

SOL RISING

January 2011

FREE

Remembering Satoshi Kon

The Merrill Breaks Bread With
the Authors of *Tesseracts 14*

Celebrating Theodore Sturgeon

ChiZine's Spec Fic Colloquium
Roars Into Town

Activist. Poet. Humanist.
Chan Davis Drops By the Merrill

Michael Swanwick Takes Centre
Stage at the Merrill

The Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy



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Sol Rising

Friends of the Merrill Collection
Number 43 January 2011

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From the Editor

Stumbling After the White Rabbit

By Michael Matheson

Yes, we've changed the production schedule again. Um, mea culpa? From now on we're going to be putting out the Winter issue at the beginning of the year, and the Summer issue in ... well, the summer.

The change was inevitable. The Friends and the Merrill Collection were in overdrive in 2010. By year's end the Merrill had hosted an astonishing *eighteen* events (an average of an event every three weeks). Let's just say we're all looking forward to a more ... quiescent ... year to come.

But before we leave the year that was behind, it's worth looking for a moment at the publishing industry's continued twisting and writhing in an attempt to find purchase in a changing landscape.

Amazon.com's sales figures consistently had e-books outselling print hardcovers, and there do seem to be a growing number of Kindles and other e-readers about. It was less than a month ago that I glanced down at someone sitting reading, near where I was standing on the bus, and recognized text from Tolkien's *The Two Towers*.

So even our own rarified ilk of Spec Fic lovers are gravitating toward the shiny sliver-thin boxes like dazed magpies. Personally, I still find e-readers immensely uncomfortable to use, but my view is more and more in the minority. I am not, however going to concede the absurd point floating around the internet that 'physical books are going to be entirely replaced by e-books'.

It was a very sane voice (the ownership of which escapes me) who last year quite rightly pointed out that every new technology to come along is so hyped. Radio was hailed as the death knell of the print media. Television was supposed to kill radio, and the internet was going to make television superfluous. So far they're all still alive and kicking.

And publishing, like technology, is a venue of change. Yes, over the past year e-books have continued to sell well. And will, I'm sure, continue to do so. But we've also seen a resurgence of small publishing houses, print magazines taking their productions online instead of folding, and a bevy of online magazine startups.

So yes, we're living in a time of change. And change can be terrifying. But it can also be uplifting. And hey, unless you're reading this in the Archive online, you just picked up a whack of text writ across the carcass of a dead tree.

How 'bout *them* apples?

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Farewell Satoshi-sama

By Donald Simmons

August of 2010 saw the loss of one of the most talented and innovative anime directors in the business, Satoshi Kon, who died far too early at 46 of cancer.

While he only had four theatrical releases to his credit, Kon punched far above his weight in the anime community as he made *films*, as opposed to movies. When you went to see a Satoshi Kon release, you knew you were in for something special, both visually and in terms of storytelling.

Kon started out as an aspiring manga artist who then made the switch to animation layout artist with the film *Roujin Z*, a satirical look at Japan's coming explosion of the elderly crossed with an over-reliance on technology. After that he worked as a supervisor for the great Mamoru Oshii's *Patlabor 2: The Movie*, a deeply serious film that was a striking departure from the comedy-action core of the long-running series. That departure set the tone of his work as an outsider within mainstream anime.

In 1997 Kon had his directorial debut with *Perfect Blue*, a suspense story involving a pop singer making a career change to acting. Her fans are in an uproar, a stalker goes over the edge, her own grasp on reality starts becoming increasingly tenuous, and then things get really messed up. While not a big commercial success, it's a favourite of mine and a film I think Hitchcock would have thoroughly approved of.

Much of his later work continued with the ideas of blending fantasy and reality, sympathy for societal outsiders and a belief in the redemptive power of love. His second film, *Millennium Actress* was released in 2002 and was centred around a retired actress who mysteriously withdraws from the public eye at the peak of her career. Drawn out by a documentary filmmaker, we learn her life story as portrayed by scenes from her movies, an idea that allows Kon to pay homage to several different styles of Japanese film-making, from Japanese woodblock prints to Kurosawa films (Kurosawa-type cameos often pop up in his work). A commercial and critical success, it earned Kon several awards.

Kon followed up quickly in 2003 with *Tokyo Godfathers*. On

Christmas Eve a trio of homeless people in Tokyo (a middle-aged alcoholic, a runaway girl, and a drag queen) discover a baby and set out across the city to search for her parents. His biggest budget film to date, it looked at the plight of the homeless, homosexuals, and other outsiders in a culture that is generally unforgiving toward them. All the while not losing a comedic touch.

In a change of pace in 2004 Kon created the 13-episode television series *Paranoia Agent*, about a juvenile serial killer.

An anthology-type series, the episodes followed the repercussions of the killings on a large cast of characters. Kon used the series to express a large number of his ideas that by themselves didn't fit into his larger projects.

In 2006, after several years of development, Kon released his masterpiece *Paprika*, about a researcher who uses an experimental invention to actually enter into people's dreams as mental therapy. When one device is stolen the wall between dreams and reality starts breaking down. One of the most visually striking films I've ever seen, it leaves Christopher Nolan's *Inception* in the dust and takes to the limit Kon's fascination with blurring fantasy and reality. Even after multiple viewings there are aspects of the film I just can't figure out, but have decided that it's wrong to try and treat it as a puzzle with a set answer. Kon summed up the film with "Kihonteki na story igai wa subete kaeta", which roughly means "Everything but the fundamental

story was changed". A major success, it earned a large number of film awards and was internationally released.

After *Paprika*, he worked on shorts; he also helped establish, and served as a member of, the Japan Animation Creators Association. He then began work on a new film to be called *The Dream Machine*, but was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2010. He chose to spend the remainder of his life at home, and shortly before his death in August of that year posted a final message to his fans on his blog (a moving and very long goodbye).

