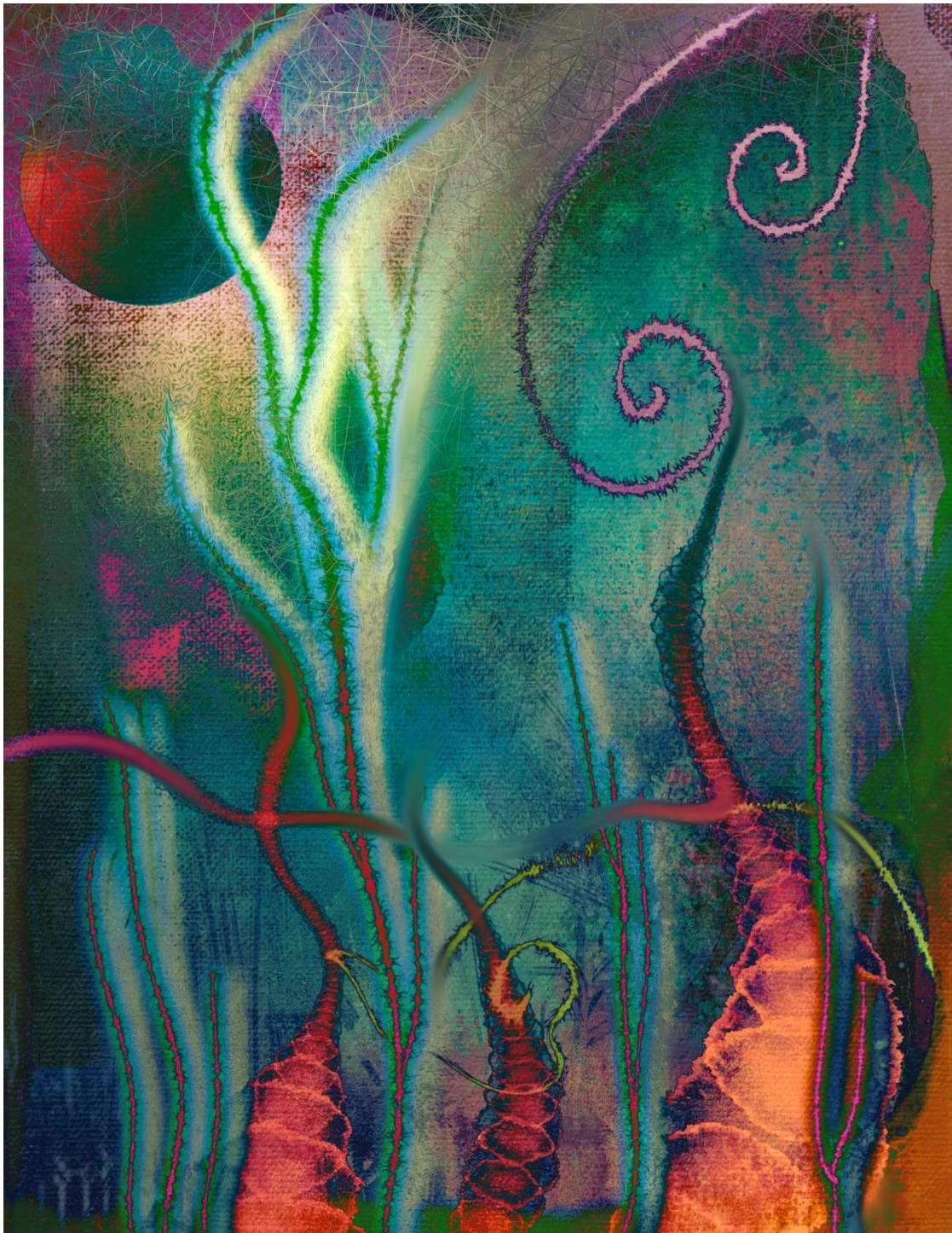


POLAR STARLIGHT

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Poetry
(Issue #13 – February 2024)



POLAR STARLIGHT MAGAZINE

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**THIS ISSUE
IS DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY
OF RICHARD STEVENSON***

* See entry on page 30 in "About the poets and artists"

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ART CREDITS

COVER: *Mind of a Monster* – by Swati Chavda

EDITORIAL

By Rhea E. Rose

A hearty, happy new year. Welcome to 2024 and *Polar Starlight's* first issue of the year! The poetry is as fabulous as usual. I'm honoured, excited, and privileged to be editor for the fourth *Polar Starlight* year of brilliant Canadian-specific poetry. My heartfelt thanks go to the authors for their fine work, and for their patience awaiting the appearance of their spectacular creations so ably evoked by the fantastic cover artwork of Swati Chavda.

