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...AND OUR RESIDENT EDITOR
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SIDE OF ANIME

AND A CAVALCADE
OF CONS!

WE'VE GOT ADVANCE INFO
ON THE 2011 ACCSFF

WE STOPPED BY THE
2011 TORONTO COMIC
ARTS FESTIVAL

AND WE'VE GOT THE
SCOOP ON THE UPCOMING
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Number 44 July 2011

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Sol Rising, the newsletter of the Friends of the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy, is published by the Friends of the Merrill Collection, c/o The Merrill Collection, Toronto Public Library, 239 College St. 3rd Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1R5. This is issue number 44, July 2011.

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ISSN: 1199-2123

From the Editor

We Have Seen The Future (It's Neon Blue)

By Michael Matheson

As has been commented on before (mostly by me) we just keep changing the way we do things around here. Of course it's always for the better, but that's exactly what *should* happen with any periodical.

Change is good. It allows experimentation, improvement, growth, and advertising opportunities (a shameless plug, true - see page 11). Change allows us to continue to explore how best to reach, inform and entertain those who share our interests (or *euphorically approached obsessions* if we're being honest).

But what doesn't change is the sense of wonder the Merrill continues to evoke and share with you, our patrons.

To wit:

At the Michael Swanwick event the Merrill held on Nov. 18, 2010 (covered in the January 2011 issue) Swanwick read a then unpublished story of his entitled "For I Have Lain Me Down on the Stone of Loneliness and I'll Not Be Back Again". That piece has just recently seen print in the August 2011 edition of *Asimov's*. Michael Swanwick gave everyone present at that event an extraordinary gift - an invitation into the future.

And of course it's true of all the guests who grace the Merrill with their presence that they give those who attend something special. Be it an insight into the craft or an unguarded or slyly divulged statement concerning future or upcoming work(s), or even simply the opportunity to meet an author whom one reveres or idolizes.

So through all the changes we've already made and the others still to come what we're really doing is giving you, our readers and patrons, donors and members, researchers, browsers, attendees and friends, a way to engage a world glimpsed but rarely through conventions and expos - a world of wonders and fantastic voyages, of journeys speculative and strange; a haven of passions and intrigues and rare spices that tingle the tongue and heart and soul. We come bearing wonders.

And we're going to keep pedalling them, and we'll do it through expanded content, advertising and (so help me it's true) colour format in the online version of the magazine come the Winter 2012 issue. There are other changes and innovations we're just bursting to share with you, but we'll have to bide our time on those.

So yes, there have been changes. There will be more. Glory in them.

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Madeline Ashby at the Merril

“While You Were Reading Tolkien, I Was Watching Evangelion”

By Lorna Toolis

Madeline Ashby wrote her Master's thesis at York University on anime, fan culture and cyborg theory. And on Wednesday March 16, 2011, in the reading room of the Merril Collection she talked about growing up with anime, as opposed to text, delivering a short lecture entitled “While You Were Reading Tolkien, I was Watching Evangelion”. She compared *Neon Genesis Evangelion* to other anime series and answered questions from the audience.

Madeline Ashby's blog describes her as a science fiction writer, futurist-in-training, anime fan, and immigrant. You can find out more about her at <http://madelineashby.com>, or follow her Twitter at <http://twitter.com/#!/madelineashby>.

[Addendum]: Madeline Ashby's eponymous website also contains a bibliography of her published fiction, appearing in Tesseracts Eleven, FLURB and Nature among others, her Tor.com blog, and her writings for io9, Online Fandom, SF Signal and elsewhere. She also has a novel in the offing, which according to her blog post “Why the New York Times should give me Ginia Bellafante's Job:” “[is] a science fiction novel. It has robots in it. Killer robots. Killer female robots.” You had us at killer robots.



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Come to the Dark Side

Exploring the Darker, More Adult Side of Anime

By Michael Matheson

All kidding aside (okay, *some* kidding aside), the label “teen” anime is an extraordinarily loose one. Just about everything that isn’t stuffed to the gills with explicit content gets tagged as “teen anime”. If *Pokémon*, *Card Captor Sakura* and *Sailor Moon* are evidentiary of children’s, or “kiddy” anime, then everything else right up until an 18A title is going to be considered “teen”. But there’s a great deal of material that gets overlooked because people new to anime assume it’s for a younger, or teen audience, when in fact the majority of anime is produced for an older audience, not a younger one.

Speaking to that, by now you’ve probably seen the “Got Anime?” pamphlet put out by the TPL in December of last year - if not you can pick one up at any TPL branch and the pamphlet’s well worth a look as a list of sample recommendations. But even that pamphlet, which was actually geared toward a teen audience through the TPL’s *RAMP* program, falls prey to the same misconception that so proliferates Western understandings of anime as to be systemic.

Calling something anime does not automatically mean it’s for teens. We’ll cover off some of the better titles mentioned in the pamphlet below, pointing out which were geared for a teen audience and which for an adult, with *A* and *T* as quick reference and you’ll see what I mean.

Appleseed (A, with a story that’s far more intellectually and conceptually driven than action oriented), *Bleach* (T), *Cowboy Bebop Remix* (A, with stories that are, with a few exceptions, adult pathos-driven work), *Fullmetal Alchemist* (A, with a heavy emphasis on pathos and the notion of emotional and physical self sacrifice), *Ghost Hunt* (T), *Millennium Actress* (A, with a heavy focus on loss and how that affects us over the full course of our lives, a notion which to get the most out of you really need to have lived for more than 18 years), *Orphen* (T), *Peacemaker Kurogane* (T), *R.O.D. the OVA* (T, and do yourself a favour and avoid the series which the pamphlet also mentions as the latter is painfully uneven, starting out as a roommate/situation comedy with supranormal goings on, then halfway through the series shifts gears, turning into an apocalyptic battle for world domination plot replete with character origin headfakes and outright switcharoos. It also has what is probably the clumsiest attempt to manage a “writing literally changes the world” plotline I’ve yet seen, and the

“active” and indulgently destructive brains of Wells, Doyle and Shakespeare in preservation vats. I mean *really?*), *Record of Lodoss War* (A, despite having to overcome some truly appalling dialogue there’s an excellent story here in the grand quest tradition. Granted it’s a story you know intimately if you’ve ever played D&D since the series was based on the creator’s own experiences with the game, but it’s beautifully told), and *Tokyo Godfathers* (A).

There are more series or OVAs mentioned in the pamphlet

with which I’m not personally familiar or that I haven’t seen all of yet that probably do deserve mention: *Naruto*, *Rurouni Kenshin*, *Samurai Deeper Kyo*, *Samurai 7*, *Scrapped Princess* and *Steamboy*. And it’s worth mentioning that there are some ... oddities ... in the pamphlet. *Gravitation* is a good example. Though the series is covered it apparently slipped everyone’s notice that the central theme of

the series is a yaoi (gay) love story. It’s a rather important thing to just skip over, constituting the entire basis of the

series. Not exactly sure what happened there, but that minor oversight is probably in the same category as the inclusion of *Burst Angel*.

If you don’t know *Burst Angel* that’s okay, you’re not actually missing anything. It’s not teen anime, and it’s not adult either, it’s just bad. It’s about fan service (I mean hell, if Sei’s breasts were any bigger she wouldn’t be able to walk, she’d just fall over repeatedly as gravity asserted itself) and guns (*insert Freudian comment here*) paired with an extremely unsatisfying finish (*more Freudian commentary?*), rushed because we’ve taken too much time watching Jo shoot things. Though I do like the fact that Jo’s mecha is named Django. I mean who *didn’t* like watching Franco Nero play that role?

