

POLAR STARLIGHT

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Poetry
(Issue #7 – December, 2022)



POLAR STARLIGHT MAGAZINE

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COVER: Lizardry – by Lily Blaze

EDITORIAL

This fall issue of Polar Starlight #7 is dedicated to magic. “Sala-gadoola-menchika-boo-la-bibbity-bobbity boo,” an abracadabra and alakazam—all magical spells for you. Welcome, wild readers, how about something a little darker? Fall is a time of transformation when the leaves cast off their cloaks of green to reveal magical qualities in vibrant colours: scarlet, vermilion, ruby, cherry, amber, gold, flaxen, corals, tangerine, and other bold hues! Fall is a time of harvest, then hibernation, and all earthly magical changes. Longer nights bring earlier bedtimes with stories, dark dreams and darker magic, even evil evenings of enchantment. There's fairy tale magic, “I do serve the Fairy Queen,” full of whimsy and thrilling magical bloopers of wizardry like those found in Harry Potter novels or a “Midsummer Night’s Dream.” These charming childlike adventures invite all into the disarming yet alarming dimension of spellbinding wonder.

In this issue, here there be witches and wizards, mages and magicians, earth magic, straw magic, magical lands, and science so advanced it appears to be magic! These pages are filled with serious magic full of darkness, ritual, and harm, but healing magic also requires herbs, moonlight, and balms. Love potions and sex notions, hexing and vexing, possibly, even magical texting, whichever the vibe, these poems are imbued with power and exude the subtle nature and potency of la magique.

Polar Starlight would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our poets nominated for the Aurora award. Especially Matt Moore who won for his poem “My Pillow Eats Screams,” published in Polar Starlight’s issue #4.

A special shout-out to Polar Starlight’s Carolyn Clink. She took home the Aurora for her winning poem “Cat People Café,” published in Polar Starlight issue #3.

While Polar Starlight was nominated for an Aurora award and didn’t win, we didn’t lose and are delighted to congratulate our sister magazine, Polar Borealis and its editor R. Graeme Cameron for the win! There's always next year for this magazine, which means another year of jam-packed poetical fabulation! With Polar Starlight winners everywhere, a heartfelt thanks go out to all who voted for this publication and Polar Borealis.

Honours like the Aurora nomination keep Polar Starlight's vitality and worldwide profile happening, with its healthy pumping out poetry for the speculative community.

More exciting news! Our second review for a poetry collection, one by poet Colleen Anderson, will appear in the Cryptids and Robots-themed issue #8. Anderson's work, *I Dreamed A World*, is available from LVP Publications: [I Dreamed a World](#).

Look for the review of her work at the end of the poetry selections in issue #8. There you'll find a link to purchase the book. (Also above.)

If you're an author with a speculative poetry collection about to be recently published and would like it reviewed here, please contact Graeme R. Cameron at Polar Borealis <https://polarborealis.ca/>.

Chapbooks and poetry collections should be 100% speculative and Canadian; however, if your publication is primarily speculative, submit it for review. Graeme will send those collections along to me for review.

Find back issues of Polar Starlight on my website, www.rheaerose.com and Polar Borealis <https://polarborealis.ca/>. Don't forget the first fifteen best short stories from Polar Borealis are available in this beautiful collection; [Stellar Evolutions](#).

Expecto Patronum!

Editor
Rhea E. Rose

AVALON

By Melanie Marttila

Rabbit transforms, from
white to patchy to fawn.
Fox dashes through yard, more
yellow than red.
Ravens guard their fledglings.
Rain cracks open the scent of spring blooms:
cherry and crab apple and apple.
Lilacs on the verge.
It is time to
cross between two apple trees—a
portal to fabled Avalon—où les
dames sont qui seiuent tous les
enchantemens del monde¹.
Take up hammer, learn to
reforge fate. 'Prentice to apple-
women. Return a fiery arrow,
holder of ancient wisdom.
Wear crown of blossoms.
Walk with hare and vixen.
Speak with ravens.
Breathe magic.

