



Introduction
to the
Retro Hugo Awards
for 1953

to be presented at

Noreascon 4

September 2-6, 2004

1953 Retro Hugo Awards

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From the WSFS Constitution:

*Section 3.13: **Retrospective Hugos.** (<http://worldcon.org/bm/const-2002.html>)*

A Worldcon held 50, 75, or 100 years after a Worldcon at which no Hugos were presented may conduct nominations and elections for Hugos which would have been presented at that previous Worldcon. Procedures shall be as for the current Hugos. Categories receiving insufficient numbers of nominations may be dropped. Once retrospective Hugos have been awarded for a Worldcon, no other Worldcon shall present retrospective Hugos for that Worldcon.

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An Introduction

Andrew I. Porter

1953 was a time of transition in SF and publishing. The pulp magazines, which had reigned for much of the century, were in the process of becoming extinct. They were being replaced by the digest-sized magazines which would dominate SF magazine publishing, and by the mass market paperbacks which would also dominate SF, and publishing itself, for the rest of the century. In fact, while Avon and Bantam had begun doing SF paperbacks a few years earlier, 1953 was to see the rise of both Ace Books and Ballantine Books, whose output over the next half century would fundamentally change SF as we had known it.

America was changing, too. The same year saw the indecisive end of the Korean War, a new president and a change, after more than 20 years in power by the Democrats, to a Republican administration. The baby boomers were swelling the ranks of elementary school classes, while rock and roll was rearing its ugly head, preparing to infest innocent young minds with another utterly new kind of music.

In SF itself, that year saw the first ever Hugo Awards presented, at Philcon, the 1953 World SF Convention in Philadelphia. And although the Hugo Awards weren't given out in 1954 for 1953's books, magazines and other material, they returned at Clevention, the 1955 Worldcon, for the works of 1954. They've been around ever since, each year more ornate, covering more material, honoring the best that our genre has produced. They're now a marketing tool

for the professionals, and a way of honoring the best that fandom has produced, in fan publishing, in fan artistry, and in fan writing.

Which brings us to the Retro Hugo Awards. In an effort to honor those fans, professionals and the output of those years passed over for praise by earlier generations of fans, the Worldcon has seen fit to fill in the blanks, as it were. But there's a catch. These glimpses back in time are limited in their scope and in the years they can examine. Twice now we've used the time machine that the Retro Hugo Awards have given us, honoring the output of, first, 1946—at the 1996 Worldcon in Los Angeles—and then again the best of 1951, at the Worldcon in Philadelphia in 2001.

Voting for this set of Retro Hugos will happen in 2004 as part of Noreascon 4 — at which, of course, Hugos will be selected for the best of 2003 as well. This publication gives you an opportunity to read about the people, events, books, fiction, movies and other dramatic presentations of that now distant year, 1953. We hope it provides a base from which you can go to various other places, especially websites, to explore comprehensive information about material from 1953.

For far more information about the Retro Hugos, look for information in the Noreascon Progress Reports as well as on the FANAC Fan History Project website at <http://fanac.org>.

— Andrew I. Porter

Identifying Items to Nominate

Joe Siclari

The Science Fiction Achievement Awards, better known as the Hugo Awards, were started in 1953 at the World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) in Philadelphia. You can read about the start of the awards in the Philcon Program Book which is available on-line at <http://fanac.org/fanzines/Philcon/Philcon2-05.html>. After being skipped in 1954, the Hugo Awards became an annual tradition allowing attendees to select the best material of the previous year in the SF field.

In 1994 a motion was passed to create the Retro Hugo Awards. The Retro Hugo was an option that a Worldcon could decide to implement to retroactively make awards for years when the Worldcon had taken place but for which no Hugo Awards had been given. Awards are allowed only for specific years: 50, 75, or 100 years before the current Worldcon.

In 1996, at LAcon III, the Retro Hugo Awards were bestowed for the 1946 Worldcon, which also happened in Los Angeles — the first Pacificon. In 2001, the Millennium Philcon awarded Retro Hugo Awards that could have occurred in 1951. The 2004 Worldcon, Noreascon 4, will be presenting the Retro Hugo Awards that would have been given in 1954.

As is normal for the Hugo Awards, the Retro Hugo Awards are selected from the best of the previous year for which they would have been awarded. Therefore, the awards will be for work done in 1953.

The FANAC Fan History Project (<http://fanac.org>) is pleased to assist Noreascon 4 and voters for the Retro Hugo Awards by placing material online that will help voters to identify eligible and appropriate works worthy of nomination.

On our web site we have a comprehensive list of the short fiction and serials published in 1953 and will soon have a full list of the novels. We are creating a display section of the book and magazine covers so you can see and enjoy the artists for the year. Lastly, we will be putting online many issues of 1953 fanzines for you to read and enjoy. We hope that this will allow you to make a better qualified judgment of all the fan categories for the awards: Fanzine, Fan Artist and Fan Writer. We will try to put up material from as many potential nominees as possible.

We encourage you to review the works of 1953 and nominate and vote in those categories where you feel knowledgeable. Some of the recommended works in this publication may have had versions published before 1953. The Retro Hugo Committee will research all nominations to be sure they meet the appropriate qualifications.

Now it's time for you to get acquainted with the science fiction world of 1953, one of the best years, professionally and fannishly, in our history!

— Joe Siclari, Chairman,
Fanac Fan History Project

The Year of the “Hugos”

by Juanita Coulson

1953 was a critical year for fandom in a great many ways. The SF magazine boom had passed its peak. Fanzine editorials and fan correspondence were filled with worried speculation that if the collapse continued there wouldn't be anything left for us to read. Such concern was valid. *Remember*: in 1953 the SF and Fantasy magazines drove our entire subculture; there were precious few hardbacks or paperbacks around. And fans in those days, even fannish fans, were thoroughly addicted to reading science fiction. Media SF, for the most part, just didn't exist. By and large, fans were a pretty serious bunch, still infected with leftover viruses of the technocracy-loving fandom of the 30's and 40's.

In 1953 another aspect of fandom that's now taken for granted—the convention—was even more rare than hardbacks and paperbacks. We had Midwestcon, Philcon, Westercon, one or two others, and the all-important annual Worldcon. The last was the highlight of the year—for those fans who lived close enough geographically or were well enough off financially to attend. Travel and salaries during that decade didn't even come close to what

the 21st Century regards as “nominal”.