Not only was his death a tragedy for his family and friends, but also for his fans who will now never see the films he would have made. A true original in an industry often beset by creative doldrums, Kon will be sorely missed.



Mutant Fleas and Futurian Economics

The Merrill Collection Sells Its Swag

By Lorna Toolis

The Friends of the Merrill Collection Anime and Science Fiction Flea Market was held in the Beeton auditorium of the Toronto Reference Library on September 11, 2010.

Attendees browsed the twenty-five tables of anime, science fiction and related materials. There was something for everyone.

Funds raised at this event are used by the Friends of the Merrill Collection to further Collection goals.

[Editor's Note]: You never quite know what you're going to find at the Flea Market. Well, okay, you know that the tables will be overflowing with more Star Trek and Star Wars goodies than you can shake a wookiee at. But the rest is a delightful surprise, somewhere between Christmas morning and your local hobby store's sidewalk sale.

And as we had a flood of photographic evidence to bear out said point we thought we'd share that bounty - which comes to you courtesy of our in-house photographer Anne Dunford.



Let the Word Ring Forth

Taking Over Queen's Park One Bag of Books at a Time

By Lorna Toolis

Last year's booth at *The Word on the Street* Festival was so successful that the Friends of the Merrill Collection decided to take a booth every year, rather than every other year. And so on September 26, 2010, the Friends shared a booth with the Friends of the Osborne Collection (to reduce costs) out at Queen's Park.

The Friends of the Merrill Collection sold paperbacks - ten paperbacks in a plastic bag - donated by members as a fundraiser. The booth was extremely popular with the members of the public, and has proven to be an excellent means of reaching people who did not realize the Merrill Collection existed. At one point, when the table was mobbed, Arlene Morlidge was tossing bags of paperbacks to people determined to purchase, who couldn't get close to the table.

[Editor's Note]: The 2010 Word on the Street Festival was the 20th iteration of the immensely popular gathering in support of literacy, the written word, and the simple joys of the fall fair (sans costumed gathering, thankfully). And though the Merrill booth was clearly the most interesting thing to be found at this

year's Toronto fair (unless you happen to be three feet tall and watch TVO Kids) the event itself is so much larger than just the Toronto exhibition.

2010 was a good year for the Festival, in more ways than one. This year there were also Word on the Street gatherings held in Vancouver, Saskatoon, Kitchener and Halifax. The event draws a sizeable crowd its true, but it also draws writers out of hiding (usually only accomplished via book launches/signings or hot food - we're a squirrelly lot). Yann Martel was a special headliner at this year's Festival - a fact which I suspect his slightly more local Saskatoon Word on the Street may not be entirely happy about - but there was also a bevy of fascinating people either reading, delivering lectures or just walking the pavilions. For a full look at the Festival that was, and news and information on what's coming up for next year's 21st Word on the Street Festival go to:

<http://www.thewordonthestreet.ca/wots/Toronto>

We'll see you there next year, right? Right? Good.

Chan Davis at the Merrill

Activist | Poet | Humanist

By Lorna Toolis

On October 21, the Friends of the Merrill Collection hosted a celebration of the career of Chan Davis, marked by *It Walks in Beauty*, a collection of his fiction and non-fiction writing.

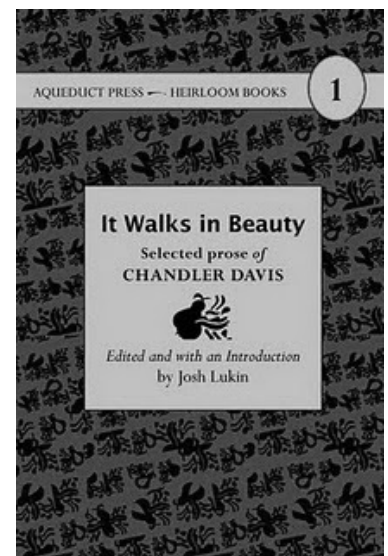
Chan Davis was a close personal friend of Judith Merrill, the Collection's founder. His science fiction was published between 1946 and 1962, usually in *Astounding Science Fiction*. He taught mathematics at the University of Michigan, until being brought in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee in the United States.

After he got out of jail in 1960 (having served six months, during which he did a slew of research - having time on his hands), he moved to Canada and taught mathematics at the

University of Toronto while continuing to work as a peace activist.

Music for the event was provided by his son, Josh Davis, who is a professional musician.

Fifty-three people attended Professor Davis' talk, asked questions and reminisced about the early days of the Merrill Collection.



A Dark Tide, Rising

ChiZine's First Spec Fic Colloquium Comes to Town

By Michael Matheson

In the wood paneled halls of Hart House, on October 23rd of last year, a grey and damp morning was brightened by a gathering of renowned Canadian Spec Fic authors and something in the vicinity of 150 attendants. The all day event was sponsored by ChiZine Publications to celebrate the diversity and distinctiveness of Canadian Speculative Fiction. The program consisted of lectures, author readings and general schmoozing (which intensified somewhat later in the evening when the open bar, well, opened, before the author readings began).

There was a welcome from the good people at CZP, and a short presentation on saving the Sunburst Award: a video display assembling portions of clips submitted by members of the Canadian Spec Fic community (including the Merril's own Lorna Toolis). The campaign to save the Sunburst is nothing new, but knowledgeable and enthusiastic discourse on the matter can only serve to keep the Sunburst alive.

After the opening remarks discussion turned to the entire reason for everyone being there: what is the current state of Canadian Spec Fic? How do we define ourselves as a community? What is our impact? And just what are the broader horizons beyond our increasingly less and less literal borders?

The event organizers put the Colloquium together with an eye to engaging "controversial" subjects. The lecturers and their topics ranged far and wide, each delving into and approaching the subject from their own unique perspective.