This issue of *Polar Starlight* finds new contributors to the publication. Let me highlight new submitters to encourage others to send their work this way when the next submission window opens.

In *Darksome* by KT Wagner, we find ourselves entangled in a mysterious dreamscape where the elemental force of Boneless slumbers beneath the surface.

Mark Thomas's *Funereal Disease* introduces us to navigating the delicate balance between morbidity and the awkwardness of mourning.

Rebecca Franklyn's *Alien Games* presents a concise yet evocative exploration of extraterrestrial interaction, challenging preconceived notions with a twist of dark humor.

I Don't Want Your Cure by Derek Newman-Stille challenges societal notions of normalcy. A powerful commentary on the diverse ways in which bodies and identities are policed and scrutinized.

Jennifer Shelby's poem *Essence* captures the longing to encapsulate the creative magic of stories and have it at the creator's fingertips as a source of guidance, joy, and enchantment.

These poems, among others in this collection, collectively form a tapestry of speculative wonders, where winter's chill is but a backdrop for the rich and varied landscapes of the imagination. Immerse yourself in these verses, embark on a journey through the speculative realms crafted by these talented poets.

Rhea E. Rose

DARKSOME

By KT Wagner

Boneless smoulders. Tucked into fissures and rifts, beneath loam, worms, the deepest roots. Dreaming of fire and rebirth.

Men. Old boys. A wilderness celebration far from the gaze of civilization. Float planes skim the chop of the lake. They arrive roaring.

Boneless slumbers. Constrained by limestone, savouring the lingering taste of metal, coal dust, screams.

Men disgorge from planes onto a rotting dock. A century-old camp. A scar beneath regenerated forest. The sun shines.

Boneless twitches. Its dreams darken.

Men unload supplies. A blight of beer, food, chainsaws, fishing gear, tents, stacked on an outcrop. A hot wind blows.

Boneless churns. Thickens.

Men drink, raze and burn. Slaughtered Steelhead discarded in favour of steak. Florid faces gather to ignite sparklers and bottle rockets. A celebration of success.

Boneless swells. Bituminous and woolly.

Men stumble, back slap, clamour, howl. Creosote-soaked timbers and rubble, punched into a hill. An adit, a cavern, a shaft.

Boneless rouses. Pulsing, sifting coal dust.

Men light fuses. Spinners, fountains, snakes, and strobes. Dropped into the abyss. Explosions. Raucous laughter.

Boneless roils. Ascends. Enjoins.

Men shriek, gibber. Burning duff, eldritch smoke, suffocates. Equipment abandoned. Planes roar.

Old boys return to cities, offices, and boardrooms. Eyes smouldering.
Boneless.

FUNEREAL DISEASE

By Mark Thomas

It was amazing that it didn't happen sooner,
considering the guy's stressful life-style
and crappy genetic markers.
But it's not polite to label poor outcomes
"weakness"
so we don't say much.

Of course, we had to go to the funeral.
After fifteen years of teamwork,
we couldn't just send flowers
and head for the bar.

"That doesn't look like Darius,"
you said, as we neared the casket.

I wasn't sure.
To be honest, I had been avoiding
Him—or his illness—for months.
Sickness made his thin outer shell
collapse around his ankles.

It was embarrassing to witness that exposure.

"It doesn't look like Darius," you said again
and we retreated to the buffet.
A few minutes later, the assistant manager
of payroll equity
reported that the corpse

had gone missing.

I guess it was bound to happen eventually.
Sometimes the accounts don't balance,
anomalies refuse to be reconciled

and the ledger is irrevocably spoiled.

We scoured the crowd of corporate mourners
searching, in vain, for Darius.

He should have stood out,
as the most obviously least-animate.

“Well, that’s frustrating,” you said,
as a throng of gray bodies headed for the doors.

LATE

by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

When he wasn't back for dinner
I got worried.
Twice baked potatoes in the oven,
steaks, well-seasoned,
ready to go on the grill,
and salad waiting to be dressed and tossed
beside the stove
grew dry, and gray, and wilted
as the wait time grew.

"He's never late."
That's what I told his office
when I called to check,
what I told his parents,
one day later
what I told the cops...
but what I did not tell our kids,
since they already knew,
yet would not understand.

