

POLAR STARLIGHT

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Poetry
(Issue #1 – March, 2021)



POLAR STARLIGHT Magazine

Issue #1 – March, 2021 (Vol.1#1.WN#1)

ISSN 2563-8440

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.

Distribution of this PDF Magazine is free, either by E-mail or via download.

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

Headings: Engravers MT

By-lines: *Monotype Corsiva*

Text: Bookman Old Style

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Art Credit

COVER: “Order in Chaos” – by Swati Chavda

Look Up

Here it is, one more star in the night sky. *Polar Starlight*, issue one will, I hope, be the first star in a constellation of Canadian speculative poetry. The tsunami of works received for this issue and the ones to follow tells me that there is a massive cry for magazines like *Polar Starlight*. The scintillating talent of Canadian Speculative poets and their poetry needs to find its place, form its bright array in the great universe of literature; and what better place to see stars than in the great black bowls of northern skies where starlight is most immanent?

Thank you once again to R. Graeme Cameron, editor of *Polar Borealis*, who selected me and permitted me to put together this first of many *Polar Starlight* publications. It's such an honour to be a part of this process and it's a soul- quenching and delightful task to read what's out there. I feel refreshed every time I read a new batch of writers who have worked their magic on words, feelings and concepts to convey a collective compulsion to capture the light of the universe's fireflies.

During the selection process, there were times I felt like Bilbo sifting through Smaug's great pile of golden treasure looking for the gems and jewels that sparkled and twinkled more brightly than the rest. At times, I felt the eminence of the goddess push aside the black veil of the universe, her sensitive powers at work helping me to select, collect and tag star poems from the black sand beach of the multiverse. While Bilbo and the goddess found wonderful jewels in the depths of caves and the darkness of the heavens, I found myself asking the question, what is it that defines speculative poetry for me? The only way to answer that question was to write a poem.

What do I like in a speculative poem? I like a poem to haunt me. I like a poem to be that voice in my head that won't let me sleep. I like a poem that makes me chuckle at the irony of the ordinary seen from a new POV. I like a poem that makes love without sexually assaulting me. I like a poem that assaults what I think I know. I like a poem that makes me want to visit and hold its hand. I like a poem that holds my imagination cooling my mind as it blazes in the hot lava of paradox. I like a poem that changes eye colour, sets the mind's eye on fire, churns guts. I like a poem that stalks me, casts its shadow and scares me with a dark poetic path. One that makes me want to come for you, kill you if only in poetic agoraphobia. I like a poem that joins me

to you in a forest dance. I like a poem that lets me evaporate the children of acidic aliens and pick my bones with their teeth. I like to stalk it, stab it, have it, grab it, slap me like the cheeky, sultry, handsome, gorgeous, innocent thing that it is. I like wings that unfurl then melt in magic currents and keep me wishing. I like a poem that plays with the formal tropes of language. I like to love a poem that likes to love. I like a poem that takes me into battle with my demons and calms the fallen angel sleeping in my bed. I like a poem that reminds me of my animalistic tendencies and that my cat's instincts can be taken over by unknown galactic forces, while insects can be sentient friends. I like a poem that invites entities to save my planet with visions of warning hellfires. I like poetry that destroys me, plays me and reconstitutes me for dinner. I like poetry that picks up my pieces and puts them together all wrong. I like poetry that is a song without knowing the tune. I like other planets' poetry, their little songs. I like poetry that strums my strings to starlight.

Rhea E. Rose

THE GOD/DESS OF WONDER

By Neile Graham

This isn't her, the eminence
the immanence of loss
or it is but not yet.

Is s/he what you see pass
in the mirror behind you
through the curtains' gap
at the strike of dawn?

Golden light
leaps like a bird out of your range
of vision, sparks
every nerve like a bee-sting.

Is wonder
that quick fire
between what we know and what
we imagine unknowable?

Sun setting or rising
behind hills or sea, igniting
angels, demons, song.

But wonder?
Does s/he ride the bright creatures
at the depth of the sea?
Flock the chasms between stars?

It is all her eminence
her immanence, flesh and not-flesh
inside the atoms, inside the cracks

inside the stars. Any stars.
All of us. We. That light.
Every darkness. Ours/not-ours.

