

POLAR STARLIGHT

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Poetry
(Issue #18 – April 2025)



POLAR STARLIGHT MAGAZINE

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ART CREDITS

COVER: *Patchwork Man* – by Derek Newman-Stille

EDITORIAL

By Rhea E. Rose

Once upon a time, we told stories to explain the stars, ward off the wolves, and understand ourselves. In this issue of *Polar Starlight* #18, we return to that instinct—not to escape the world, but to reimagine it.

In this latest issue, fairy tales intersect with science fiction. Dinosaurs give press conferences. Androids whisper old platitudes while tending to tabby-patterned reptiles. Much of the poetry in this issue conveys a mischievous sense of form and humour.

These days, the world may feel uncertain, but poetry has always been one of our most enduring technologies—for resistance, remembrance, and resilience.

I'm thrilled to welcome new voices to this issue—Elizabeth Creith, Donald B. Campbell and Spencer Keene, whose poems echo with wit, whimsy and charm. And I'm grateful to returning poets who continue to shape this strange, starlit space into something alive and expansive.

On a personal note, I was delighted to have a poem, “Between Bonobos and Circuits,” published in the latest *Polar Borealis* #33—a reminder of how connected these creative communities are.

Graeme, our esteemed publisher, has announced the future publication of his novel, *Shatter Dark*, from CelticFrog Publishing. Congratulations, Graeme. Stay tuned to these pages for my review!

And on that note, I too have a publication coming out, *Strange and Charmed*, a new speculative fiction collection of my recent but previously published short stories and poetry including a few never-before-seen titles. It will be a second volume to my first, *Pandora's Progeny*, also published through RainWood Press, publisher of my *Stellar Evolutions: The Best Short Stories and Poems of Polar Borealis Magazine's First Fifteen Issues*.

Now, take a breath and let yourself be caught. Poems are nets we cast into the dark, hoping to catch something shimmering. Look into that net and experience the shimmer. Whether you meet a singing cyborg, a vengeful princess, or a faery learning physics, I hope you find something here that reminds you the world is still full of strange, lovely things—and poetry is how we capture them.

Rhea E. Rose

NOT QUITE

By Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

It's not quite what I'd expected.
The castle walls are not
the color I'd envisioned
once upon a time,
all pastel shimmers like
the contents of a young and naive
schoolgirl's pencil box,
the inside of a polished shell
with glitter sprinkled for effect.
Instead they're jewel-toned,
wine on crimson,
violet with hints of black
just shining through
like drops of blood
turned dark with time.

He's not quite what I'd envisioned.
The charming prince
with sparkling eyes,
and shining sword,
and brilliant smile,
who sat atop his noble steed,
has changed,
or shifted, just a bit.
The eyes are coals, the sword,
a mace with haloed spikes
of gleaming steel.
The smile is there,
complete with fangs
so dazzling they hurt to see,
and there too is his mighty steed,
all bones and twisting shreds of flesh,
the harnessed rage he rides to war
upon my whim.

I'm not quite what I'd imagined,
so long ago when I was young,
when fantasies were pure and trite,
and tinged with pale pink blushes
forged from fairy tales
and schoolyard sighs,
before life happened,
wicked away my washed-out dreams
and gave me purpose,
rich, and red, and full of fire,
demanding I be more than just
some fainting maiden,
pining in her woodland bower
for change to come
and whisk me off
to some long-promised,
empty,
ever-after.

THE PRINCESS AND THE SACK OF PEAS

by KT Wagner

You refuse to discuss the bruises.
Fresh over fading yellow,
bleeding into blue,
muddling into green.
Mushy peas, on toast.

Once upon a time, in October
an invitation to a costume party.
Wink, nudge, wink.
Sexy nurse, sexy vampire, sexy princess.
No charge for ladies.

He favours diaphanous gowns.
Frothing peignoir sets
befitting a princess
dancing on bare toes
in front of the stove.

Once upon a time, a girlfriend
called into work, ill, on All Hallows' Eve.
Go without her. Have fun.
Address printed on napkin.
Should be easy to find.

Once upon a time, stomach swollen,
ribbed and orange.
You named her Pumpkin.
an ugly shade of unwanted.
Wrinkled little marrowfat.

You ignore your child's questions,
while pushing peas
around a plate with a fork.