"He's always home by five o'clock,
like magic... that's our little joke,
since he's a scientist by trade..."
but it's not funny now,
and wasn't when his office
finally called me back
to mention paradox, and parallels,
wave functions and entanglement,
and nothing that made sense at all.

They brought in terms like "hero,"
and "groundbreaking,"
spoke of hazard pay,
advanced insurance plans,

and non-disclosure,
then finally sent some men in suits
with papers that they made me sign,
with hinted threats
and zealots' smiles.

But in the end, when our anniversary
had joined the meal I'd prepped for it
out in the green waste bin,
when he'd missed our son's first wobbling step,
our daughter's first ballet recital,
and my tears...
the only phrase that really stuck out
in the babble of their quantum muck
was "somewhen else."

FAERY DREAM

by Geoffrey Hart

I was walking late one night, on a darklit Scottish moor
On a hunting trip for silence, came across the strangest spoor
First I heard a merry piping, then a harp so soft and airy
That before I had it spotted, I had stumbled 'cross the faery.

Hard to say who jumped the highest, or who laughed the loudest first
But he asked me to be seated, and with pipe in hand rehearsed
Well, I had my six-string with me, and in no time had joined in
Then our harpist reappeared, and we made an awful din.

Then I thought I must be dreaming, for before we worked things out
We were circled by the others, who began to sing and shout
Then a silence fell upon us, sitting cross-legged on the green
For a Lady came to listen, and she was the Faery Queen.

Clad in sparkling cloth of starlight, golden hair hung to her knees
And her eyes as blue as sapphires dancing as she took her ease
Then she beckoned me to play, and again a silence fell
So I did my best to please her, and I think I did quite well.

For I played all night 'till morning, 'till the moon had disappeared
All the faeries fading 'way as the sun and morning neared
I awoke, my fingers aching, lying curled upon the ground
And I thought I had been dreaming, 'till I heard a tiny sound:

By my feet there stood a mouse, and he looked to be scared sick
And he held a shining something and I saw it was a pick
Made of faery-silver surely, for it felt warm in my hand
And the music that it made, surely came from moonlit lands.

In the years since then I've wandered, like True Thomas did before
Tried to find the gathered faeries just to play with them once more
Though I've walked the moors by moonlight, tried to recreate that scene
I have never 'gain been blessed to relive my Faery dream.

ALIEN GAMES

by Rebecca Franklyn

the cheese ate the mice
or so I heard
when the aliens
came to play
cat and mouse
with earth

THE MECHANICAL BRIDE

by Carolyn Clink

Eyes wide
in programmed innocence,
you clutch a yellow bouquet.

Your memory is set to wipe
each time you are knocked
on your back,

each time you spill
a little oil.

RAM REFRESH

by James Grotkowski

our fingertips touch
unseen sparks refresh my RAM
robots do love

TRIOLET

by Robert Dawson

I sit and watch the screen in silence, while
A chatbot writes my love for you in verse.
It knows (of course) the spelling and the style
Better than I, who watch in silence. While
Its slick Cyrano act brooks no denial,
It feels both unromantic and perverse
To sit and watch the screen in silence, while
A chatbot writes my love for you in verse.

AI TALENTS OF THE FUTURE

by Lisa Timpf

I wouldn't if I were you—
nanny-bot's arm snakes out
to avert catastrophe
search and rescue—
avalanche victim found
in record time
Swan Lake—
never have dancers
leaped to such heights
Beethoven's Fifth Symphony—
though he plays the piece flawlessly
it's just not the same

MINDLESS

By Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

“Just make mine blue!
With sparkly bits!!
And rainbow flares!!!”

I hear her words,
the frothy buzzing
of a fashion-conscious teen
who cares far more for
how my top-rank,
years of research aug-ware looks
than what it does,
and file them away,
along with varied babbled bursts
about some boy
who tried to scan her chest
for moddies in the uptown trans,
and what the zoned barista
tried to tell her was “low hydrofoam”
last week at the coffee shop,
for when I get to be
less busy wiring
high chrome fixtures
to her brain.

Maybe, if she keeps it up,
and stays annoying,
I’ll react to her inanity
by tinting all her wet-ware
seasick green,
just visible beneath the strobing lights
at Planet Death, the latest
high tech nighttime joint
I know (from other
comments that she’s making
endlessly)
she hopes to hit.

Her mothers own InventiaCorp,
the place I buy my hottest tech,

so going with my other choice
and severing her frontal lobe,
is rated “nyet.”

