

SOL RISING

May 2005

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

Frank Kelly Freas 1922-2005

By Sabrina Fried



Frank Kelly Freas' cover for *Martians Go Home* (1955)

Frank Kelly Freas was born in New York in 1922 but spent many of his formative years living in Canada. His artistic career started in 1950 when his friends persuaded him to submit one of his paintings to *Weird Tales*, who promptly bought the piece. He would go on to have a long and successful career as a cover artist for, among other publications, *MAD* magazine, *Astounding Science Fiction*, *The Magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, *Asimov's* and *Analog*. In addition to his work in science fiction and fantasy, he was also commissioned by the Smithsonian to paint space murals, became an official NASA mission artist, and, by request, designed the crew patches worn by the astronauts of Skylab I.

In 1955, he painted the cover to the Frederic Brown story "Martians Go Home" for Baen Books, considered by some to be one of the quintessential pieces of science fiction art. The rights to reproduce this piece were donated to the Merrill in 2000 and this image has become for the collection an unofficial second logo, being used on T-shirts, posters, and the banner mural that hangs outside the Lillian H. Smith library to raise awareness of the collection. The image of the green man has become, in the half-century since it was originally painted, a symbol saying "Here be the stuff of your imagination."

On January 2, 2005, Frank Kelly Freas passed away quietly in the early hours of the morning. He will be missed.

I can't say I knew Frank Kelly Freas except through the hushed but reverent tall tales about encounters with him that I seemed to hear at any con I attended. And yet his contribution to the Merrill and sf fandom in Toronto is unquestionable. For it was his act of generosity that gave the Merrill the face we show to the world, in all its green glory.

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www.friendsofmerril.org/

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Contact Sabrina (sabrinafried@rogers.com)
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The 9th Amazing, Fantastic, Thrilling Pulp Show

By Jamie Fraser

The most recent event held at The Merril Collection was The 9th Annual Fantastic Pulp Show & Sale on Saturday, April 30th. The most popular attraction of the show is always the Dealers Room. This year a new record was set, with 23 tables for dealers from Ontario and the USA.

The basement room offered a broad selection of interesting pulp magazines and pulp-fiction related material. Attendees could choose from old radio shows, movies, many types of pulp reprints, as well as scarce and collectable science fiction, fantasy & horror material. Also available were first editions, both hardcover and paperback, fanzines and unusual paper ephemera.

There was a good turnout, and the attendees were eagerly looking through the terrific selection of material available for sale. The dealers were pleased with their sales and intend to return next year, for the 10th anniversary Show.

Attendees of the Pulp Show have the opportunity to take a guided tour of the Merril Collection. These are always well attended, not surprisingly, as it's the only day of the year when the public is allowed such intimate access to the Collection. The ever-popular slide show presentation of science fiction pulp art was also a great success. Visitors to the Merril Collection on the 3rd floor were also able to see the 4th Annual Fantastic Art Show, which only had one week left to run. We've now had nine successful Pulp Shows. This does not mean that it's getting easier to put on, nor can we rest on our laurels. Much hard, unseen work goes into this show, split between two groups. One is the Pulp Show Committee, which consists of Neil and Leigh Mechem, myself, and the godfather of Canadian Pulp Fandom, Don Hutchison.

The other group involved in the planning process consists of members of the Executive Committee of The Friends of The Merril Collection, and the many Friends and volunteers who have always been there helping to make the Pulp Show into the fun, successful event that we've all grown to love.

I thank you all and look forward to putting together next year's Special 10th Anniversary Show.

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From the Collection Head

By Lorna Toolis

Judith Merrill used to paralyse intelligent discussion in the Collection by walking in and demanding, “What’s new? What’s good?” She never, ever liked our choices, for reasons that were always cogent and depressingly intelligent. Individual taste within the genres remains idiosyncratic, everyone on staff has different favourite authors and subjects.

The new books are our reward for good behaviour. If we eat all of our management and administrative spinach, at the end of the day we actually get a chance to look at the books we select. For the staff at the Merrill Collection, it is like working in a candy factory would be for someone with a sweet tooth.

A lot of books come into the Merrill Collection, where the staff sort through them. Staff check them for condition, appropriate subject and age level and, in the process, cannot help but notice publishing trends. Vampires may be fading away, after the better part of two decades; certainly the interior-decorating vampire detective novel I looked at causes me to hope. Television and movie-based novels are less popular than ever before, possibly reflecting cultural exhaustion with this kind of derivative material. However, series are regrettably still doing very well. Graphic novels continue to be hugely popular, particularly those presenting the story in a film noir style. A lot of excellent teenage novels have been published in the last year, no doubt encouraged by Harry Potter’s success.