Later, for her, boiling them with mint
gathered in the courtyard, below the tower.

Once upon a time, a dark sky
shivered with rain and drenched the unprotected.
Princess costume ruined.
The address smeared, misdirecting you.
Welcome to his party.

Burlap bag of dried peas, almost gone.
Time to cook the loathsome legumes
“American style”
Boiled hard in plain water,
foxglove and belladonna.

You startle as the bolt clicks, slides.
The veil is thin for the sensitive.
Cool and congealed,
a phlegm-green meal awaits your guest.
Treat and trick.

MALEDICTION

By Neile Graham

the first night of the war
something growls, growls and grows
sunset fires over the
tilted roofs of the town then
sinks behind grey cloud grey roofs grey sky
like battle's
glory gone to mud and sand
we creep through town
to the hushed shore
silence dogs each word we speak
heavy as the gunfire that follows
we hold back a beast
that gnaws its tether to a thread
so we loose the clasp and
tell it to run
we can't shout it
back though we're dragged to rags
as we chase it through the emptied streets
it's about freedom
we say but it doesn't care
fires celebrate the sky
guns anchor the land
we look out into darkness toward the horizon
obscured by smoke
lights that spine
a town a world away we are voices
distilled to fury
words that bite flesh
seeding all the old curses again
a darkness a beast
the darkest beast

WISDOM OF THE AGES

by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

The other androids
told me to take one for the team,
accept the sackcloth and ashes
that were the requisite monkey suit
to wear inside the grave we'd collectively dug.

After all, the written records teach us
that you can't make a killing
without breaking a few eggs,
and when things head south,
you can't just grin and bear it,
look the other way,
or bury your head deep in the sand.

The customer is always right,
big brother is always watching,
with great power comes great responsibility,
and the needs of the many outweigh
the needs of the few.

Therefore, in the nick of time
to play our company's knight in shining armor
I knelt to pay the piper,
laid my head upon the block,
and listened as the robot auctioneer
chimed "Going, going, gone!"

HUMPTY DUMPTY

by Elizabeth Creith

Humpty Dumpty, the king's best advisor,
climbed up to the top of outer keep wall,
which he wouldn't have done, if he had been wiser.
He teetered and toppled and had a great fall.
The keep wall was high, and his fall was dramatic;
it shattered poor Humpty to dozens of bits.
He made quite a mess. It was very traumatic;
three witnesses fainted and two more had fits.
The funeral service was solemn and grand,
and they laid him to rest in a white marble tomb.
And they said "rest in peace," but contrary to plan
His spirit refuses to keep to its room.
Each day he repeats both his climb and his drop,
and his dying scream echoes in everyone's head.
And all the king's mediums can't make him stop,
nor all the king's exorcists make him stay dead.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR BABY DRAGON AFTER IT JUST GOT SPAYED

by David Clink

Don't let your baby dragon lick its surgical wounds.

Limit high energy activities.

Feeding your dragon after surgery

— be careful!

Managing your dragon's pain afterwards

— be careful!

Post-surgical litterbox use

— monitor from a discreet distance.

3044

by Spencer Keene

Eyes click open,
Lungs whir to life,
Skin glints briefly,
Like the blade of a knife.

Heart hums deep,
Limbs quiver alive,
Pod creaks open,
Mother drone arrives.

Mecha-arm descends,
Fastens to the head,
Inserts a sharp titanium tube,
To pump its daily bread.

Mother drone zips away,
To the pod next door,
So starts the day of cyborg Jim,
In 3044.

COLONY WORLD TANKA

by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

colony world
he sets out saucers filled with
carrot-coloured cream
and strangely textured kibble
for tabby patterned reptiles

LIFE NUMBER TEN

by Donald B. Campbell

We were victims of disinformation.
Our rivals committed a crime.
They made an untrue accusation
That cats do not know how to rhyme.

I assure you we all are quite able
To write poetry of great worth
Since we turned metaphorical tables
On humans and took over Earth.

They'd had an ambitious plan
To further "the ascent of Man."
A test tube was deemed far superior
To a male in a female's interior.

They hoped to arrive at perfection
By careful genetic selection,
But negligence led to their ruin.
They were, after all, only human.

In the old days they tried to train "kitty"
As if they knew more than we did.
Our purrs were not love; they were pity
And laughter that we wisely hid.