Let's look at Philcon '53, the 11th Worldcon. James Williams, the chairman, had died early in the year and was replaced by scientist Milt Rothman. Bob Madle, still active today as a bookseller specializing in SF, was treasurer. Willy Ley was GoH. The con was held at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel—and fans made kilotons of jokes about the first part of that name.

Registration cost a dollar, the banquet, \$5.75. Nearly every male fan who attended wore a tie, and most wore a suit. Females, then less than 1/10th of the fannish population, wore dresses, and not only to the banquet. I can prove this, because professional photographer “Zinni”, using a fish-eye lens, took a picture of the entire

E. E. “Doc” Smith



banquet assembly. As it happens, I own two copies of said photo; Buck Coulson and I weren't yet married and we both bought one. Time has faded the color to sepia, but most of the faces are still recognizable.

Pros, and pros-to-be, galore: Robert Bloch, Julie Schwartz, Isaac Asimov, Willy and Olga Ley, Tom Claresson, Sprague de Camp, Gordy Dickson, John and Peg Campbell, Phil Farmer, Doc Smith, Lloyd Eshbach, Judy May and Ted Ditky, Evelyn Paige Gold.

And fans. The Detroit Mob: Fred Prophet, Ben Jason, et al. The Cleveland Gang: Harlan Ellison, Honey Wood, etc. The Cincinnati Bunch: Doc Barrett, Don and Margaret Ford, Ben Kiefer, Stan Skirvin. Chicago: Earl and Nancy Kemp. Oh yes, and a smattering of Indiana fans and their friends: Lee Tremper (now Lavell), Gene DeWeese, Buck Coulson, Bob Briney, later to write texts for NASA, and Sid Coleman, who in his current career as a physicist has rubbed elbows and discussed obtruse subjects with Feynman and other world-famous colleagues.

For someone who was active in

L-R: Robert Bloch, Harlan Ellison, Evelyn Gold, Arthur C. Clarke



fandom at the time, it was disappointing that certain well-known fans weren't able to attend the convention. Where, for instance, was Joel Nydahl, editor of *Vega*? In the previous year he burst upon the fannish cosmos like a supernova. *Vega*'s annish (anniversary issue) was 100 pages—absolutely unheard of in that era. And it was chock full of both fan and pro contributors. If there had been an award for fanzines, Joel certainly would have rated a nomination.

Unfortunately, the "Hugos" were brand new that year, and there was no category for fanzines. Also unfortunately, Joel's annish was his fan swan song. He'd gone deeply in debt to produce that beautiful publication, and his father bailed him out solely on the condition that he quit fandom forever. So Joel did, alas, and fandom lost who knows how many more brilliant demonstrations of his skills. And the kid was only 14!

Hugos. That designation was still unofficial in 1953. A number of fans had already begun agitating in favor of other nicknames for the miniature rocket ships—"Vernes", for one. But "Hugo" eventually won out. Asimov, as he was to be at many a subsequent Worldcon banquet, was Philcon's Toastmaster. *Astounding Science Fiction* (it wasn't *Analog*, yet) and *Galaxy* tied for the top award. Campbell and Evelyn Paige Gold accepted their rockets jointly. "Best Interior Illustrator"—I believe they were making up award names as they went along—was, justifiably, Virgil Finlay. "New Discovery of the Year" was Phil Farmer, for,



naturally, “The Lovers”.

And that was it. No fanzine Hugo. No Fan Writer Hugo. No Semi-Pro Publication Hugo. All of those came later. Much later.

If there had been such awards in 1953, which names would have risen to the top? Harlan, for *Dimensions*? Probably. Lee Hoffman, for *Quandry*? Probably. *Fantasy-Times*, as the “Newspaper of Fandom”? Maybe. The content was informative, but the style made for dull reading. Then there were all those other fanzines out there, either being published or in the planning stages. And many of those fanzines were edited by future pros such as Robert Silverberg, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and Terry Carr.

Fifties fandom was marvelously incestuous; well-established pros were not too proud to contribute to fanzines “for the usual”—a free issue or wow! a free sub! And there were still more fans in ’53 who were already in the process of honing their writing skills and preparing to make their leaps on up to paying markets.

However, there was a darker side to 50’s fandom as well, just as there had been in earlier eras during the

“exclusion act” days at previous Worldcons. In 1953, fandom, like the rest of the US, was being dragged, often kicking and screaming, into more modern attitudes. That’s ironic, given the nature of science fiction, with its interstellar outlook. 50’s fandom sometimes was prone to follow the patterns of the larger society around us. Voting for the site of the next Worldcon, for example.

There was no Rotation Rule in 1953. Nor had there been the previous year. At Chicon II in 1952, nominations for the site were thrown wide open. San Francisco, enthusiastically backed by The Elves, Gnomes, and Little Men’s Science Fiction, Chowder, and Marching Society of Berkeley, assumed that it would be the west coast’s turn to host the con in ’53. They came to Chicago expecting that, and rightly so.

It didn’t happen. Down and dirty politicking took over. Most of the attendees—and everyone sitting in the meeting hall could vote, as many times as it took to get a majority—made a choice on the basis of “can I get to the con in 1953?” Since the majority of the fans attending lived in the Midwest,

they voted for Philly. Afterward, following considerable rehashing, recrimination, and bitterness expressed in fanzine lettercols, second thoughts and guilt set in. By the time Philcon rolled around, the fans felt they were duty bound to vote for San Francisco in '54—even if we had no real chance of attending a west coast con. So that's what we did.

The movement that was to become the Worldcon Rotation System began there. That powerful aftermath feeling of "San Francisco was gypped" helped change fannish opinions. Later the rotation plan was taken for granted, and now it's gone again. Fans can now spend their time arguing over far more important subjects like whether it's obligatory to hold a NASFIC in the US any time the Worldcon goes overseas. Ah, progress!

Nevertheless, the rotation plan was a change for the better, and Philcon was, for a small chunk of fandom in the Great Lakes, a major change for the better in quite another way.

Consider the times. Earlier in the year, Midwestcon was held in the Indian Lake district of Ohio, at a resort

Lee Hoffman and Bob Tucker



hotel Bob "Hoy Ping Pong" Tucker dubbed "Beastley's On the Bayou". Actually, the owner's name was "Beatley", but Tucker's version suited the proprietor much better.

Harlan held court in his inimitable fashion. Arthur C. Clarke also was in attendance; he'd been touring the US, and showed the fans some beautiful color slides he'd taken on his trip. That was the highlight of Saturday evening's "programming". Randall Garrett got in a fight with the House Dick—the proprietor's son, actually, and showed up later on with a black eye. The banquet was rubber turkey, enlivened by Tucker tossing barbs at all his friends and Ray Beam stabbing himself with a couldn't-cut-butter cheap table knife, and getting an emergency patch job off stage, courtesy of Doc Barrett.

