

POLAR STARLIGHT

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Poetry
(Issue #6 – June, 2022)



POLAR STARLIGHT MAGAZINE

Issue #6 – June, 2022 (Vol.2#2.WN#6)

Publisher: R. Graeme Cameron

Editor: Rhea E. Rose

Proofreader: Steve Fahnestalk

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:

< polar.borealis.magazine@gmail.com >

All contributors are paid before publication. Anyone interested in submitting a poem or artwork, and wants to check out rates and submission guidelines, or anyone interested in downloading current and/or back issues, please go to:

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

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

ISSN 2369-9078 (Online)

Headings: ENGRAVERS MT

By-lines: *Monotype Corsiva*

Text: Bookman Old Style

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ART CREDITS

COVER: SATURN RETURN – by Tracy Shepherd

EDITORIAL

This sixth summer issue of Polar Starlight is hot in many more ways than one; shall I count the ways? Exciting news; this magazine and I are nominated for the Canadian Aurora Award! I'm so delighted that speculative poetry is loved. While this is my first nomination as editor for Polar Starlight, it is my fourth nomination for the award.

Canadian members of SF Canada can vote on the awards which starts on June 11, 2022. Voters' packages are here: <https://prixaurorawards.ca/> Both magazines, Polar Starlight and Polar Borealis, edited by our esteemed R. Graeme Cameron, are eligible for the award, but you can only vote for one of us because we're in the same category! Members can also vote for all those Canadian authors nominated for poetry, including poetry selected from both magazines.

Secondly, Polar Starlight wants your *original speculative poetry*. Look for submission windows here: <https://polarborealis.ca/> At this link, you'll also find Polar Starlight's issues #1-4 nominated for the Aurora Award. We're open to submissions periodically throughout the year.

The third piece of burning news is; the first Polar Starlight book review of poetry. We hope it will be the start of more. If you're an author with a speculative collection and would like it reviewed here, please contact R. Graeme Cameron at polar.borealis.magazine@gmail.com. Chapbooks and poetry collections should be 100% speculative and Canadian, however, if your publication is mostly speculative, submit it for review.

The fourth and most crucial reason this issue is sizzling hot—while nomination for the award is exciting and an honour I'm delighted to have, it's the poetry we're all here for! So let me wax, if not poetically, then at least prosaically, about this issue. While annihilation by fire may not be everyone's cup of tea, it's one of the looming threats from one of our least favourite cryptoids, climate change. Whether it's weather on Earth, some other planet, moon, or exploding star, or war the thought of death by fire makes us break a sweat in pyrotechnic prosody.

Also, in this issue, aliens, angels and amoebas make us ponder our existence and its meaning. Suppose there is meaning to our minuscule yet

grand presence in the universe—an oxymoron to be sure—the possibility of finding out we're alone in our cosmic journey through the Milky Way inspires terror and awe and is best dealt with in lyrical equations, better known as poetry, the perfect vehicle for the stuff of dreams, nightmares and dark matter. In this issue our relationship with death, a grave coupling, presents more opposite conditions, like the dead coming to life. While we've got plenty of experience with zombies, vampires and other creepy dead yet alive monsters, what is the fate of the living in cryogenic death? And if death isn't dark enough for some, stand by for some lights out.

Sonneteers and haiku masters dwell among the free-versers, inking out poignant messages in small syllabic packages. Who would have thought ten by fourteen fit hard facts and some whimsy with precision! Hot and cool, wet and dry, reminisce and ponder these poems on temperate summer nights while staring at organized space dust, the constellations, those ghostly expressions of distant light. Once having been alive in the world, will anyone remember us, remember what we did, where we stood, who we loved?

We are too soon gone, as are the things we cherish—fleeting phantoms of a universal opera. We sing, we dance, we juggle, but for what, for whom? Are we alone in our aloneness? Or are there others out there looking for us? Will they find only the ghost of time here, walking, pacing out our expired existence? Poets, sing our universal songs. Enjoy, laugh, despair!

