

POLAR STARLIGHT

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Poetry
(Issue #23 – June 2026)



POLAR STARLIGHT MAGAZINE

Issue #23 – June 2026 (Vol. 6#3. WN#23)

Publisher: R. Graeme Cameron

Editor: Rhea E. Rose

Proofreader: Steve Fahnstalk

POLAR STARLIGHT is a Canadian semi-pro non-profit Science Fiction Poetry online PDF Magazine published by R. Graeme Cameron at least four times a year.

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POLAR STARLIGHT offers the following Payment Rates:

Poem – \$10.00

Cover Illustration – \$40.00

To request to be added to the subscription list, ask questions, or send letters of comment, contact Editor Rhea E. Rose or Publisher R. Graeme Cameron at:

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< <http://polarborealis.ca/> >

Note: The *Polar Borealis Magazine* website is also the website for *Polar Starlight Magazine*.

ISSN 2369-9078 (Online)

Headings: ENGRAVERS MT

By-lines: *Monotype Corsiva*

Text: Bookman Old Style

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EDITORIAL

By Rhea E. Rose

“It’s all fun and games until someone loses an eye.”

The phrase, borrowed from Robert Dawson’s “Masks,” lingers like a riddle in the dark—half-jest, half-warning. While Dawson’s saying isn’t truly Shakespearean, one can imagine it spoken by Gertrude to Hamlet, or Hamlet to Ophelia; it works to capture the tone of *Polar Starlight* #23, an issue where play encounters peril, where myth and mortality dance together.

As with the previous issues, I’ve continued my “random sorting” approach—letting poems fall where they may, rather than arranging them by theme. Think of a shuffled deck of playing cards, each poem dealt to an issue until the deck runs out. The result is spontaneous harmony, a serendipitous dialogue between the living, the mechanical, the mythic, and the doomed, each poem a distinct flower in a wild garden.

In Mahaila Smith’s “The Mythmaker,” myth itself becomes both inheritance and wound—the stories that uplift us also shape the scars we carry. Lily Blaze’s “Of Gold and Bone” and Smith’s “Catskin” reimagine classic fairy tales as lessons in survival and consequence. Each poem hints that the act of creation—whether of stories, machines, or selves—always bears a shadow.

From the ecological reckoning of Lynne Sargent’s “Human Cultivars” to the cosmic elegy of Suzanne Raby’s “Cosmic Library,” these works remind us that we are both creators and destroyers, gardeners and arsonists. The same hands that build also unmake. Even the stars, as Lavinia’s “interview with Sol” suggests, have their playful vanities—and their limits, reminding us that even light has boundaries.

By the time we reach Neile Graham’s “The Goddess of the Underwave,” the laughter has softened into surrender, and the tide carries us towards something quieter, deeper, perhaps more forgiving.

In these poems, the game never truly ends. It only shifts. What begins as play becomes prophecy; what starts as light ends in reflection. Perhaps, to lose an eye is not punishment at all—but the price of learning to see.

Rhea E. Rose

MASKS

By Robert Dawson

Hewn from gnarled soultimber, they watch the stage
as cats wait at a mousehole in the wall.
Will the old juggler catch the final ball,
the dancers weave back to their proper places
in the last figure of the stately brawl?
Broken Malvolio turns on his tormentors,
skewers the nearest on his rapier, then
betakes him wheyfaced to the battlements,
crossbow in hand, clutching his bag of quarrels,
till taken down at last by the Duke's marksmen.
As Juliet's nurse said to Mercutio's mother
on the bench by the sandpit and the slide,
it's all fun and games, isn't it dearie,
until someone loses an eye.

THE MYTHMAKER

by Mahaila Smith

You sit across from me,
in the cafe, on a creaking wicker chair.
The tables around us are empty,
other human patrons stare
in a way I never noticed,
in a way you must have logged your whole existence.
You are the only mechanical being here
and must have been in many of the places
you took me as a child.
It has been years since we last spoke.
I ordered us both mint tea. Yours sits full, cooling.
How are your classes, you ask.
I like them! I answer,
especially my class on Classic Teaguish mythology.