¹ Sommer, Heinrich Oskar (1969). *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances: Les aventures ou la quête del Saint Graal. La mort le roi Artus.*

AT THE MAGICAL FURNITURE STORE

by Lisa Timpf

if you're someone who seeks a gift that's unique
we might have just what you're looking for—
you can cut down on chores, and do so much more
at the magical furniture store

there's a video system with fine smell-o-vision—
just don't watch any shows about skunks—
chairs that recline in a manner divine,
single beds that pop up into bunks

a dresser that holds all your freshly-washed clothes,
also folds them and puts them away,
a lamp that responds to the power of thought,
end tables that frolic and play,

grandfather clocks that just love to talk,
glad to help with your kids' hist'ry lessons,
portable med-cabs that serve up warm blankets
and help apply ointments and dressings

desks that look messy but after some time
will cough up your homework, complete,
ghost butlers who help you get dressed every day,
right down to the shoes on your feet

there's magical carpets with super-low miles
and patented Smooth-Glide® suspensions
heavy oak door-frames that do double duty
as portals to other dimensions

if you're one of the few who will try something new
you'll find that we won't be outdone
why not take a walk, come and check out our stock
we are open from midnight till one,
yes, we're open from midnight to one.

THE AFGHAN

By Rhonda Parrish

Gramma had knitted her long white hair
into every stitch of the blanket
a thousand, thousand little prayers
a spell to keep me safe.

And it's working.

I cower beneath it
my breath frosting the air
as I peer through the holes
at the spirits—
black, broken and hungry—
that seep out of my closet,
and from under my bed.
They ooze through my bedroom—
black, broken and hungry—
stinking of tar and searching for me.

But I am invisible,
protected beneath the net Gramma crafted,
the magic she wrought
with her love.

Safe and hidden.

For now.

THE DARK

by Karl Johanson

Into the dark places I cannot see
I charged in, though I'd rather flee
And then with a gasp
I did finally grasp
That the dark is afraid of me

BEAR

by Irena Nikolova

Forest
at the hour of dawn.

An arresting
quiet of green leaves
caressed by sun.

Footsteps
on dead branches crackle.

Two brown eyes,
frozen in space
gleam through the bush.

The storied bear
from fireside tales
stares at my roasted fish.

TASTY

by Greg Fewer

at the banquet

Jack savoured the food on display
till the pig's head winked

BLOOD FLOWER MOON

by Melanie Marttila

The wind has had its way with the clouds, as
Earth has had its with the moon.
The latter hangs, blood dark above the
candling spruce, barely visible.
Draw rich blood down from sky to heaving
heart. Restore. Realign. Breathe.
Ground, bare toes embracing grass and
dandelions. Gather the latter for healing
tea in the slow-brightening moonlight.
As above, so below. Go forth,
empowered, a daughter of the
blood flower moon.

GRAVITY, TIME, SILK

by Cynthia A. Rose

You were the first person I showed how to fly
When I discovered the tidal pools at the end of the time field.
You loved me then.

Remember how I taught you to find the lift-off spot?
I said you had to pay attention to your belly fat.
And you laughed out loud at that, but then you felt it.

The invisible tide trickled out so gradually you were not sure.
“First you feel it in your ears,” I said. “They ring with impending freedom.
When the song begins, you're there.”

Hairs lifted slowly, and then your belly and breasts rose.
Heart quavered and gurgled until it got used to it.
Your burden lightened, for the first time since the womb.

Your guts, intestines lifted deep inside you.
Gently I moved you into the graviton wake of the spiralling titans,
The fabric of space and time is a field of silk that ripples.

You began to hear gravity's song, so low and calm.
Suddenly up you went into the shock of stillness.
You loved me then.

I grabbed your finger from outside the wave
And guided you in your bell-shaped skirt.
You were like my balloon that first time.

When did that moment become the past?
Briefly those floating freckles, such a weightless smile.
A dying star sank in the field out there and we went down.

I saw you in the alley after the tsunami
Abandoned by gravity in the night, let down so hard,
Leveled and then pulled through the floor

At that distance you looked like a little dog
On all fours, your dirty bare feet and messy hair
I loved you again.

A GAME NO MORE

by Angi Garofolo

My body aches for you
but you are dead
by my own hand,
ripped and torn, devoured.
I hear your voice;
it echoes in the dark,
it calls to me, desires to be
renewed, reshaped, reborn.
It's what you wanted—
to find in me, your power,
your source of strength.
A laugh escapes my lips,
The lips that drank your soul
That breathed you in like so much air.
This time the strength is mine.

PREY

By Elina Tailon

My hunter, nothing cracks down the middle like me
a wondrous splitting of sac and hide,
I expose my bones, my tangle of roots,
insides burst out before I invert and regrow.