But three would-be attendees didn't get to enjoy any of that. They arrived at "Beastley's" and were told that *one* of their reservations had evaporated; the whites in the fan group could stay, but a black fan friend accompanying them could not. The whites volunteered to sleep in the car and give their black friend the room. At which point, quite abruptly, *nobody* had a reservation. Other fans, having overheard this outrageous exchange, gathered around the hotel registration desk and argued hotly with the proprietor, to no avail. Harlan promised that he'd expose "Beastley's" bigotry to all of fandom, using his fanzine as a platform. Though as far as I can remember, that never happened.

None of the protests had any effect. And in 1953 there was no legal

recourse whatsoever for the situation. The hotel proprietor, in effect, was the law. The three disappointed—and furious—fans were forced to get back in their car and drive home without ever enjoying a single con function.

Later in the year, Philcon is coming up. Once badly burned, now very wary, the fans and their friends write to the Bellevue-Stratford to ask about their racial policies. A hurt reply returned: “This is the city of Brotherly Love. Of course everyone in your party will be welcome.” And they were. The first sight those Midwestern fans saw when they arrived at the hotel was a huge banner stretched across the lobby reading “Welcome Urban League”. Indeed, the lobby was filled by a veritable rainbow coalition of humanity.

The second sight that greeted them was Harlan rushing across the lobby to embrace just-arrived Robert Briney and scream, “My Old Pal! You made it!” Fans established friendships largely through correspondence, in those days, and face to face contact was, indeed, a cause for delight. But it did make for an extremely odd scene. Briney is well over six feet tall. Harlan is very much not.

One final detail about Philcon ’53, one that may make today’s beleaguered concons feel better. Fifty years later, how many concons have discovered at the last moment that their printer blew up, the disk drive died, and nothing that’s supposed to be ready for the inrushing horde of fans *is* ready? When we arrived at Philcon in 1953 and walked up to con registration, we were given “Hello, My Name Is _____” badges, and told: 1) The “real” badges would be ready as soon as



Midwestcon: Clarke, Hal Shapiro, and the damaged Randall Garrett

possible, and 2) The programs would be ready as soon as possible. Harlan and others suggested a collating party. After all, a lot of us were fanzine editors. We’d had plenty of practice with this. So why not? We could sit in the lobby and assemble our own program packages, and program packages for everyone else.

Fandom being what it is—and was then—that suggestion became swift-flying rumor and eventually was stated as fact in a number of fanzines, though most of the editors of those fanzines didn’t actually attend the con, of course.

But when did having all the facts in hand ever stop a fanzine editor, or a science fiction writer, from concocting a good story?

Rest assured, though, none of the above is concocted. The memories are still vivid, and they’re confirmed by my dusty file of *EISFA/Yandros* and those fish-eye banquet photos from Philcon. Honest to Ghu, I was dere, and that’s the way fandom was in 1953.

— Juanita Coulson

Robert Silverberg Adds:

I’ve read Juanita’s piece carefully, and she covers fandom of the era pretty well, even if she doesn’t mention [my



own] *Spaceship* by name, or note that Lee Hoffman and Walt Willis, two of the biggest fan names of the era, failed to attend the con.

Significant fanzines of the period were Lee Hoffman's *Quandry*, Harlan's *Dimensions*, Bob Tucker's *SF NewsLetter*, Charles Lee Riddle's *Peon*, Redd Boggs's *SkyHook*, Joel Nydahl's *Vega*, Walt Willis's *Slant*, Gregg Calkins' *Oops!*, and my own *Spaceship*. I can't tell, without actually prowling through the dusty archives, how many of these pubbed

ishes in calendar year 1953.

Fan writers of note back then included Willis, Tucker, Rich Elsberry, Boggs, Dean Grennell, Bob Shaw, James White, Bob Bloch, me. Never paid much attention to fan art and the only name I remember from that era is Rotsler's.

I have certain reminiscences of the con that she had no access to, like seeing a poker game in which 13-year-old Dave Ish sat in manfully with the likes of Tucker and the original Marty Greenberg and did pretty well. Or the scenes in the suite that Harlan and I rented and subleased dormitory style to about fifty other fans at \$5 a night. But this is Juanita's piece, not mine, and she remembers the parts of the con she experienced, which is as it should be.

I do think she's left a couple of the Hugo winners out: without going over to the office to check, I offer the recollection that Ackerman received a Hugo as Number One Fan Face, and Bester for *The Demolished Man*. The Hugos were little scraggly home-made things: I remember from my visits to John Campbell's office how pitiful his 1953 Hugo looked alongside the ones he won later.

—Robert Silverberg



Note: a growing list of the fanzines eligible for the Retro Hugo Award for 1953 is available online at the FANAC Fan History web site: http://fanac.org/fanzines/Retro_Hugos.html. This includes the complete contents of these publications so material for the Best Fanzine, Best Fan Writer Award and the Best Fan Artist Award can be enjoyed and evaluated. Contributions of additional material, especially scanned eligible fanzines, are welcomed.

1953: The Good Ones

The Best Fiction and Novels of the Year

by Don D'Ammassa

There were no Hugo Awards given for the year 1953. That's a shame, in one way, because in the novel category in particular there were some very important works that were never recognized by the World SF Convention. On the other hand, maybe it's just as well that we never had to decide which of the contenders was actually the best of the year.

The competition was probably hotter that year than at any time before or since. Fifty years have passed now, and the perspective of time might temper our judgment, but I still wouldn't want to have to predict the outcome.

Personally, there's no doubt in my mind that the finest novel of 1953 was *More Than Human* by Theodore Sturgeon. It was his best book-length work and certainly one of the handful of genuine classics the genre had produced, the story of a gestalt personality, done with a skill and sensitivity rarely seen in SF. But he wasn't the only writer to give us

his best that year. Ray Bradbury's only true SF novel, *Fahrenheit 451*, has acquired an audience even outside the field. *Mission of Gravity* by Hal Clement, the first novel of the heavy gravity planet Mesklin, also appeared in 1953, and many readers consider it his best work as well.

John Wyndham's *Out of the Deepes* (aka *The Kraken Wakes*) was then and still is one of the most quietly effective alien invasion stories of all time.