When I was small, you would tell me myths
of the first settlers to Teagueland,
their battles against venomous gasses,
their treaties with all-seeing stone,
their pranks on Polaris and their betrayals
against the string of hereditary cardinals.
These stories were embedded into your basic code,
you recited them perfectly from Petra's Compendium.
When we got bored of the standardized text,
you added extra poisoned flasks or secret concubines.
Are you still writing? I ask.
I want to ask where you are living since I left home
and you left my parents' house. Who were you assigned to?
Are you comfortable? Or safe?
Here and there, you answer, I wrote you a poem.
You nod your purple chrome-plated cranium
And I hear the sound of a soft breeze
As the text downloads to my portable.
I'll read it when I get home, I say.

You turn your telephoto lens to the window,
I turn, too, looking out at the vibrant fruit trees
That line the tracks. A full tramcar rattles by
I turn back to you and watch the
Dusky starlight catch the crack in the left side
Of your round, shiny cheek.

Where I had kicked you, hard,
As you held me down on the twin-sized mattress.
Stubborn and unwilling to sleep until I had answers,
Riding waves of sobs, begging you not to leave,
That I wasn't old enough for you to take care of another child.
You never flinched and I see that it was never repaired.
I know now that the cost is prohibitively high.
That as a mechanical entity, you are limited
In the amount of merit points you can claim.
I work at a café, almost identical to this one, in Alexandria.
I am logging all the merit points I can afford
To trade for a new cheek plate, to make it right.

OF GOLD AND BONE

By Lily Blaze

In the light of a moonlit hill,
A man went to a cave,
And never returned to his own free will—
A soul lost, none to save.
A fearsome creature, sleek and black,
Its eyes both flame and stone,
Stepped from the dark and did not lack
The will to claim its own.
With his lamp in his trembling hands,
He searched the shadows deep,
That sighed, that moaned, through shifting sands—
A secret this place keeps.
The man swallowed fear and walked ahead;
On the cold skin of his neck
A shiver rose, a living dread,
And halted him mid-trek.
A glimmer twisted, winked, and shone—
Treasure piled high with gold;
A secret hoard that breathed unknown,
Rare gems and crowns untold.
The man rushed forth to claim his prize
With fever in his eyes,
But something moved, and blocked his sight—
A shadow vast in size.
A fearsome creature, sleek and black,
Its eyes both flame and stone,
Stepped from the dark, and in its track
The light of life was gone.
It stared until he dropped his gaze,
And crumpled to his knees;
From Otherworld's unending maze,
It had crossed the veil with ease.
The guardian's claws were long and sure,
Its price was sharp and high;

No mortal's greed could pass that door,
No thief return alive.
In the light of a moonlit hill,
A man leaves the dark cave;
His body whole, his spirit still—
But not the soul it gave.

CATSKIN

by Mahaila Smith

Freedom fits in a walnut.
In gifts of expanding masses
of celestial silk and dowdy fur.
The few consolations you could think of
amidst the menacing marriage
of a father to his daughter.
The date drawing ever nearer,
constricting your vocal chords,
forcing your feet to run.
The forest has horrors of its own,
but you can manage those.
You learn the sounds and smells
of rotting wood and poisonous fruit.
New danger comes in hunting parties
and dogs.
They sniff you out, furred
and full-pocketed and mute.
The castle needs more hands
and you join the slow parade of staff
returning to rough-palmed work.
It is amongst these strangers you are picked
for kitchen floors and endless scrubbing.
The prince and his courtiers ride far ahead
to the next party, the next available distraction.
You plan for it, too.
Dresses come and go
like days orbiting the ballroom.
You trap your finger in a ring.
And you are hunted.
Always someone's little pet,
always someone's bride.