And lastly, we have to take a moment to talk about *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. It’s the definition of a fence-straddling title in that it tries so hard to be adult work, seeking to define itself through psychological, religious and emotional contortions as a series catering to real human emotion and the “really big questions”, but ultimately falls so short of that goal on all counts. The psychology stays firmly rooted in issues of burgeoning sexual identity and self-loathing but approaches them in a glossed over, pop psych fashion. The religious



Loved. Hated. NGE is perhaps the most unabashedly polarizing anime series of the last quarter century.

questions skip over understandings of what the interposing of the "Angels" (the supranatural beings the EVAs fight against) into our existence actually means or signifies to go straight to the question 'do we end this series by killing everyone or leave two characters alive to start a new, if fractured and apocalyptic Eden?' Guess which they went with. And last, but not least, the emotional reachings fall short for two simple reasons: none of the characters in the series are fully fleshed out people. They're all caricatures, drawn in broad strokes, and not in order to give us reason to care for any of them. The characters in *NGE* are uniformly loathsome, which is actually quite surprising because you do actively *want* to care for a number of these people, you're just never given enough to work with. It prompts one to wonder just what the hell the series writers were actually trying to say about humanity. Is everything really dark and depressing and hopeless? Will we even if we can restore existence to a new beginning find that idyll to be not a heaven, but a new hell? In its inability to decide what it actually wants to say - and choosing to end the series on a massive cop out - *NGE* never manages to rise above its immensely depressing (and in this case unusually unengaging) YA roots.

Now, from the above, it's fairly clear that there is a good deal of anime that gets overlooked as teen oriented because people don't have the time or the interest to look deeply enough at what's actually unfolding, and some anime that tries and fails to hit adult levels. But what about the truly dark anime? A number of which are based on some *extremely* dark manga.

Well, there are a lot of good choices out there and they're worth discussing.

We'll start with *Gantz*. It's unrelentingly brutal and chock full of explicit violence, and has one of the best sci-fi stories you'll find in any anime. But why is it a mature title? Primarily because *a lot of people die*. Horribly. And in some cases repeatedly. Because *Gantz* isn't about the value of life, it's about the *why* of death. It just goes about the question in the most bone crunchingly, limb severing, gore splattering way available. And yet it's not splatterpunk (give yourself a pat on the back if you remember that now defunct - mostly - sci-fi movement). All of the violence and incessant brutality in *Gantz* is there to underscore the fact that people are being *forced* to do horrible things to survive. In many ways it's the antithesis of manga like *Battle Royale*, because dark as that manga is *BR* has a tendency to devolve into spurts of almost comedic violence, whereas *Gantz* never loses sight of its goal: to terrify by suggesting that survival isn't about anything remotely human. And for those of you balking at watching *Gantz* because of the level of brutality I've mentioned here, bear this in mind: the first season of *Gantz* was banned from national televised release in Japan (and that's saying something) until it had been edited down, though the second season was uncut - but the anime is considered *tame* compared to Hiroya Oku's original mangas.

Next, we have to go to *Ghost in the Shell*. There is no talking about anime sci-fi without talking about the adaptation of

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Shirow Masamune's much loved manga. We Spec Fic people talk about Gibson's *Neuromancer*, anime fans talk about *GitS*. Philosophy, the erasure of physical boundaries and the implementation and enforcement of conceptual ones, mental censorship, spies, terrorism, government policing à la Big Brother; it's all there. And while many people will tell you that *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* is a brilliant follow-up to the first movie, this is a lie. It is incredibly weak when compared to the original *GitS*. The true successor to the original film is actually the OAV *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (*Solid State Society*). The *GitS: S.A.C.* series is also well worth the watch. It ignores the storyline from the first film to veer off in a completely different direction, but conceptually the series is brilliant, and the character arcs highly enjoyable.

Unlike the two major pieces (with deep cult followings) mentioned above, *Gunnm*, released here as *Battle Angel Alita*, never really hit it big in North America. It's a shame because it's a tightly wound, if short (though the manga is several series long), piece about the tragedies of first, and one might add impossible, loves. Especially in a setting where one of the protagonists isn't human, but still experiences the same longings and passions that a human does. The entire story focuses on the possibility that humanity, as a function of being, is lost on so many levels and in so many different fashions by virtue of our decisions and those made for us by others. No one in the story is really human anymore, because each character has either had something taken from them or has voluntarily given up a part of themselves. It's quite a fascinating character study.

Those of you who read Donald Simmons' farewell to Satoshi Kon in our last issue may recall that he mentioned Kon's major works. You should familiarize yourself with these. The first is *Paranoia Agent*. It's downright creepy, and has a lot to say about communal and group psychosis and mass hallucination. It also speaks to quite literal mass hysteria and the devolution of societal boundaries and mores, but it's the way "Little Slugger", real or imagined, goes about his shamelessly brutal assaults on "ordinary" citizens that makes this a dark masterpiece. The series does not apologize for what it presents. It gives it to you to ponder. One is left feeling largely unclean after the series, because in a sense one is invited into a voyeuristic relationship with the violence, moreso than in an action story. Because here, we know that what is happening is horrible, yet we cannot stop ourselves from watching, and wanting to see more to find out where the series is going.

The other of Kon's works that needs to be seen is *Perfect Blue*. Another piece that begins simply and rapidly devolves into a mental nightmare, *Perfect Blue* is the kind of film where you can settle in thinking you're watching a teen biopic/drama if you don't look at the blurb first. It starts so innocuously and becomes a shared delusion with an excellent twist. The only flaw in this otherwise stellar film is the last line which is totally out of place in this dark allegory about celebrity devouring one's identity - though the same is true of *Millennium Actress*, wherein the last line totally undercuts the entire premise of the film, almost but not quite ruining the experience.

Continuing in the vein of deceptive stories, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* should come next. Often misrepresented as Hayao Miyazaki's first "cutesy environmentally conscious outing" people somehow seem to miss the fact that this is a story about humanity struggling in a post-apocalyptic era (environmentally induced), replete with military conquest, subjugation, enslavement, the raising of "the Seven Demons of Fire" who first razed the world and who will do so again in the hands of a mad queen who will do anything to destroy the slowly but inevitably encroaching "toxic jungle" ... and really big bugs. It's quite a masterful work, often overlooked in favour of more recent, easier stories like *Princess Mononoke* or *Howl's Moving Castle*. It's not that these are less potent stories, simply less complex and much more overt than *Nausicaa's* subtly vicious story arc. At least the ending is a hopeful one or the story would be too painful to bear multiple viewings.



Beautiful, vicious, transgressive. Hell Girl unashamedly revels in the cathartic pleasure of watching horrible people suffer.

Of course the flip side of a series about grand and sweeping themes played out against a massive canvas of war and impending apocalypse is a series about extremely personal themes played out against a tightly framed canvas. And in its almost fulsomely voyeuristic sense of intimacy *Hell Girl* comes very close to crossing boundaries better left alone. The series is brazenly open about the kind of subjects it's painting. And there are no broad brush strokes here. There is only a sense of pain, suffering and a surprisingly cathartic resolution to each storyline. Each episode is the story of the violation or abuse (more often psychological or moral than physical) of an individual who then succumbs to temptation and seeks the aid of the *Jigoku Shoujo* (literally the "Hell Girl" of the title) who is contacted through the auspices of a website that appears on the internet at exactly the stroke of midnight. Her retribution is swift. Name the object of your suffering and the *Jigoku*

Shoujo will drag them off to Hell. Literally. The price? Your soul. But beyond the delightfully Faustian nature of the series lies something even more interesting. The *Jigoku Shoujo* is a living girl named Ai Enma (that translation gets tricky: *ai* can be a reflexive usage like the English “I”, but can also mean the English “eye”, while *Enma* is the name of the ruler of Hell in Shingon [Japanese] Buddhism, so there’s a lot of room to play with interpretation there), and when the pact is made Ai literally puts on the mantle (pun intended) of the *Jigoku Shoujo*, and enacts the vengeance of the wronged party. But the real underlying question of the series is ‘who is this terrifyingly detached, almost inhuman *child*, and why is she the engine of infernal vengeance?’ It’s a dark gem, and not to be missed.

