

POLAR STARLIGHT

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Poetry
(Issue #12 – November 2023)



POLAR STARLIGHT MAGAZINE

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EDITORIAL

By Rhea E. Rose

Here it is, Polar Starlight Issue 12, our last issue of 2023. Last but in no way least. So, dear readers, cozy up with a cup of cocoa and immerse yourself in the words in this poetry that dance around us like floating snowflakes. Embrace the beauty of the season and the power of poetry to illuminate even the darkest winter nights.

Much like the snowflakes that fall with delicate precision, each poem within these pages encapsulates a diverse range of speculative voices that elevate this edition to a celestial level.

Polar Starlight continues to be a beacon for both seasoned and emerging voices. This amalgamation of styles creates a poetic landscape as diverse as the alien vistas that inspire them, offering readers a rich tapestry of expression.

As the year ends on a profoundly sorrowful note of natural disasters, human violence, and terrible tales of Man's inhumanity to one another and nature's indifference to our plight proliferate, we turn to stories and poems that evoke our superpower, resilience.

Never underestimate the power of words and creation to define our reality and send messages of hope even when staring into the abyss of nasty terrestrial or galactic circumstances. Resilience shines as brutally and brightly as a guiding star.

Speculative poetry embraces the collective effort to survive and thrive beyond familiar bonds, reinforcing our right to exist as a species. Reflecting on memory and the human capacity to find comfort in the echoes of the past, even in the vastness of space, nurtures and gives strength. The enduring force of nature, the interconnected resilience of life, and the capacity to persist, adapt, and find purpose in the face of challenges are reflected in this issue.

The overarching theme of exploration and curiosity found in speculative literature is underscored in the poetic form, which delves into the beauty of the

unknown, offering readers a glimpse into the wonders that may lie beneath the surface of the seemingly desolate and mundane.

Here, readers will contemplate the resilience inherent in the imagined and the tangible, where the ordinary becomes extraordinary. You'll explore the intersection of discovery, wonder, and the uncharted territories of inner and outer landscapes. Excitement lies in the discovery of fresh perspectives within familiar themes. It's a poetic journey through the winter night, guided by the luminosity of words.

So, dear readers, as you embark on this literary journey through Polar Starlight Issue 12's speculative realms, let the poetry guide you into a world where imagination and enchantment transcend winter's chill.

Editor

Rhea E. Rose

PEGASUS SEEKS A CHANGE OF SCENERY

By Lisa Timpf

the company of heroes and gods
is all well and good, he supposes,
but sometimes Pegasus yearns
for equine companionship

one night, he glides down
from Mount Olympus, careful
not to let his silhouette show
against the full bright moon

after a fine, four-point landing
in the midst of a horse-herd
Pegasus crops the dew-sweet grass,
relishing both food and company

ere dawn, he nickers a farewell
and departs, leaving behind
a single feather
from his left wing

back on Olympus, the memory
of this quiet night will fade for Pegasus,
but the horses will always remember
the night their shining cousin

floated down from the heavens
to breathe upon their
humble pastures
a touch of greatness

WHOLE WORLD

by Colleen Anderson

This is how the world began
an enormous plume of sound rushing
from the great black heart dropping
fallout transforming into baptismal rain
Drifting, mist dividing defining
avalanches, windstorms, quakes, rivers
where souls waited, their blurred edges
yet to be coated in form and essence
When silver sound forged their tongues
animals gave voice to what they saw, felt
trembled resonance through the woods
created dens, burrows, roosts, their beginning
Sending out their call, screech, roar, croak
their proclamation made them whole
sharpened their purpose
and shaped the world

NEW GOD

By Frances Skene

The ascetic who lives near the river
has a new god. It appeared to him
in a light from the stand that sells
figurines of Our Lord on a cross.

The god looks like a crocodile,
he says,
but see the love in those eyes.

Love of approaching its next meal,
I reply. Don't go near.

Too late. I cover my ears
as he screams with joy, his blood
gushing red

GONE WITH THE WATER

by Irena Nikolova

Gone with the water,
wind and sand
are the light in her hair
and a wreath of flowers.

