

Tanah Toraja



Steven Tabor
2024 (c)

Tanah Toraja

This is a series of images shot in Tanah Toraja, South Sulawesi in February 2024. Tanah Toraja is a region that is enveloped in an ancient spirituality centered on the fluidity between life and death. The region is mountainous, and the terrain is often shrouded in clouds which float mysteriously from one mountain top to another. While most of the population are Christian, the Torajans continue to follow a complex set of traditional beliefs. In Tanah Toraja, life is seen as just one step in a much longer journey, and death is viewed as a cause for celebration. Toraja funerals are elaborate, and involve the ritual sacrifice of water buffalo, the carving of wooden puppets (tao tao) of the deceased, and the placement of the casket and the tao tao in graves carved in the sides of mountains or in ancient cave sites. Thereafter, the horns and the skulls of the water buffalos are proudly displayed on the carved houses and granaries built to connect those on earth with those in the spiritual world. The burial sites are regularly visited, with families bringing water bottles and other everyday goods for their deceased loved ones.

The cost of a funeral in Tanah Toraja can run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, the bulk of which is spent on water buffalos imported into Toraja from Nusa Tenggara Timor and are sold for thousands of dollars in the local livestock markets. People save for years and years to hold such a funeral, and villagers come from far and wide to attend the five day burial ceremony. Young and old attend these ceremonies, since to those in Tanah Toraja, death is as natural as life itself.

For those less accustomed to such beliefs, please be forewarned—this series contains explicit images of ritual animal slaughter, skulls and other burial objects. Some may find these images disturbing, and if so, please do not proceed further.



















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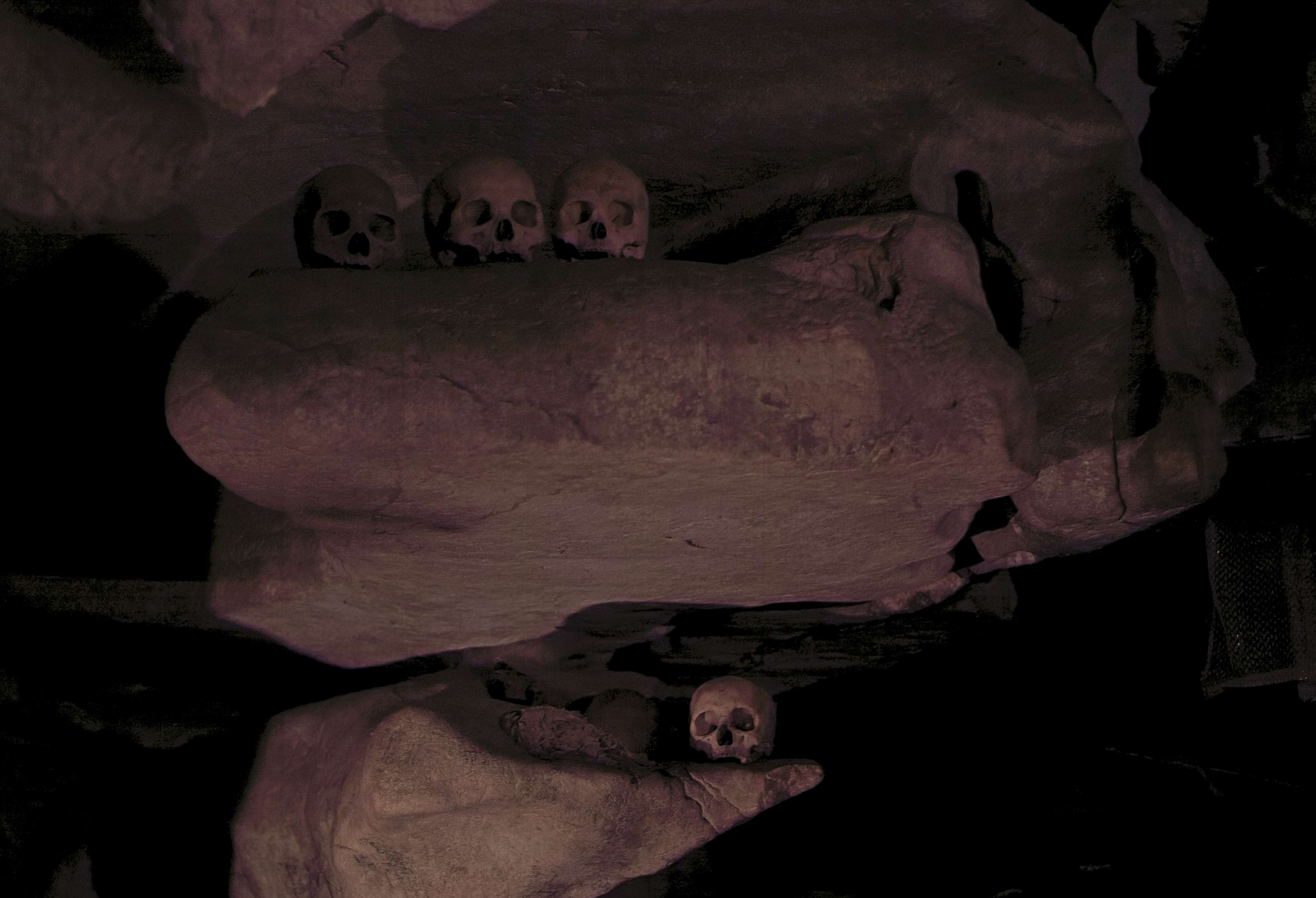


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Tanah Toraja

