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Decoder Ring — Comic Book Markup Language

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If you missed the Charleston Conference this year, then it stands to reason that you also missed my talk on Comic Book Markup Language (CBML). If you have a collection of comics that you’d like to open up for retrieval and analysis, CBML is a vocabulary for representation of comics documents in XML developed by John Walsh at Indiana.1

CBML is an extension of Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). As such, it incorporates elements of TEI as well as its own elements focused on comics content and features. Many TEI elements are available to represent common structures in a variety of text documents, for instance chapters, paragraphs, spoken dialogue, or features as particular as epigraphs. The full list of TEI elements is available at http://www.tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/REF-ELEMENTS.html.2

Chapters can be represented with the generic <div> that is familiar to Web designers and developers from the HTML version of the same element. Attributes are used within tags to provide more specific information. A type attribute, typically written as @type with the @ denoting that it is an attribute, here qualifies that this div represents a chapter:

<cbml:panel n="1" characters="#nemo #little-imp">

Our other examples of paragraphs, spoken dialogue, and epigraphs can be represented with<p>, <said>, and <epigraph>. When Sherlock Holmes awakens Dr. Watson in The Adventure of the Abbey Grange,3 we might encode the interaction something like this:

They are looking for us!  We must get down from here!</cbml:balloon>.

Now <cbml:panel> is a good start, but clearly not enough by itself to represent everything that’s going on. We can choose from a set of useful attributes to note more about a particular panel. Let’s take a look at a panel from Little Nemo in Slumberland in 1907.

Figure 1: Little Nemo in Slumberland, September 9, 1907.4 Public Domain.

Pelikan’s Antidisambiguation from page 60

Charlie Daniels, John Phillip Sousa, Carlos Santana, and Ernie singing Rubber Duckie. They’ve asked Alexa to read information from Wikipedia articles on Moomintroll, the Beat Generation, and Borscht. The combined, leveraged power of the whole stinking Internet and Amazon’s Cloud Services, and we asked for Fine Young Cannibals.

My metadata must be pure corned beef hash now.

So I’m looking forward to an endless supply of laughable, hopelessly clueless suggestions based upon my Echo activity. But perhaps more alarmingly, what if the suggestions become better over time? What if the usefulness of what Echo can do for us counterbalances our latent squeamishness over Echo’s potential eavesdropping powers? Is it HAL? Is it SkyNet? Or is it C3PO? Or Marvin?

Well, too late to worry about that now…

Endnotes