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The mystery of museums in graphic novels

David R. Howell

Museums have long served as a source of inspiration for horror and fiction writers. The cultural institutions maintain an aura of mystery, making them the ideal setting for stories of the macabre. Graphic novel authors have also made liberal use of these buildings as setting, and make frequent use of museum employees as key figures in narrative development. What though, is the role of the museum as depicted in graphic novels? What function do they play, and how are museum employees represented? Does the graphic novel offer a way in which museums can reach out to and develop new audiences, or will the medium serve only to confuse and mislead potential visitors about the reality of museums?

Keywords: access; audience development; British Museum; graphic novels; Louvre; Lovecraft; museums

Everything about Rogers and his museum was so hellishly morbid and suggestive of black vistas beyond life! It was loathsome to think of the waxen masterpiece of abnormal genius which must at this very moment be lurking close at hand in the blackness beyond the heavy, padlocked door. (Lovecraft 1933)

In H.P. Lovecraft's treatment of the museum, readers were presented with a tale of the macabre. Set in a frequently deserted museum, the protagonists are haunted by a malevolent creature which eventually kills the owner of the museum. In the cinematic adaptation of Milan Trenc's *Night at the Museum* (2006), museum collections come to life under the cover of darkness, and initially torment the museum night guard. Such representations of the museum help to establish a common trend for their depictions in popular media. The museum becomes a building steeped in mystery and frequently associated with danger.

Yet, despite such negative connotations, these associations seem to be in no way detrimental to the development of museum audiences. Across Europe, annual Museum at Night, or 'Night of Museum' event programmes make liberal use of the idea of exploring the museum in an unfamiliar, eerie setting, as a unique way in which audiences can be engaged and enhanced (Dedova 2013; Dumbraveanu, Tudoricu, and Craciun 2014).

While a popular setting in horror literature, film and television, little critical discussion has been produced exploring the role of the museum in these narratives. When considering graphic novels, despite there being a growing range of publications and academic journals addressing the topic, there is limited discussion of the importance of setting in graphic novels. The treatment of museums as a location or setting for events has generally been overlooked. Michael D. Picone's (2013) discussion of the depiction of museums in comic art does begin to explore this theme. However, Picone largely focuses on the display or representation of artworks within museums, rather than the museum fabric, or those individuals working in the institution. This relative absence of analysis of museums in graphic novels is important, given frequent use of museums as a backdrop in graphic novel narratives (which Picone does acknowledge), and the way in which some museums are turning to graphic novels as a means of promotion and audience development.

Audience development remains a major priority for museums and cultural institutions more generally. Graham Black (2005) has explored the motivations behind audience development and the strategies employed to achieve these goals, while in her introduction to *Museums and their Communities*, Sheila Watson (2007) cites the range of external funding pressures and expectations faced by museums in a competitive cultural climate. While many such considerations fall on internal programmes, such as exhibition design and community-focused workshops, raising the profile of the museum through broader external strategies is an essential part of profile development. Graphic novels provide a unique platform for engagement with new audiences; however, it is questionable to what extent such exercises succeed in

presenting the realities of the museum experience. Can institutions live up to the expectations created by their depictions?

One of the most striking collaborations between a cultural institution and graphic novel author came via the British Museum. Published in 2011, *Professor Munakata's British Museum Adventure* followed on the back of a series of exhibitions, hosted by the British Museum, to focus on Japanese culture and heritage. The first such exhibition, *The Power of Dogū: Ceramic Figures from Ancient Japan*, running from September to November in 2009, displayed prehistoric clay figurines, dating from roughly 2500–1000 BC (British Museum 2009a). As part of this collection, supporting interpretive information considered the impact of the dogū ceramics in Japanese popular culture, including manga. This led to an exhibition specifically exploring manga and the work of graphic novel artist Hoshino Yukinobu, running from November 2009 to January 2010 (British Museum 2009b). Hoshino had been preparing imagery for use in the dogū exhibition and it was through visits to the British Museum that Hoshino was inspired to develop a coherent narrative, linking the museum and the fictional folklorist Munakata.