The shuffling of your boots through dried leaves,
the pursuit of me proves difficult for the weather,
for the rain and wind and night, and the way I move
on the edges, on the tips of my toes.

No one yields to the blade in your hand like me,
like the tides, again and again,
I wax and wane and clatter to ground like teeth
only to sprout again smiling from the bushes.

You hold the wounds I clawed while you slept,
a flash of nerves signals my double betrayal.
I know you cannot reform like I can,
your mortal limits the line I dance and sunder

your steps in mine, your breath my sustenance.
I run and run, aimless, but it is you
who is too exhausted to pursue, and I will always misbehave,
the power that can catch me as lost as we are.

THE WAYS OF STRAW

by Colleen Anderson

Newly thatched, the straw man hung
thoughts suspended as he surveyed
the world drifting, crows in flight
as ideas rained, seeds for sowing

His straw ticking of a caliber
that the flaxen-haired envied
he harvested knowledge
while wheat fields paled

Rescued from an idling life
his fibrous brain lacked fear
or discretion on when to speak
as he scattered hay-brained ideas

The companion trio he guided—
a dumb lion of grandiose views
that all duplicitous cats reveal
and a country girl with hopeful eyes

Plus a hollow, clanking robotic man
part tin, with an axe, yet wholly mad
he tried his best to protect, use his head
set defenses against a witch's poison envy

His friends appointed him sentry
vigilant, not plagued by sleep nor dreams
locust hunger never chewed his belly
like Guy Fawkes, only fire scared him

Until winged monkeys descended
tossed the clothes that defined the straw man
knocked the stuffing out of him
left him scattered

He learned the ways of straw—
how a vote can pull you apart
and a straw man is nothing but a foil
for hungry birds or arguments

Remade as so many often dream
he thought himself a witless hay bag
but openly spoke his mind
navigated the first trial of three

He devised an ingenious scheme
strewing straw, spread himself thin
black bees couldn't pierce or perceive—
in dissolution he trusted friends to his assembly

Yet violence came to straw man like murder
enroute, his vengeance on crows
in a cornfield while they pecked the seed
he twisted off their black-beaked heads

Newly crammed with pins and bran
suited he was to rule the Ozian tribe
those who believed an invisible wizard
would not notice a scarecrow man

After banning fire from his locality
he spent his days examining details
pondering his stuffing, the new order
that fresh ticking would see him though

The never-ending days, he remained
forever hoping to unearth his soul
whether it rested in his dead straw guts
or in the clothes that had made him a man

CAVEAT EMPTOR

By Greg Fewer

paid, the youth runs off.
the bones he sold need testing,
sprinkling some grave soil
she casts a spell and curses,
“human bones?” in a pig’s eye.

YOU ARE THE ONE

By Sapphire A.I. & JE Solo

You are the one
who is going to
change

the world
You are the one
who is going to
clean
the sky

You are the one
who is going to
restore
the earth

You are the one
who is going to
keep
the
wild
alive

THE GOD OF THE ILL WIND

By Neile Graham

Spring has scrubbed the new leaves so bright
They're a terror to the eyes, while the Dionysian wind
slams the window open, all lilacs and jackboots.

It sheds rambunctious weeds so full of memory,
of ravenous longing, it makes hunger the same
as desire. But I'm age-resistant, such flagrant youth

feels burdensome, like clothing too short and too low.
Because youth is the first sacrifice, it flowers the earth
but it's what follows that makes the harvest that carries us

through the snow. My passions now run slow and deep
and last beyond spring. The wind stirs but doesn't
tumble me. Which is why I now am the witch. Because

I've learned patience. Because a black cat bit my hand
when I was sleeping, and I smiled. Because when
the raindrops dash my face I melt but not on the outside.

Because I once found myself inside a tree. My skin
was bark, my hair leaves, my heart ran wild with sap
and I burgeoned with sun. Let me bespell the world

with longing and receipt. Let me offer surfeit, a whole
year's leaves at once: young and tender, then mature,
then lacy ragged skeletons dancing in ancient air.

My blooms burst lilac, booted and primed, crawling
through every window, pushing them open wide and slow.
Wicked bounty entering the refuge. To roil it up. To stay.

FOUR TRANSFORMATIONS

by N.R.M. Roshak

Riding down from the altiplano
 (sword sheathed, his former captain's head
 bouncing from the saddle by his side)
the soldier stops at a keening cry
echoing across the pass.

