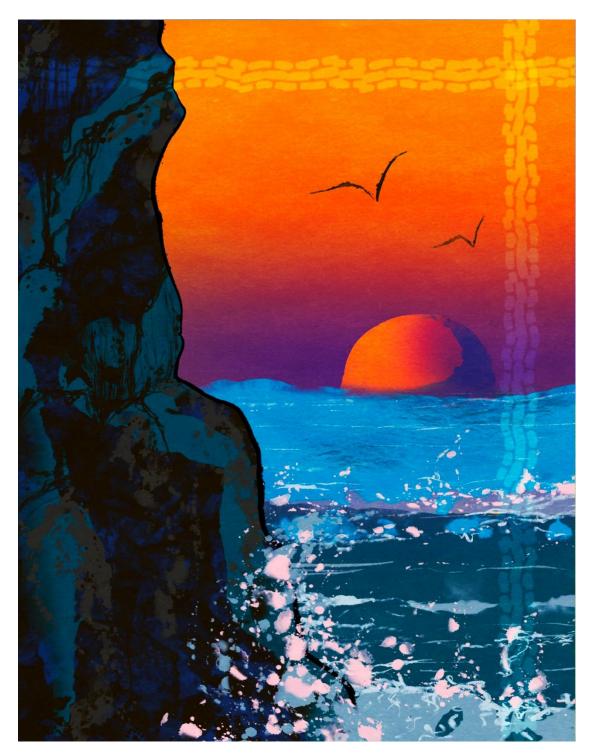
POLAR STARLIGHT

Magazine of Canadian Speculative Poetry (Issue #14 – April 2024)



POLAR STARLIGHT MAGAZINE

Issue #14 – April 2024 (Vol. 4#2. WN#14)

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ART CREDITS

COVER: Planet 3 Beckons - by Swati Chavda

EDITORIAL

By Rhea E. Rose

Our 14th issue of *Polar Starlight* features brilliant poetry by familiar and new writers. New to *Polar Starlight* this time round is poet Guy Immega, who ends our issue with "Light Fantastic." A piece about mitigating environmental disaster and hope for the planet brought about by human ingenuity. Also new to these pages is Jameson Grey's poem "The Bridge," which suggests a descent into the underworld reminiscent of ancient myths. J.D. Dresner's "The Flip Side" is reminiscent of "Alice Through the Looking Glass," which challenges our perception of reality.

We also welcome JM Spronk's "The Continuum of Salt," a poem that embodies the profound connection between existence and the essence of salt, navigating the depths of both with awe and resignation.

Lastly, we celebrate Mahaila Smith's poem entitled "Our Time and Space," a poem that looks at the traditional cycle of people shaping their environments and then being shaped by them.

I want to thank and welcome these poets, all new to our pages, and at the same time, I'd like to encourage any new Canadian poets writing speculative fiction to consider this publication as a landing space for their work. Enjoy Issue #14 with its beautiful cover created by artist Swati Chavda.

Rhea E. Rose

THE CONTINUUM OF SALT

By J.M. Spronk

I was born in salt Live because of it My remains will be preserved in it

(Amniotic fluid is a 2 percent saline solution)

While I live, salty blood courses through me While I live, salty oceans transport my streamlined body Salt water is my milieu Inside and out

(Sodium is the most abundant positive electrolyte ion in living bodies, and chloride the most abundant negative ion, governing the interchange of elements through cellular walls)

When I die, my body will settle in the deep dark oceanic abyss
To establish a home for deep sea critters
A hotspot for genetic intermingling
I'll be the salty foster parent of new species
Mutating up the evolutionary ladder

(Magma circulating through the Earth's hot innards has a similar sodium profile.)

When the seas dry up, my carcass will stew in a salty evaporating broth Then sediments will layer over my bones and calcify Fossilizing over eons

(It's postulated that salty brine underlies the polar ice caps on Mars.)

But for now, I experience intentionality Tasting the subtle salt impurities that signal Schools of krill Predators Sexual receptivity And always... the ubiquitous exudation of Man.

I cruise the locations of loss and treasure Of destruction and creation Of joy and strife. I am the guardian My flukes festooned with razor-sharp barnacles Bone white against my slick grey hide Bespeckled by the prismatic play of light through blue water I am your White Whale I am monstrous I am divine I leap I breach I slap You have my attention, Man.