Below are the Colloquium speakers, and a brief overview of what each discussed.



The Care and Feeding of Horror - Or How a Very Unpleasant Emotion Became a Very Unstable Genre

Given by David Nickle

A wide ranging, largely personal and engaging presentation, with an eye to the larger issue of why we crave horror, and why we crave "subjective" horrific experience. Delivered in Nickle's usual riveting and sparse style.



Canadian Science Fiction: Taking Over the World, Nicely

Given by Julie Czerneda

Engaging controversy head on, Czerneda tackled a stereotype we're all familiar with: Canadians really are friendly and polite. Maybe too much for our own good.

Why You Can't Teach Writing

Given by Bob Boyczuk

A wry presentation on the dangers of attaching grave import to learning the craft, and not doing the craft - in the form of an AA testimony (the subtitle of his lecture was "Hi, My Name is Bob, and I'm a Workshopaholic").



Queering the Genre

Given by Gemma Files and Michael Rowe

Delivering a presentation

on the use, misuse, and abuse of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual) in Speculative Fiction, Files and Rowe shared personal and professional experiences - one from the perspective of a straight woman writing queer fiction, the other from a gay man editing and working in a genre not often friendly or understanding of a diverse literary subculture.





Gods, Jackboots, and Rule 34: How Pornography Could Save the World

Given by Peter Watts

An outstanding lecture ranging between the highly personal and subjective and the deeply factual. Watts' solution to getting humanity

to help itself may also be one of the simplest, if not most intelligent approaches I've ever heard: if all goal-oriented actions could have orgasm as the outcome, everything would get done.

Cognitive Science and the Making of Fiction

Given by Karl Schroeder

Exploring the act of storytelling as both a conscious and instinctive act, Schroeder asked us to consider just how much of what we interpret on a daily basis is really mere neurological hardwiring - and how that ultimately impacts our ability not only to create, but also to understand.



Against Realism: Hard SF, Autobiography, and Other Questionable Strategies for Writing Fiction

Given by Claude Lalumière

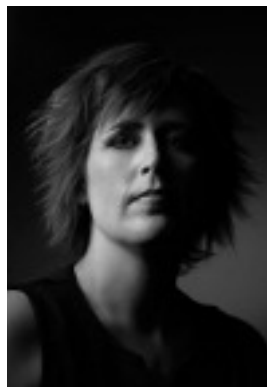
An introspective and largely abstract lecture, made all the more delightful by Lalumière's gift for language and readily self-deprecating wit.



Making the Supernatural Seem Natural: The World of Contemporary Urban Fantasy

Given by Kelley Armstrong

A combination of personal experience and professional insight into Urban Fantasy's origin and future from one of its leading proponents.



Murdering Everyone: Raising Children While Cultivating Repulsive Thought

Given by Tony Burgess

The flip side of David Nickle's talk, and perhaps on that note the most appropriate closing lecture. Burgess' understanding of the immediacy and foul nature of horror's impact (evinced in his evocative writing) gave us a window we may not truly wish to look through into the darkest aspects of horror. Theirs. And ours.



The final event of the Colloquium was a two-part series (with a short interlude between sets) of author readings, for which the incomparable Guy Gavriel Kay made a special appearance, reading from *Under Heaven*.



The remaining readings were given by Gemma Files, Tony Burgess, Julie Czerneda, Karl Schroeder, Kelley Armstrong, Peter Watts, Claude Lalumière and David Nickle.

The intended order of the readings was altered somewhat throughout the night, and Watts, not Nickle as originally planned, closed the evening's festivities (the bar still being open).

The Colloquium *was* a celebration of Canadian Spec Fic talent, but is our talent pool diverse and distinctive? Yes, but we tend to skew toward the darker and more mature side of Spec Fic. If "genre fiction" (the common disparagement levied against Spec Fic denoting it as *lesser* than Lit Fic) is the name of the game then we as a community do not play by the rules.

There will always be the argument that Canadian fiction is light and frothy, and while we do have a certain *je ne sais quoi* when it comes to wit and the wry tale, we are I think most at home with the night terrors and the bitterness of our bared souls.

You can't have introspection without actually looking at what lies beneath the fragile glass reflecting the sea of smiling faces.

And ChiZine has proved that it's willing to roll around in the lingering pit-deep darkness - to look long and hard down alleys arrayed with shop windows containing baubles of searing soul-gazing beauty, and to walk in the company of agents of clarity and dream, all the while stealing sidelong glances into the Abyss.

We are the better for it.

For Still We Seek That Gloried Sea

Reading Theodore Sturgeon at the Merril

By Lorna Toolis

On November 10, 2010, forty people attended the four readings celebrating the publication of the final volume of The Complete works of Theodore Sturgeon, *Case and the Dreamer, Volume XIII: The Complete Stories of Theodore Sturgeon* by North Atlantic Press.

The Sturgeon Literary Trust, administered by Theodore Sturgeon's daughter Noël Sturgeon, organized the readings and Noël shared memories of her father and talked about the satisfaction of knowing that her father's work will remain in print.

The readers for the event were Robert Charles Wilson (reading "Bianca's Hands"), Lesley Livingston (reading "The Clinic"), Michelle Sagara (reading "A Saucer of Loneliness") and Nalo Hopkinson (reading "Crate").

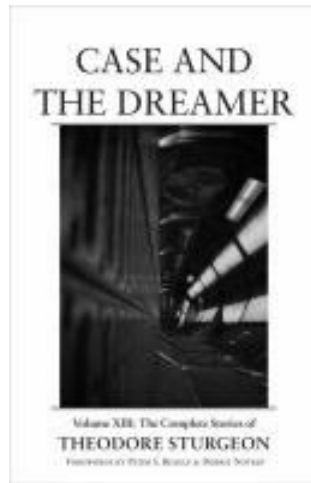
[Editor's Note]: Author readings are always a time to sit back and bask in the warm glow of a

delicious performance. But seldom do you get a handful of truly excellent authors reading from someone else's work.