I DON'T WANT YOUR CURE

By Derek Newman-Stille

They whisper "There's a cure for that"
"Why don't you try a spell?"
"I can heal you"
"I can teach you to heal yourself"
"Don't you want to change?"

But my body is always changing
fuelled by an internal combustion
called disability

Pain bites deep in my bones
And isn't that a kind of spell?
Can't you taste it?
the magic of pain

My body isn't static, it's dynamic
changing with flux and flow
its own tides

My synapses a grimoire
writing spells into my flesh
Is there anything more sacred?
more personal?

But they see me as broken,
held together by luck
And they offer me cure after cure

Some don't wait
for permission
 They lay on hands
touch me with crystals
 wands
 potions

expecting gratitude

I don't thank them

I don't want them

I don't want to be remade by them

My body made me,

changed me,

mapped my reality onto itself

I don't need their magic

I don't need transformation

I AM transformation

“Don't you want to be the hero of the story?”

they ask as I push their potions away

But whose story is it?

Why can I only be seen as the mentor?

supporting character?

teaching through my pain

because my pain tells my story

and I'm the central character in it.

DO I COUNT

by James Grotkowski

all the stars
more than sand grains, snowflakes too
one, two, three, four...
 I'm done counting them
 andromeda was too much
 not enough numbers
yet they send their spears
smacked by flung photons dying
untallied, I'm fine
 still more starlight flights
 their course sharp and sure, I'm struck
do I count or not

TIME AND TIDE

By Melanie Marttila

Time passes and the tide of age
creeps, laps against the shore of my body,
higher every day. Each decade means
sickness lingers, injury is slower to heal.
Wrinkles, scars become badges of honour, as I
moonlike, seek to change the tide, make it
retreat, reverse the flow of time without
destroying the universe.

SALT-WATER HAIBUN

By KB Nelson

Thoughts of An Ocean Nymph: Mortal creatures. Alas, they're everywhere, these brief beings of warm body or cold. Longer-lived ones as well: green of lung and blood of sugar water. To cherish them is a fair diversion but in the end, tedious. Preferable to play on the margins of ocean and land. Where we meet the naiads, where their thin twisted waters smash and riot with ours.

weary shoreline rocks
reveal aeons of nereids'
violent laughter

TERMINUS

By Frances Skene

We debark at the
terminus,
beyond it ruins and
fallen pylons, a dim
backdrop at day's end.

Water is everywhere,
here in a depression,
there in an old tunnel,
and wherever tarmac
kept it from soaking
into the ground.

Around us, small
creatures run and fly.
They have come
into their own,
living where once
they were chased out.

ABOUT THE POETS AND ARTIST

Swati Chavda

Swati Chavda is an author, editor, artist, and a former neurosurgeon. After years of repairing people’s brains, in 2010 she left her thriving neurosurgery career to follow her passion to become a full-time writer. She has published a self-help book: *Ignite: Beat Burnout & Rekindle Your Inner Fire*, and two illustrated poetry books. Her poem *At the Edge of Space and Time* is a 2020 Aurora Award winner.

She also writes speculative fiction, where her characters tend to seek answers to questions ranging from “Is there life after death?” to “Should there be life before breakfast?” She uses too many commas, too few coffee breaks—and there’s a constant battle waging in her head between British and American spelling.

Website: www.swatichavda.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*.

Robert Dawson

Robert teaches mathematics at a Nova Scotian university. In his spare time he writes, cycles, and hikes. His stories have appeared in *Nature Futures*, *On*

Melanie Martilla

Melanie Marttilla (she/her) is an #actuallyautistic SFF author-in-progress, writing poetry and speculative tales of hope in the face of adversity. Always looking up, eyes on the skies, and head in the clouds, Melanie lives and writes in Sudbury, ON, Canada, in the house where three generations of her family have lived, on the street that bears her surname, with her spouse and their dog. Her most recent poems were published in *Polar Starlight*, her most recent short fiction in *Pulp Literature*, and her debut poetry collection, *The Art of Floating* (Latitude 46), will be published on April 6, 2024.

blog: [Always Looking Up](#)

Facebook: <https://facebook.com/melanie.marttilla>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/melaniemarttilla/>

Threads: <https://www.threads.net/@melaniemarttilla>

Bluesky: <https://bsky.app/profile/melaniemarttilla.bsky.social>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/melanie-marttilla-20868047>

KB Nelson

KB Nelson is a Canadian writer who has won awards in both poetry and short fiction. You can find her work in a variety of publications including *SurVision*, *Bethlehem Writers Roundtable*, *Sea-To-Sky Review*, and *The Wild Word*. Her chapbook *The Muse of Natural History* was published in June 2021. KB has resided from coast to coast in Canada, in Arizona, and in New Zealand. She currently lives on the sunshine coast of B.C.