Rhea E. Rose

СИЛЬНИХ І СМІЛИВИХ

This issue is dedicated to the Ukrainian fighters and refugees and their struggle to be free, to create, to thrive—universal endeavours of the strong and courageous.

GHOST STORIES

By James Grotkowski

green sparks drift to stars
ghost stories hang in the air
once Earth had humans

CIRCUS AQUA

by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

I remember juggling water,
the blue spheres arching out
from hand to hand
above my head
until my focus slipped,
and fingers slipped,
and liquid slipped,
and dripped,
and ran,
along my wrists, and arms,
beneath my sleeves
and down my sides.

I remember the ocean—
at least I think
I hear the swells
sometimes within my dreams—
and lakes so deep,
and clear and still
they'd make you weep.
I remember the joy of
each new show,
each fishing town,
each seaside port
our troupe would play.

I remember waking,
our airship dancing
in the wind,
the ghosts of rift runes
on my skin,
to wonder where
we would set down,
set up, perform,
which acts we'd use,

which spells we'd cast,
which skills would shine
to strains of the calliope.

But then our transport's
rifts went wrong,
and memories
are brittle now,
desiccated, blown away
like dust amid
these arid wastes,
the searing hills,
the blazing plains,
that bind me,
tearless, in my bunk,
unfit to even make parade.

No matter how
I try to learn,
I have no skill
in juggling flame.

SOME LIKE IT HOT

By Robert Dawson

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day
On HD Eighty Thousand Six-Oh-Six
B, whose eccentric orbit makes it stray
Down to the realms where living starfire licks?
Though lightning-swift the planet races by
At periapsis, yet it's so irrayed
That scientists predict a daytime high
Of fifteen hundred (Kelvin) in the shade.
The sunrise, blinding as a nuclear blast,
Comes with a shockwave wind's demonic shriek;
Then, one day later, summertime has passed.
Though (it may be) I sometimes earn thy pique,
Yet this is not a world to emulate:
Hell is more lovely and more temperate!

LOVE AND AMOEBAS

by Frances Skene

Ash flakes from the mountain drift through cracks
in the window frames of the laboratory.
There's no phone signal. The last truck is gone.

Brush [the] ash off your forehead and return to
the microscope. "You and me, Jeremy," you say
to the amoeba. "You and me."

In the magnified drop of water, Jeremy swims
as though there's nothing to be afraid of. Now he's
changed direction. There: a second amoeba,
swims toward him.

Neither is male nor female, but you decide
to call the second one Janet.

Jeremy and Janet.

Maybe love will happen before lava hits. Maybe
The two will combine and separate as new beings.
It's something to keep your mind off fate.

The door slams open. "I got the driver to come back!"
"Hurry!"

You consider staying to see the further adventures
of Jeremy and Janet, but finally, you stand, run
to the door.

Behind you, a romance continues or not.

**IF PLANETS COULD DREAM,
THEY WOULD BE NIGHTMARES**

by R.K. Persaud

The planets scream,
an electromagnetic dream
Of Time when the sun goes nova
Nucleogenesis resumed
After all is consumed
Reborn in accreting nebula

ANGELS

by Frances Skene

The hitchhiker on a camel is new to Earth;
it came from space by way of an earthbound meteor.

Now it's living in camel hair, eating fleas,
enduring the flux of camel life. It doesn't know
I watch it from the rider's boot, but then,
I'm not from Earth either.

So many people still wait to meet aliens,
expecting to see human-like beings emerging
from circular ships, playing music from old movies.
I thought they'd realize some beings are different,
that there can be many angels on
the head of one pin.

THE COOL NEIGHBOURS

by Lisa Timpf

*News headline: Pluto Probe Finds Mysterious Night Light...**

“Imagine that you’re out in the country and it’s a moonless night... You have a neighbour a mile down the road and the neighbour goes into his kitchen at 3 a.m. and opens the door of the refrigerator...”