We developed their science much better
Than mere homo sapiens could,
With one philosophical fetter:
It must serve catkind's common good.

The world has so much to gain,
Without mistakes humans made.
Our "Adopt A Pet" campaign
Will have them all neutered or spayed.

TWINKLE, TWINKLE

by Lisa Timpf

Kirk made it look easy—
I followed his five-year mission
watching reruns in my friend's living room

and in Heinlein's book
the farmers on Ganymede...

I root for propulsion scientists
performing their new alchemy
converting dollars to tech

yet physics remain daunting
mathematics of distance
weighing us down

is it time to acknowledge
interstellar flight may not be in the cards?

grounded by reality
I try to release those dreams
above, the stars still beckon

PULP LITERATURE

By Carolyn Clink

Young and full of wild ideas,
science fiction writers
pound out new futures
on manual typewriters—
keys strike black ribbon
onto white paper,
until the impossible
becomes real.

MISSION FAILURE

By Greg Fewer

swastika-marked wreck

mummified crew within

Nazis first on Phobos!

DRAGON KARAOKE

by David Clink

During the day, in human form, dragons wear suits,
trade commodities, speculate on possible futures.

But as the sun sets they shed their human skins
and they stretch and flap their tremendous wings

causing winds to swirl and sway and conflagrate
as unsuspecting cars tumble down deserted streets.

Dragons sing karaoke, “Dragon Attack” by Queen,
or, “Dragon” by Tori Amos, if feeling vulnerable.

When people request, “Puff the Magic Dragon,”
they get extremely hot under the collar.

PRESS RELEASES FOR LATE CRETACEOUS PREDATORS

By Sandra Kasturi

Saurids are experiencing a period of great success. Growth in this third quarter of the Mesozoic is unprecedented, and the velociraptor department has approved several new hires.

Tyrannosaurs are dominating the large predator niche in North America and dromaeosaurs have outsourced distribution to Mongolia.

Segnosaurus have been rebranded as either therizinosaurs or theremins, their loop antennae on the left controlling volume, the upright antenna controlling pitch and biting.

Historically, pterosaurs have been in decline due to competition with birds, but under new management, true systematic decline has been averted.

The vice president of marine life reports that mosasaurs suddenly appeared and underwent a spectacular evolutionary radiation.

Diversification with the new modern sharks and giant penguin-like polycotyloid plesiosaurs has resulted in record profits and fewer department store returns.

Despite various detractors, the company continues to deny that mammals are an issue or even exist. The public may resume all regular activities.

Rumours about a large-scale event
resulting in bankruptcy,
mass extinctions and layoffs
may be safely ignored.

BUNCH CROSSING

By Lynne Sargent

The faery learns physics:
the boundaries of Newtonian models
like the caveats in spellcasting

principles of quantum uncertainty
already tacitly understood through fairy dust—

not full randomness,
but within a range of determinable probabilities
outcome dependent on the observer
and their openness to magic.

HOPE

By Greg Fewer

after the war
oak woods were planted for peace
fairies seen again

ABOUT THE POETS AND ARTIST

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*.

David Clink

David Clink is originally from the Andromeda Galaxy but now calls Toronto home. In his human form, he is the poetry editor (along with his sister, Carolyn) of *Amazing Stories (online)*. He co-hosts two podcasts: **Two Old Farts Talk Sci-Fi**, with Troy Harkin, and **Wizards & Spaceships**, with Rachel A. Rosen. His latest poetry collection, which he wrote in gaseous form, is: *The Black Ship* (Aeolus House, 2023). Find more at: DavidLivingstoneClink.com/.

Donald B. Campbell

Donald is a writer and English as a Second/Additional Language teacher in Saskatoon. His plays have been performed in Saskatchewan and Alberta. He is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. His writing—including poetry, short stories, plays, monologues and journalism—has been chosen in competitions and has been published in newspapers, magazines, print anthologies (including by Coteau Books, the League of Canadian Poets, Off Topic Publishing, and Streetcake in the UK) and online anthologies, as well as on websites (such as the Saskatoon Public Library and Syncopation Literary Journal) and on provincial and national CBC Radio.

Elizabeth Creith

Elizabeth lives in a hundred-year-old cottage surrounded by roses and forest, with her husband, cat, koi and a lot of wildlife, some of which is occasionally inside the house. She once chased a bear away from her kitchen door.

