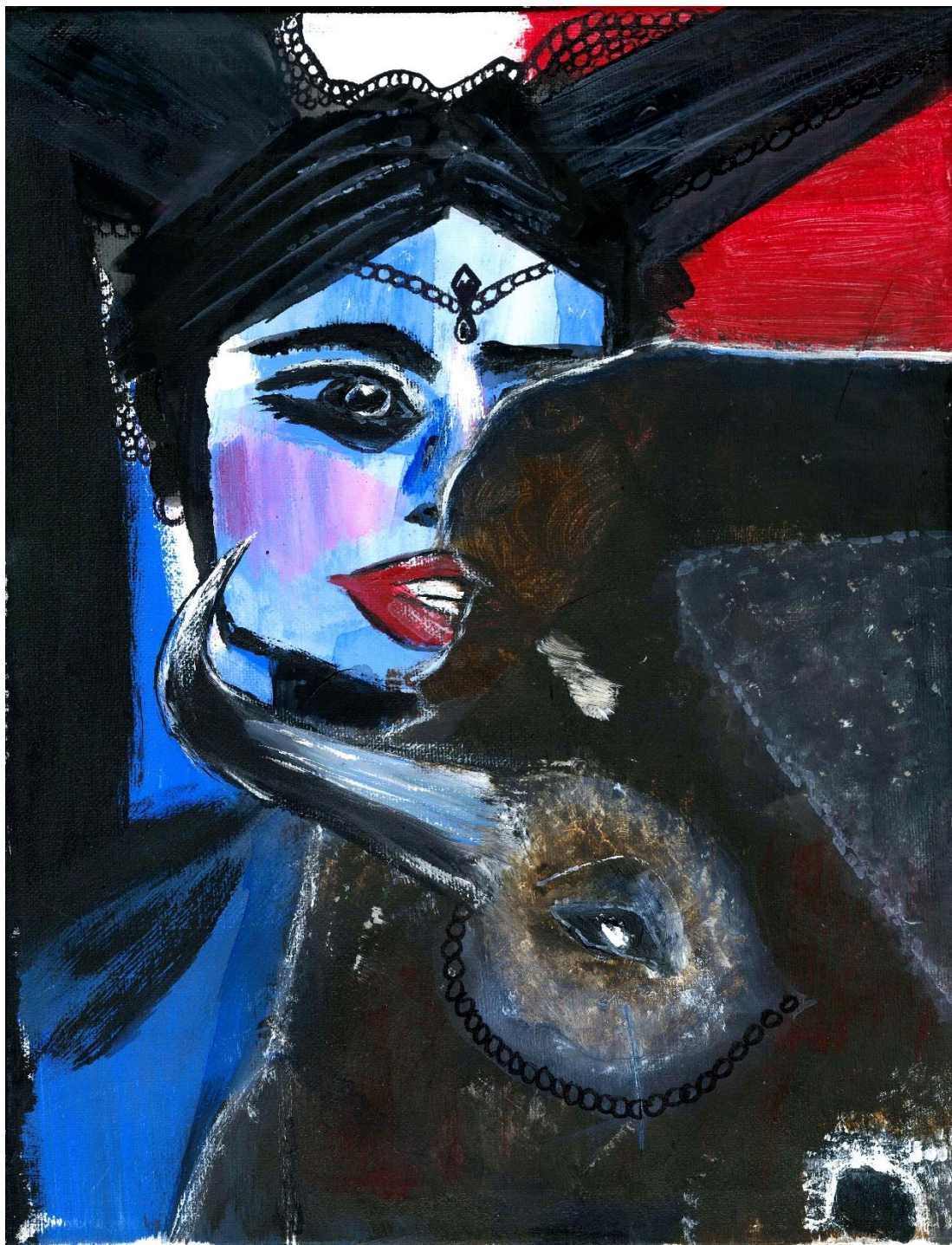


POLAR STARLIGHT

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Poetry
(Issue #4 – December, 2021)



POLAR STARLIGHT MAGAZINE

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COVER: “Buffalo Witch” – by Tracy Shepherd

EDITORIAL

Look Forward

Here we are in the fourth quarter, the last of our Polar Starlight issues for this 2021 spin around the sun. The last is certainly not the end nor the least but this issue's contents do rest in shadow. While darkness reigns and rains on these digital pages (here in the Pacific Northwest) don't let that dim the brightness you'll find in these poetic sparks of polar flair. Remember, we stand on guard in the Land of the Midnight Sun, and no one knows better than Canadians that night can descend long before you're ready to call it a day; while at other times of the year you've gotta wear your sunglasses to bed to get some sleep.