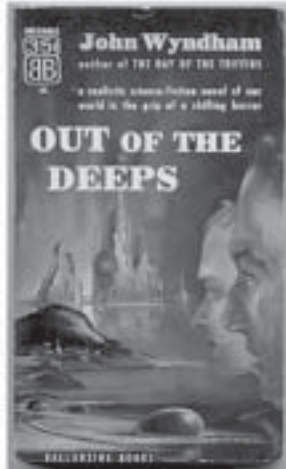
Arthur C. Clarke described another kind of alien invasion, a benevolent one that nevertheless changes the world dramatically, in *Childhood's End*.

Edgar Pangborn's *West of the Sun*

reverses the equation, with humans crashing on an alien world, interacting with the intelligent natives, to the eventual benefit of both species.

These are six of the best SF novels of all time, let alone of just 1953. There was also a dark horse, a likely contender in any other year although outclassed dramatically when it appeared. Wilmar





about its subject ever written. Less well known is Sarban's chilling little mood piece, *The Dollmaker*, long out of print but still a gem.

Short fiction is slightly harder to categorize, since I'm not about to count words and figure out which are novelettes and which just very long stories. I'll leave that to the experts. But let's take a look at longer stories first. The one

Shiras' sole SF effort, *Children of the Atom*, remains one of the most effective stories of unintentional mutation.

There were no Bram Stoker awards in 1953 either, but two horror novels appeared that year that are worth noting, although they would have had little chance of winning the Hugo. Fritz Leiber's *Conjure Wife*, a story of suburban witchcraft, is already a classic, the basis for at least two motion pictures, and the best novel

that stands out immediately is the original, shorter version of "A Case of Conscience" by James Blish, the story of a priest's encounter with a race he believes was created by Satan rather than God.

Similarly, James Blish's "Earthman, Come Home" was the core story of the middle volume of his *Cities In Flight* trilogy, and unlike most trilogies, the middle in this case was by far the best. Both were powerful stuff then and they still thrill readers now. Damon Knight's "Four in One" is on its surface the story of an alien creature that absorbs human personalities, but more than that it's a story about how we relate to one another.

There's an extraordinary novelette by a non-SF writer as well, "The Birds" by Daphne Du Maurier, a terrifying thriller that is still far superior to the Alfred Hitchcock film despite the latter's greater familiarity. For me, it's still the best nature in revolt story, and one I've re-read several times.

Other long stories of note are "Un-

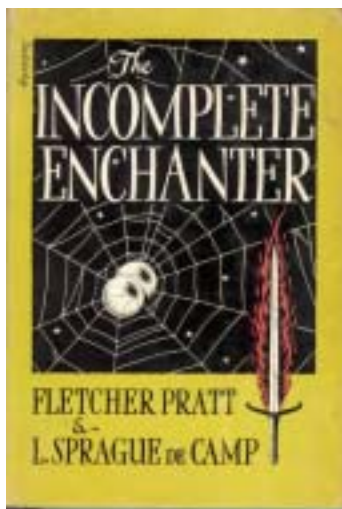


Man” by Poul Anderson, a rousing and intelligent adventure story, “The Variable Man” by Philip K. Dick, one of his best stories from the prime of his short fiction days, and “Wall of Serpents” by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt, not the best installment in their Harold Shea fantasy series, but a memorable adventure nonetheless. “Lot” by Ward Moore remains one of the most quietly effective stories of the aftermath of a nuclear war.

There were a lot of very good stories that year. Theodore Sturgeon was at the top of his form in the early 1950s, and three of his best appeared in 1953. “A Saucer of Loneliness” was mildly controversial and way ahead of its time because of the presumed homosexual aliens. “Talent” is one of the dangerous child stories that you just can’t forget, featuring an obnoxious boy who can turn himself into anything he wants, until he makes a fatal mistake. “A Way Home” is an understated but very touching story of a boy’s decision to run away from home, and his subsequent reconsideration.

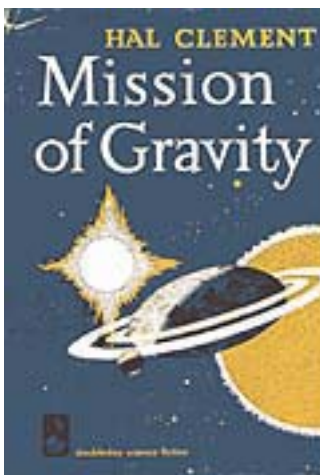
Similar to “Talent” but traveling in an entirely different direction was Jerome Bixby’s most memorable story, “It’s a *Good* Life”, twice filmed and still a classic. Ray Bradbury’s “A Scent of Sarsaparilla” also featured a child protagonist, but his story evokes nostalgia rather than terror, and his “The Playground”, also published that year, is another of his best.

Satirical humor was more respected in the 1950s than it is today, and Fritz Leiber’s spoof of tough



detective fiction, “The Night He Cried”, is an under-rated classic. One of Poul Anderson’s best tales of the quest for human freedom and dignity is “Sam Hall”. John Brunner’s “Thou Good and Faithful”, Arthur C. Clarke’s “Expedition to Earth”, “Morality” by Theodore Sturgeon, “Crucifixus Etiam” by Walter M. Miller Jr., and Avram Davidson’s “My Boyfriend’s Name Is Jello” are all among the very best shorts from some of our very best writers.

Also of note are “Second Variety” by





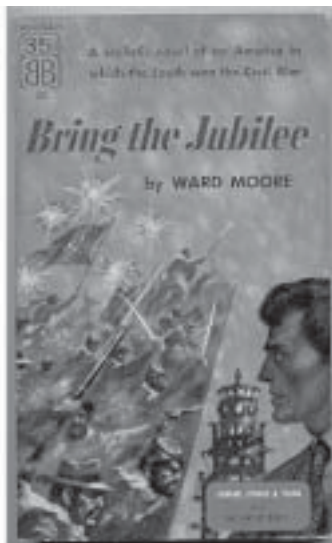
Philip K. Dick, “Babel II” by Damon Knight, “Home Is the Hunter” by Henry Kuttner, and “Little Girl Lost” by Richard Matheson. Robert Sheckley and Clifford D. Simak both produced numerous topnotch stories in 1953, of which the best are probably “The Seventh Victim”, “Untouched by Human Hands”, and “Shape” by Robert Sheckley, and “Skirmish” by Simak.

The last few noteworthy stories are

not quite up to the level of those already mentioned, but include “The Perfect Weapon” by Robert Sheckley, “The Old Die Rich” by H.L. Gold, “Special Delivery” by Damon Knight, and “The Preserving Machine” by Philip K. Dick.