Next has to come *Ninja Scroll*. It’s one of the most beautifully drawn and fluidly animated of modern anime films - not to mention a brutally tragic and exquisitely wrought story, with multiple intricate arcs, even if the premise of the plot is one you’ll recognize if you’re a fan of classical Japanese Shogun era writing. However, *Ninja Scroll* has, to the best of my knowledge, the most rape scenes (three to be exact) you’ll find in an anime film outside of a hentai title. Two actually have a basis (one for story progression, one for a quick and dirty object lesson in the abuse of women by men in a feudal system), but the other is utterly gratuitous. And still, for all its viciousness and unrelenting dismemberment (quite literally) the story balances on a beautiful thin line, delicate as silk and as biting as razor wire.

And here I’m going to go ahead and include a series you’ve probably never heard of called *Haibane Renmei*. And those of you who have heard of it are probably thinking that it doesn’t belong here with the rest of the dark stuff. You can be forgiven that assumption readily because the series is deceptively simple, and on a surface level appears to be a moralist fable. But it’s actually quite a detailed philosophical mystery. The series manages quite deftly to avoid stereotypes and asks some fascinating questions about God (both the big “G” and the little “g”), consequences and redemption, or perhaps more accurately the ability to forgive *oneself* as key to redemption. It really is the subtle undertone of forgiveness, self-loathing and whether or not we damn ourselves that makes this series so dark despite its bubbly surface *moe* production values. Foot long stylized wings cannot hide the darkness of the souls that linger in torment beneath - or the stains that spread like a creeping pox across their radiant feathers as signifying those who are tainted by the actions of their previous lives - in what is an otherwise idyllic setting. All in all it’s quite a dark little tale for something so seemingly frothy or superficial.

Technically, this list could just keep going, but one of the joys of having so many choices is the opportunity to discover things for yourself. And in that vein here’s a nudge in the right direction of some more excellent titles you really should have a look at: *Grave of the Fireflies*, the 2004 live action *Casshern*, *Jin-Roh*, *Elfen Lied*, *When They Cry - Higurashi*, *Claymore*, *Hellsing*, *Blame!*, *Vampire Hunter D*, and *X* (the OAV, the series has ... issues).



Burning Days Under Northern Suns

Glenn Grant at the Merrill Collection

By Lorna Toolis

On April 8, 2011, Canadian author and editor Glenn Grant appeared at the Merrill Collection. He read from his new short story collection, *Burning Days*, and answered questions about his writing and editing.

Mr. Grant also co-edited the anthologies *Northern Stars* and *Northern Suns*, together with David Hartwell.

[Editor's Note]: Glenn Grant's latest collection was released through Nanopress and you can find more information on the volume at

http://www.nanopress.ca/english/books/Burning_Days.html

You can also purchase a copy directly from the website.

The 2011 Toronto Comic Arts Festival

By Michael Matheson

On May 7th and 8th the Toronto Reference Library was host to the Toronto Comic Arts Festival. The TCAF is one of those rare (or maybe it just feels rare because it's so spectacularly well run) events that caters to independent, alternative and underground comics *as well as* mainstream graphic works.

As Christopher Butcher, the Festival Director and one of its co-founders, put it while doing his final wrap up for TCAF 2011 on the festival's website (www.torontocomics.com) the show had a "record year". The sixth outing, and third consecutive year, of the TCAF had more than 300 exhibitors (comprised of authors, illustrators, artists and publishers), hosted programming that included readings, interviews, symposia, art installations (several from special collections), and a range of satellite events. Something over 15,000 people attended this year's TCAF over the 3 days the festival ran. I can well believe it. When I dropped by the festival the TRL was packed wall to wall with people moving in tidal crushes, all clamouring to be a part of

what was a truly overwhelming (though undeniably euphoric) experience.



And there were an extraordinary number of international artists who exhibited their work at the TCAF, not the least of whom were three very special guests: French artist/author Arnaud Boutle, Italian multi-disciplinary artist Lorenzo Mattotti, and Japanese manga-ka Usamaru Furuya, all of whom were guests of honour at special events throughout the day on the 9th (at external venues).

Christopher Butcher discussed the other featured guests (*certainly* no less special for our inability to list them all here due to restrictions on space) as well as a wide range of topics, round-ups and thank yous specific to the event over at the TCAF website in his article "TCAF 2011 - Festival Wrap-Up and 2012 Announcement!" It's well worth a look to get an overview of one of the most trafficked (and *free!*) comics festivals going, and to see what the TCAF crew has planned for their 2012 season.

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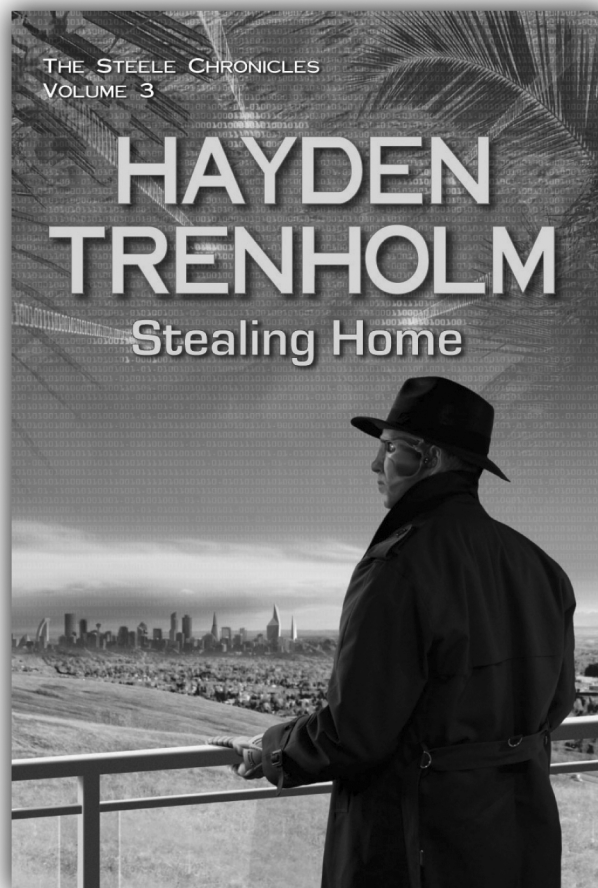
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Pulp-tacular, Pulp-tacular

The 15th Annual Pulp Show and Sale (Not a Musical, *Spec-tacular* as That Would Be)

By Jamie Fraser

From the Amazing and Astounding to the Fantastic, Thrilling and Weird (and that's just the dealers) the 15th Annual Fantastic Pulp Show and Sale proved once again to be a glorious and successful event. A treasure trove of material both old and new for those interested in the enthralling world of Pulp Magazines and Pulp Fiction in general was available for sale in the lower level of the Lillian H. Smith Branch of The Toronto Public Library on Saturday, May 14th.



entertainment reading material for most people throughout Canada and the United States.

Their garish or lurid covers combined with the high quality of writing and illustration helped them sell from the newsstands in the tens, if not hundreds of millions of copies.

The vast variety of story genres covered all areas of interest and they launched the careers of many authors. Almost every major writer from the '30s through the '60s appeared in the pulps or their successors, the digest magazines and paperback books. Chandler, Dick, Christie, Hammett, Bloch, Cain, Ellison, Silverberg, Smith (several) and Lovecraft are some of the famous

writers whose work appeared in the pulps. While the majority of the foregoing authors are still in print many others are not,

The eager crowd lining up in the basement echo chamber went ecstatic over this year's vast selection of arcane pulps, books, DVDs, and other items. With 28 and a half tables the selection and quality of material was greater than ever. The room was packed with readers and collectors of all ages - oh wait, that was just at my four tables. But everyone else was more than pleased with their sales or purchases. Kudos as always to the Merrill staff and other volunteers who helped make this year's show such a success. As always there was a fascinating slide show presentation (given by Neil Mechem of Girasol Collectables) on the pulps and also guided tours of the Merrill Collection stacks. These guided tours are only given during select Merrill events.



including Erle Stanley Gardner (best known for Perry Mason) who is one of the best selling authors of all time.

The pulps even had a lot to do with the initial creation of Scientology in that its creator writer L. Ron Hubbard incorporated many aspects similar

to the later Scientology tenets into his pulp stories and even took out ads so that people could respond with their ideas and opinions. He took the responses and used them in the creation of his very own religion.

