

101 Fiction

Issue 10

December 2015

Ten issues! 101 Fiction hits double figures, and we are on fire. From inner hells to outer space, through mindscapes and metaphor, the flicker-lick of flames plays over it all.

Come closer, warm your hands, stay awhile and listen. Inside issue ten are fifteen tiny tales to tantalise, terrorise, and transport you to other places, other times. Fifteen sparks to ignite your imagination.

I'm excited about this issue. We always try to capture a breadth of style and species of story, and I think we generally succeed (if the leaning is, often, towards horror, but that is a fair reflection of the submissions). This issue really showcases that range, and across all the various genres and differing tones, amongst some great writing, inspired storytelling and incredible imagery, all of these stories have such great spirit for such small word counts. They are all so *alive*.

It's an issue I look forward to revisiting in the future. I hope you will too.

It may be chill outside, but in here amongst the words, things are heating up.

Read. Absorb. Enjoy.

Advancing
by William Swain

When people spoke of Yueying, they called her “Huang Chengyan’s ugliest daughter.” But the strategist Zhuge Liang, withdrawing Yueying’s veil, holding up a soft lantern, said, “Exaggeration is the greatest strength of men.”

That is why... thinks Yueying, lighting the signal-fires, *that is why my strategy is perfect.* Zhuge Liang lies stuck to his bed with illness, his armies Yueying’s, on the precipice of defeat or victory.

I fight that victory might rekindle Zhuge Liang’s heart, restoring warmth to his skin, white like ice.

“Fight for your wishes,” says Yueying to her officers, “and you will fight for the world.”

Author bio: I am William Swain, with no accolades or credentials to my name, besides that I am guitarist of the band Mediseasin: <https://mediseasin.bandcamp.com/track/quiet-roar>

Forged
by Kit Hamada

I am the Iron Soldier. When I roll up my sleeves, everyone knows who I am. They know me by my marks – twin serpents on my forearms, the scars red and raised. Six years ago, I cleaved the Serpent King in two. I saved our people.

Before the ritual they warned me: if I moved, it would be for naught. I lay still. I did.

Some nights, I still feel the brands searing my flesh, the memory of agony rushing through me, piercing me anew. My arms ache with the iron spirits, twisting beneath my skin.

Soon, they hiss. Ssssssoon.

Author bio: Kit Hamada spends most of her time writing love letters to computers, and occasionally to other people.

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Kissed
by John Xero

Teeth the size of mountains, and they aren't the worst. What comes next is. Hell. In the cavernous mouth a flicker, sparking a raging torrent of hot hungry flood waters. Flames that roil and lash and consume. A living volcano.

They call her Dragon.

Her kiss spills round me, stripping the ground down to rock as it takes my flesh from me. Turning my home and my bones to ash. Setting me free.

They call me Angel.

I thank her with a kiss of my own. And when it is done I bathe in the cool sweetness of her soul.

*Author bio: John Xero is an elemental of ink and imagination waiting on the fire to set him free.
Few words: @xeroverse
More words: xeroverse.com*

Life

by Wendy Steele

Sit beside your warm hearth and think of me. Bound to this rock, the acute beaks of time pierce my fragile flesh, while you delight in primitive light.

The kindled spark of life, I gave to you.

As the mellow flame beats within your breast, set the world alight with your creativity and passion. Embrace your imperfect world and indulge your mind and heart. Ignite beacons on the hill tops with your lust for literature and art. Love without restraint and walk your path with joy. Waste nothing, appreciate all.

Too soon the snuffer falls, and fire turns to ash.

Author bio: Wendy Steele lives on a hillside in Wales with her partner and cats. Following training in belly dance and writing, she has published novels and novellas in the magical realism genre and teaches ATS® Belly Dance. Renovating her Grade II listed farmhouse and reading fill the rest of her time. www.wendysteele.com <https://twitter.com/WendyWooauthor>

Hunger
by Brigitte Winter

They crowd around the Storyteller's fire, as if stories will soothe their aching bellies, fill their sunken cheeks. I'm hungry, too. So I join them.

"Not the creature story again," a girl whimpers.

"You're safe," says the Storyteller. "Everyone knows the creature fears flames."

"What's it look like?" I ask.

"Hungry. All teeth and fur and foul breath."

I transform, and the Storyteller's eyes get big. The fire glints off the white parts. "You got it right," I say. "Mostly."

