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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The poems of *Vampire Squid* were written during a period of three years during which I was a postdoctoral research fellow at the Munderoo-UWA Deep-Sea Research Centre. I worked alongside a team of scientists as the only humanities-based postdoc. My project was to understand how and why we, as a culture, consistently position ourselves at odds with the deep sea. Why we fear it, or sometimes, why we don't think about it at all. From there, I was to find creative ways encourage care, meaningful kinship, effective stewardship, and more global support for deep-sea research.

The deep sea's inaccessibility makes it difficult to relate to, especially in comparison to more accessible and conventionally beautiful ecosystems such as coral reefs or intertidal zones. The idea of the deep sea is influenced by how it is presented to us in popular culture, in which it is consistently portrayed as an incomprehensible void infested with terrible creatures who transcend anthropocentric notions of time and space. This construction, borne from myth and the maritime novel and pulp magazines of the fin de siècle now extends into contemporary popular science—and indeed scientific writing, which continues to figure the deep sea in terms of its enigmatisation. This is an alluring figuration, but not always conducive to the ethics of care we need in an age in which the biodiversity of deep-sea manganese nodule fields is threatened by metals prospectors, and in which undiscovered hadal trenches are already littered with plastic waste

Is there such a thing as a singular, objective, true deep sea? Perhaps, but it is impossible for humans to truly know this object, as to observe an experiment is to inevitably alter its outcome. The handful of my colleagues who have visited the hadal trenches of

the deep in the submersible DSV *Bakunawa* are keenly aware of this: the process of piloting a noisy chunk of titanium around the sea floor while shining bright lights on an ecosystem which has never seen the sun will disrupt the benthos and alter the observed abundance of animals.

The accurate communication of new scientific information about the deep sea can only go so far in changing how we feel about it. The deep sea's constructed unrelatability is an aesthetic challenge; and as a researcher, I selected the research methodology best suited to the contemplation of aesthetics: poetry. Poetry is about beauty, but it can also be about ugliness and everything in between. So I learned to write poetry, and from a handful of initial poems written during meetings and posted on the team group chat came what is now *Vampire Squid*.

The cast of characters who inhabit its pages are my friends and colleagues with whom I had the privilege of sharing offices, berths, and paper authorships. They are referred to not by name but by their professions as a nod to the multidisciplinary structure of the team while also affording a degree of plausible deniability. The marine biologist, the geneticist, the ecologist, the oceanographer, the geoscientist, the molecular biologist, the invertebrate zoologist, the analyst, the taxonomist and the lab manager are each recurring personas for one or more individuals in the team. All have their own deep seas within them, constructed through personal observation, scientific data, and an unyielding passion for what they do.

Descend into Sunlight, Twilight, Midnight, the Abyss and Hades. Things may get stranger as we go deeper, but, as Poe wrote, there is no exquisite beauty without some strangeness.

depth

the Sunlight here is kind.
Twilight is less forgiving
with creatures strange and wary.
in Midnight, there are flashes
glimmers, of lonely monsters
in search of food, companionship
love, rising every night
to feast in the safety of darkness
others survive on snowfall
caught between hungry cilia.
when the Abyss gazes back
it is with the large, bright eyes
of many-armed things
bursting with vitreous humour
all the better to see you with.
in Hades, Persephone
satisfied her hunger with
six pomegranate seeds
melancholy husband at her side
she rules over these ancient
cracks in the earth
bleeding wounds in the flesh
of a sleeping planet
unless you too cut a deal
nothing returns from Hades.

Sunlight
Twilight

Midnight

Abyss

Hades

staff party

Tuesday arvo // axe chucking // warm beer on the lawn // cold beer at the picnic table // wine in the city // there's six of us for now // we pledge to keep doing interesting shit // the oceanographer leaves to get her hair done // the geoscientist leaves for his wife's work dinner // chips // Northbridge // gyoza & vegan pork buns // the ecologist doesn't remember paying // the oceanographer is back with redder hair // we all stroke her hair // rainbow sherbet beer and durries at Picabar // the marine biologist takes a business call from the UK // the oceanographer finds an Uber // we drop the marine biologist off somewhere on Stirling Highway // North Street // Swanbourne Beach // the ecologist and the geneticist leave their clothes on the shore // night swimming in bioluminescent algae // back in the lab Wednesday morning