



San Diego State University's Speculative Fiction Collections: A Growing Center for the Study of Popular Culture

Pamela A. Jackson

Keywords: Speculative Fiction, Science Fiction, Comic Arts, Special Collections, Libraries

SDSU's Special Collections & University Archives is home to all things rare, unique, fragile or valuable in the library: approximately 80,000 rare books, over 500 archival/manuscript collections, and well over half a million pieces of ephemera. The collection's strengths include historic astronomy, history of printing and graphic design, fine press and artist's books, children's books, science fiction and fantasy, horror, surfing, comics and zines, and alternative religious movements. Archival and manuscript collection strengths include local history, civil rights, performing arts, identity politics, and women's studies. Some of the rarest items in the collection include a first edition (including papal marginalia) of Nicolaus Copernicus's *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* (1543) which models a sun-centered universe, and a rare fourth printing of Heinrich Institoris's *Malleus Maleficarum* (1494), which offered a step-by-step guide to interrogating and prosecuting suspected witches.

SDSU's ever-growing speculative fiction collections are a major source for research in science fiction, proto-SF, utopian and dystopian fiction, alternate histories, fantasy, horror, Gothic literature, weird tales, and the comic arts. Related holdings in pseudoscience, the occult, UFOs, and alternative religious movements support diverse inquiries into imagined or invented realities (Culbertson 1).

Elizabeth Chater Science Fiction and Manuscript Collections

Elizabeth Chater was the author of more than 24 novels and numerous short stories in the genres of science fiction, horror, mystery, and historical fiction and romance. Under the pseudonym Lee Chaytor, she published several stories in the popular science fiction magazine *Fantastic Universe* during the 1950s. Chater joined the English Department at San Diego State University in 1962. Among her peers on the SDSU faculty at the time were science fiction authors Vernor Vinge and Joan D. Vinge.

Chater began teaching creative writing in the mid-1960s, focusing on science-fiction writing; Greg Bear was her teaching assistant.¹ By the early 1970s, Chater was teaching courses in fantasy literature and distaff magic.

In 1977, Chater began donating her collection of science fiction and fantasy books to the library. The Chater Collection has a strong focus on new wave science fiction and feminist writings, and is distinguished by many notable first editions, as well as numerous rare pulp titles dating to the early 1920s, such as *Amazing Stories*. This sizeable collection now totals more than 6,000 volumes, as items from newer donors that fit the scope of the collection are added daily. The Chater Manuscript Collection documents Chater's own creative research and writing process. Included in the collection is the original manuscript of Chater's *The Bridge and the Sepulchre*, as well as manuscripts by noted science-fiction author Suzette Haden Elgin and original manuscripts, both typed and handwritten, by author Joan D. Vinge that reveal changes made to works before publication.



Image 1: The Elizabeth Chater Science Fiction Collection includes numerous rare pulp titles dating back into the early 1920s.

¹ Now a noted science fiction author and SDSU alumnus, Greg Bear sold his first short story to *Famous Science Fiction* at age 15 and, along with high-school friends, helped found San Diego Comic-Con (now Comic-Con, International). He is the recipient of two Hugo Awards and five Nebula Awards and has had more than 60 works published. A modest collection of Bear's literary manuscripts, including drafts, corrected galleys, and correspondence can also be found in SDSU's Special Collections.

Edward E. Marsh Golden Age of Science Fiction and Ephemera Collections

Edward Marsh donated his world-class science fiction collection to SDSU in 2013 and continually adds to the collection. His extraordinary collection, currently valued at approximately \$2.25 million, features over 5,000 volumes and archival collections. Among the volumes are nearly 400 rare signed books, many of them first editions, by science fiction and fantasy writers, including Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert, L. Sprague de Camp, Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Ephemera in the collection include pulps, magazines, fanzines, photographs, art, and original manuscripts from key figures in the development of science fiction and popular culture, including Forrest J. Ackerman, Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Will Durant, and Jules Verne. The ephemera collection contains a wide range of film props and collectibles from movies such as *Battlefield Earth*, *Dune*, and *Blade Runner*, including limited-edition toys and games, prop knives used in *Dune*, and the eight-foot-tall costume worn by John Travolta in his role as Terl for the film *Battlefield Earth*.

The Marsh Collection also includes signed original pen and pencil drawings, lithographic prints, and published magazine covers from prominent science fiction and fantasy illustrators such as Frank Kelly Freas, Frank Frazetta, Gerry Grace, Charles Wildbank, Greg Winters, Shun Kijima, and Gary Meyer, many of which now hang on the walls of Edward E. Marsh Golden Age of Science Fiction Room. Marsh commissioned portrait paintings and both life-size and small-format original cast sculpture busts of Golden Age science-fiction and fantasy authors. Unique pieces include a life mask of Forrest J. Ackerman and a marble resin bust of Robert Heinlein. Additional sculptural works are items from Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth*, including a bronze cast sculpture rendered after Frank Frazetta's illustration "Man the Endangered Species."