Ophelia's body
floats on the river—
an enigma like Mona Lisa
with an elusive smile.

He looks into the water-mirror
and sees his own face:
a mere reflection,
Dali's crouching figure.

She is gone, gone with the water,
wind and sand.
He sees the Arabian desert
with camels and sand cats.

His deserted soul wrestles
with the world. He withdraws
from the riverbank
with bare feet wading
through dewy grass.

TROY

by Carolyn Clink

The horse is not so big.
There is only room for me.

I feel the horse move—
feel every one of the thousands
of splinters as my body
rubs against its tight intestines.

Eyes full of sawdust,
I see nothing.
My sweat stings like wasps
but I must not make a sound.

The one piece of wood
that unlocks this equestrian puzzle
and drops me to the ground
lies under my left hand.

I've always been small for my age
but the space seems smaller—
perhaps I have swollen in the heat.
I am not sure air is getting in.

The horse stops
its bone-bruising motion.
There is a constant blur of noise.
I must be inside the walls of Troy.

I do not know how much time
has passed, but it is quiet now.
I am so cold it must be night.
I move my left hand

ON ANOTHER ARK

by Peter Storey

Whimsical times float
from memories before the exit.
Life onboard the ship is mostly asleep
One crew stands watch, robotic
One crew sleeps, human.

Home planet is dying,
most lands already dead.
Arks were built for longer periods
than 40 days and 40 nights.

Cast out toward specific stars
we are on target to find home.
All ship's goals to keep humanity alive,
human colonies on a galactic scale.

Families kept together.
A mixed humanity pooled together.
All colours and religions together,
each a chance to survive together.

Communications keep us in touch
Of the 400 arks that departed,
3 have not checked in or have not been heard from.
30,000 assumed lost souls of the original 4 million.

The home planet is dying
though some stayed to try and save,
and hope that the star travelers
can find new homes just in case.

Only the common allowed on this voyage
no elites with personal agendas and greed.
no pious religious types living on prayer.

It was them and their ancestors
that put us in such dire conditions.

Though who is to say that the ugly
side of humanity won't raise its head
in a new world to hold power,
in a new world to have control.

Is there a chance that humanity
will live on peacefully and productive,
without the arrogance that left the Earth
intolerable and mostly uninhabitable.

THE MURAL

by Lisa Timpf

The mural in the Martian dome
is faded, cracked, and stained.
It shows them images of home,
that mural in the Martian dome,
it makes them wonder why they roamed
to this red world, where they'll remain.
Small comfort in their muralled dome—
they'll not see Earth again.

CRYSTALS OF ICE

by Roxanne Barbour

crystals of ice
circling Saturn
hiding
alien carriers
offworlders studying Earth

DAVID MALCOLM

by E.S. Taillon

I am the desert wind.
For fun, I move mountains
of sand across the Sahara,
grain by grain. I've worn down
three pairs of tweezers
to metal stubs.

These hands sometimes respond
on puppet strings to a pull
coming from everywhere.
I am the three hearts
of the octopus when it
falls in love.

In the palm of a titanic stone hand
I found a little family endangered
by the whispering of goats,
by the droning of bees
whose sky they peeled back
to peer into the hive and check
the honeycomb. And to the bees
they were titans, though they were
bees in the palm of the valley,
and the valley was a bee
on the tip of my finger.

SLNDERMAN

by Richard Stevenson

Slenderman—
ain't no insurance
bump and fender man,
no smooth howdy doody
buck-toothed rube.

Ain't no 3-D
nuisance or accessory,
just a 2-D flat
easy-to-put-away
toffee-flexive guy.

What trouble can I
possibly get you in?
I'm just a toffee
s-t-r-e-t-c-h-a-b-l-e GIF,
a sociable social meme.

Got no features!
Got no face!
If I had 'em
I'd just lose 'em or
stretch 'em out of shape.

Got no gender to bend,
no reason to offend,
no ill-gotten gains,
no smelly remains,
just a toffee body

Nothin' fat or cloddy.
Slenderman! That's me!
I'll tender all affection
to my soft center...
Don't mention it.

