



***future myths***

***syntax & salt magazine***



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# *Introduction*

We aspired, at the start of this journey, to showcase work that truly and individually defined our theme: future myths. The pieces awaiting you accomplished everything we hoped to see, and more, for the inaugural poetry issue of Syntax & Salt Magazine.

The poems you're about to read took our theme, opened it up, and began to explore. You'll find familiarity, because there is a beating heart to each one along with a strong sense of humanity threaded from start to finish.

Thank you to the incredible people who sent us their work and trusted that we would treat it well. Thank you to our special editors who diligently considered the merits of every single poem, and opened themselves to so many stories. Finally, thank you to our readers. We hope you find immense pleasure in these pieces.

# The Future Myths Editors

## Elizabeth Archer

Elizabeth Archer had it made as a National Merit Scholar, but sadly her only ambition was to write. After editing her high school literary magazine, she was doomed to pursue an English degree. She has published over seventy stories and poems, and made enough money to buy some beautiful yarn to knit a shawl. She is currently trying to put together a decent chapbook, and reading slush for several magazines. As Eliza Archer, she frequently lurks around the writing website, Scribophile. Elizabeth lives in Texas, where she collects cats and tries to save Chihuahuas from kill shelters.

## D.A. Gray

D.A. Gray's poetry collection, *Contested Terrain*, was just released by FutureCycle Press. Gray is the author of one previous collection, *Overwatch*, Grey Sparrow Press, 2011. His work has appeared in *The Sewanee Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Syntax & Salt*, *The Good Men Project*, *O'Dark Thirty*, and *War, Literature and the Arts* among many other journals.

Gray holds an MFA from The Sewanee School of Letters and an MS in Liberal Studies from Texas A&M-Central Texas. A retired soldier and veteran, the author writes and lives in Central Texas with his wife, Gwendolyn.

## Gemma Mahadeo

Gemma Mahadeo was born in London, England, and is a freelance writer, editor and occasional musician living in Melbourne, Australia. She loves reviewing beer, tea and zines at her blog [eatdrinkstagger.com](http://eatdrinkstagger.com) or photobombing social media with updates about her adorable rescue cat or gushing over music before 1750.

## Ani King

Ani King is the founder and Editor in Chief of [Syntax & Salt Magazine](http://Syntax & Salt Magazine). Her work has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Penny Magazine*, *Every Day Fiction*, *Pidgeonholes Magazine*, and many other fine publications. You can find her at [thebittenlip.com](http://thebittenlip.com), on Twitter as [aniking](https://twitter.com/aniking), or sharing *many* opinions on [Medium](https://medium.com).



***Genesis***

Brynn McCall

# Genesis

1.

In the beginning, there was rust and oil and her  
hands wrapped around her own throat,  
constricting like a snake. They will not notice  
the half eaten apples in the garden when  
their eyes are met by those splendid purple  
bruises, blossoming like blood-soaked peonies.  
The most beautiful thing she has ever owned.

2.

In the beginning, he  
wrapped round  
like a snake.  
the apples in the garden  
blossoming like  
a thing he owned.

3.

In the beginning, there was rust  
around her throat,  
They will not notice  
when  
their eyes are splendid  
like  
eve

4.

In the beginning, there was  
a snake  
half eaten in the garden  
blood-soaked  
beautiful



***Demeter's  
Daughter***

Gretchen Tessmer

## Demeter's Daughter

in poorly designed seasons  
I stand in smoldering fields, fidgeting  
with fingers dug deep  
in the skirt of my linen dress  
while a calico cat entwines  
her steps between my feet

we see hell crawl out of  
holes in the sky  
as tongues of fire fall quickly  
to lick the fissures of  
this parched and blistered landscape

my mother's words ring in my head:  
"don't be idle, don't stop fighting  
until you're dead  
and even then..."

so I consult the roots of hemlock trees  
and the reflection of moon glow on glass

with ambitious hands, I sew  
daisy petals on blackened dogwood branches  
until they stick  
then reaching up, I fold  
back the clandestine edges of that  
cinder-soot horizon, to expose

clean, white-speckled pigeons  
perched in high, blue rafters that  
the cat instinctively raises her paws at  
before settling down to observe  
greener surroundings



***Around  
the Fire***

Courtney O'Banion Smith

## Around the Fire

What was it like? Well, we believed  
our little corner was everything  
and like everywhere else  
and always would be.