And yet Noël Sturgeon has been arranging just that to help promote the ongoing release of the Complete Stories of Theodore Sturgeon volumes. And considering that the thirteen (Sturgeon wrote over 250 short stories during his lifetime) anthologies have been seeing print piecemeal over the last 15 years that's no small undertaking.

And it's an understandable commitment on multiple levels. For Noël it is an act of love. For the rest of us, those who are not family to Sturgeon but feel that through his work he was somehow family to us, it is also an act of love, albeit of a different kind.

Those of us who follow in his footsteps walk in the shadow of a giant. And we are content to enjoy the shade.



Celebrating Swanwick

And His Birthday. No, Seriously, We Had Cake.

By Lorna Toolis

The Friends of the Merril Collection together with SFContario sponsored an appearance by science fiction writer Michael Swanwick. Mr. Swanwick was the guest of honour at SFContario later in the same week.

The organizers of SFContario generously suggested that Mr. Swanwick should make an appearance at the Merril Collection as well as at SFContario, asking only one thing. They asked that the Friends of the Merril Collection organize a birthday cake for Mr. Swanwick, as it was his 60th birthday on the night of his appearance at the Merril Collection. The Friends and Collection staff were delighted to oblige.



And so, on November 18, 2011, Mr. Swanwick talked about writing science fiction in general and his writing and editing in particular. The substantial audience obviously enjoyed the reading and asked a great many questions.

[Editor's Note]: There's nothing quite like having a guest who's willing to sit back and be fêted. Granted, there was that most excellent reading to be had after the cake and the sea of people all waiting to ask their questions of Mr. Swanwick, but cake is such an excellent form of bribery, or, uh, appreciation, isn't it?

The Bell Tolls For Thee

The Artwork of Jeanette Ardley

By Michael Matheson

As Ms. Ardley (pictured right) has been good enough to allow us the use of another of her pieces to grace the cover of this issue of *Sol Rising* we thought we'd do our best to return the favour and shed a little light on an artist who tends to spend a lot of time dealing with the dark.

A highly talented photographer who's still modest enough to consider herself an amateur (though her work clearly says otherwise), Jeanette Ardley is, in her own words:



"... a self-taught amateur photographer currently residing in Wiltshire in the UK. I reside in Marlborough, Wiltshire and flit between Bristol, Swindon and Salisbury for shoots.

I don't feel bound to one particular element or subject in my work but I do however adore the darker alternative side of things."

Ms. Ardley speaks quite rightly. Even a quick perusal of one of her galleries (her main website "www.sombredreams.com") hosts a set of links to her other work under the heading "Offsite Links") makes her fascination with monochromatic work and an affinity for stark contrast evident.

And though there is at times a reverence in her work for the grittier and sometimes gorier of concepts, there is also a subtle inclination toward the light. Not all is black as midnight, and even in the darkest of pieces there is a sense of something waiting just outside of frame. Something that may be the breaking dawn, or perhaps a second dusk.



But whatever it is, there is a captivating curiosity and wonder waiting there, just beyond seeing.

Sifting Tosh in Tartarus

Or, A Diatribe Delivered in Frank Verse

By Michael Matheson

I was reading a thread posted on the Forums of the *Asimov's Science Fiction* website just before the New Year where someone new to the website's message boards (I don't recall their chosen tag) had suggested that, if they weren't being too far out of line, did anyone else think that maybe the stories being published as of late in *Asimov's* were not by and large of the highest quality (yes, I've paraphrased).

This, I would imagine fairly young reader from their manner of speech and not yet entirely cultivated mode of self-abnegation, was taken rather quickly "to task" by other, more seasoned members of the Forums who politely informed the young thread initiator that this topic was not a new one, and that there was an ongoing thread on this subject over "that-away".

And it's entirely true that this debate is not a new one. Sturgeon's Law covers the phenomenon quite aptly, and if we do as Beagle suggests in his Introduction to *The Secret History of Fantasy* (Tachyon, 2010; p.13) we can quite rightly apply Gresham's Law to the dilemma as well:

...Gresham's Law applies in popular art, as in economics: the bad, or the mediocre, drives out the good, if only because there's so much more of it produced that the good either goes unrecognized, unpublished, or - in time - unproduced.

There are, predictably, abundant theories as to why bad writing is produced in profusion. And quite truthfully as they all tend to blend together somewhat for me I'm not going to rehash the point here. In fact, I'm going to suggest an entirely alternate reasoning for the matter altogether:

Many Editors are either no longer able, or unwilling, to recognize crap when they see it.

This obviously does not take the woebegone ineffectual or slovenly writer out of the equation - indeed they should remain squarely pegged as the root of the problem - but it does address why appallingly bad work gets *published* so consistently. And I would further suggest that this problem is compounded by the vast army of slush readers who are bandied about as the best way to reduce wait times for authors, ease the burden on the Editor's available time, and effectively streamline the meat grinder through which all incoming fiction in a submissions process must inevitably flow.

Because there in a nutshell is our problem.

We have convinced ourselves that we must mechanize, streamline, bludgeon, and ultimately brutalize a process which

by its very nature *must not* be reduced to a series of paint-by-number decisions and criteria.

I, for one, have always found the idea of slush readers ludicrous - and I say this as both a writer and a reader. The entire notion of reducing the wait time on a submission presupposes that faster is better, which when performing evaluations based on tone, style, plot, theme and the other elements of a structured work is patently not true. Because it makes one careless.

Writing cannot, much as most academic courses and texts on the 'Essence and Essentials of Creative Writing' would have you believe otherwise, be reduced to mere component parts. The writer who engages in creating a piece out of a bloody great jigsaw of components does both themselves and their reader(s) a disservice. And creates an entirely forgettable story in the process.