The character of Professor Munakata is perhaps well placed to act as a centrepiece for a museum focused storyline. Established as a folklorist, Munakata is introduced as a character who can comfortably traverse a broad range of academic disciplines. While displaying an obvious affinity with Japanese studies, Munakata appears to have a comfortable grasp of global archaeological and historical research. In *The Legendary Musings of Professor Munakata*, Munakata states that 'studying Japanese culture around the world is the main theme of [his] research' (Yukinobu 1995, 3). His visit to the British Museum is therefore entirely appropriate.

With the British Museum providing a backdrop for almost the entire narrative (of *Professor Munakata's British Museum Adventure*), this would seem to be the ideal text in which museum-related themes could be presented for the casual reader. In this respect, the narrative opens with a bold interaction with the theme of repatriation. Given the difficulties the British Museum has had with repatriation claims (see Kynourgiopoulou 2011; Pickering 2011), it was perhaps surprising to see the museum actively engage with such topics. That being stated, Yukinobu addresses the subject in a manner that ultimately favours the host institution. Munakata visits the British Museum as a guest speaker, in conjunction with the 'power of dogū' exhibition cited above. During his talk, he indicates his knowledge that 'some feel that their cultural property was taken in the past without consent, and is now on display in another country without consultation' (Yukinobu 2011, 36). While this would initially appear as an opportunity for the narrative to present a surprisingly critical overview of the historical practices of the museum, ultimately the lecture returns to safe territory, with Munakata concluding that 'knowledge is not created in isolation', and that ultimately he is 'deeply impressed by the achievements of the British Museum and would like to pledge my continuing support for its activities' (37). The overall storyline continues to engage with repatriation themes. However, by the completion of the story, any compulsion the museum might have been under to return artefacts has been nullified, and the status quo of the organisation remains.

In terms of the day-to-day activities of the museum, references remain sparing despite many scenes being set 'behind the scenes'. One sequence depicts the work of conservators conducting digitisation work on collected volumes from the Edo period, while shortly afterwards, and unrelated to the core narrative, museum tour guides are depicted leading visitors through the Egyptology galleries. These interspersions of the workings of the museum into the narrative remain no more than that. The reader is provided with only passing glimpses of the activities of the staff. Despite the reader having privileged access to the inner workings of the museum, they remain, as Munakata does, an outsider.

Where the reader does gain access to the inner perspective of the museum is through the second lead character, Chris Caryatid. Chris, a specialist curator on Japanese culture in the British Museum, acts as a bridge between the institution and the visiting Munakata. The insider enables the reader to access the hidden corridors of the museum, even if the workings of that institution remain an abstract concept. Despite her specialist knowledge, there is little in the narrative to indicate anything about Chris's specialism, beyond a general interest in the Japanese collections.

The character of Chris is ultimately a supportive one to Munakata's investigations, and, despite her consistent appearances throughout the narrative, her most telling contribution is only in the closing pages. As those who have attempted to perpetrate a theft from the museum realise their plans have been thwarted,

and turn instead towards the destruction of the museum collections, Chris throws herself in the path of a commandeered truck. Her selfless act preserves the limestone bust of Amenhotep III from almost certain destruction, but results in her own death (Yukinobu 2011, 253–255).

The prioritising of the museum collections above life is an interesting choice given the events of the story up to this point. Already Stonehenge had been destroyed, as surely must have been anything in the Great Hall, which itself had been destroyed, when robbed megaliths were dropped onto the museum roof. Chris earlier leaps in front of a team of armed soldiers, imploring them not to shoot in case of causing damage to the artefacts, seemingly oblivious to the man driving past the same objects in a JCB. Ultimately, the collections survive, while the Stonehenge megaliths seem unscathed. Chris, though, dies at the base of Amenhotep's bust. Her final words are to instruct Munakata that her private collections should be donated to the museum, before announcing with her final breath, that 'I will ... become a part of the British Museum...' (Yukinobu 2011, 255). Death is quietly accepted in exchange for an eternity within the museum.