HER WINGS

By Virginia Carraway Stark

She spread her wings
Rising from the sleepy river
And falling
Too wet to fly
Onto the bridge
Where
Headlight pierced her gossamer
And tore her flight to shattered
Shards of mist
She leapt slowly
From the nearly frozen river
Her wings an amorphous
Mess of haze
The waning moon turning her
Dark
As more headlights
Declare herself, her wings
Illusion
She would leap again
The cold of late autumn
Making her a mother
Of frost winged Giants
Propagating herself
And extending her wings
Shielding winter monsters
From discovery
On blizzard roads

CORNMAN

by David F. Shultz

stalking the night dreamscape:
slender cornman, rendered
pale green in the moonlight
through shadowy trees, he sees
me, speaks:

w/aʊ/n/i:/ml/ɪ/k; w/aʊ/n/i:/ml/ɪ/k

shudders through the grass
a leafy gust of wind
skitters past

slinks through the willows
tall strides, cornman glides
dips long legs in river
sips water up stalky thighs
glares with corn-yellow eyes.

green whip-flick—
vanished!
disguised among the thicket vines.

corn voice rises
from the reeds:

w/aʊ/n/i:/m/l/ɪ/k; w/aʊ/n/i:/m/l/ɪ/k

A COURTSHIP OF FLAME

by Lynne Sargent

I did not realize what kind of sorcerer you were
when you first looked at me
like I was fire.

All I saw in you was study:
a man of the mind,
perhaps the heart, but not the body,
at least not in any way that wasn't
punishment.

But you are a pyromancer,
and now I feel a better fit:
a firebrand, a revolutionary,
an angry star.

Still, you have this veneer:
mild manners, quiet smile,
open hands.

But if you do not mind me
aflame, at times
a trash fire,

then I can only thank you
for teaching me through your eyes
to love watching things burn.

HOME IMPROVEMENT

by KB Nelson

Trip through the dimly lit dungeon
where your beauty lies.
Focus on the keys,
the scroll, the fallen scales.

Ignore narrow windows
which reveal the thickness of the walls.
Ignore cobweb streamers
hanging from the open ceiling joists,
thick with sawdust.

Don't look out at the half-dead garden,
at the all-dead tree.
Don't look down at stains
on the slates of the floor.

Don't look at piles
of trunks and coffers.
Somewhere in there, a manuscript
you've been looking for,
you know it's there
somewhere.
You think it's there
somewhere.

Keep your eyes focused
on the keys.

Until you get up, walk out,
light the whole thing
on fire.
Dance around
the gorgeous inferno,
watch your flame-cast shadow
leap amidst
the withering periwinkle.

AUTUMN BACCHANAL

by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

tipsy
with the taste of
swift- fermented summer
tree nymphs twirl and dance in rising
breezes

laughter
mad as maidens
writhing with their lovers
fills the woods with wild bewitching
music

twisting
in untempered
autumn revels they taunt
the nearby cedars, spruces, pines,
and smile

they strip
and toss aside
their fall-bright clothes, roaring
as prim evergreens all attempt
to blush

UNDANCING THE DEAD

by LeRoy Gorman

(sound sequence for two voices)

BloodyboneStroll

DraugRockaway

DullahaNightfever

GhouLockstep

GrimreapeRetro

LicHitchykoo

NukekubImprov

PoltergeiStriptease

RedcaPocopoco

RevenanTimewarp

WraitHokeypokey

ZombiEmbolada

THE FACE ON MARS

by Bernadette Gabay Dyer

Hush,
Or she will not
Speak of her aloneness,
Of how her eyes
For all eternity
Must scan distances
Unfathomable,
And she will not let you
Hear the wailing
Of frigid razor-sharp
Winds
That lash her
Incessantly,
She will not speak
Of her dreams,
Lost for all millennia,
She will not reveal
Secrets hidden
In the massive
Granite slabs
Of the mountain range
That surrounds her.
Hush,
Or she will become
Unvoiced,
Silent and secretive,
She will not speak of
Being abandoned
Beneath the swirling stars,
Where like a goddess
With an Aegean face
She remains still,
So still,
Frozen for all time,
In a dark red sea
Of loneliness.

THE DARKEST DAYS

by Elizabeth Page

On the inside I have no face

No bones

No skin

On the inside I am all darkness

No fleshy meat on weary bones

Inside — if I had flesh

It would be tight against my sternum
stretching over my hips and sallow within a concave stomach

On the inside I'm still that child

Who ran away

Hopped a Greyhound

Wished she never looked back, but she does

On the inside I am

Withered.

Weather worn

On the outside, I disappear.