Who here hasn't had to deal with the dark in one way or another? And if anyone can deal with it, it's Canadian speculative poets and deal with it they do. They rail, pray, curse, cajole, love and compete with fickle gods and goddesses of our own making, and the unknowable forces that constantly challenge we mortals. I dub this issue, "The Midnight Sun." Sixteen powerful spectral rays of poetry spilling colourfully across the page some "bons mots" casting darker shadows than others, all carrying unseen frequencies affecting thoughts and sensibilities—perhaps even opening black holes of uncertainty for the way forward in the grand scheme of things. And forward we must go, one thought, one step, one word, one poem, two, three, four issues at a time—this makes a whole year, a whole planet, a galaxy, a universe of poetry.

Rhea E. Rose

CLIMATE CHANGE

By Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

When the clouds first started raining poets
we thought it probably wouldn't last,
that it might just be some brief, odd shower
of stuffed shirts spouting lines of verse,
and that, no matter if their rhymes were strong,
and meter sparked something inside of us,
they'd dry up in an hour or two.

But, after days of well-wrought warnings,
delivered in precise haiku or skaldic verse
by deluges of literary types,
who tried to make us think, or feel
before they hit the ground and limped away,
we caught our children chanting lines
and grew at least a bit concerned.

Investing in a better class of rain gear was important,
something guaranteed to deflect floods of acid wit,
umbrellas rated for the great Northwest, and hats with visors
so we would not see the rhymers' faces when they spoke,
but better still was when the top forecasters
labeled wordsmith rainstorms just "fake news,"
and swore the clouds had gone away
to leave bright sunshine in their path.

EXPLORATION OF THE LAST REMAINING EDIFICE ON THE FOURTH PLANET OF THE BLUE STAR

by KB Nelson

Final transmission, personal log, time-delayed:

this silicon dioxide surface under my feet
like a horizontal mogul track
but bigger, with grander hillocks
it flexes with each step...

when I rub my foot across the floor
my boot's nubbed sole leaves an arc
of parallel lines over its suede-like texture
I'm distracted by the thought of
the hide of some happily sacrificed
Terran swine

the silica fibers have crystallized
along the floors of the shallow valleys
I see water through the translucent prisms
it flows and burbles beneath

...I remember corn snow in the spring

I make the surface wave and roll
when I jump or leap from hill to hill
reveling in the existence of up and down
I'm back on Earth for a moment

somehow I know it's important
that there's water beneath
texture like skin...

I need to feel it
I need to touch it
with my skin
I need...

end of transmission

DECIPHER

By James Grotkowski

northern lights
signal the milky way
Arcturans see codes

THE INUKSHUKS OF MARS

by LeRoy Gorman

1

the
inukshuks of Mars
are
part
guide
part
scare crow

2

the
inukshuks of Mars
are
many
&
taller
with
each day

3

the
inukshuks of Mars
are
they
real
ly
th ere

THE FROZEN NORTH

by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

We don't play soccer in the tunnels.
Kelly Farrel's ball (it was the last)
was eaten by a giant rat last quarter moon,
and even on the warmest days (there are a few)
the thought of wearing shorts and t-shirts
gives me chills.

We don't go topside very often.
We make brief raids, but not for sport.
The once-green playing fields are white with frost,
the stadiums empty, save for when they're housing troops,
and other things that live up there (what few are left)
do not love us.

We don't breathe well without our face masks.
We know they can't keep radiation out,
no more than parents (those of them still left alive)
can keep the bad dreams from our sleep,
and substitute their tales of sports days long years past
for all our fears.

But we won't let fear dim our glory,
or blind us to the memories of what we were
before *their* tri-toned flag topped BC Place,
before Nat Bailey Stadium housed *their* patrols
before the only Canucks still allowed below the Rogers dome
were held in cells.