AFTER THE DARKNESS OF SPACE

by Lisa Timpf

After the darkness of space, we're surrounded by red,
a welcome brightness. That first step out onto the sand—
the feeling of lightness goes straight our heads.
After the darkness of space, the richness of red
illuminates our dreams. In our excited chatter, we leave unsaid
the unthinkable strangeness of this barren, desert land.
After the darkness of space, the brilliance of red.
Our tracks vanish quickly in the shifting sands.

HUMAN CULTIVARS
(OR, THIS POEM IS NOT ANTI-GMO)

by Lynne Sargent

There are no flowers made
for greenhouses

meant to live encased
in glass

no creatures,
strain of *sapiens* scienced

made tolerant enough
of a warming world.

There are no aliens
to put us in boxes

protect us from the finger
we've stuck in the socket

no answer,
except taking our terror

using it as compost
as we build more gardens
with less plastic, smaller footprints,

and greater ties, holding the reckless
and powerful to the stakes, the trellises
of sustainable growth
within the bounds of nature.

THIS IS THE WIZARD

by J.Y.T. Kennedy

This is the wizard in the pale pink shirt
Who sat and smoked till his thoughts seeped out
Of his ears and wrote themselves in books
Or hid in the dust beneath the couch;
Who had one foot on the floor and one in the aether
As he flicked the ash from his cigarette.

This is the ash from the cigarette
That turned to a moth and flew thrice round
The room but could not find a flame
In which to die and so escaped
Out through a hole in the window screen
And was swallowed by the ghost outside.

This is the ghost outside in the dark
Who could not smell the fresh mown grass
Or feel the weight of the coming rain,
But watched and wept and tried to write
A message with ashes upon the wall,
For love of the wizard in the pale pink shirt.

SLUMBER ON

by Rebecca Franklyn

bridle the stars to the galaxies
know the angels kissed you
slumber on
as the sun and moon waltz by
tango through the night and day
slumber on

THE ALBATROSS

by Casey Lawrence

Spaceflight was the answer
to our ancestors' hubris
destroying the landing-strip
our birthright promised
of solid ground, unfiltered air,
and miles of blue ocean
the likes of which my grandchildren's grandchildren
will never see, and my grandmother's grandmother
remembered from a faded photograph.

I remember my grandmother's soft bones,
the way they gnarled in her old age,
when she gnashed her toothless gums
on her way to the Recycler,
having long ago forgotten
that there ever was an ocean
or a sky with a yellow sun
or a granddaughter who spoon-fed her
from a vacuum-sealed tube
to prolong the suffering,
because we loved her.

I look at my brother's atrophied legs
as he pulls himself along the hull
to repair a damaged conduit
and wonder what it must have been like
to walk on solid ground,
to feel the pull of gravity downward,
being anchored, like a moored ship,
to a planet teeming with life
that recycled itself without
the Council's approval.

And even if we reach the promised land
in another generation, or six, or thirteen,
the radiation has already changed us
into something other than what we were
when we left the godforsaken planet,
with its sun gods and its blue oceans,
for the promise of a salvation
that never was to come.

The eyeless babies, and twisted limbs,
and holey palates, and weakened hearts,
and pale skin, and webbed toes,
and veiny throats of my people,
like crooked, wingless birds,
will force us to keep flying
until we die in the vast expanse
from mechanical failure
or resource depletion,
having never seen the sun rise
or set
over an ocean.

SPIRIT SONG FROM THE SEA WRACK

by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

The weary tug and toll of tide,
those blood-stained rocks I've seen before.
The witch who bound me in here lied;
the weary tug and toll of tide
can't dim the pain I feel inside
to watch waves break on war-brined shore.
The weary tug and toll of tide,
those blood-stained rocks I've seen before.

INTERVIEW WITH SOL

By Lavinia Leon

Good eon and thank you for making—shaping Time for us.

Thank you for basking in my light.

We feel you've been well. How's your nuclear fusion going?

All fusing along fine, if I may say so.

Great to hear! We've been writing some scary science-fiction, eh, you know.

(Sol grins.)

We'd say you're a real rockstar, but you're, of course, more plasma.