Small presses continue to increase in numbers and sophistication of material published. Night Shade, Subterranean, Golden Gryphon and Tachyon Presses all publish excellent short story collections, a wealth of material hitherto unavailable.

Web-based publishing still doesn’t seem to be going anywhere our patrons want to be, although John Scalzi’s *Old Man’s War* has attracted some interest now that it has been published as a hardcover from TOR.

There are some authors and some books that I watch for, others that many people watch for. For the last three years, numerous requests at the Merrill information desk have pertained to George R. R. Martin’s perennially delayed *A Feast Of Crows*. Mr. Martin’s web site, www.georgerrmartin.com, states that the novel is currently upwards of 1300 pages. He hopes to have the novel finished this year (2005). He will post the news to his web site when it is completed.

An author whose work I always watch for is Patricia Finney, whose current book-in-progress involves time travel, as she drops a New York City cop into the back alleys of Elizabethan London. This is a change of pace for the author, whose first two fantasies are held by the Merrill Collection. I highly recommend her trilogy of historical novels, *Firedrake’s Eye*, *Unicorn’s Blood* and *Gloriana’s Torch*. The novels incorporate elements of fantasy, while still being historical fiction. I

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Special Notes

DONATIONS: HOW THEY WORK

Cash donations of twenty-five dollars and above, over the cost of membership in the Friends of the Merrill Collection, generate an income tax deduction certificate from the Toronto Public Library Foundation at the end of every year. The money that you donate is moved into the Merrill Collection’s book budget and enables the Collection to purchase that many more books. Think of it as a means of directing the use of your tax dollars – what better use could the library make of your money than buying books?

MISSING MEMBERS

When members forget to send a change of address to the Friends of the Merrill Collection, we try to locate them. If you know where any of the people listed below are currently living, please contact the Merrill Collection staff.

Carol Lang, Toronto

Readings and Appearances

June 3rd
Chelsea Quinn Yarbro

July 14th
Joe Haldeman

July (Date TBA)
Karl Schroeder

Other Events

First Saturday of every month

The Graphic Novels Club
A discussion group for youth ages 14 and over about comics and graphic novels. For times and topics, please visit the Merrill website

June 4th
Academic Conference on Canadian SF and Fantasy

The 2005 ACCSF will be held at the Merrill, presenting papers on works related to Canadian SF and Fantasy in film, literature, comics and other media. Guests of Honor include Robert Charles Wilson and Dr. Veronica Hollinger.

December 2005
The annual Christmas Cream Tea

How a Stuffy Old Bookseller Discovers Useful Modern Technology!

