

101 Fiction

Issue 18

March 2018

Issue 18, the first issue with 18 stories, the first issue of 2018. Welcome. And what wonders do we have for you this snowy March? Why, we have unicorns. Magical mystical creatures, pure of heart and soul, bright lights trotting through the shadowy fields of myth, right? Well... we've always liked to do things a little differently round here.

Oh sure, one or two of our unicorns are heroes and inspirations, of sorts. And some of our unicorns are victims too – after all, who could pass up that much magic bound in one being; just think what you could do with all that power. But plenty of our unicorns are not so meek, the moonlit horn you wouldn't want to meet in the middle of the lonely night; these unicorns are thieves and murderers, parasites and monsters. And then there are the unicorns that aren't even unicorns at all.

Unicorns have seen a recent resurgence in popular culture, for both children and adults. There's a lot of sparkle and rainbows and innocent delight, and we wouldn't want to deny any of that, but hopefully we've added a little something, in our own way. A little friction, a little seasoning and spice to heighten the flavour, a little shadow and contrast to make the brightness *pop*.

Join us on our strange journey through permutations of unicorn.

Read.

Absorb.

Enjoy.

Courage
by Lucy Underhill

A stuffed unicorn head, with a wooden heart impaled upon its horn, hung outside our family apothecary.

My great-grandmother sat black shawl-wrapped in a shadowy corner of the shop, amongst gleaming bottles of curling herbs. “Your great-grandfather was a fearless explorer who searched the Hidden Isles for rare and powerful plants. On a mountain top one dawn, he was startled by a wild, goat-eyed unicorn. He shot his musket, but the horned beast’s dying desire was his death.”

“And his pierced heart hangs on the sign outside?”

She wiped a tear from her lashes. “No, my dear. That is mine.”

Author bio: Lucy Underhill lives in London with her partner and a chug named Dolly.

Tethered
by Amy Triplett

I'm so sorry we hurt you, I say. You are our family, I say. You are precious and beautiful and deserve every good thing, I say. I wince as I stroke your muzzle and try not to see him mending the broken chains that bind your flanks and withers.

Your horn was bright with furious triumph and stained red, but with my loving words I can see that light fade as you calm.

We were so lucky to find a unicorn in the wild. Our lives – and our relationship – have never been better. Your magic keeps us whole and unbroken.

Author bio: Amy is a writer, a coder, a jewellery maker, and a science fiction/ fantasy enthusiast.

Sacrifice
by Shannon Bell

“Eat it.”

“I can’t. The guilt is too great.”

“A unicorn heart bestows eternity, but you must eat it while it’s beating.”

Tears leaked from my eyes. I bit into the flesh. Blood dribbled down my chin and the heart beat softly against my lips. “Where is the horn?”

“The horn is my payment.”

Magic surged through me, healing what was broken and diseased and granting eternal life. I looked at the ruined forehead, the sightless eyes, the gaping hole in the chest. I cradled my face in my bloody hands. “It’s a horse,” I whispered. “It’s only a horse.”

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.

Imaginary
by John Xero

Jeremy stared at his father's blood, spreading across the kitchen floor. It pooled around his socks, soaking into the thick cotton and touching his feet with unfamiliar warmth and intimacy.

One of the puncture wounds sputtered, as if running dry, then slurped and continued to flow.

"Samuel?" The child whimpered with a voice tiny as he was, in a kitchen a million times bigger than it used to be.

"Yes, Jeremy?" The unicorn nuzzled his friend's face.

"You saved me."

"Yes, Jeremy."

But Samuel knew the real world was never so simple. The police did not believe in imaginary friends.

Author bio: John Xero believes that imagination is a powerful thing, a true friend will always be there for you, and reality is what you make it. Now he just needs to put that into practice and make an awesome reality...

twitter.com/xeroverse
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E

by Nathan Alling Long

There were many rumours about Mr. E, that the E stood for Eccentric, or Erratic, or Erotic. No one knew. But here Jacob sat in Mr. E's dining room, sipping tea from a plain white mug, talking about philosophy. Everything seemed quite normal.

Almost.

