

Montreal's Underworld  
By Eliane M. Smith

*Island Dreams: Montreal Writers of the Fantastic*, edited by Claude Lalumiere, Vehicule Press, 2003, 226 pages.

If you are a Buffy watching, Mezzanine listening, Vendeta reading individual, you will enjoy this book.

While cruising the net for some alternative Montreal literature, I weeded through the usual mainstream publishing sites about the latest prize-winning authors and similar overexposed themes. Eventually, however, came across a site that tweaked my interest. Although promoted by the Montreal powerhouse, Vehicule press, *Island Dreams: Montreal Writers of the Fantastic* (edited by Claude Lalumiere) promised to be out of the ordinary. So I hit the bookstore and picked up a copy. Though definitely not the latest John Grisham novel, the cover seemed a bit conservative. But, while reading the back, I became convinced that this anthology presented a very interesting part of the Montreal literary scene.

Back home, I flipped through the twelve short stories, not sure where to begin. Having just finished watching the 26-hour Buffy marathon on Space, I was itching for some similar action. "Burning Day", by Glenn Grant started off with the kind of scene I was looking for. Immediately, I was enveloped by the vivid imagery that reminded me of some of the graphic novels I used to read. Grant described a crime scenes investigation unit made up of cogents, robots, and humans. I was intrigued. When Grant included some terrorist propaganda, full of scare tactics, about intolerance to the new machine race, I thought – how timely. Completely satisfied with the story, and pleased with myself for having discovered such an exciting book, I moved on.

I made coffee and began reading "Human Rites". Though not as action-packed and image oriented, I was thoroughly fascinated by Elise Moser's gang of punk street kids performing cult-like rituals on the corner of St. Catherine and St. Laurent. Why, that's only a few blocks from my house! Likewise, after reading, Mark Shainblume's "Endogamy Blues", and "Dora Knez's "Dead Park", I began to re-think my summertime roams over the mountain. To any Montrealer, some of these stories will appeal to a sense of civic pride.

After finishing the book, I was quite happy with the collection that Lalumiere had put together. The biggest problem that I can foresee is that the sci-fi/fantasy scene might intimidate many people. One tends to associate it with the nerdy dungeons and dragons geek. This might limit the audience. But let me set the record straight – this style is everywhere. Did you like the Matrix? ...X-Men?... Lord of the Rings?? Did you read comic books when you were a kid? Yeah, I thought so.

Unfortunately, another problem that tends to infiltrate itself into most sci/fi writing exists in some of these pieces as well. The message/warning that humanity will end up destroying itself in some manner or another sometimes feels like the times your mother used to lecture you as a kid: be careful what you wish for...and be happy with what you have. All right, all right, we know! But this is a familiar issue that many of us are willing to forgive.

In this light, *Island Dreams* is an awesome collection of short stories. If you can get past some of the preachy underlying themes, and take this book for what it is – a great escape into the imagination, you will be pleased. And oh yeah, it doesn't hurt that you're supporting the local scene at the same time.