

101 Fiction

Issue 17

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Welcome to issue 17. Seventeen slick little stories. And here be monsters, heroes too, for balance, but can you tell which is which, the valiant from the vicious, before it is all too late...?

Heroes and monsters are the dichotomy at the centre of so many stories, the partnered thump-thump heartbeat that drives the hot blood of a burning narrative. What use a hero without a monster? What more compelling a monster than one conflicted, at war with itself, part hero despite its dark soul?

Not only do the seventeen stories in this issue make it the biggest issue yet, they explore the theme to its fullest. From new takes on classic heroes and mythical monsters to role reversals – heroes with hideous hidden sides, and seeming monsters with chivalrous souls. Tales from the monster's point of view, or from the hero's point of view, seeing himself as anything but.

Not everything here is as it seems, and your journey through this issue should surprise, tantalise and terrorise you in equal measures. Champions are corrupt, forests are out to get you, doctors have sinister agendas and you might not even trust yourself, but maybe the monster under the bed will save you yet.

In all the best stories we see parts of ourselves, in the heroes and the monsters, it's what makes them so compelling. We all have a little of both inside us, it's part of being human, it is the eternal internal conflict, and I think we've managed to capture some of that here.

Read.

Absorb.

Enjoy.

Soiled
by Shannon Bell

He looks me up and down. "There's beauty in dirt."

I don't know what to say.

His finger pokes painfully into my flesh. "There's space for others in here."

I never know what to say.

This self-proclaimed hero who promised to rescue me is a monster that devours me. He draws from people. Enters them. Snatches their bodies. Steals things from deep within.

I am no tranquil ocean. I hum inside. He pockets that heat, slips inside my dreams and stays awhile.

Another piece gone. Each piece taken spreads his stain in my soul. There's no beauty in what's broken.

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 attention seeking dog. His stories have been published in Dark Edifice, Short & Twisted, 101 Fiction and strippedlit500. You can follow Shannon on Twitter at @ShannonBell1967.

Cure
by Dakota Canon

I went to the doctor because the spirit inside me had died.

“I can save you,” he said, his own hero. “We’ll have to cut it out.”

“But how can I live with no spirit?”

“It’s vestigial. Like your appendix. Lots of people lose their spirit. See?”

He opened a cabinet filled with infected, grey lumps. “These are just the ones I’ve removed today, and all the patients went home healthy.”

I thrust my hand inside, touching the dead spirits, and their sorrow filled me like a dream.

“I have known these people,” I said. “They all died long ago.”

*Author bio: Dakota Canon is a left-brained professional by day, masquerading as a right-brained artiste by night. She enjoys writing shorts, flash, and poems, and several years ago began assembling her stories into her first novel. An early draft of that novel, *The Unmaking of Eden*, reached the semi-finals of the AUTHORS Young Adult Novel Contest. She received an Honorable Mention in the *Writer’s Digest Annual Short Story Contest* and has been long-listed in the *Brilliant Flash Fiction* competition. You can find her work in *Seven Deadly Sins: A YA Anthology WRATH* and *Speculative 66*. Follow her on Twitter @DakotaCanon or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/dakota.canon.author>.*

Trapped
by Rach Chappers

Broken, I collapsed on the bed and tossed away the can. A decade of pretence lived in fear, years of assaults stripping my strength. Firstly, forgiving for love. Later, coping for the children. Nobody knew – convinced by his expert disguise.

“Stop,” begged our children as teens. He smashed their faces with his fists and threatened to kill me if they told anyone.

No more. I lit the petrol, numbly willing the spreading flames to free me. I was sorry only to be leaving my children, sent away to safety.

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Waking, the headlines restored brutal reality:

‘Hero saves wife from inferno’

Author bio: I'm a teacher from Swansea in South Wales UK and have been writing poems and stories since I learned how to put pen to paper. I've previously had a short story and a poem published in paperback and enjoy writing tales and poems with an unexpected revelation at the end. Find me on Twitter @RChapmanWrites

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Conquest

by Michelle Vongkaysone

I wasted my life fighting that beast.
Always elusive, preying on my weary flesh.
Its presence provoked my deepest dread.
All I wanted was to be free from it.
I believed myself a hero, if only to slay it.
I cared not for my meagre sanity.
So long as the monster remained, so would my agony.

Eventually, I confronted it, tearing into its foul form.
Its pain soared through me, as if we were one flesh.
I recoiled then, in shock, only to see its true form.
And all that remained was dread, that which I had foisted upon myself.

Author bio: I've always enjoyed writing for fun, but I'm currently trying to make it into a side-career. At the moment, I have several short stories and the like for purchase on Amazon's Kindle Publishing service. They can be found at the following link: [amazon.com/author/michellevongkaysone](https://www.amazon.com/author/michellevongkaysone)

Entwining
by Allen Ashley

At the labyrinth's core, I clamp my bare hands around the beast's neck. It's his weak point: where bull head joins brawny human chest and shoulders. Still it takes all my strength to squeeze, wrench, hold on for dear life. And as I do, my mind is catapulted through the ether: visions from my past and my future flood in. I shall abandon Ariadne on the beach; my black sails will incite my father to suicide. Deeds that define me. Although I might be cast as hero, I know that the Minotaur and I, Theseus, are joined indissolubly. Both monsters.

