



## UNDERWORLDS

# Dear Readers

We meet again for our fifth issue.

An issue that brought rich, passionate poetry and literature that took us by our eyes and dragged us right to the core of the **UNDERWORLDS**.

From satyrs to cemeteries to the icy abyss - all awaits you in this issue. Come down, journey with us and break open this fresh offering of tales.

As always, thank you for your ongoing support and thank you to the writers who make Moonflake Press so special.

*Cyrine Sinti*

*Marcella Haddad*

*Fran Fernández Arce*

*Shayal Kaur*

*Carolyn Evans*



# The Guest

the space is tall  
the ceiling arched  
one wall open  
to the sky  
the other disappearing  
into more than darkness  
and there they stand  
tiny in that place  
a speck on the continent  
of the body on the floor  
a fly in the cathedral  
of the ear canal  
no visitor more holy  
than the first  
after the stilling  
of the heart  
no place more sacred  
than the first  
spot of corruption  
brought by the  
pilgrim  
on wings

Maeva Wunn





# *Eighteen Levels Of Hell*

Chinese underworld, Diyu  
Literal translation: Earth prison  
With too many gods to remember  
When I was shown paintings of them  
As a child to fear abstractions  
Fear the consequences of  
Disobedience  
I thought,  
Well, aren't they kinda cute.

The true horror of  
Earth prison wasn't  
Paintings with no vanishing points  
Rich with flames curling like  
Petals on chrysanthemums left  
On the grave of a grandpa I never knew  
But the gravity of existing  
In a body against my will  
Bound to earth until the next go round.

Angel Lynne

# Hope for the Parallels

Zippering heat serrated Yori's hands as he pulled the thick rope, sending a woven basket of stone up to Tierra 6. He raised his head to see glints of beguilite cascade down in beams of soft azure until the harsh fluorescent lights flooded the delivery shaft again.

Yori sat on the powdery, red earth before the next basket reached him. He estimated he had approximately six minutes before its arrival. The pitting crews had grown tired since King Hemna ordered double beguilite stone to be excavated. Its healing properties were in desperate need in Cielo 5, 6, and 9 where the outbreak had become worse in the past few weeks.

For the past twenty-three years, Yori spent most of his days in one of the underground Tierra Parallels, but he longed for his youth, scavenging for agates at Loch 38 and 39 by the Bremian coast. Though it was one of the most menial and low-paying runner professions, he enjoyed smelling the salty air and hearing the crashing waves beyond the jetties. It was also where he met Voyan. After scouting, he visited her den before stopping by his mother's abode. Voyan was aware of his routine and intentions; she welcomed them with a warm cup of nettle tea every morning of his designated week in the area. They exchanged stories of ocean journeys from each other's childhoods, but his mind would weave away as he daydreamed about their lives together, one day raising children with treks filled with seashore discoveries. The recurring outbreaks of the past decade prevented much travel between the Parallels. These layers, with their different atmospheres, peoples, and cultures, were always a treat to visit, but nothing was comparable to the Lochs.

Yori woke from his reverie when one of the shortest pit boys nudged the basket into his ribs.

"Sorry, lad," Yori said, graciously taking the heavy basket and readying it for upward travel. The boy, adorned with a swipe of thick mud across his forehead, rolled his eyes and shuffled down the tunnel.

Hooking and pulling the rope to elevate the load up to the next level, Yori cursed himself as he tried to recall where he left his gloves. All the Parallels were working overtime to replenish various depleted resources because of the outbreak, so it seemed inappropriate to complain, especially since he knew of dear friends in each of the affected Cielos. He felt particularly honored to replenish the most important resource of all, the healing beguilite. Once a substantial number of inhabitants receive the stone as an elixir, the Parallels will come back to life again. For some.



He yearned for his regular post as Tierra 4, Path 3 Lead. As a supervisor, he could use his mind rather than his body. At fifty-one years of age, Yori felt he deserved the break. Sure, he helped plow and dredge tunnels, but pearl borts were easier to derive than beguilite. The desperate need for the precious stone forced his appointment to Tierra 7, Path 2 Shaft Operator.

A fresh group of pit boys filtered into the tunnel. He could already breathe in the cup of nettle tea he planned to brew in his Cielo 2 apartment. The kingdom provided the dwelling after he lost his family during the beginning of the outbreaks. As the lone survivor, he grieved in quarantine. It wasn't a big place, just a small living room, kitchenette, bedroom, bathroom, and mud hall. In the beginning, the vanilla walls and gray smart assistant panels felt stifling without his two sons and Voyan, but the home, closer to the Tierras, became a cocoon as Yori's cousin and meditation guide, Roon, helped him break out of the sorrow aura and into the liberation aura. With his bereavement stipend running out, he needed to return to the mines sooner than he wished.