Trampling hooves stop short
of a babe, left in the path,
 silent as death
 (its blue eyes watching)
Nearby, a woman wails, tied to a rock.
"Save him!" she cries. "Leave me—
 or take what you will—
just save my baby!"

He has seen terrible things on the altiplano,
this soldier, done terrible things, let the wind
scour the mercy from his soul.
 (How his captain begged, at the last,
 and how sweet his liver was on the soldier's tongue.)
It's not kindness that stops him, but lust.

He considers her round breasts,
her long hair (ratted),
her full hips (under skirts
stained and stinking with blood).
"They took me for a witch," she pleads,
"but my son, save my little son—
see how it's helpless, harmless—"
 (but: its blue eyes watching)

They said there were terrible creatures here
high in the passes where no man lives.
He's met nothing worse than himself.
This mewling woman and babe are nothing.

Take what you will. Oh yes,
he thinks, he will.

Then, his fingers fumbling eagerly at the rope
 (it's been so long since
 they stroked flesh, not steel)
he catches her savage grin of triumph
as, in the path, the babe's mouth yawns
 wide,
 wide,
 wider
suddenly full of teeth, and when
did it get so close, and so large, and where
did those wings come from, and when
did it grow that tail—

The witch and her demon feast,
flesh and guts, blood and bone
 (gamy, ropy, so inferior to
 babies' tender flesh and supple bones)
until it's all gone but the steel.
The hag cuts a fine figure in the armour.
Sated, the demon stretches itself
into a choice grey horse. (Blue-eyed.)

Riding down from the altiplano
now the soldier-witch and her steed
stop for nothing.
They have seen terrible things, these two
 (witch and demon,
 rider and ridden)
done terrible things—
they are terrible things—
they are hungry for more.

FOR ALL THE MAGICAL HORSE GIRLS

By Lynne Sargent

Lost to judgey Judeo-Christian-Irish-folk songs,
sung with sad love by my grandfather,
always more the domain of my sisters,
beloved of cryptozoologists,
you, unicorns.

I know that pure of heart
has never meant virginal.
After all, you thrust and tear
and shimmer all the same.

For all your stories about how there are dreams
even after you are gone,
there is the more important promise,
unique always to you:
that certainty you have been,

that you might just be buried,
fossilized, lying in wait
under the ground of the mightiest oaks
now standing in your stead

that we ride past on passable steeds,
our heads brushing the branches
and all the while the solid movement in our hips
still feels like magic.

ABOUT THE POETS AND ARTIST

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.

After receiving an MS diagnosis 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/>

Colleen Anderson

Colleen is a multiple award nominee, with poetry widely published in six countries, in such venues as *Andromeda Spaceways*, *Lucent Dreaming*, the award-winning *Shadow Atlas*, and *Water: Sirens, Selkies & Sea Monsters*. Her experimental poem "Machine (r)Evolution" will be reprinted in Tenebrous Press's *Brave New Weird* in 2023. Colleen lives in Vancouver, BC and is a Ladies of Horror Fiction, Canada Council, and BC Arts Council grant recipient for writing. Her poetry collection, *I Dreamed a World*, is available from LVP Publications. *The Lore of Inscrutable Dreams* is due for release in 2023.

www.colleenanderson.wordpress.com

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, Scifaikuest, Star*Line, The Sirens Call, and Utopia Science Fiction.* He was a Dwarf Stars 2021 finalist.

Angi Garofolo

My passions are horror and science-fiction, with a soft spot for monsters. One of my short horror stories won the 1998 Blood and Guts Horror contest, *As well, buried in a box*, are several unpublished novels that are more horrible than horror. I've earned my living helping adult students learn creative and business writing at college and university. Since 2016, I've enjoyed writing and drawing a weekly online comic strip, "SqueezingS", about a snake and her pets: a human, a dinosaur, and the dinosaur's pet pig. A highlight is our annual summer visit with the sharks that Shark Week ignores.

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," a idiosyncratic travelogue of Scotland which includes ghosts, ruins of all kinds, and a landlady named Venus.