Then I eat him. I eat all of them, except the girl.

"Dangerous to believe in stories," I tell her.

Author bio: Brigitte Winter is a storyteller, a jewellery-maker, a convener of artists and art-lovers, and the Executive Director of Young Playwrights' Theater (yptdc.org), a Washington, DC nonprofit that inspires young people to realize the power of their voices through creative writing. Brigitte's short fiction is featured in Columbia Writers' 2014 anthology, Trapped Tales (<http://goo.gl/Bkdvnu>), and the upcoming October 2016 City of Weird: 30 Otherworldly Portland Tales anthology by Forest Avenue Press. Her micro fiction has been published in 101Fiction, Nail Polish Stories, and Alban Lake Publishing's November 2014 Drabble Harvest journal, Tourism on Other Worlds. All of her celebrity crushes are on authors. Hang out with Brigitte on Twitter @bwinterose and at briggittewinter.com, and stay tuned for her latest project: a pre-apocalyptic coming-of-age adventure novel.

Feast

by Shannon Bell

I can't abide raw meat. It's not that I don't love the taste of blood, I do. But it's the smells and the sounds, as much as the taste, which informs my dining experience.

The smell of a juicy, fat-marbled piece of meat roasting over a naked flame; such an aphrodisiac.

A crackling fire, sizzling flesh, spitting fat, terrified screams, what music!

"Please," he begs. His fear flavours the meat, his tears a tasty marinade.

I carve a thick slice of thigh. At this rate, he won't last a day. I like them alive, but oh, I am a glutton.

Author bio: Shannon Bell is addicted to words. You will find him madly writing away in the spare time he has available between holding down a full-time job, being part of a dysfunctional family and looking after his energetic, attention seeking dog.

Tyger
by John Xero

What do you see through those cracked teeth of yours? What sounds wash by those prowling white eyes? Do those ragged ears cry victory, or defeats?

You stalk these backyard jungles, spraying your black scent, stepping your acrid footprints into the soil, steeping the air with your tattered yowl. Entwining yourself with your territory.

But what will you do now that fire has come? With its own hot scent, its red laughter. Trampling fierce and hungry through your forest. It is all insatiable maw. Its eyes a thousand bright embers, tasting everything. Sparing naught.

What can you do, but fight?

Author bio: John Xero is the shimmer at the edge of your hearing, the susurrations just out of sight. He believes every word has its own flavour and hopes you have enjoyed his synaesthetic pirouette upon your mental palate.

Appetisers: @xeroverse

Main course: xeroverse.com

Icarus

by Dustin Blottenberger

The funeral was held at dusk. Because I burned for her, I went.

"No purer death than by fire," the black priest intoned. The urn, stately, sat on a pedestal before them.

Doran saw me. He spat like a hot pan, "Out on the green, you bastard." Deserved, surely.

Back to back. Ten paces. We turned. His shot struck me in my breast. I staggered, wheezing, took aim slowly. My shot ripped him through the guts. He fell, his face ashen. The poor man nearly had his revenge.

For my sins, I expected flames, but felt only cold, encroaching dark.

Author bio: Dustin Blottenberger is a writer, painter, and printmaker living in the jungles outside of Baltimore, MD. To reach him, please contact your local animal control agency or follow him on Twitter/Tumblr at NeverSayDustin.

Reclaimed

by E. M. Eastick

Thirty men had died in a mining explosion exactly ten years before. The widow laid the rose on her husband's grave, but she didn't notice the prick to her finger and drop of blood on the hot restless soil. Under the full moon, the first body clawed to the surface, the scent irresistible. Others followed, young men with hollow eyes, hungry for life stolen by the volatile earth.

The air hissed into vacant graves. The dirt filled its lungs with oxygen, and the coal seam ignited.

The bodies howled with haunted memories as the flames of destiny reclaimed their dead.

Author bio: E. M. Eastick was born and raised in northern Australia. She recently moved to Colorado after years of travelling and working as an environmental professional in Britain, Ireland, and the United Arab Emirates. Her creative efforts can be found in the Literary Hatchet, Splickety Prime, and Mad Scientist Journal.

Labels

by Carol Stone

Larry loves labels. Especially those with fire hazard warnings on them. He likes to test the credibility of these cautions. It's his job.