Jacob couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't right, though the lamp gave off a warm glow against the soft white walls, and the mug felt magical in his hands.

He didn't know that it was made of a unicorn horn, the walls were painted in mermaid milk, and the lamp shade made from unspeakable skin.

*Author bio: Nathan's collection of fifty flash fiction, *The Origin of Doubt*, was just released from Press 53. His unpublished collection, *Two Stories, Some Tales, and a Yarn*, was a finalist for the Hudson Book Manuscript Prize and a semifinalist for the Iowa Fiction Award. For more information, other stories, or essays, please visit <http://wp.stockton.edu/longn/>.*

Virgil

by Susannah Jordan

Missing Person Report:

Virgil Winterbottom was last seen outside the Danville Piggly Wiggly at approximately 3 a.m. on April 9th, brandishing a pair of hoof trimmers. He is described as “average in every way” by his mother, with brown hair and an unfinished tribal tattoo on his right buttock. He was in full camouflage, with mismatched hunting boots, and drove off in a white Ford Pinto with a horn stuck to the hood. Friends say he was headed to Northern Michigan to hunt unicorns. Anyone with information should contact local police. Piggly Wiggly is offering free counselling to those affected.

Author bio: Susannah Jordan earned an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Queens University of Charlotte. Her flash fiction and poetry have appeared in Rathalla Review, The Mystic Blue Review, Cold Coffee Stand, Daphne Magazine, Twisted Sister, 50-Word Stories, Tiny Text, and Apocrypha and Abstractions. Her artwork and photography have appeared in formercactus, Gravel, The Tishman Review, Oxford Magazine, Cold Creek Review, Figroot Press, Riggwelter Press, Cotton Xenomorph, and Calamus Journal. She has work forthcoming in Orson’s Review.

Tanisha
by Renée Bennett

Stomp.

Tanisha puts her foot down, her fists up. Cindy from first grade runs, weeping. Tanisha gets detention. She spends it playing with the shadows on the wall – sweep of neck, curve of tail.

Stomp.

Tanisha teaches Robert that No is N-O, not M-A-Y-B-E. He spreads cellphone and whisper innuendo. Tanisha walks proud even in the teeth of scorn. Eyes bright, head high, heels sharp and sure at graduation.

Stomp.

Engines respond: forty million horsepower. Tanisha sticks the foam horn on her helmet; co-pilot Colin lifts a brow. “My mother’s little joke.”

“Not so little,” he says. She grins.

Lift-off!

Author bio: Renée Bennett is an author and editor living in Calgary, Canada. When asked, ‘What do you write?’ she replies, ‘Anything I please.’ This is why her bibliography includes Arthuriana, jazzpunk, and zombie erotica, among other genres. Her most recent work has appeared in the ENIGMA FRONT series of anthologies. Look for her in BY THE LIGHT OF CAMELOT, available July, 2018, from Edge Publishing.

Scourge
by R.S. Bohn

Grinna Grumpmutt lifted a boot caked in iridescent muck.

She hated unicorn brains. Only thing worse was unicorn entrails after a recent meal. Dragonflies, hamsters, swallowed whole and writhing feebly, half digested, in that rainbow of guts.

The only orc in Parasite Removal meant she got the 'corns. Typically, a couple a year.

There'd been twelve this month already.

Vacation beckoned in fourteen hours – a swampy slice of heaven in Louisiana.

Her walkie screeched, "Got another one! Library!"

Grinna snarled. She had no time for a damned plague of the things.

Wiping her badge, she mounted her scooter.

Countdown on.

Author bio: R.S. Bohn officially has no comment on allegations that Stephen Cosgrove based his 1978 book, "Misty Morgan," the story of a princess and her unicorn, on her. She can definitively say, however, that Scholastic book fairs at her school were, without a doubt, the best days of the school year.

Imposters
by Joseph Davidson

When they came, they only wanted two of each species. It became clear that we weren't the equine masterpieces they were going to choose.

Their data was faulty, so when the broodmare and I managed to embed horn-like shards of farm rubble into our skulls they thought they had found the last of our kind. We traded grisly incineration for permanent headaches.

Ours was the grandest cage of them all. A place of honour. I traded with one of the bipeds for a steady supply of pink glitter.