In becoming 'part of the museum', Chris Caryatid's fate mirrors one that appears to be oddly consistent for many professionals working within the museums community in graphic novels. The symbolic assimilation of the soul into the institution points towards the eternal nature of such structures. The museum is a timeless entity, through which many lives pass, some eventually being subsumed into the fabric of the institution. In a sense, the role of the museum curator is one of lifelong devotion, ultimately manifest in consumption within the site. This theme is not unique to museums and has been applied in other 'liberal art' pursuits. A striking example is found in Audrey Niffenegger's (2010) *The Night Bookmobile*. Here, the protagonist, Alexandra, becomes fixated with a mobile library, which appears to contain every piece of literature with which she had ever engaged. Driven to a state of obsession with her efforts to find and work within the mysterious library, Alexandra, in a surreal plot twist, takes her own life, only to awake in a vast central library. Her desire to work within the library ultimately consumes her, and she, or her soul, becomes eternally connected to the library. Similar to the museum professional, the librarian's role cannot be completed in a single lifetime. The impacts of this premise in the museums sector, though, is one that is replicated repeatedly through the collaborative series of publications between graphic novel artists and the Louvre.

The Louvre and life in the museum

The Louvre, inspired by Fabrice Douar, assistant head of publications, launched a collaborative project with French publisher Futuropolis to publish a series of graphic novels which would help bridge a theoretical gap between the museums and graphic novel communities (Picone 2013, 59–60). The first offering in this series came in 2005 with *Glacial Period* (du Crécy 2005), presenting a Louvre abandoned but intact, buried in a future in which northern Europe has become lost to the onset of a new Ice Age. The narrative is one of exploration and the attempts of a team of researchers to establish an understanding of a lost age, through the art holdings of the museum. *Glacial Period* offers little, however, in terms of depictions of the workings of the museum, with the curators having long since left the frozen structure. Later publications in the series do though place a central emphasis on the role of the museum expert.

The most notable contribution to the series, in respect of detailing with the role of the museum professional, is told in *The Museum Vaults: Excerpt from the Journal of an Expert*. In Marc-Antoine Mathieu's (2006) interpretation of the Louvre, the reader is presented with an institution abandoned by visitors. The name of the museum has also been forgotten, with the titular expert commenting that the official name has long since been lost (6). The lead protagonist, the expert, a Monsieur Volumer, arrives at the museum charged with responsibility for the 'study, indexing and evaluation of the collections' (7). Within a few pages of the narrative, the expert has already been engaged with his study of the Louvre for over a month, and has inspected only the subterranean levels. It is towards the completion of the expert's second year of study that he inspects his first artefact or artwork.

While much of *The Museum Vaults* is built around the fabric of the museum and its collections, it is arguably the emphasis placed on the museum staff which sets this text apart. The use of the word 'staff' might be misleading in this context, as those who used to have responsibility for the museum now appear to

be permanent residents at the site, trapped in their now lifelong pursuits. The expert is led through a series of flooded galleries, by a self-titled 'ferrywoman', who recalls a time when she used to be a museum guard. Despite her role becoming redundant, she has not left the museum. In the restoration workshop of the museum, the expert engages with a team of what can be interpreted as conservators, working judiciously on the restoration of colour on a picture frame, lamenting the negative impact of light on the preservation of such colours. The *Museum Vaults* goes on to introduce staff responsible for framing and the creation of replica objects. It is perhaps though a sequence in which prospective museum guards are being trained in the art of 'tss tss' and finger wagging to ward off visitors from touching the works of art, which will be most familiar to museum visitors. The senior guardian instructs the trainees that:

For a good 'tss tss' must suggest to the guilty visitor that you love the art-work like he does, but that it's your role to protect it.

The 'tss tss' comprises one of your essential tools. If you don't master it, you'll never be able to attain a guardianship up above. (Mathieu 2006, 51)

Two particular sequences specifically focus on the role of the museum expert, however, which are perhaps most enlightening for perceptions of the museum professional. On the 9727th day of the expert's investigation into the museum holdings, he finds another expert, near death. The aged expert transfers his life's work, his notes on the museum, to our protagonist. Before dying, he relates a story of how he had previously found another expert, already deceased, whose own notes had decayed beyond the point of recovery (40–43).

