

Grant program has creative focus

Sinclair plans to draw people into a fictional world

BY DALE BARBOUR
The Bulletin

Thanks to a \$1,972 grant from the University of Manitoba's new creative works grants program, English professor Struan Sinclair has a leg up on his new project entitled *If/Then: A Walkthrough Fiction*.

"It's a project I've had in mind for a while," Sinclair said. As director of the English Media Lab he has experience in using multiple media to tell a story or move information. His own research reaches across cognitive science, computing, literature and the possibilities of using artificial intelligence as a story creating engine.

If/Then: A Walkthrough Fiction will pull all of those various approaches together and put them together in a virtual world.

"During a trip to London, I came across a walking tour by Canadian artist Janet Cardiff," Sinclair said. People would be handed a tape or cd and head off on their own with some head phones. The tour started off with a straight forward narrative, but as the tour progressed the narrative voice became far more personal, talking about what the places had meant to her.

With *If/Then: A Walkthrough Fiction* Sinclair envisions people going on a tour of a virtual world where they'll meet people and places capable of telling or showing their own stories. The first phase of the project will be a single building, but Sinclair sees the project evolving into an open construct where people can log in from around the world and help build the story – reshaping the virtual world through their own interaction with it.

It's a project that raises intriguing questions about the ability of people from across the world to work together to develop a larger project.

But of course, building a world does take money. The creative works grants program funding will help Sinclair purchase the programs needed to run the virtual world and the technical expertise to help build it. However, as much as the grant will help him, Sinclair said as significant is the meaning behind it: It's a sign that the university recognizes the value of creative works.

"It gives credence to creative works that are often shut out of the funding circle," Sinclair said. But like other research projects undertaken at the university,

Sinclair said creative works reach out to the broader community and industry through partnerships.

"You can't make a project like this work on your own," Sinclair said. "Winnipeg is the perfect place to do it because it's so rich in resources, ranging from the strong artistic community to the expertise available on the technical side."

Sinclair is one of ten faculty members to receive a grant through the creative works grants program. The program supports high quality creative works that meet peer standards of excellence and are suitable for publication, public performance or viewing. All full-time academic staff members with professorial or academic librarian rank at the University of Manitoba are eligible to apply to the program. Details about the program can be found at umanitoba.ca/research/ors/internal_funding_grantforms.html.

Apart from *If/Then: A Walkthrough Fiction*, Sinclair is still working in more conventional media. A book of short stories, *Everything Breathed*, is out with Granta and his first novel, *Automatic World* will be published in Canada by Doubleday in 2008.



Photo by Dale Barbour

English professor Struan Sinclair is looking to create a virtual world.

Creative works grants program recipients

THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE RECEIVED AWARDS IN THE MAY 1, 2007 COMPETITION OF THE UNIVERSITY CREATIVE WORKS GRANTS PROGRAM:

University Creative Works Grants Program Competition: May 1, 2007

Applicant	Department	Project Title	Award
B. Brown	Landscape Architecture	Landscapes as/of sound: exhibit and attendant event:	2,500
N. Chard	Architecture	Active picture plane drawing instrument	2,500
G. Fitzell	Theory & Composition/Design & Theory	Strange Places / Alien Spaces: Canada's Urban Rivers	2,440
P. Hasdell	Architecture	"Blow-up": temporary inflatable installation for the Urban Sculptures Exposition in Montreal	2,350
W. Kerr	English	"Squirrels" & other delicious nuts: short works by David Mamet	2,500
L. Loewen	Music	CD recording - Harrington/Loewen duo	2,500
M. Matthews	Music	Compact disc recording of piano works	2,500
N. McArthur	Philosophy	Byzantium (short film)	2,500
D. McMillan	School of Art	Photographing Chernobyl Zone	2,500
S. Sinclair	English	If/Then: A Walkthrough Fiction	1,972
TOTAL:			24,262

U of M gives donated books a new home

A Day in the Life of a gifts and preservation librarian

Books are very personal items. You can spend a life time gathering a collection and every one of them tells a story about where you were and what you were doing when you acquired it.

Little wonder that when people give up their collections, they want to ensure they go to a good home and that's where U of M libraries gifts and preservation librarian Georgina Lewis comes in.

"I coordinate the large interdisciplinary gifts – the donations that are not limited to a certain subject area," Lewis said. The gifts come from a variety of sources, from members of the general public, to alumni to retired faculty members or their families.

"Not all of our donations are local either, one of our recent major gifts came in from Toronto. That one ran to about 100 cartons of books."

"Sometimes if it's a local person we'll go to collect the books ourselves," Lewis added. "We'll spend a day or two at the donors going through the collection and packing up the books."

It's hard physical labour, but at the same time they have a chance to chat with people connected to the collection.

"They want to know their books are going to a good place and sometimes they just want to see them treated well because they are books," Lewis said.

Of course, the university can't keep every book that is donated. While some books fill a hole in the university's own collection, others are duplicates or just not what the university's looking for. Lewis said



Photo by Dale Barbour

U of M libraries gifts and preservation librarian Georgina Lewis sorts through a collection of books that have been donated to the university.

preferably, they'll ask donors to send in a list of the books they're looking to donate. Otherwise, they may send the books directly and the university will select the books which it can use. Unwanted books may be sent to the Libraries' annual book sale for a second chance. Ideally they'll end up in the hands of a student or faculty member.

Donors may receive a tax receipt for the appraised value of those books which are added to the Libraries collections.

The preservation-side of Lewis' position involves ensuring that the university's own collection of books is kept in good shape.

"What we've done here is focus on prevention," Lewis said. "If we can control the environment we can keep the books safe." Prevention includes keeping the books from getting wet and ensuring their bindings are maintained. Acidity in paper used to cause paper to become brittle as it aged, but Lewis said printers have long since cottoned on to that problem making books made since the 1970's more durable.

Nowadays, a major threat to books in a library is mold, either from water damage or uncontrolled humidity. If a book gets doused with water, Lewis said they have about 48 hours to step in and freeze or properly dry the book otherwise mold can both destroy the book and create a health hazard.

As if being gifts and preservations officer wasn't enough, Lewis is also head of the Fr. Harold Drake Library at St. Paul's College. She's been with the university since 1990, but added the St. Paul's position in 2001.

"I liked the idea of returning to my academic roots," said Lewis who is an alumna of St. Paul's college from her own undergrad days at the University of Manitoba. A big part of Lewis's job as library head is shaping the library to meet the study and research needs of the college, particularly its focus on University 1 and Catholic Studies.

"And with the new Arthur Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice having just been created at the college, it was a chance to develop a doctoral level collection from scratch," Lewis said.