Overall, it might well have been the very best year for science fiction, particularly at novel length. It was easier to be groundbreaking and striking back before a small army of writers explored the possibilities that the field offered. Some of the stories that stood out so dramatically in the past would not seem nearly as interesting if they had been first published this year, and it’s entirely possible that nostalgia has made some of them seem retrospectively better than they really were. But I’ve re-read most of the titles mentioned above during the years since, and I’ve found in every case that they are as entertaining and exciting now as they were when I first encountered them.

—Don D’Amassa



The Short Fiction of 1953

by Mark L. Olson and Jim Mann

reprinted from Noreascon Progress Report #4

The decade of the 1950's was a great one for science fiction and fantasy. The revolution created by John W. Campbell in *Astounding* was over a decade old, and two major new magazines started near the beginning of the 50's—*Galaxy* and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*—led the way into new directions. The decade was a great one for stories of all types, but especially so for short fiction (not surprising given the two great new outlets *Galaxy* and *F&SF* provided). And even by the standards of the 1950's, 1953 was a strong year. Looking over the best short fiction of 1953 one is immediately struck by the breadth of writing—1953 was not a year where writers did ordinary stories. It was a year of extraordinary stories by great writers, a year for new writers to show what they could do, and a year of particularly iconic stories.

1953 saw publication of two of the most famous short SF stories ever written: “It’s a Good Life” by Jerome Bixby and “The Nine Billion Names of God” by Arthur C. Clarke. Both are short with real punches at the end. Who can forget a story which ends “Overhead, without any fuss, the stars

were going out.”?

1953 was a year in which some of SF’s biggest names produced major work. These are writers who, from the perspective of 2003, were among those who would dominate 1950’s SF. James Blish wrote the novella “A Case of Conscience” which was expanded into his most famous novel. In that same year, Blish also wrote “Earthman, Come Home,” a pivotal story in his *Cities in Flight* series. Philip Jose Farmer’s major early story “Mother”—perhaps the ultimate in Freudian SF—

cover art by Emsh



brought to prominence a writer who often delighted and occasionally shocked SF. Fritz Leiber gave us the memorable short story “A Bad Day for Sales” and Arthur C. Clarke gave us “Jupiter V.” Alfred Bester, Theodore Sturgeon, Walter Miller, Clifford Simak, Murray Leinster—all produced fine stories that year. And Robert A. Heinlein—the dean of them all—wrote one of his more offbeat stories: “Project Nightmare”.

In 1953 Poul Anderson, then a young writer with decent credits writing good space opera, showed what he would do over the next fifty years of his career. “Sam Hall”, still one of his most anthologized stories, broke new ground imagining a future dictatorship run by computer—remember, computers were no more than expensive calculators then—and a successful rebellion against it aided and abetted by a hacker.

Fifty years later this seam is still not worked out, but few writers have done it better than Anderson did in “Sam Hall”. And for SFnal humor, few stories can beat Anderson and Gordon

R. Dickson’s Hoka story, “The Adventure of the Misplaced Hound.” Anderson also wrote one of the stories in a series on United Nations agents who maintain the peace on earth and across the Solar System: “UN-Man.” This series doesn’t get the attention of Anderson’s later, more famous series, but it’s fine early work from this Grand Master of science fiction, and an excellent illustration of the 50’s SF fascination with wars to end civilization and the prevention thereof.

1953 was also a year in which a number of underappreciated writers produced some very good work. Charles L. Harness wrote his gorgeous story “The Rose”, and Theodore Cogswell wrote “The Wall Around the World”. Alan E. Nourse gave us “Nightmare Brother”. None of these writers ever made it into stardom—they had careers elsewhere—but they were each solid writers who delivered one of their better stories in 1953.

Anthony Boucher and H. L. Gold, in many ways better known as short story writers, earned their publications potential Best Magazine nomination as the founding editors of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *Galaxy*, respectively.

1953 was also a great year for novels—Sturgeon, Asimov, Clement and others produced major works—but that’s a subject for a future progress report.

—Mark L. Olson and Jim Mann

Note: a nearly complete list of all the short fiction published in 1953 is available online at the FANAC Fan History web site:

<http://fanac.org/fanzines/Miscellaneous/StoryList.html>



art by
van Dongen

Artists of 1953

An Overview

by Alex Eisenstein

1953 was an auspicious year for science fiction art as well as SF publishing, and an undoubted turning point for the art of SF illustration. Don Wollheim left Avon Books the previous year to go to Ace Books, where he started the soon-to-be-famed Ace Science Fiction Doubles line. As a result, A.E. van Vogt's *Away and Beyond*, left behind by Wollheim, was the only fantastic book issued by Avon in 1953. Over at Ace, Wollheim immediately issued a pair of van Vogt novels, *The World of Null-A* and *Universe Maker*, as an Ace Double, along with another Double Novel of swashbuckling science fantasies, Leigh Brackett's *The Sword of Rhiannon* braced with Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Conqueror*. Three of the four covers for these first two Ace SF Doubles were from the hands of old-line illustrators—Norman Saunders on *Conan*, Paul Orban on *Universe Maker*, Stanley Meltzoff on *Null-A*, and Robert Schulz on *Rhiannon*—all of them working here in an older, dark, earth-toned style of paperback illustration. This

style would soon be swept away by the brighter, vivacious, and more modern images of Ed Valigursky and Ed Emshwiller—but not quite yet, this year, at Ace.

Other changes were going on at the time. New and younger artists, with cleaner, crisper, more dynamic ways of portraying the subjects of science fiction, were coming into the field in the early 1950s. A number of them (including the two Eds) were already making their marks by 1953, whereas many pulp artists of the previous generation were fading away with the rapid disappearance of the large-size pulp mags.

Earle Bergey, the noted cover artist for *Startling Stories* and *Thrilling*





whose elegantly figured drybrush drawings enlivened the magazine up through the previous October, virtually ended his SF career this year, with nothing in *Astounding*. He appeared only in one issue of *Other Worlds* and one of *Universe*, and the last of his series of sleek jacket illustrations for

Wonder, had only two magazine covers and one paperback cover that year, the latter a good gray industrial scene for Murray Leinster's *Space Platform* (Pocket Books).

Hubert Rogers, one of the most important artists ever to grace the covers of *Astounding*, was virtually absent in 1953 after a career spanning from 1939 through 1952. His only cover that year was for the Shasta first edition of Robert A. Heinlein's *Revolt in 2100*. Similarly, *Astounding*'s nonpareil interior artist Edd Cartier,

Gnome Press was *The Robot and the Man*.