So we play shinny in the sewers,
skating over frozen muck on passed-down blades,
our sticks whatever we can't burn, our pucks the cans from last night's meal,
the cry of "tank!" our only warning that the enemies passing overhead
may fracture spears of icicles to plummet downwards
towards our unbowed heads.

DARKNESS DESCENDING

by Greg Fewer

dead leaves hush-hushing
rising gusts lead storming skies
shadowed charnel forms

THE DARKNESS

by Josh Connors

Deep
Deep
Down inside
Past the light
Till you find
Darkness lives within

Fire
Fire
Burning bright
Causing chaos
In the night
Darkness engulfs flame

Inhale
Exhale
Lying still
Slight vibrations
Make me ill
Darkness silences my
Soul

MY PILLOW EATS SCREAMS

by Matt Moore

My pillow eats screams, engorged on tears
Trapping confessions in celestial down

For six nights, and six again, the sky sang with steel
Trembling with warfare's thunder
Titans of the clouds, leviathans of the air

Mornings brought
Purple-tinged blood
Staining roadways and rooftops
The ground, drinking greedily
Sprouting mint and thistle
Roses and cinnamon
Snaking over row-house fences

Through yards and parking lots
Cemeteries and playgrounds
I first walked—then raced—to gather feathers
With colours beyond count
That struck competitors mad or blind
I dodged and delivered blows
For a pocketful of feathered remnants
From the inner dim and outer dark

Our battles, brutal as the elegance above
Spread like forked lightning
Spilled blood feeding the mites and ticks and flies
Dawn's calm gloom shattered by shattering bone
Gasping, pleading
Final sounds to leave a mortal throat

My treasure, safe beneath my head
Swelling with each lamentful telling
Horrors inflicted and horrors endured
A father's words and a mother's hands

Smiling denials in tomorrow's light
And silence the only armour

Replies, whispered in the small hours, of special death
Flawed, finite bodies jettisoned
An ascension, up and out and above
To touch the sky and rise above the inner dim and outer dark
To the light that eradicates all

For six nights, I wailed my well-practiced denials
Rationalizations as finely honed as steel above

For six more nights, I stalked, drenched in mortal blood
Until wings emerged

We are as that which below has shaped us
We are as that which above calls us to be
I am, now, of everything and everyone
To—at last—scream in the heavens

VULCANISM

by Colleen Anderson

The volcano god's obsidian cloak
snaps, cracks, flows and transmutes
molten, wild orange fires
flare and race along its seams
his mantle once declared him

His power reigned for a million
million years when he began
the intricate sculpting of the earth
forever reshaping in all his forms
every singeing whorl, glowing boil
the spattering cruelty of the caldera spent

He hides now, a slight indigestion
among ancient mountains, his hot sprites
nearly extinguished and grandchildren
only sprints flicking flames among forests
searing an occasional city or single home

Every now and then they remember
deep veins through which his blood flows
and theirs, they caper, surging chaos
spur him to obliterate every path
triggering change through destruction

In his darkened chamber he ponders all
that he reformed his liquid glory no longer fires
primal fury, from time to time in his core
sporadic eruptions kindle a fearsome thrill

Soon he slumbers, dreams
of clashing planets, blistering comets
the great hot eye of the roiling sun
to burn away, reform his veins
for transformation on a new world

THE TWENTY-ONE PRAISES OF TARA

By Sean Dowd

The twenty-one praises of Bodhisattva Tārā;
goddess and consort of Buddha
She manifests tantric wisdom, wrath and love

Swift heroine, blazing with light, embodiment of joyous
Effort

Transcendent perfection, draw all to you, most praised

Burn intensely, wrathful slayer, three fingers above your
Heart

Conqueror, rescuer, you radiate light

Fire of worlds end, you subdue all seven levels,
perfection of OM

You rescue through knowledge, you cause all three
worlds to tremble, dispel all poison

Upon whom all Gods rely, you dispel all violent
epidemics, with serenity

PLATEAU

by Virginia Carraway Stark

Getting stronger
My will
Tempered and tempered again
forged
In fires of heaven
Impurities
Each breaking source
Each flaw
Burning on coals
Left behind
Left below
In the forging
I am still
Unmade remade
Until every threat
Lies below me on that vast plateau

GOLDEN RATIO

By Melanie Marttila

young woman leans out open window,
longing for feel of sand and sea on bare feet.
her gathered hair, curled by salt-laden air into
perfect spiral
drawn to edge of sand where saltwater laps, a
lover. leaves gifts.
one for her:
snail shell, its Fibonacci whorl the
perfect echo of her sea-touched hair.

