

SOL RISING

Special Worldcon Issue

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The Newsletter of The Friends of the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy



There's always something interesting going on at the Merrill, from readings by world famous authors to our annual Pulp show and sale. Photos by Andrew Specht.

My Residency

By: Robert J. Sawyer

In April, May, and June of 2003, I was writer-in-residence at the Merrill Collection. Many people have thanked me for my generosity in doing this—so let's start by setting the record straight. It was a paying job, funded by the Toronto Public Library and the Friends of the Library's South Region. They're the heroes of this, and I am extremely grateful for their support.

My residency began with a reception for library board members and staff at the Toronto Reference Library, with refreshments provided by the Friends of the Merrill Collection (thank you!). At that event, I said that being writer-in-residence at the Merrill is "an honour without parallel" for an author of science fiction. And it is: to be asked to take on a role that had only ever before been held

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Friends of the Merrill Collection
Number 29, August 2003

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Reach Us

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www.friendsofmerril.org/

Call for Submissions!
Contact Sabrina (sabrinafried@rogers.com)
if you wish to submit articles, essays or art
pieces. Be a part of SOL Rising, speak out!

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SPECULATION AND FANTASY

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View From the Chair

Torcon 2003

By: Jamie Fraser

As this column is for our special Worldcon issue it may contain material that is already familiar to some of our regular readers.

Worldcon, or TorCon 3 as we also know it, takes place in Toronto August 28th through September 1st, and is split between various locales across the downtown core. Thousands of people from across the globe will be attending this prestigious event, many of whom will be visiting the Merrill Collection for the first time. It's been thirty years since our last TorCon and much has changed since then. In 1973, the Spaced Out Library was only three years old and hadn't yet achieved its current status as one of the world's best collections of speculative fiction and related non-fiction. An awful lot can happen in thirty years.

In 1990, The Spaced Out Library was changed to The Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy, named after Judith Merrill whose donation of her personal library formed the basis for the original collection. The Collection was moved to a newly built, custom designed library building in 1995.

The Friends of The Merrill Collection was formed in 1981 by members of the science fiction community in order to support the Collection, to broaden public awareness of the Collection and its holdings, especially the Canadian content, and work with the Toronto Public Library Board. 1987 saw the first issue of SOL Rising, the Friends' newsletter/magazine, which has become a popular and award winning publication.

The Friends also encourage interest in the Merrill Collection by sponsoring readings and publications, lectures and special events, and through cross promotions and displays with other Special Collections of the Toronto Public Library.

A sampling of some of the many authors to have appeared at the Merrill Collection over the past few years would include: Steven Brust, Orson Scott Card, Neil Gaiman, Terry Goodkind, David Hartwell, Nalo Hopkinson, Tanya Huff, Don Hutchison, Robert Jordan, Ursula Pflug, Robert J. Sawyer and Robert Charles Wilson.

Recent special events have included a lecture by Andrew Watt on the French fantasy artist Albert Robida; Dr. Elizabeth Miller gave a wonderful lecture and

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From the Collection Head

Collectors and Collecting: A Gentle Madnes

By: Lorna Toolis

*"I just want to check if you have any books by [insert the author's name here] that I don't have," the person standing at the information desk tells me. This is a common exercise: a serious collector of a particular author will expend a great deal of effort to ensure that he or she owns everything by that author, **everything**.*

TorCon 3, the World Science Fiction Convention, will take place in Toronto over the Labour Day Weekend, in two weeks and change. This makes the members of the science fiction community extremely happy. More precisely, it will make the book collectors extremely happy. The best part of any Worldcon, for a collector, is the dealers' room, where everything they have ever wanted to own in their lives may be found in one place. Rather like the Merrill Collection, except that they can buy the books and take them home. It is hard to explain the passion for owning books to normal people, those being non-collectors. People who are addicted to drugs, rather than paper, are reasonable by comparison.

It is a very common pastime for members of the science fiction community. I remember attending a meeting of sf collectors in my early teens where the oldest member of the group was explaining, "You always need three copies: one to read, one to wrap in mylar and keep as your good copy, and one for trading, later."