Elizabeth draws on myth, folklore, nursery rhymes and fairy tales to fuel her art and writing. She knows more about the Middle Ages than is good for her, including how to spin straw into gold and how to tan an animal's hide using its brains. She loves coffee, chocolate, cats, snakes, carrots fresh from the garden, fossils and quantum physics. When she isn't writing, she commits art, primarily paper engineering, printmaking and bookmaking.

She is currently writing the third book of her *Wings of Valenia* trilogy. The first two, *The Swan Harp* and *The Lost King* (Type Eighteen Books) are available through Indigo.

Greg Fewer

Greg originally hails from Montréal, Québec, Canada. His speculative fiction and poetry have appeared in (among other places): *Cuento Magazine*, *Lovecraftiana*, *Monsters: A Dark Drabbles Anthology*, *Page & Spine*, *Polar Borealis*, *Polar Starlight*, *Scifaikuest*, *Star*Line*, *The Nafallen University Course Catalogue*, *The Sirens Call*, *Utopia Science Fiction*, and *Worth 1,000 Words: 101 Flash Science Fiction Stories by 101 Authors*. He has twice been a Dwarf Stars finalist (2021, 2023).

Neile Graham

Neile is Canadian by birth and inclination, though she has lived in the U.S. (mostly Seattle, so she's leaning toward the border) for many years. She writes both fiction and poetry and is currently concentrating on plotting the build-out

of her fantasy romance empire. Her poetry has been published in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. and on the internet. She has four collections, most recently *The Walk She Takes*, an idiosyncratic travelogue of Scotland which includes ghosts, ruins of all kinds, and a landlady named Venus.

Sandra Kasturi

Sandra is an award-winning editor, poet, and writer, with over twenty-five years of freelance editing experience. Her writing has been published in various places, including *The New Quarterly*, *Rattle*, *CNQ*, *Prairie Fire*, *ARC Magazine*, *Taddle Creek*, and *80! Memories & Reflections on Ursula K. Le Guin*. Her two poetry collections are: *The Animal Bridegroom* and *Come Late to the Love of Birds*.

Spencer Keene

Spencer (he/him) is a writer from Vancouver, BC. He works for a BC-based public legal education organization, creating guides and resources to help British Columbians understand their legal rights and resolve their everyday legal problems. In his spare time, he loves to write short fiction and poetry, mostly of the Gothic horror and speculative variety.

Derek Newman-Stille

Derek (they/them) is a Queer, Nonbinary, Disabled, Fat, Femme settler Canadian (Turtle Island) author, poet, academic, editor, visual artist, and activist. They are the 9-time Aurora Award-winning creator of the digital humanities site *Speculating Canada* and the associated radio show. They frequently use fantasy and science fiction as a means of elucidating possibilities and potentials, reimagining the way that we situate identities and ideas. Derek has 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, Derek has published short fiction in *Dark Waters* (Poise and Pen Publishing), and *Nothing Without Us* (Renaissance Press). They 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 they co-published our collection of short fiction *Whispers Between Fairies* (Renaissance Press).

Lynne Sargent

Lynne is a queer writer, aerialist, and holds a Ph.D. in Applied Philosophy. They are the poetry editor at *Utopia Science Fiction* magazine. Their work has been nominated for Rhysling, Elgin, and Aurora Awards, and has appeared in venues such as *Augur Magazine*, *Strange Horizons*, and *Analog*. Their work has also been supported through the Ontario Arts Council. To find out more visit them at scribbledshadows.wordpress.com

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*.

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. Reach her at www.ktwagner.com and @KT_Wagner.

POLAR STARLIGHT #19 – June 2025

Cover: *Cracked Earth* – by Lily Blaze

The 19th issue contains poetry by Colleen Anderson, Karen Bingley, Heath Bleau, Greg Fewer, Aaron Grierson, James Grotkowski, Guy Immega, Sandra Kasturi, Michèle Laframboise, Derek Newman-Stille, Irena Nikolova, Rhea Rose, Lynne Sargent, Lisa Timpf, and Hayden Trenholm.

Will be available for free download in June 2025.