After nearly fifty years of research, the expert who opened the narrative is also near death and passes his notes on to the next, youthful, expert, to continue this endless pursuit (60). In Mathieu's museum, any effort to catalogue the museum proves an impossible task. It cannot be completed in one lifetime. Indeed, the fate of successive experts mirrors that of Chris Caryatid. While the death of Chris is more dramatic than the inevitable demise of the museum experts, together they become part of the museum in their passing. The experts in Mathieu's Louvre seem literally to become part of the museum, their corpses simply left to decay where they fell, their bones becoming archival objects in their own right. Increasingly, the museum experience is one that consumes an entire life.

This theme is developed further in Christian Durieux's (2011) *An Enchantment*. The narrative opens with a retirement party for the museum director. Seemingly disaffected by the celebration of his departure, or demise, the director escapes into his museum. As he makes his getaway, he has a chance encounter with a young woman who is wandering around the exhibitions after hours. Whether this individual is a figment of the museum director's imagination is unclear, but through her he relives moments of his life in, and related to, the museum. Eventually the museum director confides that he – as is the ultimate fate of the experts of the *Museum Vaults* – is near death, and that he has been carrying a vial of cyanide on his person. His intention was to end his life on the night of his retirement party (48–49).

As *An Enchantment* draws to a close, the director and young woman are seen escaping into Antoine Watteau's *The Embarkation for Cythera*, where the pair literally climb into the painting (61–63). As a prelude, the director sees snow falling inside the museum. It is unclear whether this is another hallucination, brought on by consumption of the cyanide he intended to use earlier in the narrative, or whether the snow is symbolic of the toxic powder he had, at some point unseen by the reader, ingested. Either way, his impending death had been repeatedly implied, and his disappearance into the painting confirms his departure from the real world and, by implication, his death. Whichever narrative is preferred, the fate of the director is consistent. His consumption by the museum is more literal than that of Chris or the museum expert, his physical state being subsumed into the notable artwork, but the result is the same. The director, having spent the majority of his adult life in the museum, ends his life by becoming one with the museum.

In other publications produced by the Louvre and Futuropolis, the emphasis on museum staff is less overt, but their fate is consistent. Araki Hirohiko's introduction of his more established character Rohan Kishibe into the Louvre series, allowed for the creation of one of the more surreal entries in the series. In

hunting down what transpires to be a cursed or haunted painting, sealed in an abandoned wing of the Louvre stores, Rohan meets with a Monsieur Gaucher, Curator for the Department of Asian Arts (Araki 2010, 56). While little of what transpires in the sealed vault is ever fully explained, all who enter the vault bar Rohan are attacked and killed by visual representations of their own guilt. While two firefighters and a museum interpreter are also killed in the closing sequence, the curator of Asian arts is a notable victim, being run over and crushed by the apparition of a motor vehicle (Araki 2010, 109–110). In the novels cited above, the death of museum professionals becomes an almost inevitable fate. The violence of Monsieur Gaucher's death certainly differs from the scenarios above, yet the sense of being subsumed by the museum remains consistent. In the epilogue to *Rohan at the Louvre*, it is stated that the bodies of the victims were never found, their mortal remains, at least in the case of the curator, being crushed into the fabric of the museum.

In Eric Liberge's (2008) *On the Odd Hours* focus falls on museum guards, rather than curatorial, or 'expert' staff. Here the narrative centres on Fu Zhi Ha, a guard who only operates in the 'odd hours', namely those hours of night when the museum is closed, and Bastien, who seeks an internship in the museum, but settles for a position as a night guard. Fu Zhi Ha claims to curate the 'souls' of the artworks in the Louvre (16), the works in a sense becoming fatigued through daily interaction with members of the public. This is explored later in the novel, where members of the public are shown to be discouraged by other museum guards from using flash photography and from touching the works of art. While not as discreet as Mathieu's 'tss tss' approach, it is still interesting to see the non-curatorial side of the museum experience presented with respect to management of the public.