You know to check with Mercury on this.

Oh, yes. Speaking of which, have you been vaporizing lots of comets lately?

Ah, that's my reputation, but it's been overblown, way out of context. Just ask Halley.

We'd have to wait three decades, but we trust you.

Consider: no one's ever cast shadows on me.

How about your cousins on the main?

Have you some news from them—allowing for light travel—in a while?

Proxima sends regards, and Sirius won't stop talking, but it's fine.

You'll always be the brightest star for us.

(coronal flare)

I must now take my leave, the clouds called for a break.

Almost forgot: keep watching for the rainbow.

LET ME SHOW THIS TO YOU

By Diem Okoye

All this time and I never considered an extraterrestrial poem.
You don't particularly like science fiction anyhow
unless it's about a little green friend or some other cosmic being,
devoted to peace signs and universal harmony.
So I felt a science fiction poem for you would seem bizarre,
too foreign, but I then remembered all the nights
I had asked you to telescope the stars, to track down
constellations, and said, Let me show this to you,
this galaxy I adore, and you watched.
Earlier today I was in a spaceship, thinking about light
and the way it travels and whispers across galaxies,
and I was thinking about you, too, like light,
the way your presence radiates the room, the way
you laugh and transform each little space you inhabit,
like a supernova. What is light exactly? What is love?
A science fiction poem perhaps. One in which I'd interrupt your night
to show a nebula blossoming out there. Stars drawn by light,
not in the way a photo is drawn by light
but the way starlight cuts clean through the vastness
as if carving luminous paths with its essence.
Because essence is in everything they need to be.
And later, when I think of extraterrestrials,
I imagine they envy us
Because light was once thought to be
one or the other, either wave or signal but never both,
which is to say, the poem exists regardless, in many dimensions
at once, seen yet unseen, both read and unread,
in tiny fragments, in the quiet expanse of space,
and later, in the final burst of stars.

COSMIC LIBRARY

by Suzanne Raby

A single rose sat in a crystal vase,
As dark as a witch's blood.
Past its velvety petals she gazed,
Into the centre of the bud.

Where a halo of gold formed a perfect ring,
And feathery filaments reached out,
Drawing her mind to a different sight,
Far away, where stars burn out.

No light, no matter could ever leave,
Or so the thought once went.
Until a staggering image was caught
By a drone on a mission sent.

Down the maw of a fiery black hole
The little spacecraft flew.
They thought it lost, but signals came
With horrors dark and true.

They gathered round the glowing screens;
The chamber filled with dread.
But in the depths they saw a vault—
Of worlds long cold and dead.

What they saw was vast indeed:
Not empty, but not complete.
A cosmic maw that fed on worlds,
Empires destroyed in dread defeat.

They saw creatures forged in silver,
And towers, black and high,
Majestic lizards, fierce with pride,
And all were doomed to die.

For they too had sought to conquer the stars,
But pride had doomed them all.
She turned from the bloom, her heart grown cold,
At the cry of the cosmic call.

IN MY DREAMS

By Colleen Anderson

The mansion always beckons

The leaf-shrouded, encircling hedge
 a small hollow of latticed stems
Keys of filigreed iron hidden beneath flagstones
 to ease the egress into cool shadows
Stately paned Victorian windows
 fluttering silk shielding the interior
White, wainscoted dining rooms
 adding antiquity's sturdy mark
Brass-ringed trapdoors under Persian rugs
 creaking stairs to the wine cellar
A slim ladder reaching from the storeroom
 to a tiny space with one round window
Bookcases soldiered with leather tomes
 swinging away from cobwebbed passages

Always

A house of wonder, sanctuary
 from the spit-flecked taunts
 welt-wielding canings
 calloused fingers in the dark

Until

I crawl through the shrubbery's narrow vault
 thorns clutching, content for drops of blood
The key slips from my grasp
 tumbling between slivered floorboards
I pull back the concealing curtains
 grimed and leaden glass eats the sun
The pale painted trim upon the walls
 does not muffle the desperate scratching
I descend the rickety steps
 oozing mud sucks me down
In the pantry's secret room
 the rungs shatter and leave no exit
The stone-lined tunnel weeps damp despair
 unmask a sealed door, no latch nor knob