It's true that there are essential elements for a story in any given *form* of writing, but these 'essential' components seldom translate properly between all genres or forms, and their application and use differs depending on the literary usage they are being engaged in. You can take the same idea and use it ten different ways, and produce a vast range of works. Take the rather generalized notion of characters being 'haunted' either by an individual presence or the ever-popular psychic imprinture. That one example allows you to create two pieces as diverse as Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit* and Stephen King's *The Shining*.

These are both pieces produced within a given structure (play and novel respectively) but not *bound* by them. And while you can in fact teach the fundamentals of standard structure to a writer, you can never make them great enough to *reject* those boundaries and craft entirely new ones by simply imposing or presenting examples and suggesting that method be copied or reworked.

And it is, of course, those most exceptional pieces that would now be, I submit, almost impossible to get published. Brian Aldiss' "Poor Little Warrior" comes to mind. The almost inconsequential use of 'time travel' as the device on which the story's ability to exist pivots would be considered outré, and the real basis of the piece - which is of course Aldiss' exceptional gift for and bravura display of wordplay - would be utterly ignored.

I can hardly imagine that Avram Davidson's "Selectra Six-Ten" would be any better received, especially as it requires very specific presentation - a function which seems to find only enmity in the hearts of many Editors if one goes strictly



by magazine submission guidelines - and the story itself is subservient (and indeed an afterthought) to, again, wordplay.

Given the passion demonstrated by many online magazines, and some print magazines as well now, for this “streamlining” fad, more and more slush readers are in demand, and over the past year I’ve seen several magazines on the lookout for new first readers - *Ideomancer* and *Strange Horizons* are the two that come immediately to mind.

But we really have to ask whether or not this is a good thing.

By the time an Editor receives a piece handed up the line to them by a slush reader there has already been a de facto decision made. ‘Well it got up this far, it must have at least some merit’. If an Editor does not take this view after a slush reader has given them the text, or if they find fault with the submission, then they must admit that the slush reader’s judgment or taste is flawed - either therefore chucking both the text and the slush reader, or leaving both be and pretending everything is fine.

And I don’t see a lot of turn over in slush readers from this end.

Just to put it in specifics, let’s take the Form Rejection Letter (a function of the Writing Industry I regret to say I am all too familiar with) as example. I don’t know how many of you reading this are writers or Editors, but even those of you who aren’t have probably at least heard the rest of us complain about these things.

Writers hate them because they tell us absolutely nothing. Editors hate them because they’re a necessity in a world where you can’t give an in-depth response to the hundreds of people who send something to you on a monthly basis. But there is the option to stick a couple of lines of reaction into the middle of a Form response. It’s not impossible. *Neo-Opsis* does it, and I’ve seen it elsewhere.

So ask yourself the following question. After reading a story you didn’t like, provided you are of viable status and not currently comatose, you’ve been gifted a reaction. It may be one of revulsion. You may be inordinately glad that the story is over. You may argue vehemently with the writer’s premise, their choice of language, or their senseless use of violence, obscenity or vulgarity, but, unless you are clinically dead *something* ought have stirred in your mind.

And now comes the second question. How hard is it to write down those two fleeting sentences (or one, or whatever) describing why you think the story was badly conceived or plotted, suffered from ineffectual characterization, was a steaming pile of senseless violence, etc.?

You’re sending out a Form Letter anyway. You have to actively generate or manipulate the computer entry fields that will designate where and why this Letter is going to the author. And while I understand that some people may well have

trouble organizing and presenting their thoughts in a clear and concise fashion, I don’t believe that most writers are expecting a Response Letter to read like Dorothy Parker.

It’s not as though we’re going to go off the deep end from whatever you have to say anyway (hell, we’re not even likely to agree with you, though all critique is valuable and helps us in future). I personally have received only one defamatory letter in the past few years, and the only result was that I now refuse point blank to send anything else that magazine’s way or to ever buy another copy of their magazine again - and I’m fairly certain that they couldn’t care less that they no longer receive my inconstant not even \$20 a year spent on buying newsstand copies of their production.

But quality of slush reader judgment aside, first readers may well be an inevitable necessity now. But when we didn’t need a three day, or even three week turnaround time on a story they weren’t necessary. To the best of my memory, John W. Campbell, horribly biased though he may have been, did his own slush reading. The process wasn’t perfect of course. Campbell rejected Cordwainer Smith’s first published story “Scanners Live in Vain” (okay, second published story, but the first appeared in a Cadet Corps high school newspaper in 1928, so Scanners got the glory) out of hand because it was too *other*, too *different*. Cordwainer eventually managed to place it with *Fantasy Book*, where it was published in June of 1950, only two years after his initial submission to what was essentially a fanzine back in March of 1948. *Two years* to get into print. But Campbell published an awful lot of damn fine work despite his adherence to a rather skewed vision of how Speculative Fiction should work.

And even with slush readers there have been better instances than what we see now. I have no doubt from her later exceptional editorial work that Judy Lynn Del Rey did a brilliant job of sifting through the submissions to *Galaxy* when she was acting as the sole frontline trooper for that magazine during Frederik Pohl’s tenure as Editor. *One* slush reader, and though I’ve never found the backlist of *Galaxy*’s catalogue stellar, there were some fine pieces to be found in the magazine’s not inconsiderable span under Pohl’s tenure.

And in modern magazine productions? Truthfully, I’m happy when I find *one* exceptional story in a magazine I’m considering buying. Sometimes I have to go looking hard for one *good* story. Really, this shouldn’t be the case. There are far too many good writers working and producing at least a marginal, if not prolific, body of work for every story accepted by a magazine, genre or other, not to be at least *good*.

But then, that’s not what we’re seeing, is it? So the final two-part question I will leave with you to ponder is this:

Is the seemingly fathomless depth of mediocrity now washing up on the shores of our literary beach like so much foetid flotsam the fault of the lesser-thans who write bad fiction?