Seems that New Horizons
lived up to its name, its images showing
a strange light traversing the velvet dark of space,
a light that has scientists busy weaving possible theories

involving rogue stars and dark matter. But thanks
to an analogy offered by the astronomer
who was interviewed for the article
I now have different questions, like

is there other intelligent life out there?
If so, what do they keep in their fridges?
Do they shove leftovers to-the back, like us,
forgotten until whatever organ they use for a nose

alerts them? And maybe it’s just the yearning,
the hope that we’re not alone that makes me
want to imagine a more humanoid cause of that light,
so I might look up at the stars, and sigh, and dream.

** from CBC website, Quirks and Quarks, posted December 4, 2020*

SPACE RIP

by Jim Grotkowski

at night space comes down
to drape over me, then dawn
rips it off

ANTIPARTICULAR

by Robert Dawson

Physicists have produced, for many a day,
Anti-electrons, even antiprotons,
But nobody has yet, to my dismay,
Claimed the discovery of antiphotons.
They move (in theory) at the speed of dark,
They carry lethargy but have no mass.
When Edison made bulbs at Menlo Park,
Why did he not invent a second class?
Find me a darkbulb, that can wrap the room
In soothing shadow subtle and serene,
Or pocket flashdark, casting rays of gloom,
To obfuscate things better left unseen,
And when the daytime ceases to delight,
I'll switch the darkness on, and bring the night.

I AM A NIGHT OF ENDLESS RADIANCE

By Jim Smith

The Zipper is a ride that starts in this dimension. Its god says I am the little god that could, and it squeezes, and it clenches & at that very moment a night of endless radiance sits up in bed & says heck I was dreaming I was in two places at once like some lousy boson & then I woke up & here I am, I am a night of endless radiance & it is 4 a.m., there's no milky way & the rich are treating me like a grail washer who forgot to put the grail washing machine on. Dolphins litter the bedroom floor & I realize I have never spoken. You are naked, you are rubbing yourself in the frondy mud at the bottom of the lamby swale, a word I had forgotten. The Zipper stops in the dimension we aspire to, to the place where two bits is a quarter & desire visits & stays & floats across the kitchen, where Bertie always comes home, the kettle is always on, & children never die.

HORRORKU

by Greg Fewer

a shocked mortician
split coffin wood around her
an eyeless corpse stands

THE CRYOGENIC OPTION

By Sandra Hunter

Darkness lies
on the still, white city,
the glass domed structures
punch
like bleached knuckles
through the Earth's
cracked crust.

My crystal faceplate
casts spearshafts
of brilliance
and the stars
are pulsing sparks
fanned
by my laboured breathing.

I wonder
why am I here and
why this
star-stricken emptiness.

Fretfully, memory stirs
moribund limbs:
I am one of many
juice-plumped bodies
stored on
chill slab shelves
The Cryogenic Option
for our dying race.

Yet my container alone
has whirred to life
in the dial-lit dimness:
Lambent blue light
plays my helpless form
with eerie silent fingers.

Fear pulses—
igniting my brain as
a ragged heartbeat
fills my ears
embroiling me
in my own body sounds.

So I run
to the ceramic glass door
my fists pound
soundless
on its sleek obsidian skin.

In its surface
a face reflecting
pinched and pale
 like a watery weed
 under glass
 its mouth stretches
 screaming
 into the endless silence.

MAN ON THE MOON

by Shayne Dahl

Shot off-planet
A meteor in reverse
I eloped with my art
To the moon
To surrender my heart
To the Earth

A perfect oasis
Defies desolation
With perfect balance
She spins
As if on the tilted finger
Of a benevolent God
In fast blowing
Aurora glowing
Solar winds

If a leaf could think
It would invent a self
See its tree as Other
From my perch
Here on the moon
I see my planet alive
Bathed in light
Awe and wonder

The American flag
Fallen and buried
Swallowed whole by the shadow
of a lunar dust dune
On Earth
The twilight of the idols fade
Into the darkness of
The darkest New Moon

The inner hollowness of things
So obvious now
My habitat depleted
I will die soon
One last bath
In the hot light of the Sun
Then, I will forever retire
To the dark side of the moon

Sent here by the UN to write poetry
From an observatory on Mont Blanc
I would have been famous upon my return
Instead, in the ruins of an ambitious dream,
I lie alone in my mountaintop tomb
Cursed to watch the world burn

Seeing Mother bleed,
I bleed internally
For Her and for all
That is unborn too
Armageddon has come
Sudden, unannounced
Who to bear witness?
A dying man
On the immortal moon

HOMESTAR

By Gregg Chamberlain

Home is the Wanderer
Home from the Void
And the Spaceman
Home from the Stars.