Parties every week complete  
with inflatable water slides and broken,  
plastic parting gifts.

Stretchy pants so we could super-size  
patties made of a thousand animals each.

A square of yellow for a little extra,  
and we always paid  
for a little extra.

We had so much, we thought  
we were starving if we didn't get  
what we felt like right away.

Even our pets on diets.

Back then, two gas stations for every house.

Cars because of sprawl. Sprawl because of cars.

Fake tans because the sun  
had already begun  
to kill us. And the storms.

Too much rain over too much concrete,  
tides rose to meet floodwaters. Man versus  
God with all the gadgets with all the news  
all the time about celebrities we  
wanted to be, politicians we blamed,  
and friends we couldn't make.

I remember this one time, my mother's eyes  
brimming, looking at one of her screens, soft  
rustle of her neon acrylic nails  
digging into the skirt of her cotton dress  
patterned with huge, hot pink hibiscus  
gone now forever.

This time, she answered when I asked why  
she cried. *The very last male white rhino  
in the entire world just died*, she sighed,  
like she was reading the last line at bedtime  
from an ancient, beloved book.

She might as well have said  
a unicorn.

She wiped her nose with a tissue, gripped her gold cross.  
*Now, don't litter, baby. Go throw your wrapper  
in the trash.*

Still so many species then.

We were convinced

we still looked good,

at least from the shoulders up.

I shouldn't blame her. What could she have done

really? The world had already been

lit on fire.



***Vajrakantakasalmali***

Vajra Chandrasekera

## Vajrakantakasalmali

When the water rises to the knee  
to the thigh  
when my calves are strong from wading  
my antlers grown in at long last  
bone branching like lightning  
seeking older earth  
a narrower future  
I'll slosh into your dreams, hooves wet and unseen, to prophesy.  
Listen—I am science fiction  
to my grandparents going hungry in empire's famine.  
I am their dream of foretelling,  
which they might have confused for nightmare.  
In the deep future, we are stilt-legged and hooved;  
in the future deep, we are waders in the slow and sacred grove  
of the concrete forest, shattered and marked by tides,  
measuring our little drownings in their season.  
We sleep with our faces up, ears underwater,  
listening to echoes of lost whalesong.  
In our dreams we are portents  
    sent back in time to save us  
to our bewildered grandparents  
who might think we're symbols of something else.  
My red eyes, which they almost recognize,  
and my long red tongue like a flag with a lion,  
a sun and a moon.  
The swords, one broken, in my hands,  
thunder in my other hands,  
    screens in my other hands trembling

at raindrops, as if asking  
—is that a touch  
am I being touched  
heads in my other hands,  
your hands in my other, other hands.  
They understood themselves to be haunted  
but not the name of the hell we come from:  
vajrakantakasalmali, the tree of unbreakable thorns.  
We are the thorns: we prick you,  
but loving us, you never pluck us out.



***The  
Authors***

# Brynn McCall

Brynn McCall is a high school student from Denver, Colorado with an endless file of unfinished work. She loves poetry and graphic novels, and is hoping that capes soon come back into style. Find updates or future works on her [blog](#).

# Gretchen Tessmer

Gretchen Tessmer is a writer/attorney based in the U.S./Canadian borderlands of Northern New York. She writes both poetry and short fiction, with work appearing in *Nature*, *Strange Horizons* and *Daily Science Fiction*, among other venues. Find her on [Twitter](#) and [Tumblr](#).

# Courtney O'Banion Smith

Courtney O'Banion Smith writes, edits, and raises her sons in Houston, Texas. Her work has appeared in several print and online publications including *The Ekphrastic Review* and *Relief*. Find her [here](#) and on Twitter [@cobanionsmith](#).

# Vajra Chandrasekera

Vajra Chandrasekera is from Colombo, Sri Lanka. His poetry has appeared in *inkscrawl*, *Liminality*, and *West Branch*, among others. Find him [here](#) and on [Twitter](#).





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