By Jamie Fraser

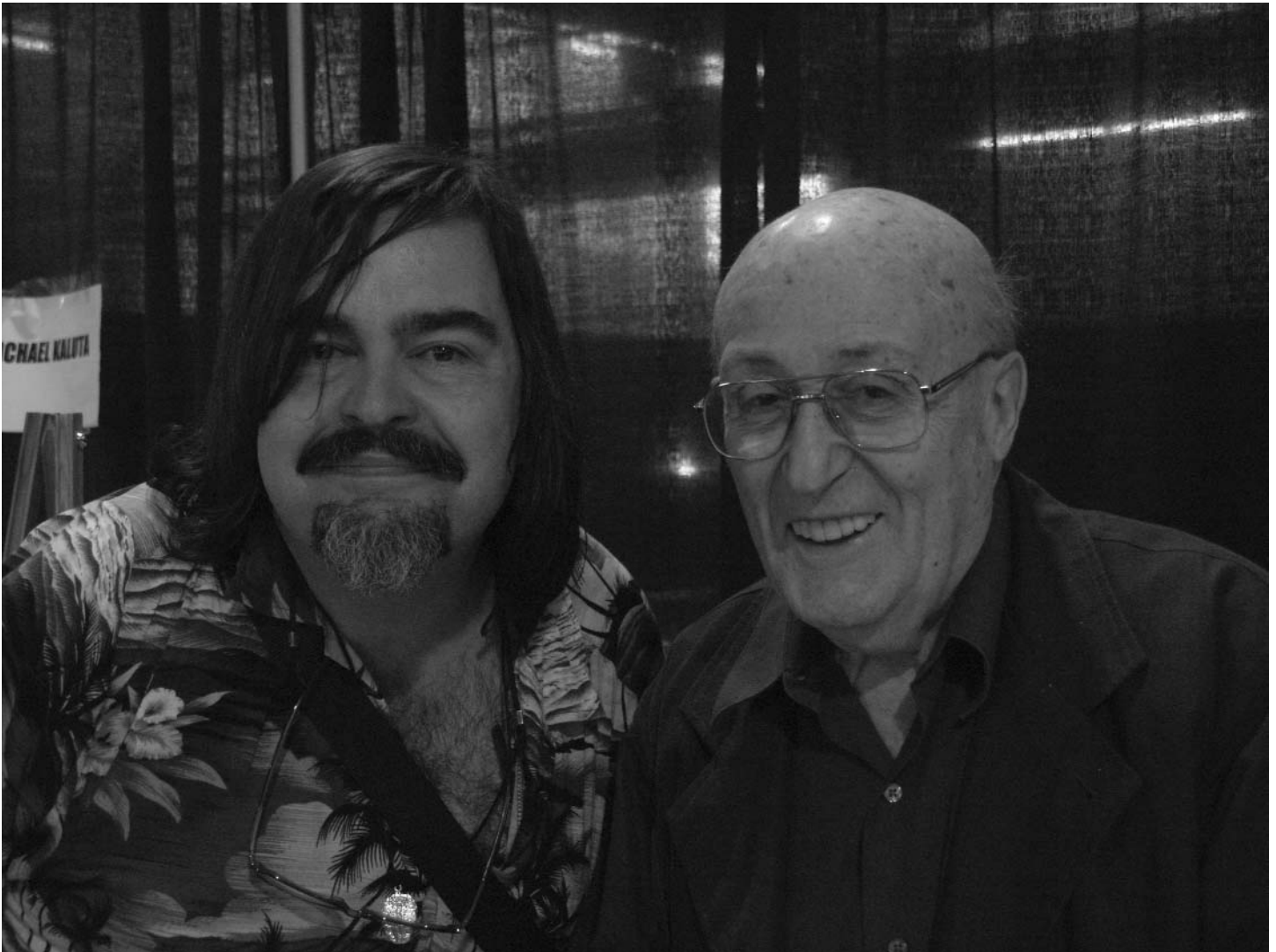
Over the past ten years or so, the use of websites and e-mail has almost put the printed catalogue in danger of extinction. Those few dealers and auction houses that still produce them are very careful to mail them only to proven customers and specialist dealers. One of the best such catalogues comes from PBA Galleries, an auction house in California. Their theme auctions in the recent past have included Photography, Autographs, and Literature, the latter including fine bindings, manuscripts, letters and signed or author-inscribed books.

Their two most recent Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror auctions contained the libraries of well-known sf collectors Arthur Stone, Peter Dillon, and even some items from Forrest J. Ackerman. There were many exceptional books, including rarities like an early signed letter from Jules Verne. As always, I lent my catalogue to Lorna Toolis so she could bid on anything that the Merrill Collection needed. Almost all of the books were signed and/or dedicated copies and the overall condition was Near Fine. Their website had more information, and at least one good photo of each item. This enabled the buyer to view the books ahead of time, thereby being more confident of what books they should bid on. It was an excellent resource, and so well managed that even a novice like myself could use it with ease.

Among the nearly 300 items were several books that I was seriously interested in bidding on, but how would I go about bidding? I wasn't in California, and bidding by telephone looked to be quite complicated and unrealistic. Then, while examining my catalogue, I saw that they now featured Real-Time Bidding for their live auctions. Being somewhat of a technophobe, my first thought was that this meant they were no longer accepting advance bids. Upon closer examination, I realized that it meant I could bid from my computer while the auction was under way, as though I was in the room with the auctioneer.

I registered my credit card data with them so I could log in on auction day, follow the auction live and bid on what I wanted. After calling Lorna to make sure I wouldn't be bidding on anything the Collection needed, I was primed and ready to go. Of course that's when things started to go wrong. I'd logged in and done everything correctly, I could see and follow the bidding, but for some weird reason my bids weren't being accepted. I finally went off-line to call PBA Galleries for assistance, but their phones were always busy. So I went back on line and tried again, but my bids still weren't going through. It made for a long afternoon, going on- and off-line several times, their phones still busy - and I was watching the books I wanted being sold to someone else.