Nightly
I cycle from dreams to reality
 taffy-twisting into nightmares
 sleep, a cage I cannot flee

So I drop a lamp and light a match
 then walk away
 the carnage in my past

ROADSIDE GOTHIC DECIMA

By Robert Dawson

The sign beside the country road
Proclaims "DEAD PEOPLES THINGS FOR SALE."
You look: a hearse, a mildewed bale
of shrouds, a rotting wagonload
of coffins in the grass unmowed
and one illegible headstone.
You stop the car, pick up your phone,
and take the eerie photograph.
The picture shows the epitaph
more clearly now. The name's your own.

THE GODDESS OF THE UNDERWAVE

By Neile Graham

Head breaking from the otherworld
of underwater.

Sleek grey-mottled head, long-lashed, smoother
than smooth

rising into our air.

Her eyes her eyes
her eyes see into you

their darkness huge, browndeeep
compassion

knowing how cold our air is
how our flesh tightens and rises

like armour against it, how
our warm blood retreats.

How she does not. She brings
the foreign and liquid flow

of the world
underwave to you

knowing the chill of this breeze
your face
how you covet this gaze

how she sees it, knows it
recognizes her knowing disappointment

we choose to call forgiveness
that she calls air.

ABOUT THE POETS AND ARTIST

Colleen Anderson

Colleen has been widely published across eight countries, with works appearing in publications such as *Weird Tales*, *Cemetery Dance*, and *Amazing*, among others. Rhysling Award winner for “Machine (r)Evolution” and a two-time winner of the SFPA’s dwarf poetry contest, she has been nominated for Pushcart, Elgin, Rhysling, Aurora and Dwarf Stars Awards. Her poetry collections include [*The Lore of Inscrutable Dreams*](#), [*I Dreamed a World*](#), [*Weird Worlds*](#), and [*Vellum Leaves and Lettered Skins*](#), as well as two fiction collections [*A Body of Work*](#) and *Embers Amongst the Fallen*. She lives in Vancouver, BC where she searches for mermaids. Look for new poetry and fiction collections coming in 2026-2027. www.colleenanderson.wordpress.com

Lily Blaze

Lily is an author and a former graphic designer. She’s lived in four Canadian cities, enjoyed many adventures across North America, then settled in the Prairies.

Having developed disabilities in 2004, Lily’s focus has changed, and now she dedicates her time to a writing career. Her story “The Lonely Mr. Fish” was published in *Polar Borealis Magazine* (#7, Oct/Nov 2018).

Website: <https://www.lilyblaze.art/>

Mark David Campbell

Mark is a Canadian/Italian who lives in Milan, Italy with his husband. He has a passion for socially and culturally driven science/speculative fiction. His background in anthropology gives him a unique humanistic perspective along with tools to build authentic worlds. He brings a queer perspective to the sci-fi narrative.

His latest publication, *The Gear Box Trilogy: Gear Child, The Arena of Mayhem, and The Wayward Star*, is a journey of the heart told from the perspectives of three AI machines: Sunny Boy, Fancy Larry, and Loofah, who like any intelligent beings, crave acceptance and long to be loved. Available on Amazon.

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 Spec, Neo-Opsis, Polar Borealis, Tesseract 20*, and numerous other periodicals and anthologies. He is a graduate of the Sage Hill and Viable Paradise writing workshops. He believes that the world needs more bicycles.

Rebecca Franklyn

Rebecca writes from Vancouver, British Columbia. Her work has won Writer's Digest Short Story awards and is published in *Chicken Soup for the Soul, Polar Borealis, and Polar Starlight*. She writes across multiple genres and age categories. She can be found on Instagram [@onelifetowrite](https://www.instagram.com/onelifetowrite).

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.