THE SAND DOGS OF MARS

By Lisa Timpf

for six months, life on these red sands seemed bland,
all study and rigor and rules and strict compliance—
and then we discovered them, muzzles to the stars
and singing, the sand dogs of Mars

at first, we daren't credit the witness of our eyes,
imagined it wishful thinking for those we left behind
all the Fidos and Rexes and Maxes and Milos and Bandits
but then we felt that coarse fur under our gloved hands

for now, they will remain our tight-kept secret
Mission Control, we fear, won't understand
might compel us to sacrifice our new friends on the altars
of science, so for now, this is our small act of defiance

we've bitten the apple of knowledge, cannot deny
that wonders exist beneath these yellow-brown skies
so close we might touch them with our gloved hands
here among the redness of the sands

beautiful mysteries under the sky-bright stars—
the sand dogs of Mars

BENEATH THE DULCE DESERT SANDS

By Richard Stevenson

Deep beneath the Dulce desert sands—
maybe miles deep—and off-limits
to most military personnel, a secret lab exists.

May well have existed for eons,
the site of wild genetic experiments
in which the greys, soulless flesh robots—

much later in collusion with top human scientists—
tried to extract abductees' souls, and soaked
in blood baths of animal and human body parts!

Seems the Greys have no digestive tracts.
No anus from which to excrete waste,
digest food or drink. They must absorb energy

through the skin, wallow amid blood and guts—
likely at the beck and call of reptoids
who've had a hand in our species' evolution.

A whistleblower, whose name shall remain
Anonymous, came to learn the reptoids
had altered the DNA of Neanderthals,

Cro-Magnon Man... literally created Homo Sapiens,
And all the world's major religions,
the concepts of heaven and hell, the whole shebang.

All to keep us on the track of an afterlife
while they abducted thousands they imprisoned
in the dreaded cages of the deepest level seven.

Now Dulce just looks like an ordinary small town—
3,000 inhabitants, clean streets, ample services...
No one suspected a thing, until the brass learned

they had been deceived. Bought the deal
of an exchange of technologies for cow parts—
saucers, saucer propulsion, lasers, Post-it notes...

Few ever got to level seven. One who snuck down
blew the whistle and, in 2017, the military
planted an atomic bomb 4,000 feet below the ground.

It blew up plenty. Not them. We lost that war.
And now greys and reptoids own an expanding underground
warehouse of captured souls and animals.

Worse than Mistress Bathory who bathed in the blood
of blessed virgins in an attempt to regain
her youth and beauty, and killed hundreds.

These greys are taking thousands—perhaps
hundreds of thousands over the millennia!
Their plans: to steal our souls and our planet.

To create a series of over-souls to envelope
their spindly, big cabeza-headed bodies.
To terraform our planet to their specifications.

Could direct a wholesale invasion any day—
all run from under the Archuleta Mesa,
below l'il old Dulce, New Mexico—and we know!

RESCUE EFFORT

by Roxanne Barbour

non-responding
alien starship
slowly circling Earth
rescue effort
disappearance

NEW NEIGHBOUR

By Jeanette C. Montgomery

I expected someone else
when I bid the tall dark stranger enter
Usually, I would be more careful
I'm your new neighbour, he said

with a smile that made me think
it hadn't seen much use
Clothing from another era
hung on his bones

He sat where I suggested
resting long hands on the armrests
We introduced ourselves; I thought
his name suits him

Coffee? I just baked cookies,
wondering what else I should do
My hand shook as I filled his mug
His eyes glowed as he spoke
of landscaping, flowers and relaxing
in his new home next door
The cat settled, purring, in his lap

He spoke a little of his former work
of disease, starvation, war
He'd retired, no longer needed
Others, unbidden, doing his work

I shuddered, suspecting what I did
of his prior job title
Again, that awkward smile
as if he knew I was unsettled

Gently placing the cat on the floor
he thanked me for a gracious welcome
He strolled down my walk
humming Chopin's Funeral March

See you, Mr. Reaper, I said with a wave
He smiled, more naturally this time
He wasn't a bad sort
Better than some neighbours I've had

THE VAMPIRE OF HIGHGATE CEMETERY

By Richard Stevenson

Seen outside the gates
or just inside, a tall, thin man
in top hat and long frock

says “Good evening, sir.”
You’re disoriented, can’t find
your way to your dead friend’s plot.