SHAPESHIFTER

by LeRoy Gorman

shapeshifter

shap**e**shifter

shap**e**shifter

shapeshi**f**ter

shapesh**i**fter

shape**sh**ifter

shapeshifter**r**

shapeshifter**t**

shapeshifter

THE ASWANG

By Richard Stevenson

To you, a creature of myth or legend.
To the residents of Mandanao,
the second largest island in the Philippines,
and the folks on the Visayas Islands—
especially Negros and Bohol—
a real, malevolent, flesh-and-blood creature.

The *Tik-Tik* or *Sok-Sok*—
is named after the strange
clicking sound it makes
when it's about to pounce on its prey.
Hunts humans—almost exclusively—
and is especially fond of newborns.

Some call her *Aswang*—and
it's usually a female that attacks.
Not a temptress or beautiful siren
plying her wiles from a watery rock,
but a pock-faced, emaciated thing
with grey and mottled skin.

Sores and boils cover her body
and she smells like rotting meat.
Wears shabby, unclean rags. Presents
as a homeless person cadging change,
then sinks her poxy incisors into
your unprotected hide. Best stay inside.

Don't wander the streets alone.
Travel like a pack animal
with hunky men, robust women.
Aswangs are athletic, can jump—
maybe not tall buildings, but fifteen feet
at least. They can outrun you too.

Better get a gun. Stay away from alleys,
raucous crowds. Don't click clack
in high heels down the street. Call a cab.
The *Aswang's* hang could as easily be
a park as a neighbourhood pub.
Keep your wits about you. Forget ear buds.

WHAT LIES BENEATH

by Colleen Anderson

skin
vener
camouflage
masks all intent
peel like an orange the rind that protects us
monsters cracking the world's shell asunder
stride forth, conquer
the feral
human
beast

double tetractys

GAIA UMI

by M. Sean Dowd

comet tail detritus
washed rained gained velocity
Earth in birth
drew in the love of the universe
proto-sun not yet a star
spiralled through the galaxy
billions of years before
a mammal
cow or goat could share the milky way
time on scales of billions pass
Earth cools and granite raises peaks
that only later
rain would wash
to beach
and reach
new seas
to spawn
all forms

ANOTHER, ENOUGH

by Lynne Sargent

The world is fireworks:
soft glimmering waterfalls of light
flashing bangs that excite
but do not startle.

I am still human enough
to distinguish these things
if not to resist
another dose,
another hour
another soft brush
of your sweaty skin against mine

diving under like the corporates want
us to, when work feels this good
when we are only bodies
but for our awareness
of that fact

we are not brave
in this new world
but neither do we
look back.

A MARTIAN CONTEMPLATES EARTHRISE

by KB Nelson

I raise my eyes
to our elegant morning star
—blue, serene—
his bright paramour now far, now close,
now in unashamed intimacy.

The days pass, the star grows large, grows small
as does his fast companion,
with unwavering faith,
a commodity
perhaps common in the cosmos
but rare and precious
in my world.

His Selene's devotion
is absent in our own wanton orbiter
as she passes overhead
beneath her lover's path.

Foboj races and laughs
while forlorn Timo watches her
pass below, again and
again and
again.

So fast, so close, a tease
to patient Timo and
to the spurned and grounded
who watch
objects of desire
with no hope of capture.

Scholars tell us
millions of years on
Foboj will be destroyed,

too late for me to enjoy
but it gives me solace
nevertheless.

BLOOD SPELLS

by Neile Graham

My hair full of elfknots. Their magic
binds me. Lured by a stabbing
gull-call I climb peak by treacherous

peak up the teeth of the searocks
into the ragged castle where I trap myself
a hundred years, my hair white

and whipping through what starts
as a window and ends as a crumbled jaw
of fallen stone over the placid

raging sea. The skies, the gray
and golden seasons pass over me
like lightning and storm. O love O love

I want to sing, but love won't save
me. My blood has made me one
with this tower. Sing what I want,

My complaints sound like a bird's.
This is what time has made me:
white and grey and gull-voiced.

This is what my father made me:
a gatherer of stones, each one
its own tumbled history of tides.

This way and not another.
O love O love. This is what my mother
made me: a listener to the booming

lilting voice from the burgeoning
woods. A witness to the tales
that fit the notches beneath the trees

to the light rising so slowly
to suddenly spread its phoenix wings
over the day. The places

that have made me make me whole.
Where the knots that hold me
ravel me, unravel me, ravish me still.

ABOUT THE POETS AND ARTISTS

Colleen Anderson

Colleen's poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart, Aurora, Dwarf Stars and Rhysling Awards. Some recent and forthcoming works are in *Penumbra*, *Space and Time*, *Sylvia Magazine* and *HWA Poetry Showcase*.