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Andrew Specht poses for a picture with the late Will Eisner (right). Photo by Andrew Specht

Will Eisner 1917-2005

By Andrew Specht

It's sometimes hard for people to identify who their heroes are, but Will Eisner was, is, and will always be on my own particularly short list. Will Eisner was born March 6, 1917 in Brooklyn, New York and was taken from us on January 3, 2005, at the age of 87. Between points A and B of Will's life, he managed not only to revolutionize the way people look at comics (a word he never truly liked), but to help launch the careers of many other creative people, not the least of whom were Jack Kirby, Wally Wood and Jules Feiffer.

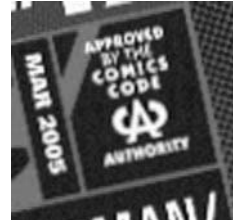
On the occasion of his last visit to Toronto, he was just finishing up work on his graphic novel, *The Plot* (to be released in May by WW Norton), a book that he sounded just as thunderingly enthusiastic for as any of his previous works when he discussed them with fans. As we were waiting in line for Will to show up, Canadian Golden Age great Ed Furness arrived and unknowingly took the seat behind Will's sign. When Eisner arrived, he impishly inquired in his Brooklynese accent, "Are you Will Eisner? I've always wanted to meet you."

I wrote far more in depth about Eisner's published works in the last issue, but what I didn't touch on nearly enough was how pleasant and affable a soul he was to meet and talk with in person. He is survived by his beloved wife, Anne.

The Comics Code Turns 50 (kinda)

By Andrew Specht

When I was three years old, I was bought one of my first comic books. It was a *Justice League of America* twenty-five-cent 80-pager. Probably the single most obvious thing on the cover was the more-than-inch square Comics Code Authority stamp which, I only discovered years later, was supposed to make this comic book “safe.”



Or Not...

The Comics Code came largely in the wake of the publication of what in this author’s view is probably the most infamous book in pop-culture history: Fredric Wertham, M.D.’s *Seduction of the Innocent*. Without going into too much detail on the nature of the book, let’s just say that Wertham laid virtually all juvenile delinquency at the feet of the comic book industry (to say nothing of the declaration that Batman and Robin were gay). In the wake of the book and the senate hearings it aroused, the comics industry had little choice but to set up its own self-regulatory body, so that by 1955 all books were emblazoned with that iconic, serrated “Approved by the Comics Code Authority” stamp.

Again, in my view, this truly did mark the end of the Golden Age of comics. For quite some time afterwards, comics were safe, sanitized and in many cases, utterly ridiculous and boring.

The first few ripples started in the early ‘sixties, out of a small outfit called Timely Comics, when they started experimenting with the idea of superheroes with real problems. Jump ahead a decade, and the same company was asked by the Powers That Be, Washington itself, to produce a comic book story denouncing the use of illegal drugs. The company, now called Marvel Comics, produced said story in several issues of its flagship book, *Spiderman*. The Code Authority promptly rejected it. Stan Lee, the author and publisher, pointed out that they’d been asked to write the story by the government – and in a daring move – published all three issues without the Code stamp.

A year later, DC Comics came out with its own anti-drug story in an issue of *Green Lantern*. This time the Code Authority cringed, but in the end capitulated and put its stamp on the book. This stands out to me as the Code Authority being shown where it was being far too restrictive: its ban on any showings of drugs or drug paraphernalia was preventing the publication of stories condemning drugs.

The Code loosened a bit. Now people could hear about even more real problems – social upheaval, the effects of real crimes that did not involve ray-guns or bug-eyed monsters; but with the Code punctured, the balloon slowly started to deflate. The first time I picked up a comic and heard myself exclaim “This is a Code book?!” was as early as 1975, in an issue of the DC title *Arak*. The lead character, in a Roman-arena type situation, first decapitates and then proudly displays the head of his opponent to his audience. This was not shown in terribly graphic detail, and by that time I had already been reading non-Code black-and-white comics like *Savage Tales*, *Savage Sword of Conan*, etc., but—damn! This guy sliced off a guy’s cocoon in a Code book! Gloryosky, Sandy!