Just nod, but can’t fail to notice
the closer this pale homunculus gets,
the more exhausted you become.

He’s not going to suddenly sink
his incisors in your neck but
his eyes flame red when he looks at you.

Sunken cheeks, wan complexion.
No widow’s peak or aversion
to crosses apparently. Wrinkled lips.

Could have stepped out of the pages
of a nineteenth-century vampire epic—
even floated through the mist on cue.

But this is psychedelic sixties’ London.
Guy could just be some junkie
with a soft spot for cement cribs.

You manage to stumble to a bus,
get home, have a shower, take a nap.
Still feel depleted. The man’s face

shows up in your dreams repeatedly.
Always getting closer, closer;
his skin rosier, plumper...

ParAbnormal parasite? Doesn't bite
or suck blood from your jugular maybe,
but he drains you nonetheless.

Be careful what you wish for
if you come at midnight a decade on.
Garlic will just make you stink.

Gonna whistle for a Bobby to come
whack the ghost's coconut? Good luck.
You might want to bring a change of underwear.

Probably more useful than a silver bullet
or stout sharp stake anyway.
Bring a sleeping bag, toothbrush, toothpaste.

If you're going to traipse into the constabulary
the next day, better to approach the desk
with fresh breath and a you-won't-believe-this pitch,

It's not like no one's heard your story
or ever met the ghost before, just so you know.
Take your time. Don't stutter over clutter.

Tell your story simply and plainly.
Get ready for a rich refrain:
souvenir shop's just around the corner.

NEON FOLKTALE

By Aaron Grierson

Mamma once told me
A tale about the woods
But they're gone now
Wildlife too
Disappeared overnight
Blinking neon is all
That remains.

Now they're pretty
Glinting through the window
Fresh flashes of pink, green, blue
As I study online
Hoping for a real career
When I get away from here
Small town consequence
Is little to speak of
Gotta head to Megalopolis
On the night train one day.

Mamma once told me
The hills have eyes
Well it turns out
The lights do too
They follow me through
Streets empty or busy
Peer into my room at night
A once comforting glow
Now a horrible sight.

No one else seems to notice
Or maybe they don't care
Always scrolling the news
With hollow staring eyes,
Until they glow neon

Too then I know it's true
The lights have always followed
Blinking, flashing, growing
Replacing trees, animals and water
Seeking flesh and bone now, hue.

Mamma never told me about this
Oh mamma, what should I do?

ABOUT THE POETS AND ARTIST

Colleen Anderson

Colleen is a multiple award nominee, with poetry widely published in several countries, in such venues as *Andromeda Spaceways*, *Lucent Dreaming*, the award-winning *Shadow Atlas*, and *Water: Sirens, Selkies & Sea Monsters*. Her poem “Machine (r)Evolution” is in Tenebrous Press’s *Brave New Weird*. Colleen lives in Vancouver, BC, and is a Ladies of Horror Fiction, Canada Council, and BC Arts Council grant recipient for writing. A recent publication is *The Lore of Inscrutable Dreams*. Her poetry collection, [*I Dreamed a World*](#), is available from LVP Publications.

www.colleenanderson.wordpress.com

Kari-Ann Anderson

Kari-Ann Anderson was born and raised in Fort Frances, Ontario and now resides in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She started out as a wildlife artist but has always loved the fantasy genre and was heavily influenced by her love of comic books. She eventually made it over to the Fantasy genre but retains the ability to create in multiple genres. Kari-Ann won the Ducks Unlimited Provincial Artist of the Year for Manitoba in 2005 for her piece titled *Family Excursion* and has been nominated for an Aurora Award in the Artistic Achievement category. She has also painted covers for books and other projects. If you would like to take a look at more of her work, please visit www.kari-annanderson.com

Roxanne Barbour

Roxanne has been reading science fiction since the age of eleven when she discovered *Miss Pickerell Goes to Mars* by Ellen Macgregor. The years passed by while she had careers as a computer programmer, music teacher, insurance office administrator, and logistics coordinator for an international freight company. She took early retirement in June 2010. Six months later, she decided to put to use all the books on writing that she had accumulated over the years, and actually start writing.