For the past 15 years The Friends of the Merrill Collection has presented this unique show to the public and while the show has changed somewhat over the years it has retained its primary purpose of broadening the public awareness of pulp magazines and pulp fiction in all its formats and offshoots. Starting with the original pulps from the early 1900s through the 1950s pulps were the primary form of mass



I would be remiss in not mentioning the great Judith Merrill whose stories first appeared in the pulps and without whom The Merrill Collection would not be the internationally renowned library it is today. The donation of her personal collection to the then Spaced Out Library (later renamed in her honour) many years ago cannot be praised enough. There are only a few such special collections of speculative fiction in the world and we are extremely blessed to have one in our own city.

So get off your duff and come in to visit the Collection - and if you can't just send money. We now take PayPal.

The 15th Annual Fantastic Pulp Show and Sale

By Lorna Toolis

One hundred and forty four people came to the 15th Annual Fantastic Pulp Show and Sale on May 14, 2011. There were 28 tables of different pulps and related materials available in the basement of the Lillian Smith building.

That same afternoon, upstairs in the Merrill Collection reading room, pulp art enthusiast Neil Mechem, of Girasol Collectables (www.girasolcollectables.com), presented a selection of cover art from his pulp magazine collection. As the digital images appeared on the screen he identified the artists, explained their styles and techniques, and discussed the popularity of the artists and the different magazines, both at that time and now. He also answered questions from the audience attending this popular annual event.

For anyone who would like more access to pulp materials, Pulpfest 2011 (www.pulpfest.com/2010/10/05/pulpfest-2011-and-other-news/) will take place on July 29-31 in Columbus, Ohio.

For a more academic approach, you can look up the display Syracuse University's Bird Library had on pulp fiction and art ([http://library.syr.edu/find/scrc/programs/exhibits/Orange%](http://library.syr.edu/find/scrc/programs/exhibits/Orange%20Pulp.php)

[20Pulp.php](http://www.20Pulp.php)). The display, titled "Orange Pulp: The Pulp Magazine and Contemporary Culture" ran from January 25, 2011 to June 17, 2011 but the general overview is still available online. Among other items the exhibit contained original work by Norman Saunders and the typescript of Isaac Asimov's "Strange Playfellow".

[Editor's Note]: And if that's not enough material for you head back one page and have a look at Jamie Fraser's article on the Pulp Show, delivered from the viewpoint of a wisecracking, not exactly hard-boiled, not quite gum-heeled vendor.

And you could always have a look at a resurrected pulp in the form of Weird Tales over at www.weirdtalesmagazine.com. Since Ann Vandermeer is current Editor-in-Chief of the magazine you no longer have any viable excuse not to go and see the production for yourself.

Or you could always drop in to the Merrill Collection and see the exhaustive collection of period pulp magazines the Collection has in the Archives. I mean it's not like that's what we actually do or anything ...



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Embracing a Sense of Wonder

The Artwork of HaveConquest

By Michael Matheson

At the time of this writing HaveConquest has chosen to strip the profile and galleries they keep on DeviantArt (<http://haveconquest.deviantart.com>) of all his past work, packaging all those pieces into four downloadable packets, to instead focus on a new body of work, crafting from a clean slate as it were.

A bold move - one not many artists would choose.



Indeed, very few artists are so readily willing ready to break with their past in order to better embrace their future. And yet, it is a quintessential choice on the part of HaveConquest.

He is an artist whose work constantly embraces change. Whether it be through his willingness to experiment with a variety of styles and approaches, to create images and videos that are paired with (and the result of) music, or as he has now done to go back to basics and literally work on a thousand instances (each) of a small series of subjects in order to better understand each, HaveConquest is an artist who will not be bound by anyone else's rules or expectations.

And if his work is any sign to go by that approach is most definitely working. And even those thousand repetitions, which could so easily become rote and boring in the hands of a less gifted artist are in HaveConquest's hands a thing of wonder. Each tiny piece that he has produced so far, creating them in small but profuse bursts as he moves through the lengthy task he has set himself, is an exquisite work of art unto itself.

We wait breathlessly, and in an ever delighting state of wonder, to see where he will go from here.

HaveConquest produced a quietly potent Fullmetal Alchemist cover for us this issue.

And given how well it turned out we wanted to share the textless version with you (see opposite page). And in case you were wondering, the images on this page are, clockwise from Top Right: "Gatling Girl", "Strict Machine" and "Frostthreads".



Anime North 2011

More Anime, Manga and Cosplayers Than You Can Shake a Shakuju At (We Tried ...)

By Michael Matheson

Okay, the first thing you have to understand about Anime North is that it's huge.

No, no. *Huge*.

It's been estimated that this year Anime North's attendance (pre-registered and door crashers who were present over the three days of the convention - May 27-29, 2011) actually broke the 20,000 mark. Yes, you read that right.

There are all kinds of cultural phenomena with a pervasive following that are big in North America. Many of these admittedly seem to involve naked or mostly naked women, but that's a discussion for another time.

Anime, unlike the aforementioned naked women, brings out the casually curious, the otaku ("fans") and the marginally obsessed. Oh yes, and Cosplayers ("costume playing" is the act, some would say art, of creating a costume modeled after a book/film/game character and then dressing in said costume - often for long periods of time while posing for pictures taken

by other Cosplayers) - in fact more Cosplayers than you would have believed could actually fit into the Toronto Congress Center. Though, admittedly, a lot of them were wandering around *outside* the actual TCC and the four hotels that housed events as well.

But above and beyond the truly numerous Cosplayers (and the obligatory Costume Judging) there were an enormous number of things to see and do at this year's Anime North, which is really what a convention is *supposed* to be all about.

What with the 404 Improv Comedy Troupe pulling off their four (!) shows and conducting their workshops, the presentation of the Momiji Award (of which Helen McCarthy was the 2011 winner), events, lectures, screenings, the Masquerades/Parties, the Charity Auction and the general gaming events (TCG, CCG, VG, LARPing - and am I the only one who finds LARPing *Battle Royale* creepy? - etc.) there was something for everyone.

Admittedly, it was a little difficult to get to everything as events overlapped over the convention's three days. But the idea behind Anime North has always been (or at least has always seemed so to me) to present so wide an array of options that everyone comes away having had exactly the mix and match experience they wanted from the weekend.

It's no easy task getting 20,000 people enthused enough to rave about the event and begin gearing up for the next year's roundup the moment this one's over, but that's exactly what Anime North keeps pulling off year after year.

In fact registration has already opened up for 2012, and it can only get bigger (and better) from here.

The convention got some excellent press this year, and most of that coverage is available online, as well as some group and guest specific coverage. We've compiled a quick list of places to browse for good Anime North 2011 coverage below:

Helen McCarthy on Anime North (*excellent* coverage):
<http://helenmccarthy.wordpress.com/2011/06/04/anime-north-2011-canada-is-big/>

The Grid (not so much coverage as a snippet):
www.thegridto.com/city/local-news/when-worlds-collide/

Trigunkwan (404 Improv Group member) on Anime North 2011 (Just ... wow ... TMI):
www.crunchyroll.com/forumtopic-719145/anime-north-2011-from-toronto-canada-con-report

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Purist Fandom Gets a Home at OSRCon

Like Building a Time Machine, Minus the Physics, Engineering and Lower Back Pain

By Chris Cunningham

Nostalgia is a drug. One day you're living your life looking out the window and you start to recall events in the past. They have a bright glow to them.

The problem is that nostalgia is a nice place to visit, but you can't live there. The more one becomes seduced by nostalgia the more you start to feel that ... perhaps ... your life now and in the future could never be any better than it was then. Is that true? Eek, you'd better hope not. Thinking that could put a serious crimp in your well-being from now until the end.

But what is one to do? Sometimes you want to go back. You want to see those places. Maybe if you were young when *Dungeons & Dragons* was going mainstream, you want to play those games of yore, capture that old feeling.

Then you discover that demographic is real. You are not alone. Blogs pop up on the interweb that tell you other people have the same sentiments for how role playing games used to be in the early 1980s. And maybe they have a point.