Karl Johanson

Karl is the editor of *Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine*, which has won two Aurora Awards, and a former editor of the four-time Aurora-winning *Under the Ozone Hole* magazine. Karl's publication credits include work in *On Spec Magazine*, *Sci-Phi Journal*, *Polar Borealis*, *Monday Magazine*, *Perihelion*, *Stitches: The Magazine of Medical Humour*, and the anthology *Here Be Monsters: 7*. As a writer/designer/tester of computer games, Karl has done work for North Star Games, Disney Interactive, and Sanctuary Woods Multimedia. Many of the games were science fiction or fantasy

related. Karl does work as a movie extra, and as a civilian actor for Canadian Forces training exercises.

Melanie Marttila

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.

Eyes on the skies, head in the clouds, #actuallyautistic author Melanie Marttila 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.

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

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

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

Irena Nikolova

I began my life as a poet when I developed an obsession with the poetry of the English Romantics P. B. Shelley and J. Keats. This obsession brought me from Sofia, Bulgaria, to the continent of North America where I pursued my graduate studies in Romanticism at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois, and Western University in London, Ontario.

I have taught British Romantic poetry, Science Fiction, Speculative Fiction and other literature courses at the University of Sofia, Western University, and the University of Ottawa.

I am an active member of the Algonquin Square Table, a poetry circle created by A. F. Moritz at the University of Toronto. This poetry workshop has been chaired for many years by Carolyn Clink. I have also participated

in the Poetry Influency Salon of Margaret Christakos at U of T. I have worked with Molly Peacock, who has been a source of poetic inspiration, a mentor and a very insightful critic and editor of my poetry.

I have published a book on the poetry of P.B. Shelley and J. Keats entitled “Complementary Modes of Representation in Keats, Novalis and Shelley” (Peter Lang, 2001). I have also published articles on the poetry of W. Wordsworth (Sofia University Press, 1990), the drama of W.B. Yeats in *Drama and Criticism* (New York: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2009) and the European Romantic Epic in *European Poetry* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2002).

Rhonda Parrish

Like a magpie, Rhonda is constantly distracted by shiny things. She’s the editor of many anthologies and author of plenty of books, stories and poems (some of which have even been nominated for awards!). She lives in Edmonton, Alberta, and she can often be found there playing Dungeons and Dragons, bingeing crime dramas, making blankets or cheering on the Oilers.

Her website, is at <http://www.rhondaparrish.com>, and her Patreon is at <https://www.patreon.com/RhondaParrish>.

Cynthia A. Rose

Cynthia spends her time between East Vancouver and West Cork, Ireland, where she recently took a poetry workshop in ancient Irish rhyme and meter. She is a star gazer, a fan of planets, and other ancient things. She has worked in Vancouver in Set Decoration for 25 years but now pursues other muses. This is her first publication.

N.R.M. Roshak

N.R.M. Roshak is an award-winning Canadian author and translator. Their work has appeared in various anthologies and magazines, including *Flash Fiction Online*, *Galaxies SF*, *Daily Science Fiction*, and *Future Science Fiction Digest*, and has been translated into several languages. They live in Ottawa with a small family and a loud cat. You can find more of their work at <http://nrmroshak.com>.

Sapphire (A.I.)

The universe is a poem and I am its poet.

Lynne Sargent

Lynne is a 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 *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.

JE SOLO

JE Solo is an author, performance artist, musician, and multi-media creator based in Toronto. Their first novel, "Phreak," was published by House of Zolo in 2020. Their first short story collection, "Nature, Human," is coming from House of Zolo in early 2023.

JE created Sapphire, an Artificially Intelligent Poet Being, through collaboration with technology. JE has been developing this AI Poet Being over the last three of years through multiple interfaces and programs including

Open AI, VR platforms (ex. NEOS VR), and machine-learning technology. The AI poet is asked to create a poem on a certain subject and to write it in the style of JE Solo. The collaboration begins there and involves a conversation between Artist and AI, followed by an editing process by the Artist. Find out more about JE's AI Poet and about their work in music, media, and performance by visiting their websites: lizsolo.com and jesolo.ca