If their data said our shit sparkled, then it damn well would.

Author bio: Joseph is a student from Boise, Idaho working towards a degree in Creative Writing with an emphasis on fiction. He likes weird stories, hanging out with dogs, and believing in unicorns. You can find him on Twitter @thew0ck.

Commission

by Benjamin Niespodziany

I trampled back to the weekend market with my bag: my ill-purchased scam. Like fool's gold. Like knotted clown shoes. I approached the store surrounded by pomegranate trees and shouted a bath of potato wine at the owner's face, demanding my money back. "I should've known this is not a unicorn horn, this is not magic! This is just narwhal! Cheap, plentiful narwhal!" Mid ramble, I looked over and saw a timid family of narwhals selling the clerk handfuls of their own sawed-off horns, tearfully saying how unicorn commissions are the only way to afford diapers for their little ones.

Author bio: Benjamin Niespodziany is a librarian at the University of Chicago who runs a multimedia art blog known as neonpajamas. He self-released a chapbook of poems in December known as Dress Code Aquarium (<https://gumroad.com/neonpajamas>) and has had work published in The Occulum, formercactus, tenderness, yea, Water Soup Press, and 1833.fm (<http://1833.fm/>).

Twitter/IG/Facebook/SoundCloud: @neonpajamas

Trial
by John Xero

“You broke sacred law, and in the most heinous way. You interacted with the real world, you killed an *adult*.”

The chamber filled with agitated snorting. Angry hoofs stomped the ground.

Samuel lifted his horn high, defiant. “I upheld something greater: the essence of our existence. I protected a child, my *friend*, from a horror far greater than the dark, a monster more real than any under the bed.”

“Irrelevant. We are *imaginary* friends, not part of reality. That is the One Law, now tarnished with death and stained with blood. You will be exiled, Samuel: an eternity in darkness.”

Author bio: John Xero believes in doing the right thing. It isn't always easy, but you have to try, right? He likes to write too, and that isn't always easy, but...

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Canny
by R.S. Bohn

“If you see such a thing, find Gregory. At the Pious Goat.” The man bent, his coat falling open enough to reveal the glint of a silver dagger within, as he passed the coin. “Careful, little man. They're canny beasts. And they eat boys.”

When the man had passed the giant sycamore, Daniel whistled. A shape coalesced from the birch. It snorted, stomping a huge hoof into the deadfall and thwacking its single, spiraling ivory horn against a tree before changing again.

“Shame someone didn't eat him when he was a boy.”

Daniel shrugged. “Never mind, momma. Let's go home.”

Author bio: R.S. Bohn officially has no comment on allegations that Stephen Cosgrove based his 1978 book, "Misty Morgan," the story of a princess and her unicorn, on her. She can definitively say, however, that Scholastic book fairs at her school were, without a doubt, the best days of the school year.

Agunni
by Samantha O'Brien

The women glided forward, closing the circle they had made. Their hair, each a different shade of copper, tousled by the jasmine-scented wind, was hypnotising. The travel agency had told me that this place was off the beaten track, they also told me not to roam on nights like this. As I gazed upon the ladies, I wondered why. When the last of the seven moons finally peaked above the horizon they changed, they morphed. I swear I had not been drinking. They became single-horned beasts with hooves and blazing eyes. I ran screaming as they bayed and gave chase.

Author bio:

Allure

by Michael Turner

It emerged from the brush, striding on silent mist, its eyes gleaming with starlight, its mane soft like a cloud. She cheered and ran to greet the beautiful creature. It padded closer, lowering its head and braying in a dulcet tone, like it was singing. Two steps away and she was pushed to the ground. Her father stepped in front of her. He lurched suddenly. The beast reared, lifting her father on its horn and flinging him to the dirt. She stared as it leaned down, lapping up her father's blood. It lifted its head, starlit eyes locking with hers.