You don't know your place in this infinite scheme I wish I was your nemesis, but for all my ancient power I am helpless

CHILD OF THE MODERN PROMETHEUS

by Gregg Chamberlain

Everyone knows the story Of science in pursuit of glory.

Fingers nervous with anticipation, Pull away the veil of Creation.

> We share the fame But not the blame.

> > What am I?

Is this my body?

A living patchwork.

Bits and pieces Of charnel house refuse. Gleanings of graveyard garbage.

> Stolen in secret Assembled in darkness

Alive at the midnight hour.

Why am I?

Have I a purpose?

Is there a reason For my being?

Am I a metaphor? Or a parable? An object lesson? Or a warning?

Cogito ergo sum.

Is that all That there is For me?

Who am I?

I have no name.

My Maker gave me none.

Still, I am called many things.

Monster.

Creature.

Abomination.

But never

Human.

THE GODDESS OF BEDTIME STORIES

By Neile Graham

Each night looking for the bones of someone's tale shaping the steps that frame it finding the paths that might

become stairs: risers of stone, spine-bound and flaring, spiraling up in the darkened, desecrated abbey to reach

the edge of nothing, the sky and no more stone, meaning the whole night, the broken edges of rooms becoming air.

Or instead the stairs are wooden, glowing with lacquered care, lifting a trail of silk carpet, leading somewhere rare and fine. Or maybe

it's just a staggered climb of dragon footsteps in mud. She shapes the world, word after word, into a ladder

aimed at the prickling stars, where she reaches a hand to the overwrought moon while the other reaches down, down,

down. Her breath the breeze that calms the bedsheets, warms the blankets, presses backs to free your sleeping wings.

THE WELL

by Frances Skene

The well was once a brick-lined enclosure in a village square.

It collected the souls of some who passed on, a handful each year.

Of course, those souls didn't take up much room. You could talk to someone you loved while lowering your bucket for water.

Now the well is a pile of rubble amidst what's left of the village, but the souls are still there.

We have come to listen to the ones who entered the well so suddenly.

They recall the horrors of war, and the relief that death brought when the missiles came.

THE PRICE

by Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

he spends impulsively

a rescued hostage here a cure for cancer there

each crucial burst of magic summoned at haphazard cost of random memories forever lost

NEW NEIGHBOUR

by Mark Thomas

I carelessly parked my body under a black walnut tree. Soon, my body was spattered with viscous sap, marked with tiny footprints and dented by fallen fruit.

My new neighbour asked if he could take my body for a drive, since I didn't seem to be using it.

"Sure," I said, flushed with new neighbourliness, "it's a shame to let it sink into the gravel because I lack motor-vation." My new neighbour smiled and climbed in.

Next morning, I heard whistling as the new neighbour sluiced blood and shame from my extremities with a hose.

He saw me staring, my fingers lightly touching living room window glass. The man waved, water droplets refracted sunlight, and he said those words I dreaded: "I need to keep your body for a few more days."

Then, more water spattered against my filthy carapace and the new neighbour smiled with tiny pointed teeth. He knew I was powerless, like a ghost. "You don't mind, do you?" He said, and turned away, without waiting for an answer.

HELP WANTED

by Gregg Chamberlain

He only had this one job, our Bob. But Bob didn't like to do his job. So now we have no more Bob. Now who would like to have Bob's job? Arkham Imports, 1-800-Cthulhu. Ask for Yob.

CATS AND DOGS IN SPACE

by Carolyn Clink

A feline's fur loses its static feel as it leaves Earth and heads to the dog star at faster-than-light speed on ships of steel with currents flowing along magnetic bars. There's no retirement, no graveyard plot for crew this far out, only time to fill and cats to kick and curse and dogs named Spot to walk both up and down the deck until something snaps and the chores outweigh a cat's company or a dog's cool nose for crime or maybe space changes and mutates that bond between cat and dog and man. In time cadets begin to load the astro-gun with hissing, barking live ammunition.