J.Y.T. Kennedy

A long-time resident of Alberta, though born on the other side of the planet in Auckland, J.Y.T. has published one fantasy novel and multiple speculative fiction stories and poems. Her work has previously appeared in both *Polar Borealis* and *Polar Starlight*, as well as *Neo-opsis* and various anthologies.

Lavinia Leon

Lavinia was born in Romania and writes about the many forms and times of Home. She has received an Honourable Mention in Off Topic Publishing's Contest (2023) and was longlisted for the Magpie Award for Poetry (2024). In 2025, Lavinia published two chapbooks: *Wallachian Lullabies* and *don't say no-no to Dada*, and became a first reader for *The Masters Review*. She can be found at LaviniaLeon.com.

Casey Lawrence

Casey (she/they) has a Ph.D. from Trinity College Dublin in English literature. After taking a hiatus from creative writing to pursue her doctorate, Casey published her third LGBT YA novel in 2023. The trilogy is available individually or as a boxset <https://www.jms-books.com/the-survivors-club-box-set-p-5590.html>. The author identifies as an autistic, bisexual feminist, queer activist, and democratic socialist.

Born and raised in St. Catharines, Ontario, Casey currently lives in Europe with her husband, Rhys. An avid consumer of all things science fiction and fantasy, Casey writes the stories she wishes she had growing up: positive depictions of queer people in any world. She also moonlights as a freelance editor and convenes a bi-weekly *Finnegans Wake* reading group on Zoom. Follow her on Bluesky @myexplodingpen.bsky.social or check out her blog <http://clawrenc.medium.com/> for stories, reviews, articles, and updates on her novels.

Diem Okoye

Diem is a writer and teacher whose work has appeared in *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, *Reckoning*, *Liber Review*, and other literary journals. She has been awarded second place in the *Blue Mesa Review* Spring 2025 Contest Issue and was nominated for the 2024 Dwarf Stars Award for speculative poetry. In addition to her writing, she works as a copy editor. She lives with two German Shepherds and two neurotic cats.

Suzanne Raby

Suzanne Raby is a Canadian author whose work blends science fiction, history, and speculative storytelling. She is the creator of the sci-fi series *The Chronicles of Deneb*, and the prehistoric novel *Frozen in Time*, character-driven sagas exploring survival, identity, and humanity across vast stretches of space and time. Drawing inspiration from history, archaeology, and travel, her novels combine immersive world building with emotional depth and philosophical themes. Suzanne is also the founder of Ridgecrest Books and host of the YouTube series *Chatting with AI*.

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.

Mahaila Smith

Mahaila (they/them) is a researcher, poet, editor and MA student based on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg in Ottawa, Ontario. They won the 2024 John Newlove Poetry Award and were nominated for the

Rhysling and Best of the Net awards. They adore fibre crafts and collecting sea-glass. You can find more of their work on their website: mahailasmith.ca. Their debut narrative poetry collection, *Seed Beetle* is available from Stelliform Press.

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/>.