Larry McCaffery Collection

Larry McCaffery is a literary critic, editor, and retired professor of English literature at San Diego State University. An expert in postmodern literature, McCaffery is credited with helping to establish science fiction and cyberpunk as major academic literary genres. He is well known for his cyberpunk anthology, *Storming the Reality Studio* (1991), which features the work of



Image 2: Signed works of Ray Bradbury with a small bronze cast portrait bust of the artist from the Edward E. Marsh Golden Age of Science Fiction Collection.



Image 3: John Travolta's costume as Terl in Battlefield Earth (2000). Edward E. Marsh Golden Age of Science Fiction Collection, SDSU.

William Gibson, Samuel R. Delany, Don DeLillo, Kathy Acker, J. G. Ballard, and Thomas Pynchon, among many others.

McCaffery focused great effort on recording conversations with 72 contemporary authors, such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Samuel R. Delany, Theodore Sturgeon, Jack Williamson, Suzette Haden Elgin, Thomas M. Disch, Gregory Benford, Joanna Russ, William Gibson, and Bruce Sterling. McCaffery published numerous books featuring transcripts of these interviews,² and the original audio recordings are preserved in SDSU's collection. In addition to McCaffery's personal library, which features hundreds of books from postmodern and speculative fiction writers, many of them signed first editions, SDSU also holds the Larry McCaffery Papers; these consist of manuscript drafts, research files, recorded interviews, and personal and professional correspondence with science-fiction and fantasy authors, such as Octavia E. Butler, Harlan Ellison and Don DeLillo, in addition to the authors he interviewed. Items from McCaffery's collection will be exhibited in the SDSU Library from autumn 2018 to summer 2019.