Ed Valigursky (who would not begin doing work for Ace until 1955) left the art staff of *Amazing* to become the Art Director of *If*. Starting in March, he began creating a series of twenty-one crisp renderings of future technology and space exploration, which ran as attractive duotones on the inside covers over the next three years. Though he had no full-color cover art this year, his inside front cover for July '53, depicting astronauts exploring the crackled surface of Mercury, and his inside back cover for September, showing armor-plated explorers on the snowy surface of Titan, compare favorably with the best of Chesley Bonestell.

The glory days of Ace Books were yet to come, but they had already begun at the newly formed Ballantine Books (founded by Ian and Betty Ballantine after departing Bantam). Ballantine brought out a dozen SF books in 1953, their first year.

A new artist named Richard



Richard Powers also right top & bottom

Powers, who had done two intriguing covers for *Galaxy* in '52 and two other surrealoïd ones for *Beyond* in '53, was developing a whole new image for the new-minted Ballantine SF line, influenced by the surrealism of Tanguy, Matta, Ernst, and Dali. Most of Powers's art back then was still fairly representational, if more highly stylized than that of his colleagues, filled with strong iconic images and moody, coruscating colors.

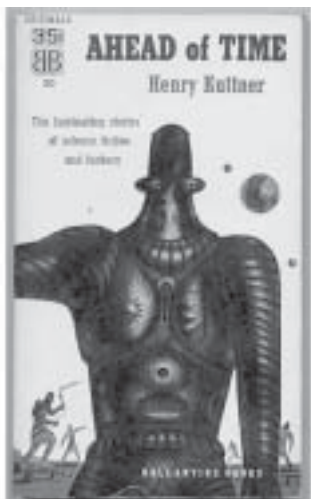
Outstanding examples are the covers for *Childhood's End*, *More Than Human*, Frederik Pohl's anthologies *Star Science Fiction 1* and *2*, Fletcher Pratt's *The Undying Fire* and Gerald Kersh's *The Secret Masters*. His two-color art for two book jackets, Andre Norton's *Star Rangers* (World) and J.T. McIntosh's *World Out of Mind* (Doubleday), are perhaps his most traditional fare—especially the one for the dystopian McIntosh novel, with its young woman at a control board superimposed over the pencil-scrawled profile of a grim hawk-faced man.

Among his more famous of the “avant-garde” covers from that year are those for Clifford Simak's *City* (Permapstar/Doubleday), Arthur C. Clarke's *Expedition to Earth*, and Henry Kuttner's *Ahead of*



Time (both BB). The robots on the Simak and Kuttner books are bizarre, Henry Moore-ish forms, and the wraparound painting on the Kuttner displays a rare flash of the artist's mordant humor. His second cover for *Beyond*, on the September issue, is also wonderfully weird and spooky, in its depiction of humanoid amazons spear-hunting in a forest of floating polyps. Almost single-handedly, Powers was changing the course of science fiction art.

The two most obvious award





Emsh

candidates for 1953 are the inimitable Frank Kelly Freas and the superlative Ed Emshwiller, who seemed to share the rest of the field between them for the next decade. While he began in 1950 with a light-footed piping Pan for *Weird Tales*, 1953 was something of a breakout year for Kelly Freas. His third cover for *Weird Tales* appeared in January, and he executed another eight covers for genre magazines that year, including three for *Planet Stories*, one for *Tops in Science Fiction*, and last but not least, his first one for *Astounding*. His *Tops* cover for “Lorelei of the Red Mist” (Fall), surreal and coolly sensual, presents a hypnotic porcelain siren whose serene Kabuki face gazes enticingly at every male viewer—an exotic interplanetary pin-up that remains one of his most striking visions.

His very first *ASF* cover, for Tom Godwin’s “The Gulf Between” (Oct.), is another of his most famous works, picturing a giant robot with sensitive sculptured face and liquid soulful eyes, silently asking what should be done with the dying rag-doll man cradled in its hand. For what each of them does,

either of these two paintings is worthy of its own special award. In addition, he did the dust jacket designs for three Gnome Press volumes that year: *Against the Fall of Night*, *The Coming of Conan*, and *Children of the Atom*. In his magazine covers for *Astounding*, and to a lesser extent for others, Kelly Freas began the practice of encapsulating in a single vivid image the essence of the story, and he is already doing this with amazing clarity and force in “The Gulf Between.”

Kelly Freas also did a passel of interiors for the magazines, including four issues of *Planet*, four of *Astounding*, and five of *If*, bringing a bold new method of three-dimensional drawing and shading to otherworldly landscapes, creatures, and vibrant, solid, sculpted spacemen and women. Typical of his best work in his *Planet* style are the illo for “Castaways of Eros” and the magnificent series of heroic, art-nouveau-like pen-and-inks for “Lorelei of the Red Mist,” from the Spring and Fall issues of *Tops*. Other notable Kelly Freas interiors for the year include the ones for “The Custodian” and “A Bottle of Old Wine,” from the November and December *If*, and those from *ASF* for “Humpty Dumpty” (Sept.), “The Gulf Between” (Oct.), “The Happiness Effect” (Nov.), and “Mother of Invention” (Dec.).

The following year, Kelly Freas would begin sharing cover duties on *Astounding* with H.R. van Dongen, who first appeared in and on *ASF* in late 1951. In 1953, van Dongen had four covers on *Astounding*, two on *Science Fiction*

Adventures, and one on *Space Science Fiction*. Two of the *ASF* covers, for H. Beam Piper's "Null-ABC" (Feb.) and Hal Clement's "Mission of Gravity" (Apr.), are among his best and most evocative works. "Mission of Gravity" in particular presents a moody, atmospheric, highly charged image of the storm-wracked surface of planet Mesklin. His cover for the May *SF Adventures*, depicting a team of astronauts parachuting into the site of a crashed spaceship, is also a dramatic scene carrying a good deal of conviction. His precise pen-and-ink interiors for *ASF*, often textured like fine engravings, varied in their quality, but the best of them were more stylish than those of Paul Orban, a workmanlike though largely dull artist who turned out interiors for more than a dozen magazines besides *ASF* in that period.