THE MAGIC OF UNIONS

by Lynne Sargent

When mages chant together
miracles get built.

My signed name is a promise,
our closing, "in solidarity,"
like ants in a hive,
apprentices in a guild

quietly working
until the kings give credence
to our work,
understand that we are that
upon which their kingdom stands:

each whispered incantation,
each trained new acolyte,

the tender alchemist who cures
the queen's illness

the conjurer who stands
alongside the commander at war.

each young magician dreams
of something great
and if their school is not enough
of an answer

do we not still have each other?
still have some dream of justice?

join me,
and we will make that
at least, real.

WHAT A POEM DREAMS

By Sean Dowd

(With lines of T.S. Eliot)
"Concepts of Consciousness"

"I should have been a pair of ragged claws
scuttling across the floors of silent seas"

perhaps a sign post
compost
or yellow flag to mark a gas line

plastic bits
once alive under our sun

I could have been a hair on a spider's leg
or paper

the last page of Asimov's Foundation, or Game of Thrones
or braille punched out touched
then memorized

Eliot's "Love song..."
nears one hundred years old
fresh as August apples

a century old tree
renders pulp
is printed on
and harvest press reaps new life

the poem cries out
"Reprint!
the end is near"

THE GODDESS OF THE VAGUERIES OF FATE

By Neile Graham

You find yourself in the ruins, the barest bones
of beauty poised, crumbling against the sky.
Below you outlines of rooms and towers. Ghosts

of working lives. Did they think of their days
as treasured or tragic? Boring or beguiling?
Are the rooms full of riches or nothing now?

When are those just different ways of being
the same, of saying the same things? The sun
is bright. The wind is Scottish cold.

The nettle-filled gaps smell of seaweed
and sheep. The memory of someone's back
aching as they lift those stones to make

that wall which is half nothing now.
Children climb what used to keep out winter
and now lets in summer's fullest light.

Two dark heads sit on the grass sharing stones
to make another wall they tumble down
laughing. The wind hauls with it a scattering rain

from the west. As drops lands heavily icily
on your arms, your face, send you running
to shelter, you think of that day on the Turkish

Mediterranean. A necropolis full of mosaics to explore
and the humid heat soaking the ability to wander
leaden in your bones leaving only longing, longing

and the inability to move from the cafe
and lemon drink you guzzled as you ran the tin's
condensation over your arms, the chill not enough

to move your feet even knowing you had to leave
that clearest most brilliant blue sea—and those
unexplored ruins—behind. When would you never

return? It's tea you drink now. Too strong but
hot enough from the carafe you cup to warm
your hands. This. The rooms weather has chased

you from. The ghosts of ice of heat just memories
in your skin. Your time other times you thought you had
inhabited. This is how you find yourself in the ruins.

SILENCE

By Jim Grotkowski

moonlit snow field
the stars, a drift
black and white space

ABOUT THE POETS AND ARTIST

Colleen Anderson

Colleen edits and writes fiction and poetry. Her work has appeared in over 250 publications such as *HWA Poetry Showcase*, *Polu Texni*, *Really System* and *Starline*. Her collection, *A Body of Work* was published by Black Shuck Books. She has edited three anthologies.

Colleen's poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart, Aurora, Dwarf Stars and Rhysling Awards. Some of Colleen's recent poems are in *Shadow Atlas*, *The Dread Machine*, and *TERSE*. Her poetry collection is forthcoming from Lycan Valley Press.

[*A Body of Work*](#) from Black Shuck Books, UK.

www.colleenanderson.wordpress.com

Josh Connors

Josh is just your average playwright, director, home baker, '80s slasher nerd, drag queen, theatre professional living in Corner Brook, NL. Graduate from The Randolph College for The Performing Arts Toronto Class of Summer 2012. He self-published his first play *Small Town Queer (STQ)*. Shortly after self-publication in December of 2019 *Small Town Queer* was chosen as a mandatory reading in three courses at the local university, Grenfell Campus. Two selections of English 1001: Critical Reading and Writing (Poetry & Drama) and one selection of Queer Literature taught by Professor Stephanie McKenzie.