Dungeons & Dragons was a basement start-up, once upon a time, similar to any number of Silicon Valley rags to riches stories. E. Gary Gygax had worked for a Wisconsin insurance company; he was let go and endeavoring to keep his family fed worked as a cobbler fixing people's shoes, in Lake Geneva.

But he had other interests. For years he'd been involved in wargaming: lead figures on sand tables or painted papier maché hills. The two main eras represented were Napoleonic and World War II. It was the sixties. The whole enterprise was not mainstream and it was very handy-crafty.

Big money changed all that, as it usually does. The company that started raking in millions of dollars was called TSR for Tactical Studies Rules. The first publication these hobby enthusiasts cum entrepreneurs created was called *The Strategic Review*. I suspect they just liked the acronym so much they chose new words for the same initials.

The thing is that the qualities required to start a business often are the opposite set of those needed to manage a large business. The management of TSR caromed out of control. Then TSR was bought by a bigger fish called Wizards Of The Coast. WOTC in turn was bought by Hasbro. Perhaps you've heard of them?

So now it's the '90s and the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* property is owned by one of the largest toy makers in the world. They have a way of doing things, a corporate way. They are not handy-crafty. They are unfamiliar with the battles of either Austerlitz or Kursk. To them papier maché is

something you buy in a crafts store, and which *no* line of television commercials will ever make profitable.

Dungeons & Dragons changed quite dramatically. *First Edition (Basic)*. *Second Edition (AD&D)*. *Third Edition*. And now - *Just In Time For Christmas!* - came the *Fourth Edition*.

At almost the same time (March 2008) E. Gary Gygax died.

At that point nerds of a certain age started to reflect ... and then they compared the way *Dungeons & Dragons* is today to the way it was. They found some significant changes and - like the Cylons - they had a plan.

To bottom line it for you, they decided that the *Fourth Edition* of *D&D* was radically over engineered. There were too many rules. There was a rule for every possible situation. In a way it sounds ideal, but to this group that level of uniform detail killed a certain quality that the old game, with its incomplete rules, used to possess. Mystery and wonder seems to be related to the unknown. If you know, and your players know, all the rules then all you do is argue about them.

Back in the day the Dungeon Master who ran the game was in complete control. His word (let's not kid ourselves about what gender played *D&D* back in the day) was law. He was making it up on the spot half the time. People three blocks away from your house were playing a slightly different *D&D* because there were so many gaps in the rules where the DM was expected to make a ruling. And besides, there's a commercial incentive for Hasbro to grind out dozens of books answering every contingency.

Some people started making their own games such as *Labyrinth Lord*, *Lamentations of the Flame Princess*, and *Swords & Wizardry*, which aimed to be more evocative than complete in an effort to recapture the way *D&D* used to be played.

Those are the kinds of games - along with a pantheon of old games (likely purchased on Ebay) - that will be present at OSRCon (Old School RPG Convention) at the Lillian H. Smith Library on August 12th and 13th, 2011. Learn more at <http://www.osrcon.ca>, or through the OSRCon announcement on the TPL's website (www.torontopubliclibrary.ca) in the Events section (under the Merrill Collection category).

Austerlitz was Napoleon's greatest victory. Kursk was the largest tank battle of WWII. And it is to be hoped that people will bring their old lead figures to OSRCon. Sometimes handy-crafty creations have more charm than corporate ones. There will be no papier maché.

If These Ivied Walls Could Talk ...

The 2011 Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy

By Allan Weiss, Chair

Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy

In 1995, Jim Botte and Siân Reid created the Academic Conference on Canadian Content in the Speculative Arts and Literature (ACCCSAL) as part of that year's CanCon SF convention in Ottawa. I was pleased to be one of four presenters at that initial conference, along with Siân, Paula Johanson, and Robert Runte. Jim asked me to take over as Chair, and in 1997 I brought the newly named Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy (ACCSFF) to Toronto, where it has found a permanent home at the Merril Collection.

Since its move to the Merril, the ACCSFF has been held fairly regularly every two years, and has proudly hosted some of the most important authors and scholars of the fantastic in the country. Among the authors who have spoken at our conference are Judith Merril, Guy Gavriel Kay, Nalo Hopkinson, Candace Jane Dorsey, Elisabeth Vonarburg, Robert Charles Wilson, Peter Watts, and Margaret Atwood. Our scholar guest speakers have included Veronica Hollinger, Peter Fitting, and, most recently, Dracula expert Elizabeth Miller.

There have been ten conferences in the series thus far, and papers presented over that fifteen-year span have covered a vast range of topics, from the novels of William Gibson, Margaret Atwood, and Peter Watts to the films of David Cronenberg, from television series like *Supernatural* to young-adult, fantasy, and horror fiction, and from radio prizes to SF poetry. Our goal has been to provide a venue for talks about all forms of Canadian SF, and we seek papers that are academically sound but geared to a general audience. Given the lively question-and-answer sessions that have so often followed the paper presentations, I'd like to think those papers that have proven to be provocative as well as interesting! The conference has grown every year, and two years ago, for the first time ever, we had to have concurrent sessions to accommodate all the great papers submitted.

It's now time for another conference, and ACCSFF will be returning to the Merril later this summer. The conference will be held on September 10, 2011, and we're pleased to announce that our Author Guest for ACCSFF '11 is Charles de Lint! Instead of a talk, however, his appearance will be in the form of an on-stage interview, followed by a question-and-answer session with the audience. The interview will focus on his role in the history and development of urban fantasy, a genre that has blossomed in the past two decades or so. I'm sure we'll see an animated discussion afterward.

The conference's program is now shaping up, and it looks as if we will have sessions on science fiction, SF film, young-adult

fiction, the readership of SF, and media expressions. We will have papers on Peter Watts, Nalo Hopkinson, Margaret Atwood, and Julie Czerneda; on SF in Canadian music; on such movies as *Splice* and the *Resident Alien* series; on some early Canadian authors of SF; and on the portrayal of Native-Canadians in SF by both Native and non-Native authors. There will be more papers, and papers on a greater variety of topics, than ever before.

A number of volunteers and staff members have been helping us with this year's ACCSFF, and I'd like to thank them. Michael Johnstone at the University of Toronto and Sarah Henstra and Jennifer Brayton at Ryerson distributed the Call for Papers in Canada, while Lars Schmeink in Hamburg has been spreading the word through his European contacts. Collection Head Lorna Toolis again booked space for the conference in the Lillian H. Smith branch, and librarian Annette Mocek has once more offered to assist with administration and planning. David Cheater - who will be presenting his first-ever conference paper at ACCSFF this year - is returning to head our refreshments committee. (Of course, we're always looking for people to help us with registration and other duties...)

Thanks to the generosity of the Friends of the Merril Collection, who have contributed financially to ACCSFF over the years, and with the free space that the Merril has been providing we have been able to keep registration costs at a minimum. We're still working on the details, but this year's conference may well be even more affordable than usual, especially for Friends! Please watch our website for details about the program and registration. We can be found at: www.yorku.ca/accsff

The foregoing website provides a history of ACCSFF, including programs and photos from earlier conferences. If you click on *Publications* you can find out how to obtain a copy of *Further Perspectives on the Canadian Fantastic: Proceedings of the 2003 Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy*, which features Margaret Atwood's keynote address as well as all the papers presented at the event. Proceeds from the sales of the book go toward future ACCSFFs.

ACCSFF '11 promises to be one of the most exciting and wide-ranging conferences ever. If you're interested in Canadian science fiction and fantasy, and want to hear the latest research on what has been and is being written, filmed, and televised, come and participate. I look forward to seeing you there!