THE GOD OF GRAVITY

By Neile Graham

What if I want to detach both feet
from the soil, to fly up unto the trees?

What if up in the trees I want even
the most delicate branch to cradle me

inside the gossamer light and air?
Gravity sinks me. It is him, he keeps me

from flying off the face of this earth.
He is granite. The rock of him keeps me

from laughing, keeps me falling like stone,
lifting one foot then the other. Never the two together.

How grave is the gravity? How great
and how gray. When I drop things

he brings them down on me,
hard, though each time I pray

he'll be just a little more gracious.
These days I feel him more, as I, too,

take one more step, just one,
toward the grave. But when I'm there

I'll defy him. Be smoke. Ash. Some
bits of bone will fall, it's true, but

others will seed farther ground. Something
of me will ride cradled in branches, lift

in a tide, take to the air, but
you only know how I so secretly

love the ground, how so secretly,
gravely, laughing.

THE WALKING MAN

By Gerald L. Truscott

The walking man walks along well-travelled roads.
You may have seen him in his ragged clothing
walking steadily forward, tapping his long oak staff.
He looks an odd fellow from a bygone age,
with his terraced brow and his promontory jaw.

The walking man walks like he'll never stop.
But he'll pause now and then for a moment of peace,
upon a still, grey morning or beneath a starry sky.
Or on a rainy night in a warm, dry tavern,
he'll take a hearty meal with a pint of real ale.

Then the walking man talks, and if you sit near
you'll hear his tales of healing, loss, love and hate.
"Live well," he might tell you, "for life's all you have."
And before he leaves he'll raise his glass to the house:
"I'll see all you dear souls as you walk out the door!"

The walking man walks as if he always has,
as if the world depends on his constant pace.
Yet he looks so at ease in his even stride,
as his staff strikes the ground steady and true,
like he's measuring time on a never-ending road.

The walking man walks along well-travelled roads,
striding steadily forward—tap, tap, tap, tap, tap.
But sometimes he'll pause on a clear, starry night
to point his staff at the moon, when it dares show its face,
and he'll chuckle and call out, "In good time, my old friend."

BERNADETTE GABAY DYER

"A WONDERFUL COLLECTION OF POEMS ... THE THEMES OF LOVE, IDENTITY, TRADITION VERSUS MODERN BELIEFS ARE WOVEN WELL IN STORIES... WITH UNPREDICTABLE ENDINGS."
-KAREN LEMMONS

A collection of new poems by a singular, mature, multi-talented, unique voice, equally compelling in prose, poetry and oral storytelling whose reputation has grown considerably in the Caribbean, Canada, the US and the UK.

"Bernadette Dyer is a folk singer of the Caribbean and a weaver of fantastic, moral and spellbinding tales. Her words induct and seduce, instruct and soothe. Elementary in style, but philosophical in subject, she be Miss Lou of song and Annap of the story telling. To open her books is to be enlightened, and one closes them knowing one has been refreshed and improved."

-George Elliott Clarke, internationally renowned poet, Parliamentary Poet Laureate of Canada

"...a beautiful piece of literary art. Richly written, Dyer takes the reader on an historical trip through World War I and the Holocaust. She eases the reader from one cultural experience to the next with ease and grace. With each page the reader is captivated ... If you are in to quality, no nonsense fiction, Bernadette Gabay Dyer is your writer."

-T. Rhythm Knight, Apoo Bookclub

"Bernadette Gabay Dyer ... brings a unique voice influenced by the Caribbean experience and Storytelling tradition to the Canadian Diaspora in ways that unite cultures and foster insight and understanding."