In 1983, both DC and Marvel hit on another way to get around the Code and thus was born the Direct Market – books that would be sent directly to only specialty comic shops, thereby eluding the sensitive gaze of “poor defenseless children.” Before long, a number of smaller companies came forth with their own offerings that were also direct-sales and sans the magical Comics Code stamp of safety. As the direct market grew, newsstand sales shrank, and so did that friendly white stamp.

In the early ‘nineties, a bubble of comic book collecting speculation that had been growing over several years of “multiple covers,” “hologram covers” and other attempts to increase collectibility finally burst. Many publishers

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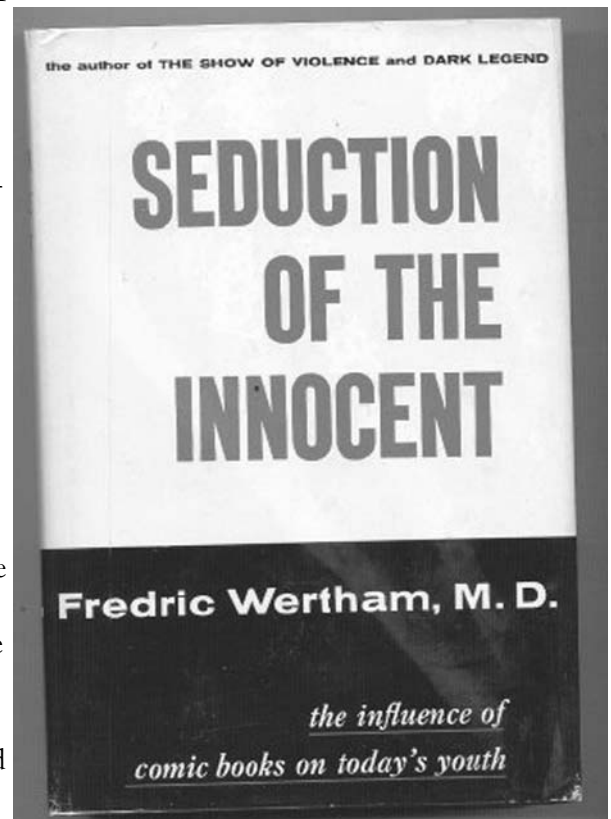
went out of business, and a goodly number of the smaller comic shops in North America closed. While all this was happening, the two largest companies, DC and Marvel, had been licensing an ever-increasing number of products that their characters (i.e., “properties”) could appear on. Superman sold lunchboxes, and so did Captain America. As sales of the actual comic books shrank, it appeared that many of the more iconic superheroes were being maintained in print purely as an excuse for the companies’ parent corporations to sell Spiderman bubble bath or Superman running shoes to whatever little tot just needed to have a picture of their favourite character on said products.

The century turned and fewer and fewer “mainstream” comics were found with that old friendly stamp, or even a tiny important reminder of its former glory. A couple of months ago, I picked up a regular issue of one of the DC comics titles I regularly buy, *Superman/Batman*. This was one of the titles that still carries the tiniest feeble remnant of a comics code stamp. In fact, almost all of DC’s titles carrying its chief iconic heroes (Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, etc) still carry the stamp. This is so they can be distributed not only to the specialty market, but to the mom-and-pop corner stores or larger outlets such as 7-11, Chapters, gas stations, etc. Again, mainstream comics for the most part are ruled over by corporations more interested in selling tie-in merchandise than the books that spawn them. So now, for example, you can’t kill a character like Robin the Boy Wonder without some Time Warner exec finding out six months later and exclaiming “We have T-shirts of that guy! You can’t do that!”

However... there was a page in the above issue of said comic whose imagery was so blatantly violent that it could easily compare with many of those cited in Dr. Wertham’s book. Up until that point, I’d been quite enjoying the story, about an alternate universe where Batman and Superman are dictators, ruling earth with an iron fist, and in which Wonder Woman raises an army of the old Quality Comics heroes to fight them. This page, however, depicted their final, lethal battle in what I felt was unnecessarily graphic detail – and this was a “Code” book, which quite young kids could potentially pick up and look at, and, if they were not familiar with alternate-universe stories, try to figure out just why Wonder Woman would stab Batman and why Superman would strangle Wonder Woman.

Ironically, the gruesome page was also weak storytelling. By way of contrast, another book out that same month, *JSA*, depicted as part of its storyline the murder of a family, but there the crime was shown through strategic tight shots, with the violence happening just out of frame; to much more dramatic and chilling effect. The *Batman/Superman* page was simply ugly and sad.