The character of Fu Zhi Ha ultimately follows the well-established path for museum workers and dies, though the circumstances of his death are not fully explained. That Fu Zhi Ha has spent the majority of his working life in the museum is implied, and his final act in life is to ensure the well-being of the museum collections by appointing a reliable successor in the form of Bastien. In Bastien's final showdown with a museum curator, following his theft of the works of art in the Louvre, he secures his job as the night guard for the 'odd hours', but with a selection of demands that mirror the theme of the museum being a role for life. In exchange for returning the art collections to the museum, Bastien insists he must be given the role of night guard 'till the end of my days', before adding that he wants to live in the museum while maintaining this job (67). While the reader does not see whether Bastien gets his wish, it is implied that this is the conclusion of the story. As a result, Bastien makes a conscious choice to give what remains of his life to the museum. He seems destined to follow those examples above; though, in the case of Bastien, he commits his life to the museum willingly.

For museums to be willing partners in the development of graphic novels, the consistent experience of the museum professional is evident. To work in the museum is to dedicate one's life to the discipline. Whether through choice or through fate, those protagonists to be most heavily invested in the fate of the museum tend to forfeit their lives in the protection of the site.

Museums in DC comics

Beyond the museum-sponsored publications, more general graphic novel materials have also made liberal use of the museum as a setting, a backdrop to narratives; but these rarely dwell on the sites for an extended period of time. A comprehensive overview of the treatment of museums in graphic novels is beyond the scope of this article. However, several notable contributions from the DC range of publications point to the role of the museum in a supportive capacity to narrative development. It is anticipated that this research model will be expanded in the future to include a wider range of publishers. In such instances, the museum seems to fulfil one of a narrow range of functions, including serving as a base of operations for a hero, being the scene of a crime or conflict, allowing for brief social commentary, or sourcing the expertise of a museum employee.

The sourcing of expert knowledge is the theme that most closely mirrors the museum supported examples noted above, in which curatorial figures are placed at the centre of narratives, even though those characters consistently die before the end of the story. In the first issue of *Hellblazer* (Delano and Ridgway 1988), the character John Constantine visits an unnamed professor of anthropology in the British Museum, to source his expertise on a particular set of facial tattoos. The sequence is concluded within two panels, and

the museum and the expert then disappear from the narrative. The Royal Museum in Edinburgh makes a passing appearance in Neil Gaiman's (1989) *Sandman* series, where the senior curator, Professor John Hathaway, commits suicide, having previously, in a grief-stricken state, illegally removed a text from the museum's collections. In both cases, the contribution of an expert in a museum context plays an important role in developing the plot, but such appearances are concluded rapidly.

The museum as a base, on the other hand, is more common. The creation of the fictional Stonechat Museum as a base for the character of Hawkman is arguably the most frequently visited museum in the DC graphic novels universe. While the character Hawkman has been reconceived several times, the original 'by day' cover, through which Hawkman, as Carter Hall, acted as a curator and archaeologist within his own museum, is perhaps the most iconic imaging of the character. As a result, the Stonechat Museum appears as a background, or setting in which discussions are held, which act as precursors to events elsewhere. The fact the museum acts as an armoury for Hawkman is illustrated through the highly militarised collections displayed in the museum. The result is a museum that makes little sense in terms of the coherence of display objects, other than to indicate that Stonechat is a museum of militaria (Johns 2003, 13).

Actual reference to curatorial activity is highly limited in this context. Arguably, it is during the *Hawkgirl* series launched in 2006 when consideration for the wellbeing of the museum is given greater attention. Here, the character of Kendra Saunders takes over responsibilities as museum curator (and guardian of St. Roch, Louisiana) following the disappearance of Carter Hall. Significantly, discussions on curatorial matters are conducted. Themes considered include the fabric and funding of the museum, and the precarious state of some of the archive collections. Saunders is at one point reassured by her colleague, Danny Evans, stating that she is 'a terrific administrator and you've done wonders for the museum. We've got more tourists visiting us now than ever!' (Simonson 2006, 9).