Author bio: Allen Ashley is the author or editor of 14 published books. He works as a creative writing tutor in north London, UK. He is the judge for the annual British Fantasy Society Short Story Competition. www.allenashley.com

Red

by John Xero

Slowly, the crimson veil slips from my eyes. The world is obscured no longer. And yet the red remains: slick on my skin, drenching my clothes, dripping thickly from my hair. My knives are twin rubies catching the light wetly.

People approach, my people, stalking through fields that I have sown with a terrible crop, the earth heaped with corpses.

Their cries reach me.

“Hero,” they cheer. And, “Champion.”

But why, I want to say, and no, can you not see what horror I have wrought?

But I say nothing, and they bear me high, a stained and undeserving idol.

Author bio: John Xero believes in heroes, but he also believes in complicated; he believes the penumbra between hero and monster is vaster than either the light or the shadow. And complicated is interesting.

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Slain

by Lyric Hyde

He saw the blade drawn back, his blood glistening on its tip. He felt the pain, sharp in his chest, and clutched at his heart. Warm liquid spilled over his fingers. Tears filled his eyes as he fell beneath his opponent. He watched the glint of sunlight caress the heavy armour. He wanted to call for help, but all that escaped was a fear-filled gasp. He closed his eyes, struggled with heavy death-rattle breaths. He heard the delicate clinking of armour as his opponent turned away.

The voice, hidden by the metal helm, whispered with venomous disdain, "It's over, monster."

Author bio: Lyric Hyde is a high school student that wishes to go into a writing career, at least as a secondary job. As well as writing, she enjoys learning, music, anime, and a good book. Fairly new to posting her writing, Lyric does not yet have a specific website but can be found at various ones such as Wattpad, Figment, Prose, and Young Writer's Society under the name Animarret-Writing.

Rescue

by Chad Plunk

Sir Adalbert heard of the awful flaming dragon threatening the village, causing trembling terror in the women and children, sowing nightmares of starvation from burned crops.

Gleaming in mail, the knight on his charger trotted through the field, hooves crushing cabbages. He reached the ragged villagers and raised his helm.

"I will save you stinking lot," he said. "It will be a hungry task. Prepare me a suckling pig, cool ale, the least dirty of your daughters." He laughed at the last, then snorted, staring down the nearest man and his young boy.

Lowering his helm, he sallied bravely forth.

Author bio: Chad Plunk, raised in Cincinnati, spends his days working for a multi-national defense contractor and his nights imagining other worlds. He lives with his dog Abner Fancy, universally believed the more intelligent of the two, in Phoenix, Arizona.

Chiselled

by Thomas Diehl

One careful hit and the stone chipped just the right way to make the perfect cleft in the hero's chin. Nothing but perfection for Aeliseia's employers. They said they wanted to be surrounded by the perfect beauty the gods had robbed them of. Why that required a blind sculptor, she did not know. No reason to ask, though. That way she still earned a living.

She heard something slither behind her, then the cluck of a new statue set on the marble floor.

"Another one just came in. Somewhat lanky," Medusa said.

Those Gorgons sure collected a lot of statues.

Author bio: A predominantly English-language German writer of stories with little to no padding, Thomas Diehl can be found online at <http://en.thomasdiehl.eu>

Dillinger
by Joseph S. Pete

Dillinger once robbed this dive bar. That was the legend; that was the lore. Jukebox and dollar PBRs be damned, that was still the most notable thing about the place nearly 80 years later, Mike thought.

How did a bank robber ever capture the public imagination?

Today, no one romanticized robbers. It was just another violent felony. You were another monster they demonized on the 10 o'clock news.

Mike finished his beer, headed to the restroom, wondered if any of these hipster kids had heard of Dillinger as he drew pantyhose over his head, then his .45 from his waistband.

Author bio: Joseph S. Pete is an award-winning journalist, an Iraq War veteran, an Indiana University graduate, a book reviewer, and a frequent guest on his local NPR affiliate. He was named the poet laureate of Chicago BaconFest 2016, a feat that Geoffrey Chaucer chump never accomplished. His work has appeared in Chicago Literati, Dogzplot, shufPoetry, The Roaring Muse, Blue Collar Review, The Five-Two, Lumpen, McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Prairie Winds, The Dime Store Review, Pulp Modern, Zero Dark Thirty and elsewhere. He has twice as many first names as the average writer.

Accelerant
by Stella Turner

The eulogy, fit for the hero he was! Saving an old woman from her burning flat, rescuing a family trapped in quicksand. At the graveside, colleagues form the guard of honour he justly deserves. The priest eyes me nervously. He has heard my confession. He knows the hero talked a jumper down from the bridge one night. He knows I'd had enough! Scars etched deep in my brain. Hard to fade. Wooden stake in his heart would be too good. He wouldn't rise again. My husband was a monster, he knew my weaknesses, but I knew his. Death by fire!