If Kelly Freas was on his way to being the illustrator doyen of *Astounding*, the work of Ed Emshwiller (a.k.a. Emsh) was well on its way to becoming what many readers would view as the "default mode" of

Emsh

SF art. Ed Emsh (who sold his first cover painting to *Galaxy* in 1951) was already hitting his stride in 1953, with eighteen magazine covers that year, including six for *Galaxy* and four for *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and more than a hundred interiors in four dozen issues of fifteen separate magazines. His fresh distinctive approach to the genre is evident in these early *Galaxy* and *F&SF* covers, from the witty dilemma of "Settlement Out of Court" for the July *Galaxy*, in which a flustered spaceman has landed his rocket on the cow-pig of an irate alien herdsman, through the mellow holiday mood of *Galaxy*'s December cover, with its quartet of human and alien carolers serenading a four-armed Santa below his ship's airlock.

Other outstanding covers of '53 are the ominously Edenic tableau of "The Hypnograph" (July *F&SF*), the iconic warrior robot guarding its delta-winged aircraft in "The Defenders" (Jan. *Galaxy*), a cluster of beetle-like spacemen tending a sensor device

Kelly Freas

Kelly Freas





Frank R.
Paul

under the glaring white-hot sun in “Solar Weather Station on Mercury” (Sept. *Galaxy*), and last but not least, the vaulted maze-like warrens of “The Caves of Steel” (Oct. *Galaxy*), which features the nearly-joined hands of robot and man superimposed in the foreground. Emsh brought a new crisp realism, as well as sly humor and a canny pathos, to the adventure of science fiction.

Many of Emsh’s most expressive and expressionist interiors were done for *Galaxy*, though his b&w illos appeared in fourteen other magazines, including *Amazing*, *If*, *Planet*,



Alex
Schomburg

Startling, and *Space Stories*. In *Galaxy* in particular, he seemed to devise a new style for almost every story. A brief survey of the best from that magazine would include his drawings for “Horse Trader” and “The Drop” (from March), “Made in U.S.A.” (April), “Tangle Hold,” “Colony,” “Warm,” and “We Don’t Want Any Trouble” (all in June), “The Touch of Your Hand” (September), and “Mr. Costello, Hero” (December).

One famous pulp illustrator, Frank R. Paul, was having a small renaissance in the short-lived Gernsback revival, *Science Fiction Plus*, where he produced four out of its seven covers, as well as a wealth of airbrush b&w interiors for its slick pages. For these interiors, he created a number of interesting, even plausible spaceships; particularly nice among these are a sleek rocketliner hulled by a meteoroid, and a solar observatory rocket speeding past a gigantic storm-wracked sun.

The remaining *SF Plus* covers were the work of another great airbrush mechanic, Alex Schomburg, who also did all of the jacket art for the Winston juveniles (five in 1953), as well as the nifty endpaper mural for this popular series. Schomburg’s colorful combination of hard-edged hardware with fairyland-ish backgrounds enhanced the covers of nine other magazines (*Dynamic*, *Fantastic Universe*, *Galaxy*, *Startling*, et al.). His bright white space-station wheel for the January *F&SF* is very well known; but his masterpiece this year, an instant classic, is his April *SF Plus* cover,

depicting an asteroid starship accelerating through the void.

Virgil Finlay, a major pulp-era illustrator noted for his meticulous, Gustave Dore-influenced ink drawings, was still going strong in the pages of *Weird Tales*, *Startling Stories*, *Thrilling Wonder*, and nine other magazines. Never a prolific cover artist, he had one painting on the December *Science Stories*, and one of spacesuited men on the hardcover anthology *Space Service*. Finlay's drawing and subjects tended toward the fantastic and phantasmagoric, often even for scenes set in outer space. He did, though, mute this quality for items like *Space Service* and various later astronautic subjects.

His remarkable, slightly archaic engraving technique served him well in the often scatty repro of ink line on pulp paper. A great example of his style, and just plain wonderful drawing, is his scratchboard interior for an original Shirley Jackson story, "Root of Evil," in the April *Fantastic*, wherein an excited man grapples with a



Virgil Finlay

swarm of convincingly detailed greenbacks.

A name often linked with Finlay's, whose work was even more phantasmagoric, and much more mannered than Finlay's, was the legendary Hannes Bok. He had seven covers this year, four of them for the four issues of *Fantasy Fiction*. The cover of the June issue, showing a baroque mask topped by a bat-winged sprite, is typical of his style and sensibility. Like so much of his work, it has the quality of bright dreams (or

Mel Hunter



Hannes Bok



Chesley Bonestell





Jack Coggins

nightmares) cast in porcelain.

Three artists who concentrated on astronautical/astronomical subjects appeared on the major magazines and elsewhere. Chesley Bonestell, renowned for his space travel and scientific images in *Life*, *Collier's*, and *Scientific American*, had fifteen appearances on the SF magazines since late 1947—seven on *Astounding*, five on *F&SF*, and three on *Galaxy*. However, his only magazine cover in 1953 was a pretty view of the old Mars from a craggy Phobos on the March *F&SF*, though he also had a planetary

landscape on the jacket of *The Best from F&SF* #2.

More significantly, this was the year Cornelius Ryan's *Conquest of the Moon* was published by Viking Press (recast from the *Collier's* series of the year before), containing seven breathtaking realizations by Bonestell of an expedition to the Moon, exploring its surface, and establishing a base. These paintings, with their sweeping vistas and deep perspectives, set a high water mark at which other astronautical artists would aim.

Jack Coggins and Mel Hunter were two others of this ilk. Coggins had three covers on *F&SF* (May, Aug., and Sept.), three more on *Thrilling Wonder* (Feb., Apr., and Aug.), and one on *Science Fiction Quarterly* (Nov.). On the whole Coggins's renderings were painted in a more rough-hewn style than Bonestell's; even so, they brimmed with raw vitality and a strong sense of adventure, and were no less concerned with pragmatic engineering details. His art often focused in tight on spacemen at work, doing the real labor of mining, hauling, and construction; and his space vehicles and equipment typically looked as if professional mechanics had hammered and bolted them together.

In general, Mel Hunter was more oriented toward landscape and wide-open vistas, in the grand manner of Bonestell, with extremely sleek sculptural rocketships extrapolated from the swept-wing jets of the day. An exception was his outstanding "Rescue Above the Moon" for the May '53 *Galaxy*, which sports a compact version of the multi-sphere Bonestell



Stanley Meltzoff

circumlunar craft drifting a hundred miles or so above Mel's distinctively etched lunar landforms. His three other covers for *Galaxy* emphasize the excitement and wonder of prospecting the Moon (June), the vertiginous nose-eye view of a needle-nosed rocket poised for launch (Feb.), and Mars colonists precariously repairing their meteor-damaged glassy dome (Aug.).