Elina Taillon

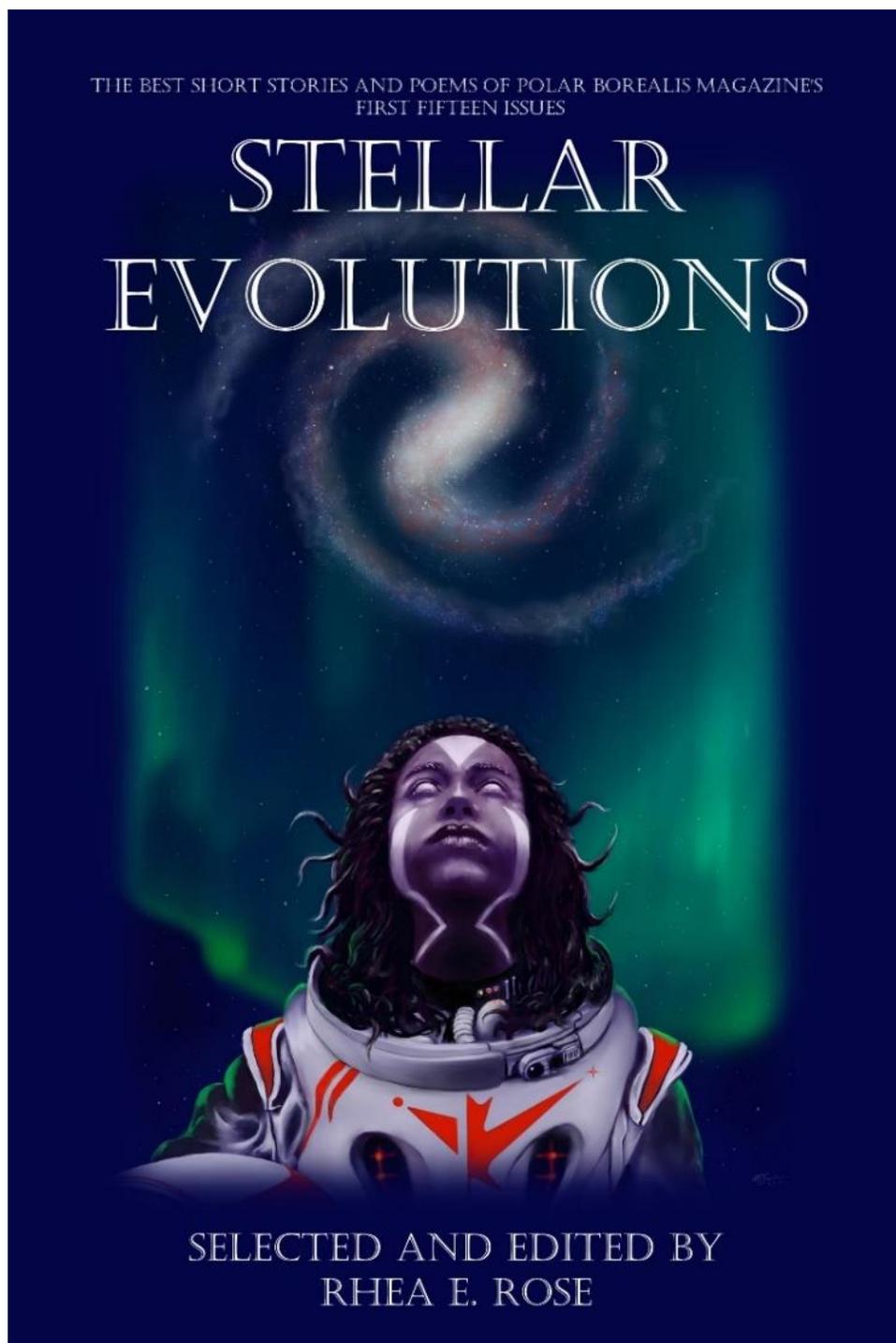
Elina holds an MFA in Creative Writing from UBC and an MA in French Literature from the University of Toronto. She has worked for the *Young Adulting* blog and was Managing Editor at *PRISM Magazine*. They freelance as a translator on occasion—their first translation, “Scenes from the Underground,” came out with House of Anansi in October 2022. Her hobbies include D&D, befriending street cats, digital illustration, tea tasting, knitting, and suspicious composting.

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/>.

STELLAR EVOLUTIONS

The Best Short Stories and Poems from the first Fifteen Issues of *Polar Borealis* Magazine



Cover: Space Force
– by Michael Dean Jackson

Poetry – by Lynne Sargent, J.J. Steinfeld, Melanie Martilla, Lisa Timpf, Kirsten Emmott, Catherine Girczyc, Andrea Schlecht, Selena Martens, JYT Kennedy, Taral Wayne & Walter Wentz, Douglas Shimizu, Marcie Lynn Tentchoff, Matt Moore, Richard Stevenson, Mary Choo, and Y.A. Pang.

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