WITH NEITHER A BANG NOR A WHIMPER

by Lisa Timpf

News Headline: "Cosmologist Katie Mack explores scenarios for the end of the universe"*

funny, how I figured the universe would continue infinitely, like that one friend you can depend on to pick you up no matter what

and I've tried not to be one for gloom and doom, but I must admit, when I heard about the cosmologist positing the various ways

our universe might wind down it felt like a gut-punch, as though humanity had just been informed that a beloved relative

was diagnosed with a terminal disease and may leave us sooner than we thought, or want to think,

and suddenly the universe was filled with falling stars, hemorrhaging time, counting down to an ultimate oblivion deeper and more dire than death

maybe our extraterrestrial neighbors have glimpsed that abyss, and that explains why they've never bothered to come and say hello

I imagine them sitting, locked in despair, on some far-off rock, their rockets grounded, their fleet of silver ships silent and still...

*cbc.ca/radio, October 21, 2022

PANDORA'S BOX

by Derek Newman-Stille

It happens in the interstitial spaces between heartbeats the ghosts come whispering up through the silence Stygian dark a sip of Lethe before the awakened world rushes back with the next beat They linger betwixt and between

liminal the hush between breaths when we die a little and the shadows creep across the corners of our eyes.

We never stop being haunted teetering on the edge of life on the edge of monsters afraid to open up afraid of what's inside

but they wait in a cage of bones drowned in blood for a long enough pause for the space between heartbeats to be long enough for the prolonged silence

The drum of the heart settles them exorcises disempowers casts them to the depths inside

But they linger waiting for an opening.

THE BRIDGE

By Jameson Grey

Unable to honour the boatman's toll, I wander the riverbank this night of days, For weeks, for years, until an old inn, light—and hope. *"There is another way,"* the taverner says.

"A bridge..." — of course, there is a bridge! Yet the bridge is of the ancients— Older than the keeper of the inn— Its levy unknown, merely its existence.

I venture forth, I dare not look down Each step a creak, a yelp, a splinter, Warnings from earlier souls, fallen, gone now Lost in the mist of Cimmerian winter.

I move on, regardless I've come for catabasis I cross over to the under—while below, The mystery of Hades ripples across the Styx.

WITCHING HOUR

By Geoffrey Hart

When the chill winds of October roam despondent through the night And the clouds come scudding over, then there comes a sudden fright. When a black cat stands before you, meets your eyes with hidden power And a chill goes racing through you... Then it's come, the witching hour.

When the shadows in the graveyard move from tomb to tree and back And a hidden something prods you as the evening fades to black. When the something hides again, lurking restless in its bower And you're not sure that it's left you... Then it's come, the witching hour.

When a bat flits racing past, throwing shadows 'neath the moon And far off a wild-wolf howls, then you know it's coming soon. When you wake from restless sleep, feel a sudden urge to cower As the shadows start to creep...

Then it's come, the witching hour.

OOPS!

by Greg Fewer

catching up on chores a spaceman cleans his helmet dons it and sneezes

THE FLIP SIDE

J.D. Dresner

Mirrors don't lie. You look, someone looks back. You reach for the glass, another's hand impedes. Quick as you are, there's a copycat that can match your speed. You'll never pass you entering our world, now can we? Aguona you entering our world, now can we?

Behind your reflection, a bed. Behind that, a poster: Tournée du Chat Noir, asleep, waits before climbing through hand black house as before climbing through a strength and the state of cat. Art deco, yellow eyes, red halo. Her stare can burn skin and stand hairs on end.

As you lose yourself within the frame, you wonder . . . Can you ever be a tourist of the flip side? Can you deceive your mirror twin with a feint left and a pivot right? *Poof!* you're through the looking glass. But wait . . . in the flip side left is right, right is left.

Behind you, the cat's vigilant gaze rests heavily upon your shoulder, her behaviour mimicked through the glass. She hates you from both worlds . Can't wait for you to leave. How long must you stare into that mirror?

Mirrors sometimes lie. When you aren't looking, I often look back. When you extend a hand, I block it with mine. Quick as you are, I will always be quicker. We cannot have

You've got a cozy bed, I see. And a poster of my cat. She watches you fall the mirror. Mine visits you too, kneads your skin, plays with your hair as you slumber.