To date her books include: *An Alien Collective* (2014, Wee Creek Publishing), *Revolutions* (2015, Whiskey Creek Press), *Sacred Trust* (2015, Whiskey Creek Press), *Kaiku* (2017, Self-Published), *Alien Innkeeper* (2017, Wild Rose Press / Fantasy Rose), *An Alien Perspective* (2017, Self-published), *An Alien Confluence* (2019, Self-published.) She also writes speculative poetry, and has poems published in *Scifaikuest*, *Star*Line*, *Polar Borealis*, and other magazines. Website: <https://roxannebarbour.wordpress.com/>

Carolyn Clink

Carolyn won the 2022 Aurora Award for Best Poem/Song for “Cat People Café,” which appeared in *Polar Starlight*, Issue 3. She won the same award in 2011 for “The ABCs at the End of the World.” Her genre poetry publications include *Weird Tales*, *Analog*, *Imaginarium 2012: The Best Canadian Speculative Writing*, *On Spec*, *Tesseract*, *Tales of the Unanticipated*, *Room*, and all 5 volumes of *Northern Frights*.

Aaron Grierson

Since completing his undergrad from McMaster University in English Literature and History, Aaron Grierson has continued striving to be a published storyteller and poet while exploring the world, especially through society’s extensive merging with technology. He is a First Reader for *Flash Fiction Online* and former Senior Articles Editor at *The Missing Slate*. Always

hungry for more literature, references and puns inevitably sneak into his musings. Previous publications appear in *The Missing Slate*, *Marisa's Recurring Nightmares*, *Polar Borealis*, and *Polar Starlight*.

Jeanette C. Montgomery

Jeanette C. Montgomery began writing when her Grade Two teacher instructed the class to write about the Norman Rockwell print on the blackboard. Jeanette wrote a story about the boy, his dog, and their adventures. That set a lifetime pattern of writing about whatever adventure pops into her busy mind. Living and traveling in Vancouver, BC, and various global locations, exposed her to diverse legends and mythologies. She credits her wild imagination to an Irish ancestry and a limitless curiosity which sometimes leads her into trouble.

Jeanette has published articles, poems and stories in *Write On!*, *Talespinners*, *Folklore*, *Freelance*, and McGraw Hill Ryerson's *Modern Morsels – Selections of Canadian Poetry and Short Fiction*. She has two stories included in the Saskatoon Writers' Club Inc. anthology *Fact, Fiction & Fantasy*. She lives in Saskatoon, writing YA fiction and poetry.

Irena Nikolova

Irena began life as a poet when she developed an obsession with the poetry of the English Romantics P. B. Shelley and J. Keats. This obsession brought her from Sofia, Bulgaria, to the continent of North America where she pursued her graduate studies in Romanticism at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois, and Western University in London, Ontario.

She taught British Romantic poetry, Science Fiction, Speculative Fiction and other literature courses at the University of Sofia, Western University, and the University of Ottawa.

Irena is an active member of the Algonquin Square Table, a poetry circle created by A. F. Moritz at the University of Toronto. This poetry workshop has been chaired for many years by Carolyn Clink. She has also participated in the Poetry Fluency Salon of Margaret Christakos at U of T. She has worked with Molly Peacock, who has been a source of poetic inspiration, a mentor and a very insightful critic and editor of her poetry.

Irena has published a book on the poetry of P.B. Shelley and J. Keats entitled *Complementary Modes of Representation in Keats, Novalis and Shelley* (Peter Lang, 2001). She has also published articles on the poetry of W. Wordsworth (Sofia University Press, 1990), the drama of W.B. Yeats in *Drama and Criticism* (New York: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2009) and the European Romantic Epic in *European Poetry* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2002).

Irena's poems have appeared in *Polar Starlight*, *Poetry Pause* issued by the League of Canadian Poets, and the radio program *Accents: A Radio Show for Literature, Art and Culture* in Lexington, Kentucky.