Or the people who publish it?



Mad Hatters, Scones, and Carolling à la Cthulhu at the Merril

Wherein We Party With *Friends* and the *Tesseract's 14* Crew (Who Are Also Friends)

By Lorna Toolis

The annual Friends of the Merril Collection Christmas Cream Tea was held on Saturday, December 4, 2010. Friends' Chairman Chris Szego formally presented the new guestbook to the Collection Head, Lorna Toolis.



The new guestbook replaces the Merril Collection's first guestbook, which was started in 1970, when the Merril Collection was opened. The book was designed and built by Robert Wu, highly regarded in the specialized field of hand-made books.



Attendees sang Christmas carols published by the H.P. Lovecraft Historical Society, drank tea and ate scones with whipping cream and jam. A good time was had by one and all.

[Addenda]: Every year the Friends of the Merril host a special guest, or gathering of guests, at the Annual Christmas Cream Tea. This year the Editors and some of the local authors for Tesseract's 14 were good enough to join us and talk a little about the book's development, read from their works and generally have a good time.



We had our share of luminaries at the Christmas Cream Tea thank you very much. From the pages of Tesseract's 14 allow us to present (from left to right): David Nickle, Sandra Kasturi, Brett Alexander Savory (Ed.), David Clink, John Robert Colombo (Ed.) and Suzanne Church.

That First Sci-Fi Store

By Chris Cunningham

If you are thirteen or fourteen years old, Yonge Street is a long, long way away from Oakville. You can't get on your bike and go there. You need to take the GO Train, which at that age is exciting to do by yourself. I'm going to the city! And then you get to Union Station ... and you have to decide at that point that there was a reason to leave this Saturday afternoon. Do this a few times and you start to develop a repertoire of places to visit. Everybody who reads science fiction had a first destination bookstore they discovered. Mine was the World's Biggest Bookstore in 1983-84.

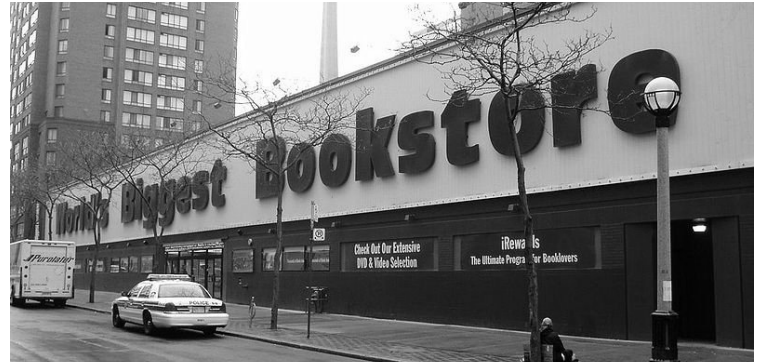
Why not Bakka, you ask? How could my first destination sci-fi store not be the most famous science fiction store in Toronto?

It was far away. It was close to absolutely nothing. As a result, I didn't know it existed. Let me explain.

If you take the train in from Oakville, you are intending to cruise Yonge Street. That's it. Get out at Union, get on the TTC, choose a subway stop, walk down Yonge Street on your way back to the train station. Repeat for several years.

I don't know if Toronto has changed or it's just my perception, but I'm going to posit that Yonge Street used to be something that it isn't now: a sort of 42nd Street of Toronto. It was sin strip a little before my time. Emanuel Jaques, a shoeshine boy of twelve years, was murdered after being lured to the rooftop of a building about where Dundas Square is located, several years before I started cruising Yonge Street. The City of Toronto took steps to curb Yonge Street's seedier aspects of the Street. It had been sleaze on display with peep shows: the unsinkable Zanzibar strip club, and Cinema 3000, which was a movie house busted for playing Russ Meyer flicks.

And there were loads of record stores selling vinyl. Tapes were new. And they didn't have those great covers. Secondhand bookstores were everywhere with National Geographic, novels, more shelves upstairs, and - for collectors - vintage smut mags. There were head shops selling posters of famous rock bands like Led Zeppelin, Kiss, and Duran Duran. For reasons unknown to me some girls in my high school would wear a small alligator clip attached to their feathered hair with a short lanyard of leather at the bottom of which was a single feather of pink or white. I imagine you bought things like that at head shops. There were movie theaters such as the Imperial 6 across from the Eaton's Centre that made you walk up a huge flight of stairs over a bridge spanning a back alley and into another building to see movies. There was another theater at Yonge & Bloor two flights down an escalator underground. And the Uptown had a huge, single theater in a beautiful centenarian building that looked like an amphitheater in the dark.



Are you getting the picture? Yonge Street was an entire ecosystem of some kind. And I haven't said anything about the legendary games store - Mr. Gameway's Ark - at Yonge & Charles, which had been pulled down by the game craze crash of 1983. They had rooms full of Trivial Pursuit they could no longer sell even though they were the sole distributor. They simply bought too much. It was gone before I could take the train to Toronto.

Yonge Street was a complete world of novelty and sleaze and suburban escape. It probably still is.

The World's Biggest Bookstore had a set of turnstiles just beyond the main doorways. They got rid of them recently to my great relief. Turn right on entering and there was a corner of the store that was just science fiction. I'd say it was about a fourth of the current science fiction rack space that science fiction now occupies in the WBB. And it was in a corner in a far part of the store, which was intimate.

The racks on the walls and the standing racks were an explosion of evocative covers the way a science fiction store is to an over imaginative thirteen year old. Stacks of Michael Moorcock novels from Elric to Corum. A beautifully painted book called *The Adventures of Samurai Cat*. A strange pre-Cyberpunk cover of future lowlifes lounging around with a blue woman with rows of breasts.