Derek Newman-Stille

Derek: I am a Queer, Nonbinary, Disabled, Fat, Femme settler Canadian (Turtle Island) author, poet, academic, editor, visual artist, and activist. I am the 9-time Aurora Award-winning creator of the digital humanities site *Speculating Canada* and the associated radio show. I frequently use fantasy

and science fiction as a means of elucidating possibilities and potentials, reimagining the way that we situate identities and ideas.

I have published poetry in fora such as *Fat Studies In Canada: (Re)Mapping The Field* (Inanna) and *Whispers Between Fairies* (Renaissance Press), performed and published poetry for Artsweek Peterborough's SHIFT: Post-Code Tour, and performed poetry for Peterborough's Arts Ability: Taking the Stage.

In addition, I have published short fiction in *Dark Waters* (Poise and Pen Publishing), and *Nothing Without Us* (Renaissance Press). I have edited the collections *Over the Rainbow: Folk and Fairy Tales from the Margins* (Exile), and *We Shall Be Monsters* (Renaissance Press). Additionally, Nathan Frechette and I co-published our collection of short fiction *Whispers Between Fairies* (Renaissance Press).

Jennifer Shelby

Jennifer hunts for poems in the beetled undergrowth of fairy-infested forests. She fishes for them in the dark space between stars. As part of her ongoing catch-and-release program, a collection of her stories is going to the Moon with the Lunar Codex. You can read more about that at <https://jennifershelby.blog/>

Frances Skene

Frances is the author of a poetry chapbook, *Seasons*, and two one-act stage plays that were locally produced. In addition to her poems and stories in *Polar Starlight* and *Polar Borealis*, she has been published in *Eye to the Telescope*, the magazine of SFPA, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association. Her poem, "Angels," in *Polar Starlight* # 6, made it to the long list for the 2023 Rhysling Award.

She is a co-author of the novel, [Windship: The Crazy Plague](#), available from Amazon.

Richard William Stevenson (March 4, 1952 – October 18, 2023)

The following is the last Bio Richard submitted:

“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).”

Born in Victoria, B.C., Richard obtained an Honours BA in English from the University of Victoria, then an MFA in creative writing from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. While at UBC his role of Editor-in-Chief of *Prism International* led him into the world of magazines, anthologies, e-zines and journals in which he ultimately published hundreds of reviews and poems, both nationally and internationally. He pursued a thirty-year career at Lethbridge college in Alberta, teaching Creative writing, English, and Canadian Literature. Throughout his life he conducted numerous workshops and multiple readings. He also served on the executive of various arts groups, including the *Old Man River Writers Group* in Southern Alberta and *Wordstorm* in Nanaimo, B.C. And he loved to perform with two musical groups, the jazz/poetry band, *Naked Ear*, and the alt-rock/YA verse troupe, *Sasquatch*.

It should be noted his poetry was published no fewer than twenty-three times in the pages of *Polar Starlight* and *Polar Borealis* magazines, beginning with “The Gist of It” in *Polar Borealis* #3 (Dec 2016) and “The Aswang” in *Polar Starlight* 1 (Mar 2021). After all, who can resist poems with titles like these:

“Do the Funky Cryptid” – *Polar Borealis* #06, May 2018.

“Fluorescent Freddie of French Lick” – *Polar Borealis* #10, May 2019.

“Sasquatch and Sex” – *Polar Starlight* #08, January 2023.

“Beneath the Dulce Desert Sands” – *Polar Starlight* #12, November 2023.

Richard’s passionate creativity, sense of playful fun, and exuberant enthusiasm will be missed by all who knew him and his works.

Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

Marcie is a writer/poet/editor from Gibsons, BC, where she lives in the middle of a whole lot of prickly greenery with her family and various other critters. Her work has appeared in such publications as *Star*Line*, *Dreams & Nightmares*, *Strange Horizons*, and *Illumen*.

Mark Thomas

Mark is an artist and writer living in St. Catharines, Ontario. In a previous life he was a teacher, wrestling coach, and ex-member of Canada's national rowing team. Check out his website: <https://flamingdogshit.com/>.