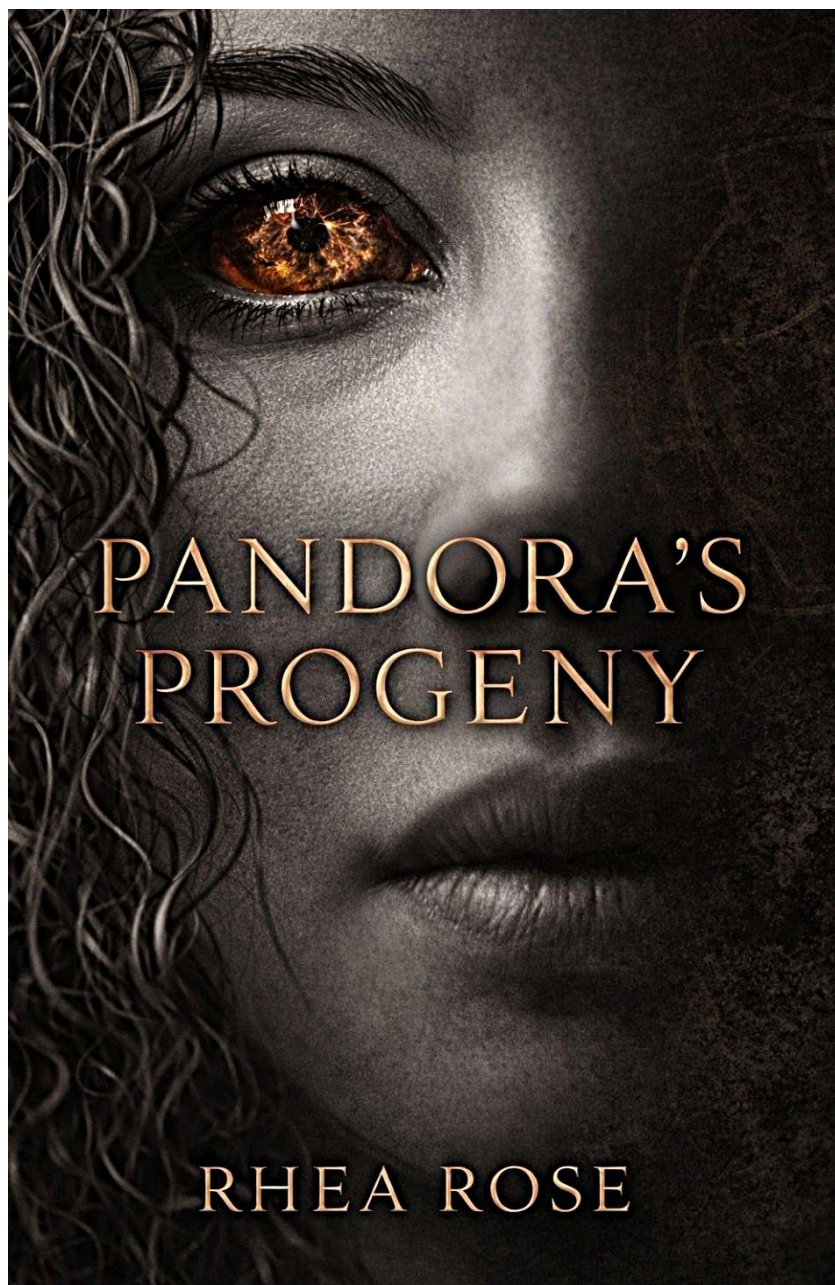
POLAR STARLIGHT #24 – August 2026

Published by R. Graeme Cameron, Polar Starlight is edited by Rhea E. Rose. Each issue features cover art and 16 speculative fiction genre poems. Cover: Robert Pasternak.

The 24th issue will contain poetry by Colleen Anderson, Lily Blaze, Carolyn Clink, Renee Cronley, Robert Dawson, Neile Graham, James Grotkowski, Sandra Kasturi, Irena Nikolova, Diem Okoye, Lynne Sargent, Marcie Lynn Tentchoff, Lisa Timpf, and Hayden Trenholm.

Will be available for free download in August 2026.

PANDORA'S PROGENY



From Aurora Award–nominated author and editor Rhea Rose comes a haunting collection of dark speculative fiction with mythic poetic energy, blending horror, fantasy, and science fiction.

- Genetically selected children compete for the right to survive another year."

- A family trip to see a captured Bigfoot awakens something older than myth."

Before dystopias became spectacle, there were stories of children chosen and discarded, of monsters misunderstood, of love defying design.

In *Pandora's Progeny*, Rhea Rose unveils a haunting collection of speculative fiction and poetry that explores survival, transformation, and the thin membrane between the human and the monstrous.

- A girl befriends the undead and learns that monsters are not always what they seem.

- An aging alien trapper makes one final journey across the galaxy for a secret prize.

- Strange children offer lemonade in the tall northern fields, and travellers vanish.

Dark tales from the opened urn

move through cyberpunk futures, quiet horror, mythic longing, and cosmic isolation. Interwoven with poetry, they ask what remains after the vessel has been opened—and whether hope is the last cruelty or the last gift.