And John Norman novels. Mirabile dictu, but there was a time when Gor novels - always with a painted cover that would have been at home in other Yonge Street shops - sold millions of copies and were on public display everywhere. Political correctness cleared that out. And perhaps, science fiction was becoming less cultish and more mainstream.

The first science fiction store you frequented was not just about buying books. It was about peeking at potential staring at you from every cover about a wider world about which you knew nothing. I suppose that everybody remembers a certain store when the neighborhood, the walls of the building, and the covers of the books were all talking to you about the future. Not mankind's - yours.

Braving the Bitter Chill of Winter

Actually, Forget That. Stay Inside With These Instead.

By Michael Matheson

You may have noticed it's *friggin' cold* outside this drab and dreary Winter. Consequently, this seems like a most excellent time to dig in and curl up with a warm book (what? You don't warm yours?). But then that vaguely sinful temptation, accompanied by understandable pangs of guilt hits. You *could* watch a movie, yes. But what about the books?

Well, like most things in life, there are two possible paths here. You could either read, or you could watch that ever so tempting movie. Frankly, we think Yogi Berra said it best:

When you come to a fork in the road, take it.

There have been an inordinate number of books adapted into films, across pretty much every category the film industry has come up with. Some of them have even been faithful adaptations. So we thought we'd give those of you who just can't make up your mind as to which path to take a couple of dual route options from our own celluloid corner of the world: Speculative Fiction adaptations.

We're going to skip over *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Not that I mind spending twelve hours at a stretch watching the expanded versions (and I've done it more than once, so yes, sunlight and I are becoming rather estranged), but we thought it might be more fun to cover some less talked about pieces (that means no *Twilight* either - I have no interest in playing in the sandbox with the sparkly beefcake vampire, the puppies, and the painfully ambivalent and indecisive 'heroine'. Those who have a problem with this can bite me, because nobody else from that material will ...).

There are, of course, obvious classics one could curl up with. Robert Wise's *The Day The Earth Stood Still* (1951; adapted from Harry Bates' short story "Farewell to the Master") comes immediately to mind. Also pieces like Fred Wilcox's *Forbidden Planet* (1956; while not a strict adaptation, it is crafted using the central premise of Shakespeare's "The Tempest"), Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956; based on Jack Finney's novel), or even Byron Haskin's *War of the Worlds* (1953; adapted from the H.G. Wells novel).


But the simple joy of discovering, or rediscovering, a much overlooked title is simply too good to pass up. And we like the idea of spreading the wealth, so without further ado ...

First among our offerings would have to be John Frankenheimer's *Seconds* (1966; adapted from David Ely's novel).

Audiences couldn't get over the idea of Rock Hudson moving away from his role as the charismatic leading man, and like the later *Pretty Maids All in a Row* (not SF, though it was adapted by Gene Roddenberry), *Seconds* suffered for it. The novel at least produced some tangible homages. Orson Scott Card's "Fat Farm", for one, clearly owes its existence to Ely's work.

Following the first foray I would be utterly remiss if I did not mention a film that is largely overlooked in favour of the later remake: Howard Hawks' /Christian Nyby's *The Thing (From Another World!)* (1951; adapted from John W. Campbell's "Who Goes There?"). While it's true that John Carpenter's later remake of *The Thing* (1982) was much closer to Campbell's original story, the 1951 adaptation is a piece well worthy of consideration, in spite of the changes to the story, and the lack of credit given to some of the people who worked on it (Nyby and Hawks both had a hand in the direction, but only Nyby received screen credit for same - and Ben Hecht helped craft the treatment, but only Charles Lederer received credit).

Still, for all its minor issues the film is a gem, both in terms of its above average dialogue (Hecht was a master of the almost brutal pacing characteristic of the 1940s screwball comedy, and was responsible for the adaptation of *His Girl Friday*, among other celebrated works) and its stark, almost austere cinematography. And perhaps in retrospect one of the major differences between the two film versions is the use of graphic content. Though not absent, nothing is explicit in the 1951 version - never actually shown on screen, whereas Carpenter's remake is *excessively* graphic (though Carpenter has proved he doesn't need gore to make a film work as evidenced by *Starman* [1984]).



Now, I understand that Science Fiction may not be everyone's cup of tea, and for those of you who still want to curl up with a book to film adaptation there are other options to be had under the benign auspices of Spec Fic classification. What is Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937; adapted by James Hilton from his own novel, with Robert Riskin and Sidney Buchman) if not a Spec Fic story? Shangri-La here is a mythical locus analogous with Utopia. Though Lit Fic may lay claim to much of Hilton's work, we too get to benefit from his literary excellence (though actually the film is a much better, and far less confused adaptation of the story - Hilton had a tendency to clean up the writing and stories of his novels when they were ported to film as evidenced by the adaptations of *Knight Without Armour*, *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, and *Random Harvest*).



Volunteers Needed

If you would like to help with any of the following please contact Lorna Toolis at ltoolis@torontopubliclibrary.ca

Event Setup

In the hour or two before every Friends of the Merrill event (readings, Xmas Tea, etc.) there are minor jobs which need to be done (moving furniture, picking up catered snacks, etc.).

Event Notification

Before Merrill events it is necessary to email notifications to members, contact local weeklies (*Eye*, *NOW*) and local event websites (The Torontoist).

Staff the Tables

Help staff the Merrill promotional table(s) at events such as local sf / fantasy conventions and Word on the Street.

Merril Mailings

Help organize and carry out occasional mass mailings to members of the Friends (generally two to three a year).

Sol Rising

Write articles for our semi-annual newsletter, or help with proofreading, ad sales and/or graphic design.

Marketing/Promotion

Help the Marketing and Promotion Committee look at ways to increase the profile of the Friends and the Collection (among both individuals and corporations) and promote Merrill events. Requires being able to schedule attending periodic meetings and follow-up work to investigate options.