You are hypnotized by my gaze, aren't you? Paralyzed in wonder about this flipped side of your world. You wish you could step through, sit on my bed, play with my cat as I do with yours once you've left. Isn't that right, mon chat noir?

Behind you, she presents an art deco smile, her behaviour the antithesis to what you see behind me. She can't wait for you to leave so she can climb through the mirror, nuzzle in beside me on my bed. If only you would stop staring at yourself.

THE FLIP SIDE

J.D. Dresner

OUR TIME AND SPACE

By Mahaila Smith

We live, we make, we work in interconnected stratigraphies. We alter our histories. We are nostalgic time travelers building and rebuilding our homes. Reusing river stones and rafters. Treasuring the objects of our ancestors. We are all the things we've ever been. A lineage of becoming and unbecoming. Peeling back a cross-section of our community will show you this place, in all its seasons, and what we grew, how we ate. How we molded the land to suit our needs. How this has always been our home. Foundations built on foundations, orchards spread over graveyards. These are our memories, archived in earth.

LIGHT FANTASTIC

By Guy Immega

Rows of recycled rockets On a desert island Boom and blast Every five minutes Night and day For twenty years; Payloads of silvery solar sails Hope for an overheated world.

Gossamer discs spin Mirrors glint Vectoring solar flux Navigating on command Tacking upward, outward, sunward; Flocks of trillions dance In lazy Lissajous orbits Doing the do-si-do at Lagrange One.

Like dust on a lightbulb The subtle penumbra Embraces our planet; Cooling tempers Cooling the ocean Absorbing industrial exhalations, While choral coral celebrates Renewed life.

Muted hurricanes Banished biblical floods Dampened wildfires Rebounding glaciers; Bruised biomes sprout Ruined cities rebuild People breathe easy The world restored.

Let there be limited light!

ABOUT THE POETS AND ARTIST

Gregg Chamberlain

Gregg lives in rural Ontario, Canada, with his missus, Anne, and their cats, who have 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.

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.

Carolyn Clink

Carolyn won the 2022 Aurora Award for Best Poem/Song for "Cat People Café," which appeared in <u>Polar Starlight #3</u>. She won the same award in 2011 for "The ABCs at the End of the World." Her genre poetry publications include *Weird Tales, Analog, Imaginarium 2012: The Best Canadian Speculative* Writing, On Spec, Tesseracts, Tales of the Unanticipated, Room, and all 5 volumes of Northern Frights.

J.D. Dresner

J.D. has multiple poems published in <u>Polar Starlight</u> and <u>Academy of the</u> <u>Heart and Mind</u>, including *For the Robots, Our Sunset*, and *Freckles*, with another three being published in 2024. His short story, "Dragons v. Subways," is set to be published in volume 2 of <u>Versus</u> in 2025, and his short story, "The Death Sentence," will be published in a British magazine in 2025 as well. Dresner's novellas, <u>Sword & Witchhazel</u> and <u>A Goblin's Mind</u>, are available in 50+ countries, and can be found on Amazon and Indigo.

J.D. lives in Langley, British Columbia, where he provides professional book layout, design, and editorial work for various publishers. More information about Dresner can be found at <u>jddresner.com</u>.

Greg Fewer

Greg originally hails from Montréal, Québec, Canada. His speculative fiction and poetry have appeared in (among other places): *Cuento Magazine, Lovecraftiana, Monsters: A Dark Drabbles Anthology, Page & Spine, Polar Borealis, Polar Starlight, Scifaikuest, Star*Line,* The Nafallen University Course Catalogue, *The Sirens Call, Utopia Science Fiction,* and *Worth 1,0000 Words: 101 Flash Science Fiction Stories by 101 Authors.* He has twice been a Dwarf Stars finalist (2021, 2023).

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.

Jameson Grey

Jameson is originally from England but now lives with his family in western Canada. His work has appeared in *Dark Recesses Press* magazine, *Dark Dispatch*, and in anthologies from publishers such as Ghost Orchid Press, Heads Dance Press and Hellbound Books. He can be found online at jameson-grey.com.

Geoffrey Hart

Geoff (he/him) works as a scientific editor, specializing in helping scientists who have English as their second language publish their research. He also writes fiction in his spare time and has sold 72 stories thus far. Visit him online at <u>www.geoff-hart.com</u>.