Bottom line – the remnants of the Code are a pathetic little façade, giving the illusion of “safe” reading; and the comic book publishers are playing a dangerous game of blind-man’s bluff with censorship. I really hope the next time little Johnny walks up to a 7-11 magazine rack that Mom and Dad give a good flip through the books first; and that they don’t instantly put in a call to today’s version of Dr. Wertham.



According to Fredric Wertham, there's just something about superheroes running around in tight costumes doing battle that isn't exactly what he would call wholesome family entertainment. Of course, according to Fredric Wertham, there isn't much about comic books that is wholesome family entertainment!

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.

Ed Wood and *Plan 9 From Outer Space* The True Master and His Skewed Masterpiece

By Ted Brown

It is generally acknowledged, by those who study such things, that the all-time master of the bad movie was, and still is, Edward Wood Jr. And it is further acknowledged that his masterpiece was *Plan 9 From Outer Space*. Ed and his masterpiece are considered “incomparable” and, indeed, since his heyday in the 1950s no filmmaker has even come close to wresting the laurels from him. *Plan 9* remains the benchmark against which all “so bad they're good” movies are measured.



Plan 9 from Outer Space: Bargain basement sf at its “best!”

Ed Wood was never a part of the mainstream. To begin with, he was a transvestite – not a gay man, but a man who dressed in women’s clothing. It shaped his life, and certainly limited his career prospects. Ed was married, to a number of different women, for most of his life, but he loved angora sweaters and would convince women he met to give him their sweaters, which he would then wear while writing or directing. He wore high heels and dresses around the house, and sometimes out in the street if he felt brave enough. But when not dressed as a woman, Ed was a “man’s man” and a charming, energetic fellow with a large helping of charisma, who attracted people to him who were both very odd, and very loyal to him. He rescued Bela Lugosi from the pit of oblivion into which he had fallen in his later years due to depression and drug use, and infused the forgotten old man with a generous portion of his own enthusiasm and excitement to “make movies.” Ed had a dream, and the ability to convince other “outsiders” to come along with him for the ride.

What makes *Plan 9*, and Ed’s other films, so very bad yet so unusual and even unique? Certainly Ed’s position as a strange fellow on the edge of the mainstream, to begin with, but there are other considerations, as well. Unlike the films previously discussed in this column, *Plan 9* was made on an almost non-existent budget. According to later interviews with people involved with the filming, Ed would get his hands on some money, film for a few days until the money ran out, then rush around to find more backers, film for a few more days, and repeat this process until the film was finished. He did this for all his films. (But in his rush he neglected to keep track of who had put up which funds, consequently overselling percentages in the films, and making not a penny for himself).

Because money was tight, time was of the essence and Ed prided himself on how quickly he could complete a film. He had no time or patience for details, and this is another important aspect of why his films are so wonderfully bad. Consider: Bela Lugosi, the star attraction of *Plan 9*, dies soon after filming begins. Does this faze Ed Wood? No. He has his chiropractor fill in for Lugosi, draped in a black cape and standing with his back to the camera. A huge zombie lumbering through a graveyard knocks over headstones that are obviously made of cardboard. Re-shoot the scene? No, no, time is money! Press on! In the alien spacecraft, the divider between the cockpit and the rest of the ship is a shower curtain. Why? It was cheap and ready to hand. Ed employed a colour-blind cinematographer; he worked cheap, and Ed liked him. And, of course, why spend money on special effects for the flying saucers when you can fashion them from Cadillac hubcaps, hang them from piano wire, and swoop and wobble them about by hand. Trust me, it’ll work, nobody’ll notice the wires! (Apparently, Ed first tried using balsa wood models, which he suspended over a small town he had constructed out of cardboard. But every time he lit a

What's New at the Merrill

Special Gifts

The staff and Executive Committee of The Friends of the Merrill Collection thank Mr. Bill Vrantisidis for his generous donation of a first edition of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*. We are also grateful to Mr. Dave Duncan, who has been kind enough to contribute a generous number of signed first editions of his books to the Merrill Collection.

New Procedures at the Merrill Collection

Starting on December 1, 2004, patrons using the material kept in the Merrill Collection stacks have been asked to register at the information desk. The Merrill Collection was the last of TPL's special collections to move to a registration procedure, but concerns for the well-being of the books made it necessary. This allows staff to give all patrons the handling instructions for material - nothing earth shattering. Don't write on the books, don't fold the corners, don't pile them on the floor...this kind of thing.