See: : [A Body of Work](#) from Black Shuck Books, UK,
www.colleenanderson.wordpress.com

Swati Chavda

Swati 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.

Websites: www.swatichavda.com and www.thewritingvault.com

M. Sean Dowd

M Sean was a poetic reviewer of Jazz Music, a teacher of many courses all called "Hanging out with Sean and Whatever," and performed at many open mic nights in Ottawa 1992 to Dec 21, 2012. He also acted in two feature films with Siloam productions of Ottawa. When not touring Spain where he

retired to at the end of the Mayan Long count calendar, he can be found typing poetry and essays, or painting endless portraits of his beautiful wife, Ma Angeles FV, near Vigo, Galicia.

Bernadette Gabay Dyer

Bernadette is a member of SF Canada, as well of the Writers Union of Canada. She is a novelist, a poet, a short story writer and a storyteller, as well as an artist, who resides in Toronto and works for Toronto Public Libraries. Her historical novel *Chasing the Banyan Wind* was published in 2018, and her supernatural fantasy novel *Santiago's Purple Skies at Morning Light* in 2019.

LeRoy Gorman

LeRoy lives in Napanee, Ontario. His poetry, much of it visual and minimalist, has appeared in various publications and exhibitions worldwide and has garnered numerous awards including, most recently, the 2017 Dwarf Stars Award. His latest book *goodwill galaxy hunting* was published by Urban Farmhouse Press in 2019.

Neile Graham

Neile is Canadian by birth and inclination, though she has lived in the U.S. (mostly Seattle, so she is leaning toward the border) for many years. She writes both fiction and poetry and recently wrote the introduction to a collection of essays on writing by Clarion West workshop instructors. That's because she spent 20 years associated with that workshop initially as a student then as their workshop director. Now she has stepped down and is 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*, a idiosyncratic travelogue of Scotland which includes ghosts, ruins of all kinds, and a landlady named Venus.

KB Nelson

KB Nelson is a Canadian writer who thrives in the intersection of art and science. She 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 *Polar Borealis*. KB has resided from coast to coast in Canada; in Arizona; and in New Zealand; and currently lives on the sunshine coast of B.C.

Elizabeth Page

Elizabeth is a recent graduate of Simon Fraser University's *The Writer's Studio*, and was long-listed for the CBC poetry prize in 2019. She is currently editing her first collection of poetry.

Lynne Sargent

Lynne is a writer, aerialist, and philosophy Ph.D candidate currently studying at the University of Waterloo. Their work has been nominated for Rhysling and Aurora Awards, and has appeared in venues such as *Augur Magazine*, *Strange Horizons*, and *Daily Science Fiction*. Their first collection, *A Refuge of Tales* is out now from Renaissance Press. To find out more, reach out to them on Twitter @SamLynneS or for a complete bibliography visit them at scribbledshadows.wordpress.com.

David F. Shultz

David writes from Toronto, Ontario, where he organizes the Toronto Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers group and is lead editor of *Speculative North* magazine. Author webpage: davidfshultz.com

Virginia Carraway Stark

Virginia has had a busy life and puts everything she does into her writing as well as creating worlds of science fiction, fantasy and steampunk. She has written dozens of books under her pen name, *Virginia Carraway Stark*. She is an International bestseller who has won multiple awards and been nominated for many others. Notable among these are her Aurora Award nomination, an honorary mention for her essay on the Kellogg-Briand Pact, and her Birds of a Feather Award for novel and poetry. She has written screenplays, poetry, blogs, novels, short stories, novellas and group stories. Her film *Blindeye* starring Roddy Piper won an honorable mention at the Cannes Film festival and her short screenplay won second place at the “Reel to Reel” Film Festival.

Richard Stevenson

Richard Stevenson 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. Has the usual pedigree: MFA in Creative Writing, thirty-five published books and a CD to his credit, including four forthcoming volumes in his Cryptid critter series: *Cryptid Shindig* (a trilogy including the volumes *If a Dolphin Had Digits*, *Nightcrawlers*, and *Radioactive Frogs*) and a stand-alone collection, *An Abominable Swamp Slob Named Bob*.

Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

Marcie is a writer/poet/editor from B.C.'s rain-soaked Sunshine Coast. She lives surrounded by deep, dense underbrush and various noisy animals, both human and not. Her latest poetry collection, *Midnight Comes Early*, is due out from Hiraeth Publishing in early 2021.