As another pit boy approached, Yori straightened up and opened up his hands to take what he hoped was his last basket of the day. He hooked it and clenched his teeth as he pulled the rope with his raw palms. His face was awash in the blues reminiscent of water and sky as he waited in near darkness.

# *Flour Explosions*

flour explosions  
three satyrs  
wrestling a serpent



**Jerome Berglund**

# *My Rock (and the Body): A Double Exposure Poem*

I have a rock, it's smooth and cold.

*You know things aren't alive when they're like that.*

White and shiny, it shimmers in the light.

*One open eye, glassy in the coffin.*

It has been smoothed, tumbled

*To be watched and remarked upon by all*

Has sanitization made this better?

*I never knew him when he was living.*

Found where, in some cave?

*Experiencing what Plato called life, I guess.*

Body soft enough to be scratched with a fingernail

*Is the soul intact still? I'm clenching my fist.*

**Nora Glass**





# When

When I was thirteen, I saw my aunts for the last time. Time has gotten away from me since then, the years washing through my memories, rinsing them clean, smoothing them flat like stones. Stones lined the beaches near my aunt's house, then. Then they opened the door and welcomed me inside. Inside, everything smelled of burnt sage and lingering incense, the air bright with the glitter and chime of a rainbow of beads. Beads hung round my aunts' necks, too. Too gaudy, my mother always said, too tacky, too childish—for the handmade necklaces did seem like they'd been strung by children. Children my aunts never had. Had my parents allowed me to see them more, I might have been their daughter, but although I didn't mean much to my mother and even less to my father, they'd have kept me forever if it meant my aunts couldn't have me. Me, then thirteen, stick-legged and frizzy-haired, gazing at beads and smoking incense sticks like I'd entered a realm more heavenly than heaven. Heaven is where my aunts are now. Now, I find myself wondering if I'll see them again, if I'll ever traverse that stony beach to an open door, a door that exudes the scent of sage and a faint chime of wind-stirred beads, a door held open by my aunts. Aunts I'm sure I'll see again, though I don't know when.

Christina Poulin



# Sedna

I stand at the water's edge. Overwhelmed  
With the silence of the empty sea.

The moon eyes me warily  
Mocking me with an icy stare.  
Moon glade coats the waves like an oil slick.

*I must follow this labyrinthine tangle of hair.*

The ice cracks underfoot  
Like so many old bones. Surprisingly easy.

Below black fathoms,  
Murky with countless lost souls laid bare,  
Lies Sedna, and all she has summoned to her cold embrace.

*I must follow this labyrinthine tangle of hair.*

I reach her swirling skirts of darkness.  
An abyss. I inch closer to her lair.

The depths grow heavy on my tired limbs.  
I feel the weight of their sin, their regrets.  
The water feels suffocatingly close.

*I must follow this labyrinthine tangle of hair.*

A sight too terrible, too awful, too rare.  
She suffers and strains under the weight of her beauty. Poor woman.

I kiss her fingerless hands then comb out her hair,  
Polluted with the transgressions of mankind.  
Dark matrix of forgotten promises and broken taboos.

*I have followed this labyrinthine tangle of hair.*

R S Kendle





# Moonshine Tea

creatures die in black forests | tomorrow will be better | mother  
said | upturned spindles | vine leaves become green nooses |  
hanging like old laundry | in midsummer light | outside the  
temperature never dips below boiled egg | but my skin is cool  
water | porcelain | flecked blue by veins | and the snake pit soup  
I drank for sunday lunch | moonshine tea | nettles | the floor is  
covered in moss | green blanket | gecko carpet | my feet are fuzzy  
moss balls | engulfed by jungle bugs | bitten yellow by mosquitos  
| lemon toes | if I lie on the soil it will cover me whole | my heart  
will burn terracotta | baked earth | I will beat the forest back to  
life

Alice Eaves

# Bodies Below the Banyan Trees

Outside the cemetery is a hand-painted sign in wonky English:

1. *Don't be proud.*
2. *Don't be spite.*
3. *Don't be greedy.*

*It's important to be seen by the human being who realise they will die.*

A pair of pantomime effigies, arms limp like dolls, beckon in the living. One is a man, with lips framed into a juicy smile. His suit jacket is rotting away, revealing the warped bamboo frame of his body. His partner is a woman. Her yellow dress has been eaten by the rain.