Meanwhile, the Cataloguing/Linking project continues apace, fuelled by the Cataloguing staff at Front St. under Veronika Furst's direction, and Ted Hiland's conviction that he can explain the zeigeist of the Library of Congress to the Merrill Collection staff, and vice versa. Merrill Collection English-language fiction records by authors whose last names begin A- MAC, as well as all materials purchased after November 2003, should now be accessible off-site via Dynix, TPL's database.

Farah Mendlesohn

Farah Mendlesohn, editor of *Foundation* magazine, spoke at the Merrill Collection on the evening of March 3. She talked about the development process used for the non-fiction journal and her own studies in science fiction and children's literature. The interview was followed by a question and answer session.

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also recommend her "Robert Carey" mysteries, which have no fantastic elements whatsoever, but are still a lot of fun. The author's web address is www.patricia-finney.co.uk.

Personal favourites in this year included Patricia McKillip's lovely *Alphabet of Thorns* and Stephan Zielinski's first novel, *Bad Magic*. Books that Merrill Collection patrons liked, and that I haven't got to yet, include *Banner of Souls* by Liz Williams and *Singularlity Sky* by Charles Stross.

Volunteers Needed!

If you would like to help with the following events, contact Lorna Toolis at ltoolis@torontopubliclibrary.ca

*Writers for *Sol Rising* and *Solar Flare* (Ongoing)

*Set up and clean up for the AGM (May 2005)

*Staffing the TPL Special Collections booth at The Word on the Street (September 2005)

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the cat.

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sabrinafried@rogers.com

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By now anyone more computer savvy than myself, that is to say almost all of you, realizes that all the problems were a result of my having a dial-up internet connection, not a high speed connection. If I'd had the latter, then my bids would have been accepted and I'd likely now own at least a couple of the books I wanted. Fortunately for everyone, Lorna has a high-speed connection and so was able to get the book she needed for the Merrill Collection. (It was, incidentally, *The Mezentian Gate* by E. R. Eddison, the 1958 First Edition published by The Curwin Press, Plaistow, UK.)

To sum up, I appreciate all the hard work and effort that goes into producing such catalogues in this digital age, and understand that they've had to add on web sites, etc., to stay competitive. I like being able to peruse the items in advance, the photos are a real bonus, and Real-Time Bidding for live auctions is marvellous. But why should I be forced to switch to high speed from my beloved dial-up, which has served me well for the past twelve years. I know engineers, and that they love to change things, but this is getting ridiculous. Next I'll have to give up my Contempra phone, my 26-year-old Quasar VCR, my Sony Walkman and my precious 27-year-old Zenith System 3 with Space-Phone TV, all of which still work fine, for some new and improved model. Where will it all end!

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saucer on fire and crashed it into the "town," it cost him \$20 to replace the model and the section of town that was destroyed.)

Ed also saved on costs, and gathered funds, by using non-actors in principal roles; friends who wanted to help out, and backers who made their investment contingent upon a role in the film. An example of the former was John "Bunny" Breckinridge, the eccentric black sheep of a wealthy social family who managed to lose all his money. True to his name, and his lack of any hint of acting talent, he gives a stunningly over-the-top camp performance as the head alien – a lisping, slightly pudgy man, dressed in a shiny spaceman outfit and standing in front of a shower curtain. And "Bunny" is ably assisted in his style and performance by Dudley Manlove (a rich dilettante who put up money for many of Ed's productions) as his assistant alien. The scene in which Bunny and Dudley brandish handguns and "threaten" the gigantic zombie played by the massive ex-wrestler Tor Johnson is worth the price of admission all by itself.

The sum total of all of this is that the sheer gall of the filmmaker shines through on the screen. We watch in awe (and some hilarity) as the vision of a warped genius with no money, patience or apparent talent unfolds in front of our eyes.

It's easy to deride Ed Wood. His films really are cheapo junk. But they also have an unmistakable quality of watchability. Often in the sense of a train wreck, but also because no matter how bad the film, it was made with love, enthusiasm, boundless energy and commitment and a very skewed vision, and all of this somehow shows through. Ed had the dream, he never recognized that he didn't have the talent. His vision was clear and his dreams were grandiose, but he didn't notice that the end product never measured up to the dream. He loved the process; making the film was the important thing, how it came out in the end was relatively unimportant to him.