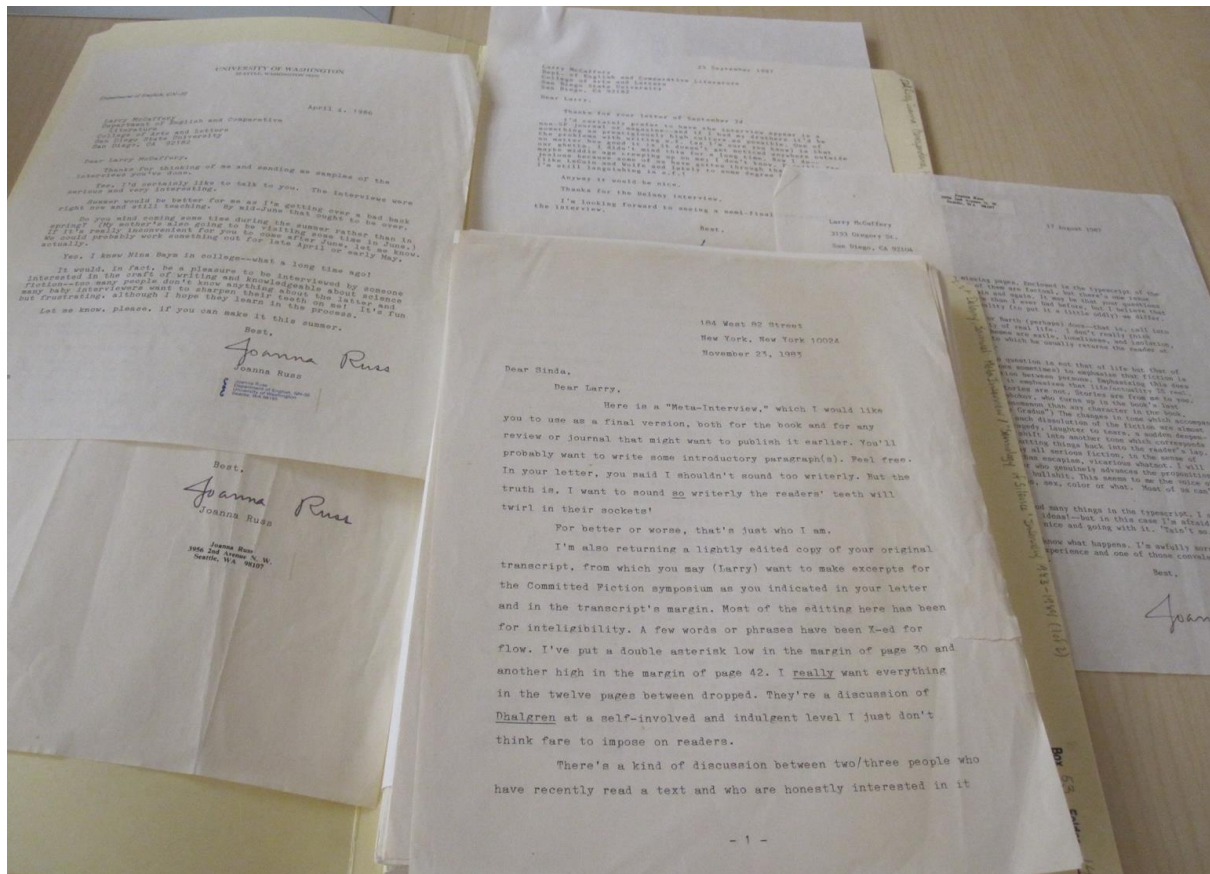


Image 4: Pictured here is correspondence from Joanna Russ and Samuel Delany from the Larry McCaffery Collection.

² See *Anything Can Happen: Interviews with Contemporary American Novelists* (with Tom LeClair). Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983.; *Alive and Writing: Interviews with American Authors of the 1980s* (with Sinda Gregory). Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.; *Across the Wounded Galaxies: Interviews with Contemporary American Science Fiction Authors*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1990.; *Some Other Frequency: Interviews with Innovative American Authors*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.

J. Gordon Melton Vampire Collection

Dr. J. Gordon Melton, a Distinguished Professor of American Religious History at Baylor University's Institute for Studies in Religion in Waco, Texas, founded the Institute for the Study of American Religion in 1968. Dr. Melton is a pioneering scholar in the field of New Religious Studies, helping to create the sub-discipline. Melton's research focuses on new and alternative religions, western esotericism (more commonly known as occultism), parapsychology, New Age, and Dracula and vampire studies, in which he explores the historical, literary, mythological, biographical, and popular aspects of vampirism.

Melton amassed what is believed to be the world's largest collection of fiction and nonfiction English-language books related to vampires (the major competing collection has been auctioned off). Melton is in the process of giving his entire collection to SDSU in a multi-year donation. To date, SDSU has acquired his vast collection of vampire comics, which includes more than 10,000 issues of twentieth-century English-language titles (including Canadian, Australian, and British titles) primarily covering the years 1960 through 1999. The collection includes complete publication runs of titles from some of the longest-running vampire-oriented English-language comics, such as the original *Vampirella* series, the original *Tomb of Dracula*

series, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which also includes a number of French-language editions. A regular attendee at San Diego Comic-Con for over two decades, Melton systematically sought signatures of the comics' writers and artists. Many of the *Tomb of Dracula* comics are, for example, signed by the late artist Gene Colan and by writer Marv Wolfman. Some of the *Vampirella* issues are also signed by the models who posed as Vampirella.

In addition to the near-complete collection of English-language vampire-related comics, Melton's collection includes many



Image 5: A sampling of signed titles from the J. Gordon Melton Vampire Collection, including *Vampirella*, *Tomb of Dracula*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

titles in Italian, French, Spanish, German, and Swedish, as well as English-language translations of Japanese manga. Highlights in the foreign-language collection include an autographed Italian edition of *Dracula* drawn by the late artist Guido Crepax and one of the very few complete collections of the longest running vampire-oriented comic books ever issued, entitled *Jacula*, an Italian comic or fumetto.

Comics, Zines, and Fandom Collections

Due to the generosity of donors, SDSU has amassed more than 50,000 non-circulating comics in “floppy” format: the thin, stapled paper periodicals that are universally thought of as comic books in the United States. The collection emphasizes alternative and independent titles, underground comix, drawn books, superheroes, and Modern Age comics, as well as materials that document the history of comic-book culture, fandom, and the creative process behind comic-book production. SDSU's *Zines and Minicomics Collection* contains over 1,600 independently published works that concentrate on identity politics, sexuality and reproductive rights, punk rock, anarchism, activism, alternative lifestyles, creative writing, and popular culture.

The *Comics and Science Fiction Fandom Collection* is largely unprocessed to date, but consists of publications, ephemera, memorabilia, and artwork from various comics, science-fiction and fantasy conventions and conferences, with a particular focus on Southern California conventions. The collection not only documents the evolution of fandom and shows a rise in the study of popular culture, but is also useful in the study of business, advertising, and marketing. Items in this extensive collection include official publications from fan conventions; badges, tickets, bags, flyers, posters, and other official promotional materials and “freebies” such as buttons, postcards, toys, trading cards, and even foam chainsaws promoting *Sharknado* and *Evil Dead*. Also included is a sizeable collection of rare and early fanzines dating back to 1934 that reflect the evolution and involvement of the science-fiction fandom community over the years.