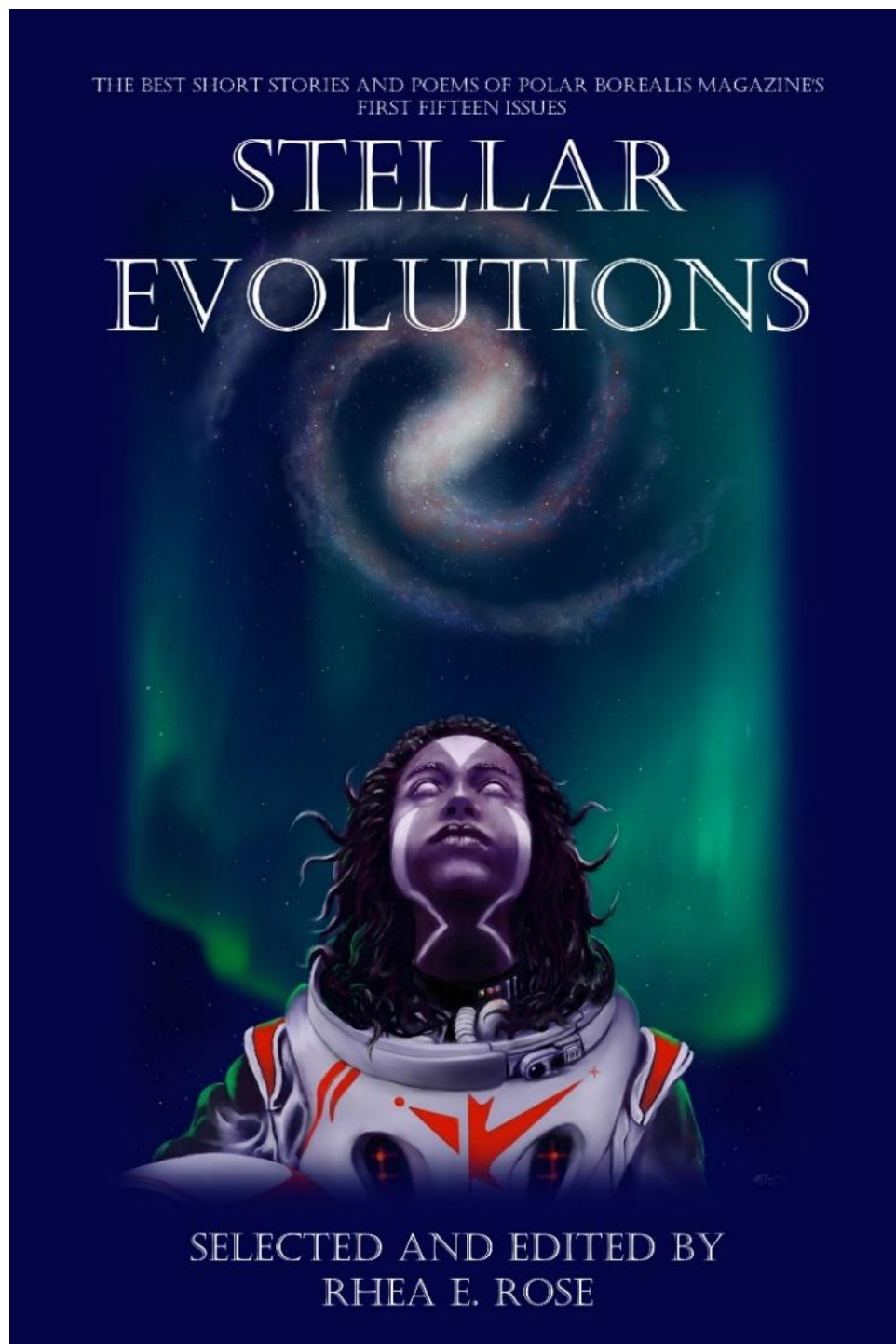
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