These soggy sentinels guard a dark entranceway framed by knotted creepers and flanked by two stone columns. On top of each sits a human skull. Real ones.

A bit of *mise en scène* for you. I'm deep within a volcanic caldera, and have just been rowed across a black lake by two boatmen. It's pure Halloween, or would be, were it not summer in Bali. But I'm a long way from the tattoos, traffic jams and outlet stores of the coast. This is the island's dark heart. From Google Earth, the crater, 20 kilometres across, looks like a giant beady eye. The black lake, Danau Batur, is the iris, staring east. And the cemetery is a speck of dust atop it, a tiny clearing between cliffs, accessible only by boat.

I'm inside the cemetery now, stepping over the roots and twisting trunks of a fabulous banyan tree. One of the boatmen tells me it's a thousand years old. It can't be, I think. Regardless, this giant started life as a fig. The seed of a fig, as small as a grain of sand. And now it shelters the dead.

Unlike us mortals, banyan trees seem to cheat death. They strangle their hosts with love, then spread outwards, sometimes becoming a whole clonal colony, a forest of genetically identical trees.

Eastern religions revere them. Buddha sat under a banyan tree for seven days, pondering his enlightenment. Hinduism celebrates the banyan as a tree of immortality, likening it to the shelter given by God to his devotees. But it is also associated with Yama, the God of death.

This banyan tree, though, has a certain other usefulness.



The locals call it **taru menyan**, meaning something like tree of fragrance. They believe it absorbs the reek of the dead as the bodies rot.

Because, in the cemetery of Trunyan village (the name supposedly a derivation of **taru menyan**), the dead are not buried. They are right here, on the ground, next to me. The most recent corpse has been in residence for four weeks, wrapped in a white sarong. I try not to look. I fail.

“See, there is no smell!” grins the boatman. The bodies rest in simple bamboo cages to keep them safe from wild animals. It’s called **mepasah**, the flesh returning to the earth while the souls are carried up towards heaven by the birds, as offerings to the gods. When new dead come in, arriving by boat in solemn ceremony, the bones of the longer-serving tenants are gathered up and stacked all around the small clearing, or pushed into folds and hollows of the tree.

There are leg bones, arm bones, and skulls by the score. This isn’t as horrifying as it sounds. As a species, we scrub up quite well in bone form, I realise. Alive, the lucky are handsome and shapely; the unlucky probably look better as skeletons. But underneath the meat and the hair, we’re all just grining marionettes.

Other creatures not so much. Rabbits, for example. No rabbit ever looked comelier sans fur or floppy ears. Cut them off, peel it away, braise what’s left in a five-spice broth, and they are pure horror. I once ate two and a half rabbit heads at a place called, appropriately, Grandma Wang’s Rabbit Head Restaurant in Beijing. (Summary tasting notes: tongue = chewy as hell, cheeks = OK, brain = delicious blob of foie gras.)

Don’t be greedy, the sign said.

It’s quiet, under the tree, with the dead. The cemetery clearing is about the size of a squash court, which might sound like an incongruous metric, but the particular dimensions of a squash court correlate to the claustrophobic depth here. And the sweaty humidity. And the creeping sense that life, like bouncing a ball really hard against a wall, is somewhat futile.

The loudest noises are our footsteps, each one crunching the detritus of the departed. Cigarettes, coffee cups, bowls, plates, old shoes, tubes of toothpaste, toothbrushes. Toothbrushes! Brushing twice a day is dull enough for the warm-bodied. I crouch to brush aside layers of dried banyan leaves, and find the floor carpeted in money. Useless low denomination notes, 1,000, 5,000 rupiahs, even a few old Chinese coins cut through with square holes.

“You can take a photo!” grins a boatman, who surely realises he will die. Perhaps he thinks I

don't, just yet. But it's dawning on me.

I realise I will die. Kind of. I mean, I kind of realise I will die, yet I hope I will only kind of die. I hope something will stay behind after I'm gone. Some artistic legacy, positive spiritual vibes, or failing that, kids. Does that make me proud and greedy? Pretty sure it doesn't make me spiteful.

These bodies and bones belong to the original Balinese. The people of Trunyan village call themselves Bali Aga, old Bali, claiming to be the first islanders. They predate the arrival of Javanese Hindus, and now survive in just two inland villages. This is the cemetery of one of them.