Image 6: Ephemera from various fan conventions, particularly from Comic-Con, International in San Diego, California. Comics and Science Fiction Fandom Collection, SDSU.

Donna Barr Collection

Donna Barr is best known for her comic book series *Stinz* (1984) and *The Desert Peach* (1986). Subsequent publications include *Hader and the Colonel* (1987), *Bosom Enemies* (1987), *Barr Girls* (1990) and *Afterdead* (2007–). Barr's drawn books cross the boundaries between art and writing and combine elements of traditional novels, artist's books, graphic novels, and book design and illustration. Her background in 20th-century German culture and language, literature, world mythologies, history, and religion informs her artwork.

Her most intricate work is a series of handmade ornate, stitchery-covered bound sketchbooks called the *Black Manuscripts*. The manuscripts contain dozens of separate stories using pencil, ink, watercolor, and silkscreen. Of her *Black Manuscripts*, Barr states,

They are set in a mythical Reich that I consider my true homeland – and I don't claim it's a nice one, or that I ever want to go back, or want anyone else to live there. The stories all deal with new characters, like anthologies of short stories. They're politically tumultuous, insular and complex, dealing with everything from changing status of Jews and women in that Germany, to the place of gays and vampires and black people. It was drawn after my time in the army, when I was coming to grips with the ideas of the early '70's. I don't claim they're valid or relevant for today. Or maybe they are. They were drawn and written for myself, and I don't claim anything else for them. (Barr)

Barr donated her life's work to SDSU and continually adds to this large collection. In addition to her published works, SDSU holds her *Black Manuscripts*, numerous sketchbooks, drafts and unpublished manuscripts, correspondence with fans, original paintings, rough sketches, penned ink art, line drawings, colored panels and covers for her comics, musical production files, and audio and video recordings from *The Desert Peach* musical production.



Image 7: Six of Donna Barr's twelve handmade ornate, stitchery-covered bound sketchbooks called the *Black Manuscripts*.

Richard Alf Papers and The Comic-Con Kids

Richard Alf was an entrepreneur at a very young age. An avid fan of comics, Alf began selling comic books at age 12, and by age 15 he was running his own successful mail-order comic-book business. In 1969, at age 17, Alf, along with a group of teenagers and one adult, co-founded what would become one of the largest conventions celebrating comics, science fiction and film in the world: San Diego Comic-Con. In 1970, Alf served as co-chairman of

the first three-day convention, then called San Diego's Golden State Comic-Con, and was chairman of the convention in 1971. Among other co-founders, Alf is often affectionately credited with having the funds and the 1954 Volkswagen Bug that made those early Comic-Cons possible. In 1975, Alf opened Comic Kingdom, one of San Diego's first brick-and-mortar comic-book retail stores. He created and ran many other businesses, including a mail-order baseball-card collecting and trading business and a video-game mail-order business. In 1989, Alf was honored with a Comic-Con Inktop Award, given annually to individuals for their contributions to comics, science fiction/fantasy, film, television, animation, and fandom services.

Alf's collection documents the early roots of San Diego fandom and Comic-Con through convention-planning documents, correspondence, flyers, forms, posters, and photographs. The collection also includes personal correspondence with family and friends, original art, Vietnam draft materials, marijuana materials, business inventory lists, promotional materials, advertisements and correspondence with his mail-order customers. Collection highlights include Comic-Con planning invitation flyers, hand-drawn by cartoonist, Scott Shaw, rare correspondence between convention organizers, and original tickets to the first 1970 three-day Comic-Con in San Diego.

Before his passing in 2012, Alf worked with SDSU to plan a grant-funded project called *The Comic-Con Kids: Finding and Defining Fandom* (<https://comiccon.sdsu.edu/>). The website collects personal histories, through a series of video interviews, of individuals involved in San Diego's early Comic-Cons and fandom communities. These stories explore the emergence of comics, science fiction, and fantasy in the youth counterculture movements of the 1970s and help bring together the cultural histories of San Diego and Comic-Con. The project was made possible with support from Cal Humanities, an independent non-profit California state partner of the US National Endowment for the Humanities.