At the time, this seemed to make perfect sense. The copy you read is going to be damaged by the body oils on your fingertips. (As I recall, he also advised turning the pages with the tip of a fine pin, feeling that this was less invasive). Your mint copy you will wrap up and keep safe forever, and your trading copy you will reluctantly part with many years later, when making an arrangement with a fellow collector, who will not be tempted by mere money.

Some people who collect books read and re-read them. Others don't read them at all, either because they don't want to risk damaging the books, or because the joy of possession has replaced the need for intellectual understanding. This is the frame of reference which produces the T-shirt which says, "*Whoever dies with the most books, wins!*"

Both groups have a major problem, that being storage space. Long ago, I realized that I had to ignore the well-intentioned advice of my collector friend: not only could I not afford to buy three of every book I wanted, I didn't have the space to store them. (I should mention that my friend's basement is packed wall to wall with boxes of books, with anthill-like tunnels allowing access to the boxes. His wife retains a corner of the basement for the washer and dryer).

The issue of compact stacks in the stack area of the Merrill Collection, something which both my manager and I consider highly desirable, has come up at the annual general meeting of the Friends of the Merrill Collection. For those of you not familiar with the idea, compact stacks are shelves which move on rails, allow-

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SOL RISING

Friends of the Merrill Collection

Number 29, August 2003

Special Thanks

The Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy wishes to thank the following donors for their generous gifts:

Prof. Elizabeth Cummins
Mr. Russell Howe
Mr. David Kotin
Mr. Bill Vrantisidis

Events

August 21 to October 19, 2003

Books on loan from the Merrill will be part of the Other Worlds: Get There From Here exhibit taking place at the Toronto Reference Library

August 27, 2003

The Merrill will be hosting a panel discussion on the fantastic in Canadian literature as part of the 2003 Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy. Margaret Atwood will be in attendance as the keynote speaker.

For more information contact Dr. Allan Weiss, Conference Chair, aweiss@yorku.ca

Worldcon Notes

The Friends of the Merrill will have a table outside the dealers' room in the fan tables area at Worldcon this year. Friends T-shirts, mugs, memberships and back issues of *Sol Rising* will be available for sale at the table. Volunteers for the Friends table are still needed. Please see the Volunteers Needed! box on page 6 for more details.

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by Judith Merrill herself was hugely flattering, and I was deeply moved by the opportunity. Indeed, I felt Judy's spirit hovering over me throughout my time in residence, and I tried my best to make her proud.

During my residency, patrons were allowed to each submit up to 20 manuscript pages, and I read these in depth. I then had an hour-long one-on-one session with each patron, going over his or her manuscript and answering questions.

I was delighted by the wide range of people who came to see me: absolute beginners, previously published writers, students, retired people, and more - even the grown son of one of my high-school girlfriends! At the end of the session, each patron was asked to fill out an anonymous evaluation form. To my delight - and relief! - 100% of the feedback was positive.

I'd learned a lesson from my previous stint as a writer-in-residence (in 2000, at the Richmond Hill Public Library). Back then, I went into the library for just one or two appointments several times a week, which I found discombobulated to my writing schedule. At the Merrill, I decided to do most of my appointments on Saturdays (assuming that most patrons would find that more convenient than coming in on weekdays), and sometimes did as many as seven appointments in a row. Rather than flagging as the day wore on, I found myself energized-every session was a pleasure.

This scheduling let me handle my residency duties while still getting a lot of my own writing done - which is actually part of the point: a writer-in-residence is supposed to devote 70 percent of his or her time to personal writing projects.

My contract called for me to critique sixty manuscripts, but demand was so high I agreed to do an extra ten for free-and we still had to turn people away. That just goes to show how much need there is for this sort of service, and I hope that it won't be long before the Merrill Collection gets to have another writer-in-residence. Working with Collection Head Lorna Toolis and her staff was a treat. Their constant professionalism and good humour were a joy.