-Nicole Lyn, Actress & Celebrity

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COVER PHOTO BY BERNADETTE GABAY DYER
COVER DESIGN BY RASHMIBRACHA

9781551511211
\$17.95 CAD \$21.95 USD
9 781551 511211

STONE WOMAN

BY BERNADETTE GABAY DYER



STONE WOMAN



A COLLECTION OF POEMS
BERNADETTE GABAY DYER

Woodcut cover by Bernadette Gabay Dyer

THE STONE WOMAN: A REVIEW

By Rhea E. Rose

Jamaican-born Canadian by choice, Bernadette Gabay Dyer, lives and writes in Toronto. As she states at the beginning of her new collection of poetry, *Stone Woman*, her poetic influences are Canadian poets George Elliot Clarke, James Deahl and Al Moritz (A.F. Moritz), and it is to these three poets that she dedicates her work. Dyer is an author of fiction, plays and poetry. Her newest work is a collection of eighty-five free verse poems titled *Stone Woman*, named after one of the poems in her book. Her book is published by Mosaic Press, an indie publisher specializing in the publication of multicultural and the Canadian ethnic mosaic.

While most of the works collected here read as portals of poetic memoir, I think it would be fair to say that Dyer straddles the literary world with one foot lightly planted in speculative writing. About seven percent of her works fit a speculative sensibility, meaning they embrace the fantastical. For example, "The Face on Mars," which first appeared in *Polar Starlight* magazine, issue #1, 2021, is about the famous stone face seen on the surface of Mars. Dyer's poem

mythologizes and personifies the Martian image. She embellishes the face of Mars's mystery with her awe and wonder interpretation.

The first poem in the book, "Love Spell," invokes magic and the binding of a partner through love-sorcery, and it's one of my favourite poems from the collection! "While Her Hours Wound Down" is a poem that, in my opinion, alludes lightly to the fairy tale Snow White and the bad apple. These softly and not so softly speculative works are sprinkled throughout. I would have liked more speculative works in the collection.

Some of my favourite poems are the ones that allude to Dyer's Jamaican influences, like "Black Woman Talk to Me," about a woman's inability to reconcile how she looks in her sage years. And "My Black Mother" is about the steady influence of a mother who's grown very old and whose strength flows through generations. Another gem in this collection is "Kitchen Solitaire," about the aching emptiness of a kitchen once occupied by its well-loved cook. Dyer hits her stride in "Let Him Sleep," "Old Woman Things," "The Sieve," and "Egg Shells on Her Face" (another of my favourites). Like all poets, Dyer sees through the mundane into the moments of light and dark that make up the realm of life's mysteries: Why do we love those that can't love us back? Where do those we love go when they leave for good? Why must we age and be so alone?

Perhaps these poems should have been divided into chapbook-like sections with similar themes. However, while the book's structure may seem sprawling, the poetry is poignant, sad, entropic, and sometimes despairing, but all very relatable! The poems get longer and more potent in the last half of the book.

Eighty-five poems seem like a lot of poetry for a single publication. Still, gem after gem fills these pages with feather-light, fragile yet tenacious and often powerful weavings of words, even if they aren't all speculative. Perhaps because I am a writer, I may insist that when reading, don't skip "Dancing in the Sand," probably my favourite poem in the entire collection—well, at least in the top three! I might have led the book with this one. Find Bernadette's poetry here: <https://mosaicpress.ca/search?q=Stone+woman>

Review by Rhea E. Rose
—Editor

ABOUT THE POETS AND ARTIST

Gregg Chamberlain

Gregg lives in rural Ontario, Canada, with his missus, Anne, and their cats, who let the humans do all the mouse-catching around the house. He writes speculative fiction and zombie filk for fun and has several dozen published examples of his fun, including past appearances in *Polar Borealis*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *Speculative North*, *Mythic*, *Weirdbook*, and various anthologies.

Shayne Dahl

Shayne is a Canadian anthropologist currently affiliated with Harvard University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto and has several academic publications on topics related to religion, dreaming, pilgrimage, sacred mountains, and mummies. He has published a poem called “Man on the Moon” in *Polar Starlight* (#6) and a short story called “The Void” published in *Aerial Chart: International Literary Journal* (2021) which is about classism, depopulation, and human-animal relations in rural Japan.