Focusing less on collections and more on the physical structure of the museum, the brief period in which Dick Grayson's *Nightwing* takes residence as the curator of the Cloisters Museum in New York positioned the fabric of the museum as a recurring feature in related stories. The 'Freefall' storyline also included a rare exchange, questioning the curatorial competence of Richard Grayson. Here, museum employees express concerns at the sudden installation of a new museum curator with no reputation in the field (Tomasi and Morales 2008). In 1968, the first appearance of Captain Action focuses around the Metro (Metropolis) Museum, where an attempt is made to rob the museum, following which the museum becomes a base of operations for the Captain, otherwise known as Clive Arno, an archaeologist (Shooter and Wood 1968). In all of these instances, the museum serves as a recurring backdrop, but with highly infrequent reference to the museum interiors, or the work conducted within them. Despite their significant presence, the museums remain mysterious and slightly ambiguous buildings, familiar yet unfamiliar. The most common circumstance in which a museum will be included within a graphic novel narrative, however, is as the scene of a theft or similarly dramatic event. The introduction of Captain Action, connected to a museum robbery, is a case in point; but such incidents are far from isolated. The Gotham Museum of Antiquities is one of the more frequent settings for a crime-based narrative. In a reimaging of the first meeting between Superman and Batman in 1986, the Museum of Antiquities becomes a focal point for the nefarious activities of the character Magpie. Magpie, a former curator of the museum, who develops an obsession with 'shiny things', is depicted ranting in the museum that she has attempted to rob (Byrne 1986). One sequence portrays Superman bursting through a wall in the museum, while miraculously not damaging any of the surrounding artefacts. Destruction to the fabric of this particular museum is notable as well in 1968. Here, the entrance of the museum is rigged to explode upon Batman's entry in an effort to foil a robbery (Fox and Stone 1968). In 2009, the same site plays host to a fight between Booster Gold and the Elongated Man, who is attempting to prevent a robbery at the museum (Jurgens 2009). Similarly, artefacts from a collection in the Museum of Natural History are looted by Wonder Girl (Heinberg and Dodson 2006). The Museum of Natural History also appears in a 1975 issue of *Adventure Comics*, in which the Spectre confronts a criminally insane museum curator. The curator in question has developed a habit for kidnapping people and using their bodies in the displays of the museum (Fleisher and Chan 1975). This example has resonance with a 1939 issue of the *Blue Beetle*, in which the Beetle intervenes to prevent a ritual human sacrifice in a museum setting (Fox 1939). In almost all such examples, the activities portrayed tend to take place at night, with little to no intervention from members of the visiting public, or museum

staff, other than those who seem intent on stealing or sacrificing in their own place of employment.

In the DC universe the one, albeit fictional, museum to have a recurring position of significance is the Space Museum. First appearing in 1959 in the *Strange Adventures* series, the museum largely serves as a backdrop to loosely related stories of heroism. Experienced through the perspective of the father-son duo of Howard and Tommy Parker, the pair make monthly visits to the Space Museum, and stories are told on the strength of their connection to specific objects displayed in the museum. Tommy describes the museums as being 'filled with souvenirs of men's brave deeds in space ... and a terrific story goes with each one!' (Fox and Infantino 1962, 24). Published during a heightened period of intensity during the Cold War, it is plausible to see these stories of heroism in a cultural context that demanded tales of heroism and self-sacrifice, frequently in the face of an aggressive invading force. In this sense, the fictional Space Museum fulfilled many of the criteria that might be seen in relation to real-life museums (see Adams 2010; Black 1999). The empire building, of which museums were a key contributor during the later part of the nineteenth century in Europe, mirrors the way in which the Space Museum is used. The narratives depicted in the museum are ones of a celebratory nature, often in the face of severe adversity. There seems to be nothing in the Space Museum that challenges the legitimacy of certain heroes, or calls in to question the consequences of their actions. In this sense, the Space Museum of the twenty-fifth century is very much a product of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The depiction of the museum is quite distinct from the description provided by John Constantine of the British Museum in the 1988 first issue of *Hellblazer*, in which the institution is presented as being the 'treasure house of the empire. Where we keep all the loot' (1988, 6). Three decades on and commentary on the role of the museum has become more critical, with an awareness of the impact of imperial collection policies and the development of repatriation claims growing since the 1980s (see Cubillo 2010; Fforde 2007).