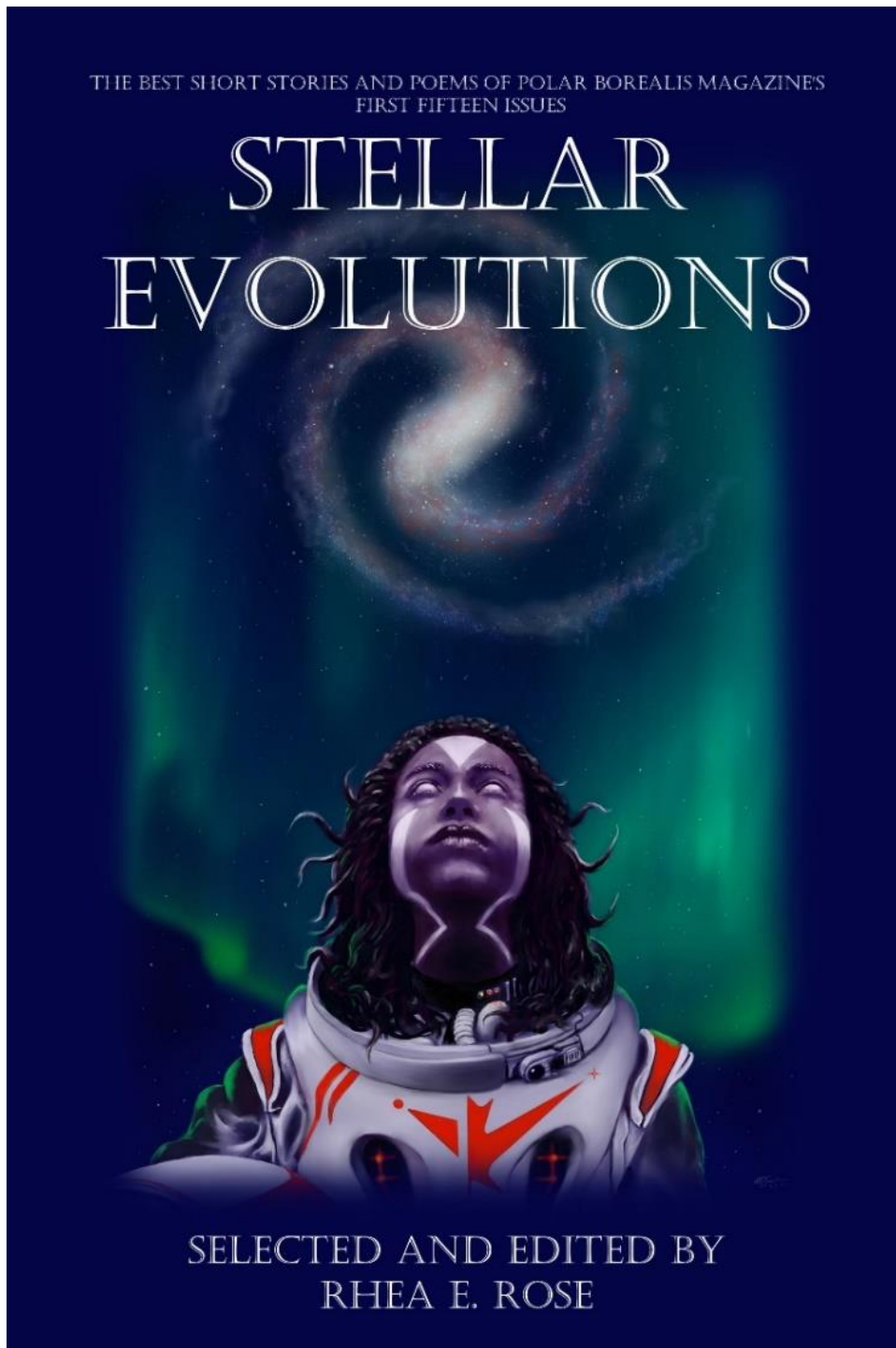
Lisa Timpf

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/>.

KT Wagner

Surrounded by gnomes, gargoyles, and poisonous plants, KT Wagner writes speculative fiction and poetry in the garden of her home on the west coast of Canada. She enjoys daydreaming and is a collector of strange plants, weird trivia, and obscure tomes. KT's musings are published in magazines, anthologies, and podcasts. www.ktwagner.com and [@KT_Wagner](https://twitter.com/KT_Wagner).

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 Fahnstalk, Michelle F. Goddard, Chris Campeau, Ben Nein, Karl Johanson, William Lewis, Tonya Liburd, Jon Gauthier, Jonathan Creswell-Jones, and Akem.

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