Robert Dawson

Robert teaches mathematics at a Nova Scotian university. In his spare time he writes, fences, and hikes. His stories have appeared in *Nature Futures*, *On Spec*, *Neo-Opis*, *Polar Borealis*, *Tesseract 20*, and numerous other periodicals and anthologies. He is a graduate of the Sage Hill and Viable Paradise writing workshops.

Greg Fewer

A *montréalais* by birth and descent from seventeenth-century colonists, Greg Fewer 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 poetry published in (among other places): *Cuento Magazine*, *Lovecraftiana*, *Monsters: A Dark Drabbles Anthology*, *Polar Borealis*, *Polar Starlight*, *Scifaikuest*, *Star*Line*, *The Sirens Call*, and *Utopia Science Fiction*. He was a Dwarf Stars 2021 finalist.

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.

James Grotkowski

James is a native northern Albertan who now calls Calgary home. He holds a degree in geology but presently works in IT systems development for the aviation industry. He is a long-time member of the World Haiku Club with dozens of his works included in its published reviews. James has just begun his non-haiku writing endeavours, with two short stories having been published in *The Enigma Front* anthologies. Much more is soon to come. So far, few of his readers have been lulled to sleep. *ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ*

Sandra Hunter

Sandra has always lived at the edges of ocean and forest in the Pacific Northwest, so it came naturally to have a sentient forest as a major character in her Elanraigh series (YA/Adult High Fantasy) beginning with *The Guardian Forest* (published 2019) and its sequel *A Scourge of Shadows* (coming 2022). Similarly, the Dragon Heir series, beginning with *Daughter of Earth & Fire*, *The Fledgling* (published 2020) takes place in the Pacific Northwest. She has short stories published in *Spinetingler's* and *On Spec*; and poetry in *Gaslight*, *Lynx* and *Women & Recovery*.

Sandra's a member of SF Canada, and W.I.P. (a Vancouver Island writers' group). She lives in Parksville, BC, is a "fair weather" kayaker, and a lousy gardener. She enjoys time spent on her patio, laptop at hand, with a view of either ocean or coastal mountains—and being spirited away by her characters.

Web Page: <https://sandraahunter.com/>

Facebook: [Sandra Hunter: Fantasy Author](#)

R.K. Persaud

Since the third grade at an unremarkable school in southern Ontario, R.K. has wanted to be two things: an astronaut and a novelist. He spent several years in graduate school studying Martian geology and working with international teams researching crew psychology, field operations, astrobiology and planetary geology at Mars analog sites around the world with the Mars Society, NASA, and the Canadian Space Agency. After grad school, a bout of madness led him to entrepreneurial efforts creating the world's first zero-gravity sport, played on aircraft simulating microgravity by flying parabolic arcs. When those ambitions took a nose dive, Rocky returned to his first love of science fiction, and is now working on a 8-volume mosaic novel.

The poem "If Planets Could Dream, They Would be Nightmares" was inspired by this recording of planetary sounds made from electromagnetic measurements here:

<https://www.facebook.com/PlanetaryLandscapes/posts/4367506023315941>

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.

Frances Skene

Frances is a retired librarian who has been actively involved in science fiction fandom and promoting science fiction literature since the 1970s. She is also a co-author of the Science Fiction novel *Windship: The Crazy Plague*, which can be found here: [Windship](#).

Jim Smith

Jim is a retired trial lawyer and lifelong SF fanatic who had the good luck to meet Judy Merrill in 1981 and work, argue, laugh and be frustrated with her (and her archives) on and off from then till she passed in 1997. He expressed a lot of his mixed feelings about their friendship in his 2015 Toronto Fringe one-man show, *I Love You, Judy Merrill*.

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. Her speculative poetry has appeared in *New Myths*, *Star*Line*, *Triangulation: Habitats*, *Polar Borealis*, 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/>.

Gerald L. Truscott

Gerald, Gerald spent 33 years as an editor and book publisher, all the while restraining his own creative impulses. Now, after a brief encounter with the walking man, he's setting his inner self free.