The Bali Aga are withdrawn and suspicious, the guidebooks say. They beg for rice and money. Only a few thousand survive. Around 400 families live in the village, the boatman tells me. Protected by water, it has survived repeated eruptions from Gunung Batur, rising 700m above the caldera, because the lava just fizzles into the lake. The last eruption was in the year 2000.

A legend of the Aga refers to a king with the ability to cut off his head and reattach it without pain. But one day it fell into the river and was swept away. A pig was quickly decapitated by a resourceful servant and the king's head replaced.

As I scan the rows of skulls, I wonder: would a pig's skull look very different to a human's?

Unlike everyone else here, we leave the way we had come, by boat. Caldera is Spanish for cooking pot, but chill mists are filling the crater now, and the temperature has dropped.

The boatmen press me to take more photos. I look back at the skulls one last time as we drift away. They grin back at me. Death, the eternal punchline. Eventually, we all get the joke.

I realise I will die.

# Scorn Armour

she plays with walnut shells,  
miniature vessels for  
an imagined world peopled with tiny objects:  
a figurine, a boardgame token –  
each intrepid voyager armed only with  
an acorn helmet and twig-sword.

her characters traverse damp mossy places,  
watchful for the hungry jaws of passing rodents,  
or dew-dripped cobwebs  
that might entangle a walnut barge.

unafraid of giant dangers,  
each little explorer presses forward,  
quietly courageous when she is not.  
they step lightly through fallen leaves,  
seeking a fairy grotto, or forgotten burrow  
to house the desperate longing  
for a small, safe place in which to rest.

**Karen Baumgart**

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DANTE GABRIELE ROSSETTI RITRASSE NEL CAPODANNO DEL 1874

## Maeva Wunn

Maeva Wunn is a bi-sexual non-binary neurodivergent writer of poetry and prose, crafter, history buff, and music enthusiast living with chronic illnesses. They currently reside in Iowa with their spouse and cats.

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Desiree McCullough lives in the Walla Walla Valley of Washington State with her family. She's currently writing a hybrid memoir about discovering sensuality post-ministry. Find out more about her at [desireemccullough.com](http://desireemccullough.com) or [clavicle.substack.com](http://clavicle.substack.com).

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## Angel Lynne

Angel is a photographer by day and a poet at all other times. She is inspired by dream imagery, psychology, and a touch of magical realism. She can be found writing at cat cafes, during long walks, or in a different continent suddenly, as she has a habit of taking off to go travel frequently.

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## Jerome Berglund

Jerome Berglund, recently nominated for Touchstone and Pushcart prizes, has published many haiku, haiga and haibun, most recently in *bottle rockets*, *Frogpond*, and *Modern Haiku*. His collections of poetry were released by Setu and *Meat For Tea*, a mixed media chapbook showcasing his fine art photography is available from Yavanika.

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## Nora Glass

Nora Glass is a high-strung 17-year-old from Atlanta, Georgia. Passionate about the theatrical, poetic, and linguistic, she can be found reading, writing, and making unnecessarily complicated spreadsheets. Her poetry has appeared and will appear in the Weight Journal and Eunoia Review. Her website can be found at [noraswriting.weebly.com](http://noraswriting.weebly.com).

## R S Kendle

R S Kendle is a poet and writer from the north-east of Scotland. They hold a BA Honours in English Literature and Politics from the University Of Strathclyde. Their work has been featured in several publications, including Feminist Space Camp, Free Verse Revolution, and The Winged Moon. They are also an editor for Mxogyny's digital site. Follow them on Instagram @rskendle.

## Christina Poulin

Christina Poulin is a writer from New York City who studies history and English at the University of Pennsylvania. She has been recognized nationally by both YoungArts and the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. Her work has appeared in Mochi Magazine, The F-Word Magazine, and Dear GlobalGirls Magazine.

## Alice Eaves

Alice is an artist and writer based in Edinburgh. She has been published with The Alchemy Spoon, The Lit Platform and with Forest Publications. She is Editor-in-Chief of the Ukraine Poetry Project and a Melbourne UNESCO City of Literature Writer in Residence. She holds an MSc in Creative Writing from the University of Edinburgh.

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## Thomas O'Malley

Thomas O'Malley has had several writing jobs including working as an editor for Marvel Comics and a guidebook author for Lonely Planet. He spent 12 years in Beijing, living in the city's old hutong alleyways. He now lives in Edinburgh with his family.

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## Karen Baumgart

Karen Baumgart lives in Australia and adores beautiful quotes, pink things, cats, and chai tea. She loves working in human services policy, especially when it enables marginalised people to have a voice. Karen used to be an English teacher, and is quite certain that writing is, indeed, the best therapy.

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