on Twitter as @spyscribe.



Carlos Hernandez (he/him) is the author of the Pura Belpré-award winning *Sal and Gabi Break the Universe* (2019), as well as its sequel, *Sal and Gabi Fix the Universe* (2020) and the short story collection *The Assimilated Cuban's Guide to Quantum Santeria* (2016), along with numerous short stories and poems. He is also a CUNY professor of English at BMCC and the Graduate Center, as well as a game writer and designer. Find him on socials @writeteachplay.



Wendy N. Wagner is the editor-in-chief of *Nightmare Magazine* and the managing/senior editor of *Lightspeed*. Her short stories, essays, and poems run the gamut from horror to environmental literature. Her longer work includes the novella *The Secret Skin*, the horror novel *The Deer Kings*, the

Locus bestselling SF eco-thriller *An Oath of Dogs*, and two novels for the *Pathfinder* role-playing game. She lives in Oregon with her very understanding family, two large cats, and a Muppet disguised as a dog. You can find her at winniewoohoo.com



Claire Smith writes poetry about other worlds. Her work has most recently appeared in *Penumbric Speculative Poetry Magazine*, *Spectral Realms*, and *Tales from the Moonlit Path*. She lives in Gloucestershire, UK, with her husband and Ishtar, their very spoilt Tonkinese cat.



Marissa Lingen is still recovering from her physics education. She writes speculative fiction, poetry, and essays, mostly in her home in the Minneapolis suburbs even before all of this. She likes Moomins and tisanes immoderately and has read more sagas than a person really should.



Kristin Fullerton resides in upstate New York with bucolic views of the Helderberg Escarpment from her backyard. She is a proud alumna of both Elmira College and University at Albany. Previous work has appeared in *Poetry Hall*, *Panoplyzine*, and *The Maine Review*.



Author, poet, and aspiring swamp witch **Erik Amundsen** (they/he) has found their way into *Strange Horizons*, *Weird Tales*, *Clarkesworld*, and *Apex*. They live in central Connecticut with their partner, brother, and a handful of cats to which they are known to sing nonsense.



Daria Lavelle writes fiction, most of which features a healthy dose of unreality. Her stories have been shortlisted for prizes by *The Masters Review* and *Molotov Cocktail*, and have appeared or are forthcoming in *Breadcrumbs*, *The Arcanist*, and *Dread Machine*. She is an MFA candidate in Speculative

Fiction from Sarah Lawrence College, and is currently at work on a novel about food, ghosts, and the New York culinary scene. She lives in Hoboken with her husband, hyperactive golden-doodle, and toddler twins, who are in training to learn how to make stuff up, too.



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.



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Front Cover: "Ghost," by Andy Walsh

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