Author bio: An aspiring storyteller from Manchester, Michael Turner is a man with his head in the clouds, day-dreaming of stars. When he isn't writing, he's usually thinking about what to write next. Amidst his addiction for crafting characters and various fantasy worlds, Michael works to balance his hobbies of comic books, drawing and Dungeons and Dragons. A self-confessed nerd in love with fantasy and science-fiction, he has recently gained a Masters Degree in Creative Writing and is working towards producing a novel in the future, whilst dabbling in short stories.

Twisted

by Anne Wrightwell

The golden pomander around his royal neck disguised the nauseating stench of the king's wounded leg.

Undeterred, the unicorn gently laid its curved, pure white horn against the swollen, oozing flesh. Red and gangrenous became pink, healthy flesh. The unicorn transformed into a beautiful maiden and the delighted king grabbed her, kissing and fondling.

She struggled. "Let me go! Give me my reward."

"To be my courtesan and most valued possession."

Her soft human skin shifted back to glossy unicorn hide. The king stumbled back, lacerated by sharp hooves. The last thing he saw, a twisted horn of deepest black.

Author bio: Anne Wrightwell is a British science fiction and fantasy writer, living in London. She has had one short science fiction story, The Boom Show, published recently in BFS Horizons, a British Fantasy Society periodical. A short fantasy story, The Mysterious Mr. Fox, will be included in the forthcoming BFS anthology Emerging Horizons, showcasing new writers, to be published in 2018.

Debt

by John Xero

Bleak Wood rattled around him; dark branches scraped the night like fingernails, clutching at him as he forced his way deeper. Milky light splashed the trees, seeping from the white sceptre grasped in his right hand – the only illumination in that cursed place.

Reality was a fragile thing for Jeremy. Truth too. Product of childhood trauma, therapy and hypnotism, alcohol and drugs.

Watching his young son playing with an imaginary friend had brought piercing epiphany. Truth like lightning. A debt remembered.

Jeremy crashed into a clearing, saw the unicorn bound in black chains at its centre.

“Now I save you.”

Author bio: John Xero loves a hero. But the hero's journey is never easy; sad to say that's part of the deal; it's what makes their eventual triumph all the more glorious.

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Monster
by Brigitte Winter

Outside the holding cage, my mentor paces.

“Let me in!”

My fist tightens around the key.

“They’re coming!”

The banner over her shoulder proclaims, “Fantasy Camp! Opening Soon!”

We’ll never open now. Thank God.

She presses her forehead to the bars. “Please.”

In my lap, the young dragon I raised from a hatchling lies dead, pierced through the heart. I picture the mermaids, faces kicked in, drifting in the lagoon.

“You bred monsters,” I say.

“I didn’t know.”

Behind her, one of the beasts appears, mane spattered with blood, horn glittering through gore.

I cover my ears and turn away.

*Author bio: Brigitte Winter is a storyteller, a jewelry-maker, the co-founder of No Discipline Arts Collective (www.meetup.com/No-Discipline-Arts-Collective/), 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 the 2016 *City of Weird: 30 Otherworldly Portland Tales* anthology by Forest Avenue Press (<http://www.forestavenuepress.com/catalog/city-of-weird/>), Columbia Writers’ 2014 anthology, *Trapped Tales* (<http://goo.gl/Bkdvnu>), and the 2017 *Enter the Apocalypse* anthology by Tanstaaf Press. All of her celebrity crushes are on authors. Visit Brigitte at briggittewinter.com, and stay tuned for her latest project: a pre-apocalyptic coming-of-age adventure novel.*

Home

by Ian Steadman

We found her under Vauxhall Bridge, our unicorn. Her horn had snapped to a jagged nub, her flanks sodden like wet felt. Someone had covered her with a blanket, stained and reeking, as if she was already dead.

We took her home.

She thrived at first, on a diet of green tea and chicken Pot Noodles. But a week later, her eyes glazed over. One morning she was gone, along with Archie's fake Rolex and all the coppers in the coin jar. The last we heard, she was seen heading west on Harrow Road, ruined horn raised to dying sun.

Author bio: Ian Steadman is a writer from the south of England. His stories have most recently been published by Black Static, Unsung Stories, Storgy and The Year's Best Body Horror. You can find him at iansteadman.com, or he sometimes manifests on Twitter as [@steadmanfiction](https://twitter.com/steadmanfiction).

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