Today, Larry is checking the label in the nape of a blouse. It screams FLAMMABLE! His heart bounces.

He strikes a match, allows it to lick the lace trim around the edge of the fabric. Soon, furious dragon's tongues eat their way up the garment.

The woman's screams become distant. Larry is too consumed with the blistering pop of skin. But it's the melting of her terrified eyes he's waiting for.

That's what *really* spikes Larry's pulse.

Author bio: Live & work in the UK, previous publications include Alien Skin, Coloured Chalk amongst others but it's been a while since I last submitted.....so here goes!

Witchcraft
by B.E. Seidl

"Burn in hell!" she hissed at the melting face, her thumbnail cutting into his throat as flames flickered from the head like a mane. His eyes were bright and full of himself. No wonder he had always said it was his favourite photograph – it truly captured his quintessence. She had studied the ritual online on a page for black magic, determined to believe that afterwards he would never hurt her again. Yet, he did. The pain shot through her fingers, the sleeve of her shirt ablaze. She waved her arm like a witch's torch and indeed it burned like hell.

Author bio: A native of Vienna, Austria, B.E.Seidl works as a translator and university lecturer. Her fiction has appeared in the anthology "Things You Can Create" by FrostProof808, in Flash Fiction Magazine, at 101words, MicroHorror, Microfiction Monday Magazine and Tethered by Letters. An avid reader of horror fiction, she is a little bit obsessed with Shirley Jackson.

Neptune

by Sarah Verneti

You're great, but I have to be honest. You're not what I'm looking for right now. Eventually, I know you'll find someone who appreciates your generous girth, frigid temperatures, and dramatically tilted magnetic field. Maybe even someone who loves you despite your methane. However, I am not that person. I've been seeing someone, Mars actually, for about a month, and things are going really well. I've always been attracted to carbon monoxide-rich atmospheres.

Anyway, I know your future will be bright. Perhaps someday you'll even know the intense heat of a fiery solar flare.

Take care, my mysterious cobalt princess.

Author bio: Sarah Verneti lives in Las Vegas, Nevada. Her flash fiction has appeared in 300 Days of Sun, Black Denim Lit, Eunoia Review, Foliate Oak, Vending Machine Press, and others.

Starlight
by John Rhea

It was a routine repair. One we'd done a thousand times.

Her tether, the tether I secured, came loose while she fixed the solar panel. One errant move, a slip, the smallest of fumbles and she floated beyond my reach, beyond the length of my arm and out toward a fiery grave in the star we had studied half our life.

I could've saved her. But I hesitated and she was lost.

The engines flare. My heart yearns for her. Our ship, our home, flies like a moth toward the flame. Our love shall end where it began, in starlight.

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

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Remnant
by Anela Deen

They rose from the ash, gangly silhouettes emerging from the smouldering ruins of our city. The fire used to raze the brick and stone on which we'd built New Earth did not consume their curse. Here in this place where the decomposed ferment the soil, where rot draws breath anew, and death becomes a restless imitation, only our hopes stay slain. To any who receive this transmission, come no closer. Sensors may detect a fertile land below but it is a lullaby of nightmares. Only bones and darkness reside now. Adjust course and let this world be swallowed by stars.

Author bio: Anela Deen is an author, blogger, and child of two cultures. This Hawaiian girl is currently landlocked in the Midwest but has traveled and lived abroad much of her life, speaks four languages, and loves to use her imagination to leave planet Earth. She fills her days with family, fiction, and the occasional snowstorm. She's also been known to crack wise with alarming frequency.

Blog: AmidTheImaginary.Wordpress.com

Twitter: @AnelaDeen

Ignition
by Kern Windwraith

Come, she said. Burn with me.

And I followed. Down the dark passageways gouged beneath the canopy of roots, deeper, deeper, I followed, guided by the flicker and flash of her breath, the sparks of her bare heels striking the rocky path.

The iron bars of the first gate melted under her blazing caress. Doubt whispered, cold as ice, but I didn't stop.

When we reached the final gate, she turned, flames licking her cheeks like molten tears.

Come, she said, and her eyes bled fire.

Memories of my wife and son flared and shrivelled to ash.

And I followed.

Author bio: Kern Windwraith lives with her sister and their blind, deaf, diabetic but always entertaining Jack Russell in Vancouver, British Columbia. Her poetry has been published by The Literary Hatchet.

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Thanks for reading.

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