Author bio: My name is Stella Turner and I'm known as @stellakateT on twitter. I have had flash fictions published in anthologies and long-listed several times in the Fish Flash Fiction competition. One day I will write a novel by persuading myself it's just a series of flashes strung together :)

*My blog can be found at
<http://stellalikesspidersandothermyths.blogspot.com/>*

Zero

by Gregory Lloyd

All around us, the ship is dying. Everything is on fire. There's maybe one minute of life left for us, but our fight rages. The beast forces me to the iron walkway, crushing me with its sheer size. Its hands are huge serrated claws, seeking my throat as I writhe and struggle. With one shaking hand I manage to find the knife at my belt and I bring it up into that alien face, piercing one of its six eyes. The beast screams. I laugh as the self-destruct clock runs down to zero. The final, shattering explosion eats us both.

Author bio: My name is Gregory Lloyd and I am a writer of science fiction and horror from Ontario, Canada.

Home
by John Xero

The moonlit mist whirled in ragged, agitated eddies as Elijah stumbled onwards, a single word tolling through his mind:

Home

A longing. An ache. An imperative.

He walked through a vast, dark ribcage of shattered buildings.

Home

Yellow light lanced from an opening door.

“Elijah! My God, man, you’re alive.”

“David.”

“It worked, Elijah. We’ve not seen the alien scum in days.”

“Home.”

“Home enough. God, you’re a bloody hero.”

Home enough for the last vestiges of humankind, Elijah remembered.

He remembered the aliens breaking him too, infecting him, and sending him home, a viral monster boiling beneath his skin.

Author bio: John Xero believes few words have as many connotations as ‘home.’ Home is past, present, and future. Home is comfort, pride, and belonging. Home is familiar stories, characters, and friends. Home is family.

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Heartwood
by Sarah McPherson

Don't go near the trees, mother said, but I don't believe in childish nonsense. I trail my hand across dank moss-spattered trunks, shivering at their spongy wetness. My fingers find a crack in the armour, a knot. A hole. It tugs at me, rough bark tearing skin. The sucking darkness at its heart engulfs me. There is only death here, hollow. They have been waiting. Shadow tendrils fill my eyes, lungs, heart in a sinuous embrace. I am no longer discrete, the others twisting around me; no ending, no beginning. We are the creature that waits in the dark wood.

Author bio: Sarah McPherson lives in Sheffield, UK, and has too many creative hobbies and a problem with procrastination. Her writing has been featured on Paragraph Planet. She tweets sporadically as @summer_moth

Wildness

by Owoh Ugonna Alexander

In the thick forest came voices stolen from lost birds but bound to men.

They ran through the night to a place where even gods felt naked, the sweat of their bodies becoming water that ran over stones and pebbles.

Their hearts grew, listening to the laughter of waters, yet still they couldn't fight their fears in the dark, or whisper hallelujahs.

They surrendered their throats, like the spirits of their fathers, to the demons of the forest who arose and fought them to their limits.

When Nicholas slew them at the abyss, the village came, rejoicing for their freedom.

Author bio: Owoh ugonna Alexander is a prolific writer, poet, playwright, he has written so many poems, stories, anthologies, articles, and essays. He is a romantic story teller who believes in nature as a pious and tremendous creation of God. Born in south eastern Nigeria.

Glass

by Scott Beggs

He crouched on the hill a behemoth. Mud hugged his boots though it hadn't rained in weeks, and an empty smile anchored his face. With the sun behind him, he was a dark mass on the horizon. An empty, breathing universe.

The glass in his hand caught the light for a moment, creating a star in the abyssal black of his body. Then, he descended on us.

The angry thing. The sullen deity. His attack was fire distilled through glass, burning bright holes in my friends and family, wishing us into oblivion, until his mother called him home for dinner.

Author bio: Scott Beggs writes about movies and culture for Nerdist, Slashfilm, and other fine sites, and his short stories have previously appeared in Mulholland Books' Popcorn Fiction. He lives in California with his wife and two dogs named after enigmatic Tom Robbins characters, and he wants to be Buster Keaton's best friend. Follow him on twitter @scottmbeggs and visit <http://www.scottbeggs.com> for more.

Aflame
by Rachel Wallach

She felt it through the mattress, hot breath like sulphur and wildfire. When darkness wakes, it stirs to life. Jagged claws scratched the wood floor below, and angry exhales nudged the slatted bed frame.

“Just breathe,” she whispered, knowing that by morning this would all be over.

But the burnt smell thickened, while flames cast cautionary shadows in the sliver of light beneath the doorway.

Faulty wiring, they would later say.

A giant hand with sinewy fingers reached up from below. With big eyes and a gentle grip, it scooped her into his arms, safely away from that fiery place.

Author bio: Rachel Wallach is a communications professional, who likes to write. She lives in South Florida.

Thanks for reading.

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