Frances Skene

Frances is a retired librarian and puppeteer who has been actively involved in science fiction fandom and promoting science fiction literature since the 1970s. She is also a co-author of the Science Fiction novel *Windship: The Crazy Plague*, which can be found here: [Windship](#).

Richard Stevenson

Richard is a retired college English and Creative Writing instructor. He taught for thirty years at Lethbridge College in southern Alberta and recently moved to Nanaimo, B.C. He has the usual pedigree: MFA in Creative Writing, thirty published books, and a CD. Forthcoming are a number of children's books: *Action Dachshund!*, *Cryptid Shindig* (a trilogy including the volumes *If a Dolphin had Digits*, *Nightcrawlers*, and *Radioactive Frogs*) and the stand-alone

collections, *An Abominable Swamp Slob Named Bob* (Altered Reality), *Hairy Hullabaloo* (Starship Sloane), and—just out!—*Eye to Eye with my Octopi* (Cyberwit).

Peter Storey

Peter emigrated to Canada in the spring of 1992 and obtained his Canadian citizenship in March of 2011. He mostly writes free-form poems. Words come into his mind, from beginning to end and/or bits and pieces, and he writes them down with whatever is available at the time. What goes on, creatively, in his thoughts, are words and pictures. The words come out as poems and the pictures as abstract art.

Published works include “Awake” in the *Urban Green Man* Anthology, Edge Publishing, 2013, “Flight Song” at *WritingRaw.com* in February 2015, “Becoming Immortal Again” at *WritingRaw.com* November 2015, and his 2019 self-published Graphic Novel *Awake* illustrated by Janice Blaine.

E.S. Taillon

E.S. Taillon holds an MFA in Creative Writing from UBC and an MA in French Literature from the University of Toronto. They have worked for the Young Adulting blog and were Managing Editor at *PRISM* Magazine. They freelance as a translator—their first translation, *Scenes from the Underground*, came out with House of Anansi in October 2022 and was shortlisted for the Dayne Ogilvie Prize for LGBTQ2S+ Emerging Writers. Taillon’s hobbies include D&D, befriending street cats, digital illustration, tea tasting, knitting, and suspicious composting.



Lisa Timpf

Lisa is a retired HR and communications professional who lives in Simcoe, Ontario. When not writing, she enjoys bird watching, vegetable gardening, and walking her cocker spaniel/Jack Russel mix Chet. Her speculative poetry has

appeared in *New Myths*, *Star*Line*, *Triangulation: Seven-Day Weekend*, *Eye to the Telescope*, and other venues. Her collection of speculative haibun poetry, *In Days to Come*, is available from Hiraeth Publishing. You can find out more about Lisa's writing projects at <http://lisatimpf.blogspot.com/>


**Witches,
Bitches, and
Canny Women**

An Exhibition of Artworks by
Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk and Melissa Mary Duncan
November 14 - December 2, 2023