When Judy Merrill was writer-in-residence, sixteen years ago, she invited the most promising of the people who came to see her to form a writers' workshop. Judy came to the first meeting of that group, which dubbed itself the Cecil Street Irregulars, and is still going strong. I'll be doing the same thing in September, facilitating the inaugural meeting of a new workshop, which I hope will help produce the next generation of Canadian science fiction and fantasy writers.

It's just one more way of continuing Judy's fabulous legacy.

Robert J. Sawyer's fifteenth novel, Hybrids, will be launched at the World Science Fiction Convention in Toronto.

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slide show on the origins of Bram Stoker's creation Dracula, and of the many misconceptions on the subject of vampirism. A book launch by Emily Pohl-Weary for her biography of her grandmother, *Better To Have Loved: The Life Of Judith Merrill* was especially well received.

Other occasions, such as our 7th Annual Fantastic Pulp Show & Sale, the 2nd Fantastic Art Show and the annual Christmas Cream Tea have been extremely successful, as have theme events such as the 2001 and J.R.R. Tolkien exhibits. Most recently renowned science fiction author Robert J. Sawyer finished his three month term as Writer in Residence for The Merrill Collection.

Unlike most other Friends groups, we are able to go beyond the local community and actively cultivate an international membership. This is primarily because we support a highly specialized research collection and can point out how unique and rare much of its holdings are. With over 50,000 volumes, The Merrill Collection houses the largest single collection of science fiction and fantasy of any public library in North America.

Worldcon visitors to Toronto interested in science fiction will find it well worth their time to visit the Merrill Collection. Tours of the Collection will be available, arrangements can be made by calling the Collection directly at 416-393-7748. The Friends' fan table will have brochures and various other material on display. Friends merchandise can be purchased at one of the dealer tables.

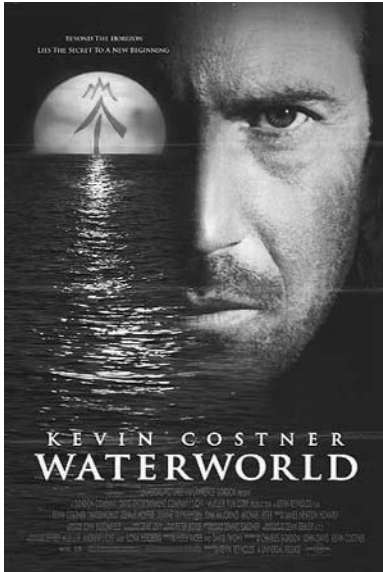
So Bad They're Good

An occasional look at sf movies that bombed at the box office despite big budgets and pretensions to grandeur - but took on new lives as "cult" films.

Waterworld - So What's the Problem?

By: Ted Brown

"The Future - the polar ice caps have melted, covering the earth with water. Those who survive have adapted - to a new world (music swells, camera swoops forward on catamaran drifting on a seemingly endless sea) - WATERWORLD."



It's not as bad as you think. No, really, it's not. Would I lie?

So goes the opening narration of yet another universally reviled big-budget epic. It sounds pretty interesting. However, unlike *LifeForce*, which initial audiences disliked but which later took on a new life, and *Battlefield Earth* which still gets slammed as a horrible mess, the "after-all-the fuss has-died-down" reaction to *Waterworld* seems to be one of dead silence. A quick google search reveals - nothing. Not a peep. A google search for Kevin Costner finds nothing but a number of fan sites that mention that he made the movie, along with a scad of other movies. One site gives the film a 7 out of 10 rating, calling it "watchable." Faint praise indeed.

I'm a little confused, as I like the movie. It's an apocalyptic tale of the future, a pirate story, a love story, and a classic Quest. The hero, known only as The Mariner, is a taciturn, self-sufficient loner, part human/part beast, who is tamed by a Little Girl. The film has chase scenes, gadgetry, over-the-top villains, a pretty Love Interest for the hero, and pathos galore. What's not to like?