The ACCSFF in Action

“Geffen and Ravna”: A SF Sestina - Originally Presented at the 2007 Lecture Series

By Dominick Grace

Nominated for the Governor General’s Award for poetry for *Ordinary, Moving* in 1969, Phyllis Gotlieb has had a split career “as a Canadian poet and an American Science Fiction writer,” as she herself has said (Ketterer, 1). While this bifurcation is as much a function of economics as anything else, it reflects, humourously, the profound concern for the nature of identity that pervades Gotlieb’s work, both SF and poetry. The Canadian market offers little to the writer of SF, or did when Gotlieb’s career began in the late 1950s - though the ongoing success of the Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy (ACCSFF), organized by Allan Weiss and hosted at the Merrill Collection, as well as the current importance of many Canadian writers of the fantastic, suggests that things have changed on that front, as Gotlieb has noted in “The Alien at the Feast: The Publishers of and the Audience for Fantastic Literature in Canada”.

This dichotomy is also misleading inasmuch as some of Gotlieb’s poetry is SF, and SF tropes and motifs recur in her non-SF poetry. Though often praised for her playfulness (Marhsall cites that “she sees life as a show, a more or less absurd circus or carnival,” [116], while Barbour notes her invocation of “counting-rhymes, game songs, riddles, jokes and traditional verses” [72]), the lightness and apparent simplicity of her work underwrites her interest in “family relationships, historical roots, and the cultural implications of biological or technological possibilities” (Lane, 476). Especially interesting are Gotlieb’s long poems. Bentley has associated the long poem in Canada with the space between the epic and the lyric, the imperial and the personal as a form that “is the record or chronicle of a cultural unit that exists in or beside a civilization and provides its constituents with a comforting sense of their identity and difference” (9); unsurprisingly, a poetic genre defined in such terms of difference or liminality is seen by many to “[arrive] at an unmappable form” (Kramer, 102). Kamboureli argues that the long poem “makes itself felt through its discontinuities, its absences, and its deferrals” (xiv); Kramer, however, has challenged such readings arguing that “if we look at recent long poems we discover mappable cultural forms and authorities” (102).

Phyllis Gotlieb’s “Geffen and Ravna: Four Sestinas”, first published in *Torus* and then in *TransVersions 5* before being collected in *Red Blood Black Ink White Paper*, Gotlieb’s collection of new and selected poems published in 2002, is a narrative consisting of four sestinas, though Gotlieb does not strictly observe the rules governing the form.

In the poem, Gotlieb uses a few standard SF tropes to metaphorize the problematic nature of identity especially in relation to issues of the self, sex, and the other, while using the

sestina form and variations on it to further underscore the interpenetrations and divergences of identity in the poem. “Geffen and Ravna” is set on a distant planet - “that last outpost world” (l. 7) - with a human population living in Terra Station and an alien population in Farroes Colony: neither species, apparently, is indigenous to the icy, snow-bound planet which is an inimical environment to both. The poem tells the story of Geffen, a human Wardman, or prison-keeper, in Terra Station, and of Ravna, a Farroes female, captured as a spy and placed in his custody.

Not surprisingly, the ensuing narrative is a love story between Geffen and Ravna; one might expect such a love story to explore the bridging of cultural differences. However, Gotlieb has a more complex and less optimistic agenda in mind. Rather than providing a narrative of cultural rapprochement and acceptance of the other, Gotlieb provides a situation in which movement outward is simultaneously movement inward. The result is not a comforting bromide about loving the alien but instead an interrogative meditation about the alien self. Even the collision between narrative and poetic form underscores Gotlieb’s interest in the anxiety of identity.

The narrative is given form by the conventions of the sestina as they are observed and subverted, just as the characters and identities of Geffen and Ravna are formed only to be subsumed. The traditional sestina consists of six stanzas of six lines, followed by a tercet. The end word of each line in the first stanza recurs as an end line in each subsequent stanza, and the six words repeat, two per line, in the tercet, which conventionally functions as a summation or commentary on the preceding poem. A conventional sestina follows a rigid pattern determining which word ends which line in each stanza, and the order in which they occur in the tercet:

stanza one:	1 2 3 4 5 6
stanza two:	6 1 5 2 4 3
stanza three:	3 6 4 1 2 5
stanza four:	5 3 2 6 1 4
stanza five:	4 5 1 3 6 2
stanza six:	2 4 6 5 3 1

tercet line one:	1 2
tercet line two:	3 4
tercet line three:	5 6

While this form may appear on the face of it to be a bit of a jumble - the word that ends line six on one stanza begins line one in the next, with no other obvious sequence - if you look closely you’ll note that, in fact, each terminal word occupies the position occupied by the word it replaces as the pattern cycles through. Each terminal word becomes the



beginning of the next line in sequence, as the schematic above demonstrates. The name for this revolving, sequential pattern is the retrograde cross, or in Latin, "retrogradatio cruciata."

No rule dictates line length or meter, though iambic pentameter tends to be popular in English examples. Gotlieb not only violates the rule governing the order of repetition of end words but "Geffen and Ravna" is also highly irregular metrically. Consequently, Gotlieb turns the form against itself by violating its predictable pattern and by disturbing the smooth surface to suggest the tensions beneath: this effect is enhanced by the metrical irregularity and the syntactical convolution frequently employed. Gotlieb suborns the conventions of this highly structured form to the service of a Science Fictional narrative by arguably defamiliarizing or othering it.

The most evident instance of Gotlieb's manipulation of the terminal position is in the third sestina in the poem in which the central twist of the narrative is revealed: Geffen also is of the Farroes species having been surgically modified and brainwashed to believe himself truly human in order to infiltrate Terra Station. Two of the terminal words in this poem are "mine" and "you," (in sestina III) but rather than cycling through one appearance at the end of each line, "mine" ends two first lines and two final lines, while "you" also has two first-line positions and two final line positions. Every stanza of this sestina either ends either its first or its last line with one of these words, and two of them begin with one and end with the

other (mine/you for stanza one, and you/mine for stanza three). The mere choice of these two words brings to the fore the importance of the relationship between the two central figures; but the additional stress placed on the two words by virtue of their heavy weighting at the beginning and/or ending of stanzas stresses the dichotomy of woman versus man and of human versus Farroes, but not in terms of straight opposition. The you/mine and mine/you usages are not respectively 'indicative' and 'indicative' or 'possessive' and 'possessive': Ravna is "you" to Geffen, but Geffen is "mine" to Ravna. "You" suggests distance, whereas "mine" suggests closeness; Ravna is claiming Geffen and in doing so forcing him to reconsider his identity.

Is he who/what he thinks he is? Thinking he was human, Geffen nevertheless felt alienated from his species: "the Wardman had never been known to need a woman," (l. 12) we are told in the first sestina, and in the third, he states, " "If I am of Earth / I cannot love a woman of my people" " (ll. 105-106). These words conclude one stanza but not a sentence. He continues at the beginning of the next stanza, " "and if I am Farroes, I'm outlandish. You say, *mine*, / *mine*! But I want firesides, meat and drink, my people / aren't Farroes" " (ll. 107-109). Here, the division between stanzas stresses the division within Geffen's self-perception: he is literally split between Human and Farroes by the structure of the poem. Regardless of which he is, he is alienated from his sense of identity.

The dichotomy between Human and Farroes, "you" and "mine", contrasts with the larger implication of another of the terminal words in this stanza, "people", a word that bridges the distance the characters find impassable. That term's implications, in fact, resonate not only in the poem but in Gotlieb's work generally.

Gotlieb has consistently chosen in her work to define any sentient creatures regardless of species (and Gotlieb has invented some bizarre species) as men and women - as people, in effect, rather than as alien and other. This distinction is clear in the poem from its beginning when the "angular alien" (l. 22) Ravna, with her patterned skin and back "spined like a lizard" (l. 14), is also repeatedly defined as a woman ("barely a woman" [l. 2]) according to her captors. She is as likely to be hunted as an animal as to be taken sexually as a woman, but nevertheless ineluctably linked to human gender roles by the choice of noun, with both her and Geffen's physical selves further stressed through the choice of words such as "body," "bones," "breath," and "eyes" as line ending words; this usage in addition to those descriptors already mentioned throughout the four sestinas, especially as the terms do not apply exclusively to either one or the other of them. The problem Gotlieb explores is the tendency to see difference rather than kinship, and the SF tropes here clarify the point by rendering Geffen literally neither fish nor fowl, neither Human nor Farroes, by virtue of his biomodifications which metaphorize the contingency and liminality of identity.