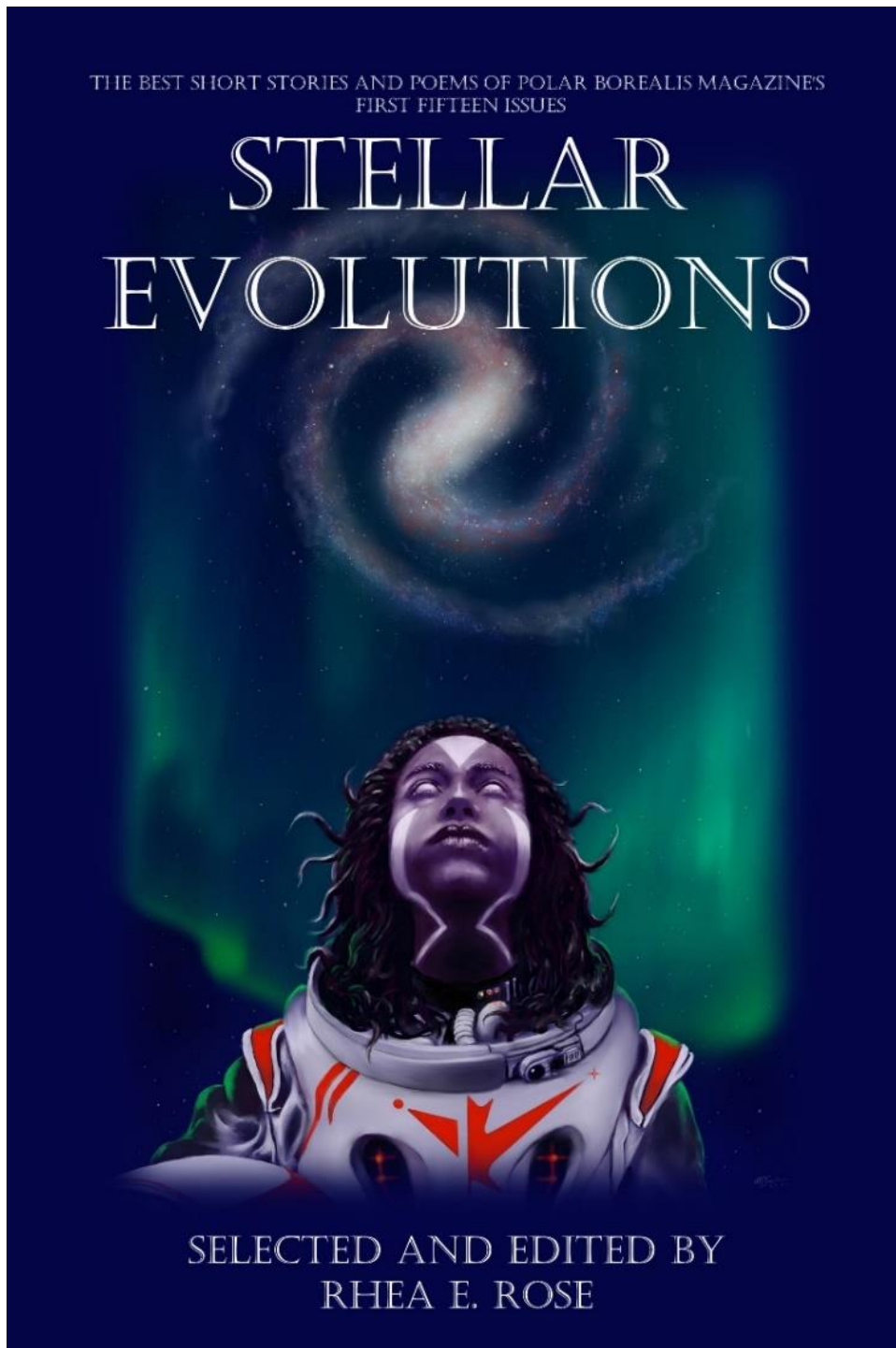


Opening Reception: November 18 - 1:00 - 4:00

Rock Family Gallery, Mission Arts Centre
33529 1 Ave, Mission, BC V2V 1H1



The Best Short Stories and Poems from the first Fifteen Issues of *Polar Borealis* Magazine



Cover: Space Force
– by M.D. Jackson

Poetry – by Lynne Sargent, J.J. Steinfeld, Melanie Martilla, Lisa Timpf, Kirsten Emmott, Catherine Girczyc, Andrea Schlecht, Selena Martens, JYT Kennedy, Taral Wayne & Walter Wentz, Douglas Shimizu, Marcie Lynn Tentchoff, Matt Moore, Richard Stevenson, Mary Choo, and Y.A. Pang.

Stories – by Mark Braidwood, Jonathan Sean Lyster, JYT Kennedy, Casey June Wolf, Monica Sagle, K.M. McKenzie, Jeremy A. Cook, Lawrence Van Hoof, Lisa Voisin, Elizabeth Buchan-Kimmerly, Dean Wirth, Robert Dawson, Michael Donoghue, Steve Fahnestalk, Michelle F. Goddard, Chris Campeau, Ben Nein, Karl Johanson, William Lewis, Tonya Liburd, Jon Gauthier, Jonathan Creswell-Jones, and Akem.

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