On the debit side there is, of course, Kevin Costner as the hero, an actor who seems to be a magnet for derisive reviews. But heck, I like him. And Dennis Hopper's villain is played for laughs, a bit of a strange choice for a movie that otherwise purports to be serious. And the army of villains commanded by Hopper is essentially a biker gang on sea-dos. There is, of course, the utterly unbelievable rescue when all is lost (which is then repeated when all is lost again!) and the classic hero-shoots-up-an-entire-army-of-bad-guys scene. Okay, so there are problems.

But - the junk technology used by the denizens of *Waterworld*, good guys and bad guys alike, is marvelous. The attack on the floating fortified city, in which the bad guy "Smokers" leap over the walls using water ski ramps and sea-dos is, while admittedly derivative of the Mad Max movies, imaginative and extremely well done. The structure of the story, in which the reluctant loner is pulled unwillingly into the Quest, the search for the mythical "Dryland," and in the end returns to his true element, the sea, is classic.

So why didn't anybody but me like it? I confess to being at a bit of a loss. The story is imaginative, the stunts are great, the villains get smacked around and "blowed up real good." The problem is not the gaps in the story line, or the impossible/unbelievable stunts and events. These are all standard procedure for any Hollywood adventure blockbuster. I suspect that one of the reasons is the general unlikeability of the hero. It is made clear early in the story that he is not fully human (he has gills), and he proceeds to be obdurate and obnoxious, and to treat the Little Girl and the Love Interest very badly indeed. By the time he comes around to cooling out a bit, it's too late - empathy has been lost (or never generated).

The other possible reason is the setting. The viewer is plunked down in a completely alien environment of end-

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less seascape. Into this watery horizon are placed outposts of “junk technology” - scrap building materials and weapons. The people live on piles of scrap fashioned into floating cities, or small boats on which individuals survive alone. They are all ragged, dirty and hungry, and stop being miserable only for as long as it takes to fight off yet another “Smoker” attack. (Interestingly, the two most valued commodities in this upside-down world are “hydro,” which is drinkable water, and dirt. I love it!) It’s all very bleak, unremittingly so, until the very end when the Quest seekers actually find “Dryland.” Suddenly the screen comes alive with colour and life - a plunging waterfall, sleek grassy hills, jubilant people - but then the movie’s over.

So, it would seem that an unlikeable hero and a depressing setting cancel out an interesting apocalypse story with all of the otherwise “winning” elements of an adventure blockbuster. The missing elements of humanity, empathy, and to a lesser extent hope, seem to have been an insurmountable obstacle to general audience acceptance. It’s a shame, really, because despite its faults (I confess to being a bit ticked that in the big kissing scene between The Marriner and the Love Interest, his gills seem to have mysteriously disappeared) it really is an interesting and imaginative take on life after a hypothetical catastrophe. And I don’t feel guilty for liking it.

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ing you to eliminate all but one aisle. The drawback is that compact stacks weigh rather a lot, and you need a building built especially to take that kind of load - like the building in which the Merrill Collection is housed, in order to handle the extra weight. (For well-funded private collectors, usually the basement floor can support some compact stacks).

There are some books about collecting which I recommend. *Used and Rare: Travels in the Book World* by Lawrence Goldstone and Nancy Goldstone is the first of several funny books in which the Goldstones describe how they accidentally stumbled into the world of book collecting and describe the people who regard this as a normal lifestyle. *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes and the Eternal Passion for Books* by Nicholas Basbanes has an historical perspective, and makes it clear that book collecting has always been an obsessive form of behaviour. One story in Basbanes identifies an early collector so determined that he tried to smuggle forbidden books into Spain during the Spanish Inquisition!

So, like everybody else in the Canadian science fiction community, I am profoundly grateful to the organizing committee of TorCon 3, who have done all of this enormous amount of work so that people like me can go to TorCon 3, attend some panels and buy some books. Probably not as many books as I would like to buy, but, like everybody else, I can always go and read what I can’t afford at the Merrill Collection afterwards.

