



New Asian Writing anthology 2013 of short stories from thirty one writers from around the world who set their stories in a distinctive Asian context.

2013

*New Asian
Writing*



The cover page image is of The Heracles Papyrus (Oxford, Sackler Library, Oxyrhynchus Pap. 2331), a fragment of 3rd century Greek manuscript of a poem about the Labors of Heracles.

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This collection of short stories is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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About New Asian Writing

New Asian Writing was started as a Bangkok-based independent press that was launched in 2010 with the intention of helping gifted, aspiring authors to become known worldwide. It also aims to discover tomorrow's literary talents. It is now being run by a team of independent editors and like-minded individuals that seek to promote the short story genre. Visit the New Asian Writing website at www.new-asian-writing.com or contact the editorial team at naw.submissions@gmail.com.

Maya, Judgement Night and other stories is New Asian Writing's third anthology of short stories that comprises the fictional work of writers from around the world who set their stories in a distinctive Asian context.

A brief paragraph about the authors themselves is also included with each story.

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'RATS AND CATS' BY TIMOTHY NAKAYAMA

They say that if you find yourself in the slums of downtown Kuala Lumpur and if you hear the wind playing a haunting dirge on a starlit night, then you should quickly make a wish, for your wish might just come true... in mysterious ways.

No one knows if the above is true, or is just an urban legend.

But everyone knows the story of Aidan Wong, and what happened to him one warm October night...

Slum areas dot the fringes of downtown Kuala Lumpur, pockets of poverty hiding behind the city's modern skyline of gleaming skyscrapers and towering national monuments.

In one of these urban cul-de-sacs, corpulent rats scrambled among filthy rubbish heaps while mangy cats prowled and wailed piteously.

Sitting in the driver's seat of the antique scrapheap he called his car, which he parked on the side of a narrow road that lead to his run-down apartment, 24-year-old Aidan Wong let out an exhausted sigh.

It had been a horrible, horrible day.

Aidan left his idyllic hometown, Penang, right after high school; his family was poor and, unable to continue his studies any further, he decided to eke out a living in the gleaming lights of the capital city, Kuala Lumpur. With no tertiary qualifications and being stuck as a lowly office boy, it was an almost subsistent affair.

Aidan's foray into the rat race magnified and exacerbated his problem: he was completely and utterly average and inconspicuous.

Not particularly good at anything, uncouth and simple, lacking in social graces, saddled with incredibly ordinary looks, an underwhelming presence and virtually no charisma, people had a tendency to overlook his presence. He was routinely ignored and forgotten by people he met; even his colleagues sometimes failed to

notice that he was right there in the office with them.

"I wish I could just get away from all of this," he said softly, peering out the driver's window and taking a simple delight in the beauty of the shining stars that hung in the vast night sky.

With another one of those deep, unmistakably gloomy sighs, he got down from the car and locked it shut. There was no point in bothering with a steering lock; no one in their right mind would want to steal a car that only worked 50% of the time and looked likely to just disintegrate any day now.

If he had remained in his seat for just a few more seconds, he would have seen the streak of light speeding across the endless firmament: a shooting star.

"Hello there," he said, not unkindly, to the rats and cats that were the regulars of this smelly, garbage-laden road. It was a greeting that he offered every night – he took solace in the fact that even though people seemed to forget his very existence the moment they took their eyes off of him, the rats and cats at least acknowledged his comings and goings with the occasional squeak and meow.

The thing about slum areas, though: there is always some black-hearted wretch with a knife, seeking to transfer the money and pricey personal belongings of law-abiding citizens into their possession. Sometimes, with extreme force.

Thoroughly exhausted, Aidan failed to turn around in time.

He felt the offending hand rummaging around in his pockets, the wallet being taken, the bag pried from his fingers.

The sound of fleeing footsteps started to grow distant.

Aidan Wong lay there, in a pool of crimson, unmoving.

Hours passed. A light rain fell, creating puddles of murky water on a road that was more holes than road. There was an unusually cold wind blowing; it whistled a mournful dirge. A few people walked past, mostly locals in the area who worked at the nearby 2-star hotel and were returning home, but only the rats and cats seemed to take any notice of the sprawled body.

They gathered around it, sniffing and licking.

The first crack of vermillion pierced the darkness of the night's mantle, and the body got up, of its own accord.

The rats and cats scattered, but only so far as to form a circle around it; they were staying, hypnotized by the clumsy movements as the figure attempted to stand upright on its two feet. It then stood still, its gaze enveloping each and every rat and cat, a look of idle curiosity plastered on the thin, wan face.

It then turned its gaze towards the crimson pool of blood, now much diluted by the rain.

And then, there was a gleam in the eyes, and it finally understood.

Kneeling down, the figure called out to the rats and cats, making a clicking sound with its tongue, motioning for them to come closer.

They approached, to pay homage to the kneeling figure; but it was one particular rat that caught its attention.

With a smile on its face (a face that was rapidly regaining its healthy colour), the kneeling figure addressed this particular rat.

"Thank you," it said softly. The voice was hoarse and the words it uttered came out awkwardly, as if it was not used to speaking.

Aidan looked at the figure, at how it wore his life so comfortably, with an ease that he never had.

And then, all feelings for his past life gone, he scampered off on all fours, to join his new brethren in the comforting darkness of the city's underground pipes, drains and sewers.

Sometimes, wishes do come true.