Gotlieb's linguistic play, especially as underscored by the

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resonances of other of the repeated words, furthers the point. “If I am of Earth” (l. 105), Geffen says, on one level a statement of species alignment - being of Earth meaning being Human - but on another a literal statement of physical reality. And if he’s not (of Earth), he’s outlandish - both literally foreign and also bizarre or weird, but it’s a word with a similar root in physical reality: land. One mines land, and Ravna’s repeated “mining” of Geffen plumbs his depths, just as the literal levels of Terra Station (“levels” is one of the terminal words in the first sestina) resonate with metaphorical levels, or depths, in people: “Always other levels / of meaning rose in her words,” (ll. 19-20) we are told of Ravna. By contrast, “Of spying, skirmish, levels, Station, Geffen (a line that includes four of the six terminal lines of the sestina) / lifelong an unquestioner of levels / cared nothing; he looked and wanted Ravna, a woman / no matter how stark the tips of her spines.” (ll. 25-28) Here the syntactic convolutions which one might superficially think merely bow to the exigencies of the sestina form in fact force the reader to re-evaluate the sentence’s meaning not only line by line but almost word by word. It is a grammatical manifestation of the poem’s peeling away of one appearance, one surface, to reveal something else beneath. Or, perhaps more accurately, to reveal the ephemerality of the constructed identity.

In my opinion, the poem ends by abandoning the physical which has so weighted its earlier stanzas while also abandoning the possibility of narrative resolution and the cohesiveness of identity by converting Geffen, stripped of Ravna, into rumor, dream, and a claim whose fate becomes multiple and insubstantial:

*The rumor that he was Farroes faded away.
Some dream he went hunting and was tusked. Some remember,
or claim, he hung about tavern kitchens complaining of cold,
gnawing stale crusts with his wine. Or, that snow
claimed him, to die unfound.*

*Or: there was no Ravna,
no Geffen, only the baffled and weary drifting away
from a cold world where there are none left to remember.*
(ll. 157-164)

After their deaths, they are denied even existence; if identity is really only memory - and Geffen’s amnesia about his Farroes origins is a key point in the poem - then did they ever exist?

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[Addendum]: When this paper was originally delivered in 2007 Gotlieb’s “Geffen and Ravna” was available online at <http://pages.interlog.com/~ccg/Geffen.html>. This is no longer the case; the most accurate version currently available can be found in Phyllis Gotlieb’s *Red Blood, Black Ink, White Paper: New and Selected Poems, 1961-2001* (Exile: Toronto, 2002; pp. 130-135).

Long involved with the ACCSFF Dominick Grace has been presenting papers consistently at the Conference, on varied subjects, since 1996 (back when the ACCSFF was still called the ACCCSAL). And in honour of Mr. Grace’s continued support of the ACCSFF Allan Weiss presented Dominick with a special certificate thanking Professor Grace for his continued support (both as a presenter and several time moderating Chair) of and for the Conference during the Closing Remarks of the 2009 ACCSFF.

Dominick Grace’s ACCSFF papers have focused on the works of Phyllis Gotlieb, David Cronenberg and William Gibson among others, with a bent toward the more rigorously academic in their form and structure, as our reproduction of his “ ‘Geffen and Ravna’: a SF Sestina ” above evinces.

We fully expect that Dominick Grace’s name will once again be among the list of presenters at the 2011 ACCSFF once the final program is posted up at www.yorku.ca/accsff.

SF in Film: Two Reviews

By David Cheater

Source Code



A friend of mine has a theory that video games are important in that they are one of the few venues left for young people to learn how to deal with failure. Each time you practice a level you die but you learn a little more during each iteration. Finally, one solves all of the puzzles and avoids each of the traps and can move on.

Source Code recreates the delight of solving a video game level. Unlike *Prince of Persia*, *Source Code*'s

story allows enough investment in the characters that the story is engaging. Jake Gyllenhaal plays a young soldier whose last memory was a fire fight in Afghanistan and who suddenly wakes up in the body of a high school teacher on a commuter train. His character tries to figure out what is happening when the train is destroyed. He repeatedly returns to the last eight minutes of the high school teacher's life, trying to solve the puzzle of what happened to the train.

The plot device of a time loop is something that can become trite and gimmicky if used without finesse. This movie pays attention to the periods between the time loops. It is just as important to figure out why Jake's character has to relive those

same eight minutes as it is to solve the puzzle of what destroyed the train.

Michelle Monaghan plays a friend of the high school teacher. In each iteration her character resets while Jake, and the audience, learn more and more about her. Her role helps change the understanding of the stakes of the game. Vera Farmiga plays the career soldier who communicates with Jake's character between the iterations of the time loop. She changes in tandem with Jake, giving her a character arc which is as important to the plot as the puzzle on the train. It's a role that could so easily have become one dimensional but Ms. Farmiga gives her character gravitas and compassion. Her choices matter.

I have some qualms though about the ending. One of the big unanswered questions is what happened to the high school teacher when Jake's character takes over his body. Other than that, the ending hits a level of emotion that is saved from being mawkish by the feeling that the characters have earned their resolution.

I highly recommend this movie. It would make a great double bill with *Donnie Darko*. It's possible to see Jake Gyllenhaal's maturation as an actor when comparing two movies in which he plays a character caught in a time loop, dealing with the themes of life, death and responsibility.

X-Men: First Class

The secret to making a good superhero movie is the same as making any good movie: you need talented actors performing a well-written script that tells an interesting story. Whereas choosing actors on the basis of how well they fit a costume does *not* produce a good movie. Thankfully, the current X-Men movie falls into the former category without sacrificing fabulous visuals and action sequences.

But it is the theme of the movie which is the most compelling aspect. The underlying theme of *X-Men: First Class* explores the tension between angry, animalistic and primitive instincts as opposed to their nobler, more rational, more civilized counterparts. Setting the story during the Cuban Missile Crisis - when the Russians and the Americans came close to destroying themselves and the planet - grounds the otherwise supranatural elements where a demon can appear in a blast of flame and a woman can be made of living diamond. In a clever twist the first expression of the New Man occurs under the Eugenics gone mad conditions of a Nazi death camp. The world did not need supervillains to commit the Holocaust any

more than we required superheroes to prevent a nuclear war. The movie utilizes mutation and the mutants allegorically.

X-Men: First Class, the first of a planned prequel trilogy, focuses on the character development of Erich Lensherr/Magneto as played by Michael Fassbinder. Erich, as a Jewish teenager in a Nazi death camp is experimented on by an ostensibly charming sociopath beautifully played by Kevin Bacon. As a young adult Lensherr is a Nazi Hunter trying to avenge the slaughter of his people. The audience sympathizes with his decision to reject humanity and can at least understand what drives him to become a 'monster'. As Magneto he embraces the reality of who he is and, in an ironic sense, celebrates the weird and wonderful capabilities of the other mutants.



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If you are thinking of submitting an article please read our guidelines carefully to ensure that your work conforms to the material we cover. Then query as to your submission.

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We will respond as quickly as possible.

If you have not received a response within a reasonable amount of time please contact Lorna Toolis at

ltoolis@torontopubliclibrary.ca

This movie fails the Bechdel test epically. There are four fully written female characters, each with their own plot arcs, but they do not talk to one another. Given that the movie is set in 1962, the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis - a little before full-blown Second Wave Feminism and consciousness-raising - this is perhaps not surprising. Neither is the sequence where Moira MacTaggart (played by Rose Byrne) infiltrates a club for rich and powerful men by stripping to her underwear and joining the back of a line of 'entertainers'. Not until 1963 did Gloria Steinem put on Bunny Ears to write an exposé of Playboy.

Essentially the mutants in the film are a group of people who begin by believing that they are isolated freaks - the only ones of their kind. It's only once they've gathered together and revealed themselves to their peers that they start forming a consciousness of themselves as something new and wonderful. It's only then that they understand their individual struggles in the context of a broader worldview, and can choose to embrace their true nature in that light.