Fundraising

The fundraising committee looks at ideas to raise money to support the Friends and the Collection itself through merchandising sales, fundraising events and the encouragement of donations (personal and corporate). Attendance of periodic meetings and follow-up required.

None of the aforementioned films really whetting your appetite? It's alright. We understand that not everyone has our somewhat obscure tastes. So no worries. We've got a stack of other ideas for you to browse through, and we've even decided to actually *list* some of them here. Unfortunately space is at somewhat of a premium, so we're going to cover the rest of our offerings in brief.

The Witches of Eastwick (1987; adapted from John Updike's novel). Who says Spec Fic can't run to comedy? *Red Dwarf* is still hilarious, and the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is as good now as it was when Douglas Adams' opus first aired in its original form as a BBC Radio program in 1978. Maybe humorous Spec Fic is just easier to get made in the UK?

Ghost Story (1981; adapted from the Peter Straub novel). Overlooked surprisingly often. The cast is marvelous, the tension excellent, gore minimal, and the ending - though not as strong as it might be - is still satisfying.

Things to Come (1936; adapted by H.G. Wells from his own novel). Not spoken of nearly as often as Wells' other work, this is in many respects one of his keenest insights into human folly, and also one of his most hopeful pieces.

Impostor (2001; adapted from Philip K. Dick's short story "The Impostor"). Dick never can seem to catch a break when it comes to faithful adaptations (*Blade Runner* and *Total Recall* spring to mind as radical revisionings), though he currently being deceased I'm not entirely sure how much it bothers him at the moment.

Immortel (Ad Vitam) (2004; adapted by Enki Bilal from his own graphic material). Yes, I can spell. The film is French. This should however not deter you from watching what is a thoroughly fascinating piece of work.

Contact (1997; adapted from Carl Sagan's novel). I never did understand why this film faded into such relative obscurity. It has a finely wrought story and first rate acting. Although, the following remarks overheard several days ago on a TTC bus help make the situation more (painfully) clear: "*I don't get Star Trek. It's so boring. It's just people standing around talking.*" One resists the urge to throttle these people as best one can.

Odds are you won't have some of these films to hand (I do realize most people don't have a film collection as ... eclectic ... as some ...). So maybe, just maybe, it's worth your while to venture out into the frost and bitter ache of winter's embrace to find some of these things. And as there are literally hundreds of Spec Fic films that have faded into the relative light of obscurity, you never know what you'll find to come home and curl up with.

Well, now you know what *we'll* be doing for the rest of the Winter. If anyone asks we're not busy, we're '*in a meeting*'.

See you again come Summer.

On Display in the Reading Room

Cities, a display curated by Kim Hull which explores the role of the City in its various incarnations throughout Spec Fic, will be available for viewing until January 31, 2011. On March 1, 2011 Annette Mocek will unveil her as yet untitled '**humour in SF and F**' themed display. The Merrill Collection is open Monday - Friday from 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM, and on Saturdays between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM.

Upcoming Events

The **Annual General Meeting** of the Friends of the Merrill Collection will be held on January 27, 2011 at 7:00 p.m.

The meeting is open to members and non-members alike, but a current membership for the 2011 year is required to speak or vote during the proceedings.

We look forward to seeing everyone who will be attending.

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Madeleine Ashby will be at the Merrill Collection on March 16, 2011 to talk about anime. She will be giving a talk tentatively titled "While You Were Reading Tolkien I Was Watching Evangelion". The event will begin at 7:00 p.m.

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Glenn Grant, Canadian SF writer and editor, will be at the Merrill Collection on April 8, 2011. The event is slated to start at 7:00 p.m. and will consist not only of a reading from Grant's forthcoming work, but will also include a Q and A session on writing and editing.

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For additional Merrill events and other events of interest, please visit:

www.friendsofmerril.org/events.html

All Great Houses Begin With A Strong Foundation



The Merrill Collection, originally the Spaced Out Library and later renamed for the late Judith Merrill, is the foremost North American public assemblage of Speculative, SF and Fantasy Fiction and is an invaluable tool for enthusiasts, researchers and authors.

The Collection houses a comprehensive array of over 70,000 (and growing) items. The reference stacks include hardcover and paperback fiction, first

and rare editions, TPB graphic works and comic collections, pulp and later era magazines, fanzines, research material and critical essays/reference works and compendia - as well as donated original manuscripts from authors such as Phyllis Gottlieb and Guy Gavriel Kay.

The Friends of the Merrill Collection is a volunteer organization that provides support and assistance to the Merrill Collection through paid membership in

the Friends, through donations, the sponsorship of related events such as readings, book launches and signings, panel discussions, and the publication of the newsletter *Sol Rising*.

Donations made to the Friends go directly toward the above services and the purchase of books for the Collection itself. We invite you to support the Merrill by joining or donating using the form below.

I wish to become a member of the **Friends of the Merrill Collection**. I have enclosed payment (if choosing a cheque or money order please make it payable to "**The Friends of the Merrill Collection**") for a year's membership fee as indicated (memberships run from January to December):

- ☐ Individual \$35.00
- ☐ Student (under 18) \$20.00
- ☐ Institution \$37.50

This is a:

- ☐ Membership Renewal
- ☐ New Membership

Name _____
Address _____

Phone _____ ☐ Cell ☐ Fax _____
E-Mail _____

Please mail to: The Friends of the Merrill Collection
c/o The Merrill Collection, Toronto Public Library
239 College Street, 3rd floor, Toronto, ON M5T 1R5

- ☐ In addition to my membership fee, I would like to make a contribution to the Friends. I understand that tax receipts will be issued for both my membership and contribution and that my contribution will go towards funding the Friends' activities \$ _____

All Information provided on this membership form is strictly confidential. The FOMC does not share/sell membership lists or email addresses.