Volunteers Needed!

If you would like to help with one of the following events, contact Lorna Toolis at ltoolis@tpl.toronto.on.ca

*Staffing the Friends of the Merrill table at Worldcon 2003 (Volunteers must have their own Worldcon memberships)

*Staffing the TPL Special Collections booth at The Word on the Street (September 2003)

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Inside the Merrill Guestbook

By: Sabrina Fried

Standing on an unassuming podium not far from the magazine shelves in the Collection is an unassuming book. When closed, it could pass for just another leather bound volume in the Merrill's collection, albeit one that had to be fastened to the podium to prevent it from walking away. This is no ordinary book, however. It is the Merrill's guest book, and in its pages are thousands of signatures, notes and doodles encompassing over thirty years of the Collection's history. Most of the visitors who vandalized this particular book in the Collection are anonymous, so illegible is the scrawl that makes up their signature. Others are so well known that their autograph has been marked with a post-it note by the Collection's staff so that they can find it quickly for the numerous requests they get for it each and every day.

The guest book of what was then called the Spaced Out Library begins, fittingly enough, with a full-page signature from Judy Merrill herself, dated October 9, 1971. As the pages fly by, in those early years before the Merrill was actually the Merrill, a rainbow of signatures follow. By the time the collection was established as an internationally renowned library of speculative fiction in the 80's the autographs of such notable authors as Ursula K. Leguin, Anne McCaffrey and Piers Anthony appear on the pages.

Reading the entries in a guest book is almost like studying the archaeological history of the Collection. Each page is a stratum unto itself, showing just how much the visitors to the library have changed over the decades. The first two decades of the Collection take up the lion's share of the pages already filled. They were a more carefree time when visitors scribbled pictures, wrote letters and even posted their phone numbers and mailing address for all to see in the guest book. And the addresses show boldly just how widespread the notoriety of the Collection is. Even back when the Collection was still called the Spaced Out library, authors, editors, students, researchers and all manner of curiosity seekers from around the world were coming to visit this unusual collection. The guest book contains signatures from all over Canada and the United States, England, France, Scotland, Finland, Hong Kong, China, Japan and even South Africa. Most of the entries are written in English or French, but there are also a few in various forms of Chinese, Japanese and even Arabic. Mostly, the visitors who signed the guest book were simply overwhelmed and overjoyed that such a collection existed. "I think you need more books," quipped one visitor, perhaps jokingly, or perhaps not.

By the early 90's, signing the guest book had become something of a rare event. Most visitors who signed the book at all decided to simply sign their name. Even marking the date alongside their signature had become less frequent. Those who did leave comments usually said something along the lines of "Nice collection, but a bit cramped." By the early 90's, the Spaced Out Library, now renamed the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Speculation, was so overwhelmed with donations and acquisitions that it was starting to outgrow its original space. But the fans still continued to come. S.M. Stirling visited the Collection on October 16, 1992 followed soon after by Michael Moorcock. Less than two years later, "Commander" Rick Green of *Prisoners of Gravity* fame, left his mark on January 10, 1994. Not long after, the Collection would be temporarily closed so that its contents could be moved to the larger and better-equipped special collection room at the Lillian H. Smith Library.

The guest book itself serves as a time capsule for the Collection, marking the points in its history when events have been held. Neil Gaiman left his mark in the guest book on July 25, 2001 when he paid the collection a visit as part of his *American Gods* tour. More recently, Steven Brust added his autograph to the guest book when he conducted a reading at the collection in March of this year. Robert J. Sawyer signed the guest book on the first day of his Writer in Residence tour this April, with the fresh red pen of someone who had a lot of manuscript reading ahead of him.

The Merrill's guest book is about three-quarters of the way full now, and new signatures are added daily. There's usually a pen or three lying around somewhere if you'd like to contribute your autograph to the book while in town for Worldcon. You never know who might end up adding their signature next to yours.

We invite you to become a member of
The Friends of the Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy

What is the Merril Collection?

The Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy is the largest single collection of science fiction and fantasy maintained by a public library in North America.

The collection serves a widely varied public, maintaining a reference collection of over 50,000 volumes. Scholars have access to older and more obscure materials as well as comprehensive collections of the most recent authors. Students have access to a comprehensive collection of critical material relating to the genre. Readers have access to current and obscure materials available only through this special collection.

The Merril Collection was established in 1970 as The Spaced Out Library by the Toronto Public Library Board with a donation from sf writer Judith Merril. The collection currently holds over 50,000 works, including monographs, short story collections, periodicals, fanzines, and complete sets from such speciality publishers as Arkham House, Cheap Street and Gnome Press.

The collection was renamed The Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy on January 1, 1991.

Who are the Friends?

The Friends of the Merril Collection is an organization through which members of the science fiction community can support the collection.

The Friends is a citizen advisory group to the Toronto Public Library Board with its own constitution and bylaws. The stated objectives of the organization according to its constitution are:

- 1. To encourage interest in **The Merril Collection** and the interests of the library.

- 2. To increase awareness of works of the fantastic imagination and of Canadian contributions to this field.

- 3. To advise the Toronto Public Library Board on policy matters concerning the Collection in consultation with the library's staff.

- 4. To act as a resource for **The Merril Collection** and other public and private collections in Canada and elsewhere in consultation with the staff of the Toronto Public Library Board.

What do the Friends Do?

The Friends of the Merril Collection is not a fan organization.

It is a group of people with the common interest of promoting the Library and to make the best public collection of speculative fiction in the world. This is done by publishing the newsletter *Sol Rising*, and by sponsoring appearances at the library by prominent people in science fiction, fantasy and related fields. Three appearances or other programming are scheduled quarterly with the fourth quarter being devoted to the annual membership meeting and informal get-together. Additional events are also scheduled from time to time.

What does your membership offer?

- 1. Members are entitled to vote at all meetings of **The Friends of the Merril Collection**, including the annual general meeting in May. This ensures that the membership has a voice in the policies of the Library.

- 2. Members will receive all issues of *Sol Rising* which are published during their membership year.

- 3. Membership entitles you to free admission to all public appearances and programming sponsored by **The Friends** (our guests have included Gene Wolfe,

Lois McMaster Bujold, Tanya Huff, Robert J. Sawyer, Karen Wehrstein, Glen Cook and more). Members will receive advance notification of such events and an opportunity to attend a reception for our guest following the regular appearance.

- 4. Members receive a 10% discount on all purchases made at:

Bakka-Phoenix Books (formerly Bakka, The Science Fiction Bookstore)
598 Yonge St, Toronto

The Beguiling
601 Markham Street, Toronto

Jamie Fraser Books
427a Queen St. West, 2nd Floor, Toronto

Sci-Fi World
1600 Steeles Ave. West, Concord, Ontario

A current membership card is required at time of purchase.

- 5. Members receive preferred pricing and opportunities to purchase selected items offered for sale by **The Friends of the Merril Collection**.

Want to be a Friend? Fill out the form below for both new memberships and renewals of existing memberships.

Visit our website...
<http://www.friendsofmerril.org/>

The Friends of the Merril Collection would like to thank all the generous supporters and volunteers, without whom this would not be possible.

I wish to become a member of **The Friends of the Merril Collection**. I have enclosed a cheque or money order (payable to "The Friends of the Merril Collection") for my 2003/04 membership fee as indicated (memberships run from May 2003 to May 2004):

- Individual** \$30.⁰⁰ per year
- Student** (under 18) \$15.⁰⁰ per year
- Institution** \$37.⁵⁰ per year

This is a:

- Membership renewal
- New membership

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Please mail to: **The Friends of the Merril Collection, c/o Lillian H. Smith Branch, Toronto Public Library, 239 College St., 3rd Floor, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1R5**

In addition to my membership fee, I would like to make a contribution to the Friends. I understand that tax receipts are unavailable at this time, and that my contribution will go towards funding the Friends' activities.
\$ _____