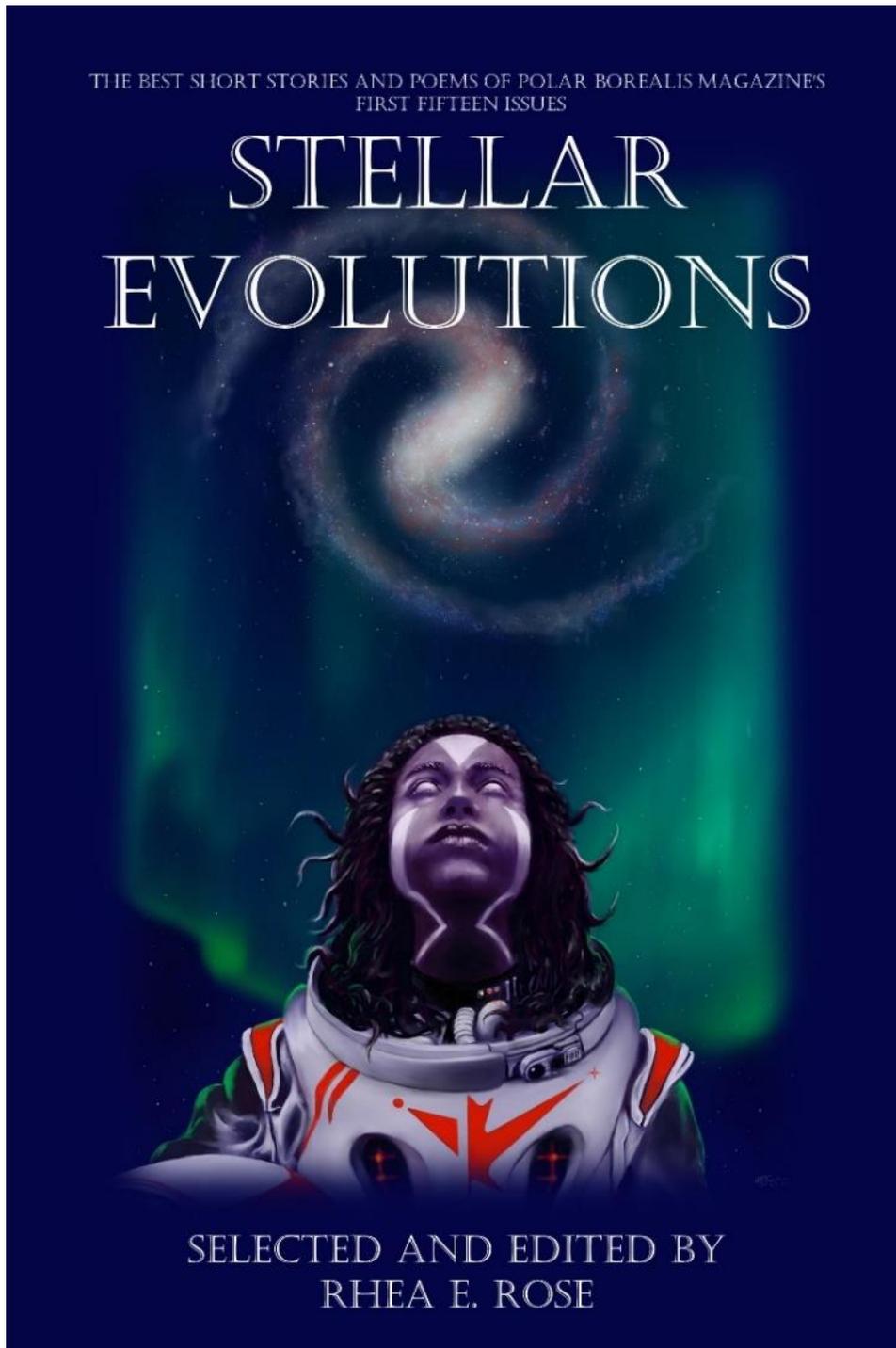
POLAR STARLIGHT #20 – August 2025

Cover: *Crow Witch* – by Tracy Shepherd

The 20th issue contains poetry by Colleen Anderson, Heath Bleau, Renee Cronley, Candace Jane Dorsey, Nelie Graham, Marion Lougheed, Marlene MacLeod, Pam Martin, Lynne Sargent, and Marcie Lynn Tentchoff,

Will be available for free download in August 2025.

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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