Ed never did make any money from his films. By the time he died, in 1978 at the age of 54, he was a desperate drunk, broke and paranoid, making ludicrous appearances in low-budget porno movies, writing throwaway sex novels and planning films that would never get made. Mercifully, the film of his life, Ed Wood starring Johnny Depp, skipped these years of decline and focused on his "glory" years – a time when Ed lusted after fame and poured his prodigious reserves of energy and warped imagination into the creation of films. Ed loved "the movies." He wanted to be a player, and to be remembered as a filmmaker. As it turns out, he got his wish. What we'll never know is if he would have been gratified or insulted by his posthumous recognition as the director of some of the worst – but most enjoyable - films ever made.

Further reading: Nightmare of Ecstasy: The Life and Art of Edward D. Wood, Jr. by Rudolph Grey (Feral House, 1992, reprinted 1994)

Bakka to Queen West

By Sabrina Fried



Mark Freiman, Kate Freiman and Ben Freiman (Owner) pose for a photograph at the Bakka Phoenix Opening Party on April 2, 2005. Photo by John Rose.

Aside from the Merril, or so I like to think, there is no place in Toronto as important to the local fan community as Bakka Phoenix Books. As the oldest store of its kind in Canada still with us, the store is not only an independent source of books, but it also serves as a meeting place for all manner of fans. Bakka opened in 1972 on Queen Street West, almost directly across the street from where The Silver Snail is today, meaning that it was possible for any stripe of fan to indulge all their interests, in the same place.

In 1998, the store moved out to Yonge Street, just north of Wellesley, where it stayed until this past March when new owner Ben Frieman rechristened the store Bakka Phoenix Books and made the decision to return to Queen West. On February 26, Caitlin Sweet helped Bakka close their Yonge Street

location in fine style as her latest book was launched at their moving party. For most of the event, the multitudes were elbow to elbow, even though most of the store stock and more than a few of the shelving units had already been packed off to the new location. As we munched on sushi and cookies, those of us who attended the launch and moving party reminisced about our favourite Bakka memories. The fact that most stories could be corroborated by more than a few of the attendees was a show of just how tight-knit the local fan community is.

The grand re-opening of Bakka Phoenix at its new location at 697 Queen St. West on April 2 felt almost as though everyone who had attended the closing party on Yonge Street had simply followed the party to Queen West. The new location is slightly larger than the Yonge Street location and laid out in such a way that there is much more shelf space. Even so, it didn't take long to pack the store to elbow-crunching capacity during the grand re-opening. In addition to a month-long party-hop, the grand re-opening of Bakka Phoenix served as a book launch for Robert J. Sawyer's latest novel, *Mindscan*. As he was quick to point out, he was the first, in print anyway, to predict that Bakka would return to Queen West one day.

Although I can't say that I have been frequenting Bakka since the day it opened, it's been interesting to see, in the years since I first found the store, just how much it and its clientele has changed, and how they have stayed the same. There was a time at Bakka when you simply couldn't find a graphic novel without crossing the street to visit the local comic shop, now such books have their very own shelf. The media tie-in shelves have waxed and waned and waxed again. Patrons who first visited the store as curious teenagers with their parents now bring their sons and daughters with them. The people behind the counter when I first visited the store are now the ones in front of the counter – signing their award winning books for a legion of dedicated fans.

The old Bakka sign on Yonge is still there, though for how much longer is uncertain as real estate that prime on one of Canada's busiest street rarely stays vacant for long. The unit is already under renovation and many of the other artifacts from Bakka that couldn't be moved are gone, but the space doesn't feel sad or empty. Now that Bakka is back on Queen West it's like they never left.

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

What is the Merrill Collection?

The Merrill 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 Merrill Collection was established in 1970 as The Spaced Out Library by the Toronto Public Library Board with a donation from sf writer Judith Merrill. 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 Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy on January 1, 1991.

Who are the Friends?

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

It is a group of people with the common interest of promoting the Collection 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 Merrill 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
697 Queen Street West, 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 Merrill 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 Merrill 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 Merrill Collection. I have enclosed a cheque or money order (payable to "The Friends of the Merrill Collection") for my 2005/06 membership fee as indicated (memberships run from May 2005 to May 2006):

Individual \$35.⁰⁰ per year

Student (under 18) \$20.⁰⁰ per year

Institution \$42.⁵⁰ per year

This is a:

Membership renewal

New membership

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Please mail to: **The Friends of the Merrill 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.
\$ _____