Sean Dowd

Sean Dowd has lived: in the Niagara area, Thunder Bay, Victoria and Ottawa. His writing has been published since 1999, on line and in chapbooks. He lives

in northwest Spain where he paints and writes poetry. His novella, *Full-Time JP* is close to his heart and available on request. He aspires to effuse his life in metrics of jazz.

Greg Fewer

A *montréalais* by birth and descent from seventeenth-century colonists, Greg has grown up and lived largely outside of Canada. His first and, for many years, only published story appeared in 2007. He took up genre writing again in 2018 and has had flash fiction and haiku published in (among other places): *Cuento Magazine*, *Lovecraftiana*, *Monsters: A Dark Drabbles Anthology*, *Polar Borealis*, *Scifaikuest*, *Star*Line*, *The Sirens Call*, and *Utopia Science Fiction*. He was a Dwarf Stars 2021 finalist.

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 a 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 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.

James Grotkowski

James Grotkowski is a native Albertan who now calls Calgary home. He holds a degree in geology but presently works in the IT systems development sector of the aviation industry. He is a long-time member of the World Haiku Club with a number of his works included in its published reviews. Two hard sci-fi short stories were published in *Enigma Front* anthologies. Another story and several poems are slated to appear in upcoming issues of *Polar Borealis* and *Polar Starlight* magazines.

Melanie Martilla

Eyes on the skies, head in the clouds, #actuallyautistic author Melanie Marttilla writes poetry and speculative tales of hope in the face of adversity. She lives and writes in Sudbury, Ontario, in the house where three generations of her family have lived, on the street that bears her surname, with her spouse and their dog.

Melanie has been writing since 1977 and her poetry and short fiction have been published in small press anthologies and in magazines such as *Bastion Science Fiction* and *On Spec* since 1994. She received her Master of English Literature and Creative Writing in 1999 and is a professional member of the Canadian Authors Association and SF Canada.

blog: <https://www.melaniemarttilla.ca>

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

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MelanieMarttilla>

Matt Moore

Matt is an Aurora Award-winning author, poet and columnist. His horror and dark science fiction have appeared or are upcoming in *On Spec*, *AE: The Canadian Science Fiction Review*, and the Aurora Award-winning anthology *The Sum of Us: Tales of the Bonded and Bound* (Laksa Media), for which his story was long-listed for the Sunburst Award in 2018. Also in 2018, his short story collection *It's Not the End and Other Lies* was published. Raised in small town New England, a place rich with legends and ghost stories, he now lives in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

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.

Lynne Sargent

Lynne is a writer, aerialist, and philosophy Ph.D. student currently studying at the University of Waterloo. Their work has been published in venues such as *Strange Horizons*, *Augur Magazine*, and *Plenitude*. Their first collection, *A Refuge of Tales*, was funded through an Ontario Arts Council grant and is forthcoming 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

Tracy Shepherd

Tracy is a professional tarot reader/witch living in Canada. She wrote four novels in 2020; three are straight-up women's fiction and one is high fantasy. She is currently seeking to place them. To date Tracy has published a book of poetry, *In Search of Dracula in a Moon Shot Sky*, and two art books, *Temple of a Space Kitten*; *Unusual Water Colour Portraits* and *I am Thirty Seconds of Ripe Peach*; *Goddess Illustrations*. All three are available on Amazon.

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; as well as many other worlds. She has written dozens of books under her pen name Virginia Carraway Stark. She is an international bestseller as well as winning many awards and being nominated for many others. A few notable among those are her Aurora Award nomination, an honorary mention for her essay on the Kellogg-Briand Pact, and her Birds of a Feather Award for her novel and poetry. She has written screenplays, poetry, blogs, novels, short stories, novellas and group stories. Her film *Blindeye* starring Roddy Piper won an honourable mention at the Cannes Film Festival and her short screenplay won second place at the "Reel to Reel" Film Festival.

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*, was published by Hiraeth Publishing in early 2021.