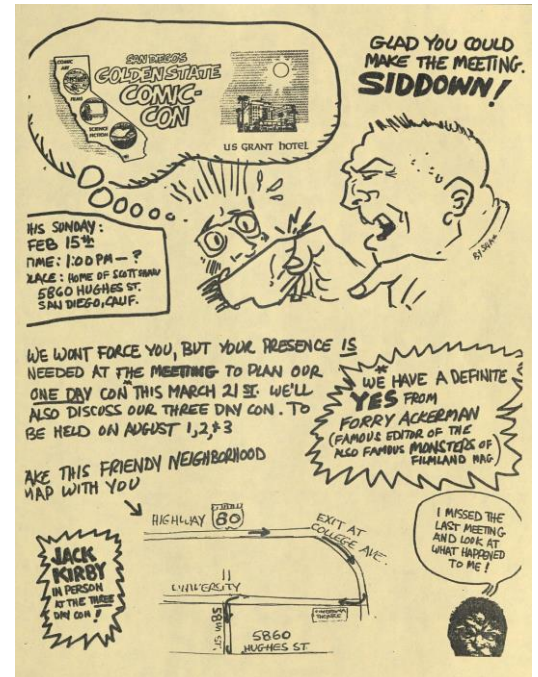


Image 8: Flyer for one of the first San Diego Comic-Con planning committee meetings, drawn and hosted by cartoonist, Scott Shaw! Richard Alf Papers, SDSU.

Outreach and Teaching

SDSU has seen an increase in the number of instructional visits to Special Collections that embed its popular-culture resources into course assignments. The library also regularly exhibits materials from these collections and has, in recent years, displayed two major year-long exhibits on science fiction and the comic arts, with a third exhibit planned for 2018–19 on postmodern literature showcasing the Larry McCaffery papers.

In 2012–13, the exhibit *Strange Data, Infinite Possibilities: Science Fiction Literature in Special Collections & University Archives* explored the ways science fiction fuels and inspires imagination and creativity. Rich with rare pulp fiction, sheet music, and original correspondence from authors, the exhibit included Ray Bradbury's unproduced screenplay for *The Martian Chronicles* and L. Ron Hubbard's original manual typewriter. A three-part lecture series with science fiction authors Greg Bear and Vernor Vinge and scholar Larry McCaffery was held in conjunction with the exhibit.

In 2017–18, the exhibit *DemoGRAPHICS: Voices and Visionaries from the SDSU Comic Arts Collection* explored how identity, in its most broadly defined sense, is cultivated and nurtured in the imagination. Comics that explore history and society through diverse lenses, such as culture, race, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, ableness, and age, were displayed. The exhibit included a three-part lecture series featuring John Jennings, Eisner Award-winning author for the essay collection *The Blacker the Ink: Constructions of Black Identity in Comics and Sequential Art*; Roberta Gregory, Inkpot Award-winner and creator of *Naughty Bits and Bitchy Bitch*; and political cartoonist Joaquin Junco Jr., also known as “Junco Canché.”



Image 9: DemoGRAPHICS: Voices and Visionaries from the SDSU Comic Arts Collection exhibit, held at SDSU in 2017–18.

Facilities and Next Steps

In September of 2017, the SDSU Library debuted the Edward E. Marsh Golden Age of Science Fiction Room, which will serve as a major research location for science-fiction scholars and the cornerstone of the new location for SDSU’s Special Collections & University Archives. In addition to more space to house collections, the new location will feature exhibit space and a larger, modernized facility for researchers. Also planned is an innovative self-service “comics nook” that will allow visitors to browse long runs of Modern Age comic-book titles in a supervised and secure Special Collections Reading Room, but without the barrier of mediated collection retrieval from closed stacks. Finally, SDSU is in the beginning stages of planning a formal, competitive research fellowship for scholars worldwide who are conducting original research on topics supported by its collections.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Robert Ray, Anna Culbertson, Amanda Lanthorne, and the rest of the current and past staff in Special Collections & University Archives at San Diego State University, without whom many of these collections would not be available for research.

Biography: Pamela Jackson is the Popular Culture Librarian in Special Collections and University Archives at San Diego State University. Her research interests include diversity and culture as reflected in comic art and the impact of popular culture collections on teaching and learning. Her works include a grant-funded humanities website, *The Comic-Con Kids: Finding and Defining Fandom*, which explores the emergence of comics, science fiction and fantasy in the youth counterculture movements of the 1970s. Pamela has an MA in English with an emphasis on Creative Writing from Sonoma State University and an MA in Library and Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. <https://library.sdsu.edu/scua>.

Works Cited

Barr, Donna. "Re: Black Manuscripts." Received by Robert Ray. 9 September 2016.

Culbertson, Anna. "Research Fellowships in Speculative Fiction and Comic Arts Scholarship." Internal document. San Diego State University. San Diego, CA. 29 June 2015.