Guy Immega

Guy is a retired aerospace engineer. His company, Kinetic Sciences Inc., built autonomous robots for the space station, robots to clean up nuclear waste, and patented miniature fingerprint sensors. He served in the Peace Corps in Africa and vaccinated nomads in the Sahel against smallpox. In 2018, he presented an invited paper at a conference in Abuja, Nigeria on an engineering plan to save Lake Chad in the Sahara.

Guy is currently working on a scheme to counteract global warming with solar sailing mirrors in the L1 region of space between the Earth and Sun. See his website: www.planet-cooling.com.

Guy's hard SF debut novel, *Super-Earth Mother*, published by EDGE SF&F (Calgary), is now available from all online booksellers, and in book stores.

Derek Newman-Stille

My name is Derek Newman-Stille and I am a Queer, Nonbinary, Disabled, Fat, Femme settler Canadian (Turtle Island) author, poet, academic, editor, visual artist, and activist. I am the 9-time Aurora Award-winning creator of the digital humanities site *Speculating Canada* and the associated radio show. I frequently use fantasy and science fiction as a means of elucidating possibilities and potentials, reimagining the way that we situate identities and ideas.

I have published poetry in fora such as *Fat Studies In Canada: (Re)Mapping The Field* (Inanna) and *Whispers Between Fairies* (Renaissance Press), performed and published poetry for Artsweek Peterborough's SHIFT: Post-Code Tour, and performed poetry for Peterborough's Arts Ability: Taking the Stage.

In addition, I have published short fiction in *Dark Waters* (Poise and Pen Publishing), and *Nothing Without Us* (Renaissance Press). I have edited the collections *Over the Rainbow: Folk and Fairy Tales from the Margins* (Exile), and *We Shall Be Monsters* (Renaissance Press). Additionally, Nathan Frechette and I co-published our collection of short fiction *Whispers Between Fairies* (Renaissance Press).

Frances Skene

Frances is the author of a poetry chapbook, *Seasons*, and two one-act stage plays that were locally produced. In addition to her poems and stories in *Polar Starlight* and *Polar Borealis*, she has been published in *Eye to the Telescope*, the magazine of SFPA, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association. Her poem, "Angels," in <u>Polar Starlight #6</u>, made it to the long list for the 2023 Rhysling Award.

She is a co-author of the novel, <u>Windship: The Crazy Plague</u>, available from Amazon.

Mahaila Smith

Mahaila (any pronouns) is a young femme writer, living and working on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg in Ottawa, Ontario. They are one of the co-editors for <u>The Sprawl Mag</u>. They like learning theory, crocheting whimsical objects and writing speculative poetry. Their debut chapbook, *Claw Machine*, was published by Anstruther Press in 2020. You can find more of their work on their website: <u>mahailasmith.ca</u>

J.M. Spronk

J.M. (they, them) is a retired air traffic controller who finds writing to be just as stressful but less life-threatening. They graduated Simon Fraser University's The Writer's Studio in 2015 (Southbank 2014) and have previously been published in *Pulp Literature* and await publication at *Zooscape*. In real life, J.M. is owned by Lucas the cat (AKA Agent Orange) and Remy the 80pound doodle, who both rightly assume they are the centre of the universe.

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.*

Mark Thomas

Mark Thomas is an artist and writer living in St. Catharines, Ontario. In a previous life he was a teacher, wrestling coach, and ex-member of Canada's national rowing team. Website: <u>https://flamingdogshit.com/</u>

Lisa Timpf

Lisa is a retired HR and communications professional who lives in Simcoe, Ontario. When not writing, she enjoys bird watching, vegetable gardening, and walking her cocker spaniel/Jack Russel mix Chet. Her speculative poetry has appeared in *New Myths, Star*Line, Triangulation: Seven-Day Weekend, Eye to the Telescope*, and other venues. Her collection of speculative haibun poetry, *In Days to Come*, is available from Hiraeth Publishing. You can find out more about Lisa's writing projects at <u>http://lisatimpf.blogspot.com/</u>.

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WILL BE PUBLISHED IN MAY 2024

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WILL BE PUBLISHED IN JUNE 2024

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