The Space Museum would continue to be a focus in various DC publications, but it is the establishment of the origin story for the character Booster Gold in which the museum becomes most prominent. The museum is once more depicted as containing 'souvenirs and mementos of man's heroic battles against the dangers from the other worlds' (Jurgens 1986, 20). For the creation story of Booster Gold, a fleeting appearance of museum staff is combined with the far more common representation of museum thefts. Booster Gold begins as Michael Carter, a disgraced former football star, who takes a job as a night watchman at the museum. It is here that he conceives a scheme to steal various heroic artefacts, and a time machine, in order to reinvent himself as a superhero in an earlier era. Once more, the museum serves only as a backdrop to theft by an employee, not unlike the Magpie character.

Conclusions

The museum as a backdrop for DC publications continued to provide a source of inspiration and setting. This complements the use of the museum as setting in wider literature and cinematic treatments. Whether the museum is a setting for a heist, base of operations or backdrop, it is a consistent source material that has been liberally employed by graphic novel writers for decades. Publications produced in collaboration with the British Museum and the Louvre further reinforce the growing significance of the medium and the role of the museum in a storytelling tradition.

The material considered above is also far from exhaustive. Beyond the range of DC publications, the role of the museum could be explored much further, with Marvel titles, such as *A Night at the Museum*, which pitches Godzilla against the Fantastic Four inside the confines of the Metropolitan Museum (Moench, Green, and McLeod 1979), or *The Mystery of the Museum Sleep In*, an Archie Comics publication with a largely self-explanatory title (Gladir and Bolling, 2008), further illustrating the potential in exploring this cultural resource through the medium of graphic novels.

While the museum as a setting for narrative remains a constant, so too does the ambiguous treatment of those who work within museums and the position of visitors. Indeed, visitors tend to disappear from the museum context entirely. While limited examples, such as *Professor Munakata* and *On the Odd Hours*, draw attention to the presence of visitors, in general they are removed from the museum. This draws parallels with wider treatments of museums, in literature and film, in which the visitor is ultimately irrelevant. H.P. Lovecraft's museum is 'ghastly in its utter solitude' (1933, 13), while the cinematic *Night at*

the Museum conveniently presents the majority of its story during the ‘odd hours’, where visitors are disconnected once more.

In this manner, the museum retains a sense of the mysterious, and perhaps a sense of danger. The high volume of deaths incurred by those working within the museums sector in graphic novels is obviously ‘above average’, but typical is the fate of the museum worker established by Lovecraft, where his museum owner George Rogers is killed and, in a sense, consumed by one of his own displays. Rodgers becomes a permanent exhibition in his own museum; the fates of those consumed by paintings – spiritually connected to museums through their deaths occurring inside such buildings or simply being killed by malevolent artefacts – demonstrate a consistency of treatment of those who pursue a career in this field.

Nevertheless, the cultural relevance of the museum remains even though those sourcing the museum have no real understanding of or interest in the inner workings of the institutions. From the work of conservators to the essential presence of visitors, these issues are either ignored or, at best, peripheral. They exist, but largely in the background, unseen. This approach means that the museum retains a sense of mystique that fits well with graphic novel themes. That the day-to-day operations of the museum remain largely hidden from readers allows for the imaginative manifestations of the museum in graphic novels to represent better the way in which the museum model is perceived, or imagined, by its audiences. The popularity of a museum can be seen in relation to the ideas of discovery, and the treatment of museums through graphic novels makes frequent and liberal use of this idea. As a consequence, it seems likely that the museum will have a continuing presence in graphic novel narratives. Such a medium represents a growing means of reaching new audiences, and institutions beyond the British Museum and the Louvre might do well to consider developing such partnerships in the future.

Notes on contributor

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