That struggle for identity, for basic rights and freedoms, was a central element of the original comic series. And it is gratifying to see that those ideals, that need to ask the important questions, are still alive and well.

That's a Wrap

The More Things Change ...

By Michael Matheson

You may have noticed that we're now carrying advertising in *Sol Rising* (and you'd be right to say that's a big step forward in the life of a magazine). This issue is also somewhat larger than the last few, or indeed any of the issues from the last quarter century of production - incidentally the Winter 2012 issue will be our *Silver Anniversary Issue*.

And we think that's a pretty damn spiffy landmark. I mean we've really changed in the last quarter century. Substantially. But then of course change is only the advent of recurring themes people haven't heard from in a while.

Take for instance the "mashup" genre that's been enjoying fair seas and following winds for several years now. The premise is simple enough. Take a classic piece of literature. Toss in monsters. Sell to great success. No matter how bad a writer you are.

Sure there have been a few good examples of this kind of literary train wreck. Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* - which of course is the culprit that started off the entire bloody shebang - had promise, though it fell flat in the area of actual writing. Try as hard as he did

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The Friends of the Merrill are currently partnered with several stores in the GTA in our effort to make physical copies of *Sol Rising* more accessible.

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For information about stocking physical copies of *Sol Rising* please contact

Michael Matheson at solrising.editor@gmail.com

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Please be advised that *Sol Rising* is a free publication and as such cannot be either sold or resold.

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.

Grahame-Smith just couldn't capture Austen's voice, even though he was in fact simply warping many of the lines from the original novel. And Sherri Browning Erwin too managed to do fairly well with *Jane Slayre*, but it couldn't capture the voice of Brontë that it was so desperately seeking - though Erwin deserves credit for having a fine voice of her own that made the mashup worth the read anyway. And don't get me started on *Android Karenina* ...

Alright, not so much *a few* as ... *two* examples of mashups that worked. But, you know what? That was inevitable - if you were listening to the Friends of the Merrill talk about this at any rate. Lorna Toolis covered it in her *From the Collection Head* article in the Dec. 2009 issue of *Sol Rising* when she bemoaned the arrival of Grahame-Smith's *P & P & Z*, and Chris Szego just recently in her *Cultural Gutter* article "*Whine. And Cheese*" touched on the fatigue induced by wading through the seemingly endless stream of these things (although technically she was arguing against the continuing trend of Zombie fiction and making an aside about mashups ... but who's counting?).

The problem is simple enough. "Mashups" often fail because the people writing them don't know what they're doing. Classics and bad monster fiction don't mix. You know, obviously. Which is why it was such a joy to come across the *Classics Mutilated* (IDW Publishing, 2010) anthology.

First, I love the title. Second, it's not *technically* a "mashup" antho. It's something else entirely. All of the stories within take multiple classical elements and/or fictional characters (and in some cases actual figures - Sid Vicious, Jim Morrison and Emily Dickinson for example) and combine their chosen elements into wildly, nigh hallucinogenically, potent pieces of *well written* fiction. The melding of ideas and literary landscapes here is seamless. The ideas are allowed to promulgate naturally, indeed organically from the combination of each story's central elements. In this collection you can even have an intelligent story centered around Emily Dickinson (Kristine Kathryn Rusch's "Death Stopped For Miss Dickinson"). And it works.

And does so in part because the idea's not new. This form of "mashup" (3+ levels of inciting idea, real figures and ersatz situ) snagged the coveted Nebula Award for Best Short Story in 1997. The story was, of course, Jane Yolen's "Sister Emily's Lightship" - a piece that blended Emily Dickinson, the whimsies or vagaries of the Muse, and alien visitation.

So where does that get us? Emily Dickinson is marvelous, yes, and should feature more largely in Spec Fic writing. But, what it really points to is the idea that themes recur. That good work repeats itself, and that bad work imitates what it can see, but can't grasp.

So change is based on past history. And history, as the saying goes, repeats itself. We like history. We here at *Sol Rising* have a ton of it. And we aim to make a ton more. We'll catch you in the *Silver Anniversary* issue next January.

On Display in the Reading Room

The Merrill Collection is open on Mondays 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM, and on Saturdays between 9:00 AM and 5:00 P.M.

Upcoming Events

Graphic novelist **Ray Fawkes** will appear at the Merrill Collection reading room on August 3, 2011 to launch his new project for Oni Press, *One Soul*.

For more information about Ray Fawkes visit:

www.rayfawkes.com

OSRCon will be held on August 12 & 13, 2011. A two-day gaming tournament for classic D&D players, it will take place in the basement of the Lillian Smith Branch. The Con is co-sponsored by the Friends of the Merrill Collection and Grognardia, the D&D blog.

www.osrcon.ca

On September 9 & 10, 2011 **The Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy** will take place in the basement of the Lillian Smith Branch.

Guest Author / Speaker

Charles de Lint will participate in an interview / Q&A session.

The **Anime Flea Market** will take place on September 10, 2011 at the Toronto Reference Library, 789 Yonge Street, in the Beeton Auditorium.

On September 25, 2011 at this year's **Word on the Street** the Friends of the Merrill Collection will offer bags containing 10 science fiction and / or fantasy paperbacks for \$5.00 each.

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

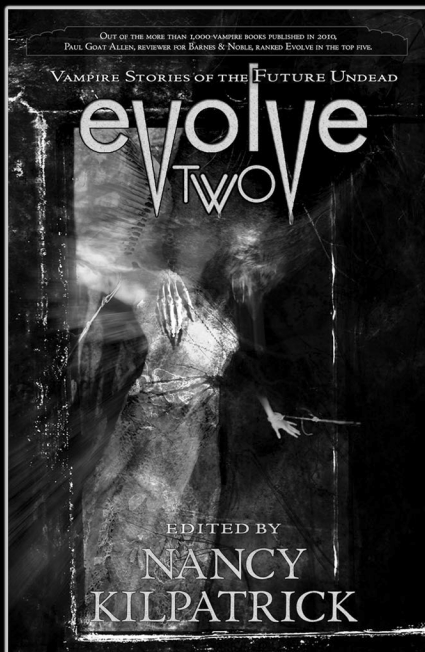
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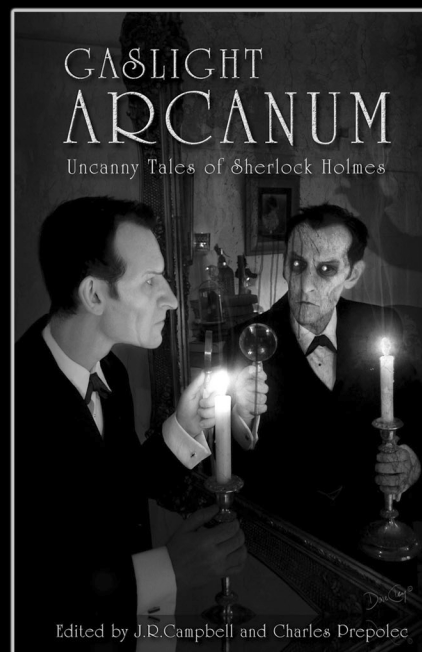
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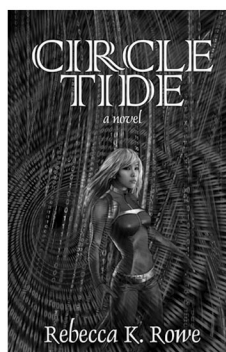
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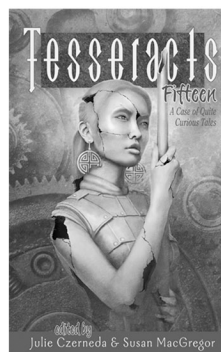
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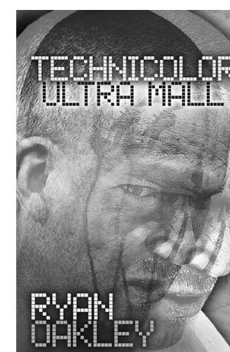
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