His lone cover for *F&SF*, in November (the first of thirty he would do for this magazine over the next two decades), drily portrays a vacationing spacesuited family viewing a solar eclipse from a pink-hued lavascape on the Moon. Already at this early date, Hunter demonstrates his great skill at devising plausible geological forms for the landscapes of other worlds. But his piece de resistance came at the very end of the year, in a wheeling jet-copter "Flight Over Mercury," on the Jan. '54 *Galaxy* (on sale in Dec.), which comes across like a Kodachrome snapped high over a smoky molten world. This truly amazing picture gives the Bonestell of *The World We Live In* a run for his money.

The great painting teacher Stanley Meltzoff, who practically spawned two generations of paperback illustrators and SF artists, early on cornered the market in Heinlein's Signet editions, illustrating, prior to 1953, Robert A. Heinlein's *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Man Who Sold the Moon*, *The Green Hills of Earth*, *The Puppet Masters*, and also A.E. van Vogt's *Mission Interplanetary* (a.k.a. *Voyage of the Space Beagle*). In 1953 he turned out the Signet covers for the

Heinlein-edited anthology *Tomorrow, the Stars*, Asimov's *The Currents of Space*, and van Vogt's notable collection *Destination: Universe!*.

In all these Signet covers, Meltzoff brought a new appreciation for the subtle play of light and color, anatomical realism, and the prismatic effects of metallic structures drifting through space. Of the latter three, from '53, the two most interesting are those for *Tomorrow, the Stars* and *Destination: Universe!*, both addressing the relationship of spacemen to their ships. In the one, an armored man emerges from a topside hatch as if newborn; in the other, several men in pastel skintights cavort beside the silvery tail of their ship, like hatchlings floating in the cold womb of the universe.

Lest we forget, a couple of terrific graphic artists were working then who are nearly forgotten today: Joe Mugnaini and Don Sibley. Mugnaini's spidery, crystalline, slightly horrific ink drawings accompanied only Ray

John
Mugnaini



Bradbury's works at this point, as in this year's *The Golden Apples of the Sun*. He also drew two versions of the angular, flaming, origami-newspaper fireman for the jackets of both the Ballantine and Doubleday hardcovers of *Fahrenheit 451*, and a full-color version of this gaunt symbolic figure on the Ballantine paperback. In *Golden Apples*, the title story drawing and the one for "A Sound of Thunder" may be two of the most satisfying of the pure SF illustrations in this volume, in each case creating a kind of delirious black-and-white science fiction embroidery.

Don Sibley, who worked almost exclusively for *Galaxy* and its fantasy companion magazine, *Beyond*, is possibly the most forgotten. Fifties artist in the science fiction field; you cannot find his name in any of the major SF reference works, not even those that deal directly with art. Prior to '53, Sibley was a regular interior illustrator for *Galaxy*, appearing in nineteen out of twenty-seven issues, nicely illustrating classic stories and serials such as Kornbluth's "The Marching Morons," Sturgeon's "Baby Is Three," *The Puppet Masters*, *The Demolished Man*, and Pohl & Kornbluth's *Gravy Planet* (*The Space Merchants*). He did a total of four covers for *Galaxy*, including a cover for Fredric Brown's "Honeymoon in Hell" on the second issue and one apiece for the aforementioned serials, which constitutes all the cover art he ever did.

Although Sibley produced no covers in 1953, his interior art—appearing this year in five issues of *Galaxy* and the

premier issue of *Beyond*—centered on well-drawn faces and figures, which he portrayed with warm human sympathy. His wash-toned illustrations for Simak's classic *Ring Around the Sun* (Dec. '52 - Feb. '53) show this quality in spades, and are among his most elegant and evocative designs. Also notable this year are his interiors for Gunn's "Wherever You May Be," (May), Simak's "Junkyard" and "Kindergarten" (May and July), and R.D. Nicholson's "Far from the Warming Sun" (Sept.). Though he seemed to be branching out into other magazines toward year's end (with brief appearances in *Dynamic*, *Future*, *SF Quarterly*), he left the field after a last shot, for Farmer's "The God Business," in the March '54 *Beyond*. Some fans might complain that Sibley's people-oriented illos smacked too much of *Saturday Evening Post* art, but his lovely wash and drybrush drawings went far beyond that mode, and he could do a pretty nifty rocketship when one was called for. There are many talented and worthy artists above who qualify for a retrospective award, but for sentimental and other reasons, my own vote would be for that overlooked humanist, Don Sibley.

—Alex Eisenstein

Note: a growing list of the book and magazine covers to be considered for eligibility for the 1953 Best Professional Artist Retro Hugo Award is available online at the FANAC Fan History web site: <http://fanac.org/ProArt/>

Contributions of additional material, especially scanned eligible covers, are welcomed.



Retro Hugos: 1953 Dramatic Presentations

by Daniel M. Kimmel

reprinted from Noreascon Progress Report #4

Voters for the 1953 Retro Hugos understand that it's impossible to duplicate the experience of having lived through 1953 and then calmly consider the best of the year. Fifty years later our take is inevitably colored not only by what has endured and stood the test of time, but also what is readily available. That is particularly true in the Dramatic Presentation category.

Under Hugo rules, nominations will take place under the current category breakdown, which includes "short form" and "long form" dramatic works. The Hugo administrators have some leeway to move items from one category to another within certain time limits, as well as to collapse the two categories into one if there are insufficient nominees. With most, if not all, of the feature films qualifying as "short form," it is going to be a Solomonic task. In order not to prejudice the voters or the administrators, this breakdown is by medium rather than length.

TELEVISION

The year 1953 is well before the heyday of classic SF TV like *The Twilight Zone* and *Star Trek*. What's more, most of what was on is not readily available for viewing, if it was preserved at all. Thus *Captain Video* (the space serial starting in 1949, image

right) and *The Secret Files of Captain Video* (a second, non-continuous series that started in 1953) were both on the air, but it will be hard to track down and promote single episodes from 1953 as Retro Hugo worthy items. The same can be said for other 1953 series that were geared to kids: *Atom Squad*, *Rod Brown of the Rocket Rangers* (starring a young Cliff Robertson), and *Space Patrol*.

In prime time, science fiction showed up rarely, but 1953 did have episodes of *Tales of Tomorrow*. Other anthology series, notably *Suspense*, may have run episodes that year that would be eligible, but lots of luck tracking them down and then getting people to see them. (Radio presentations were beyond the scope of this article, but will have the same sorts of availability issues.)

The one TV series with 1953 episodes that meets the test of accessibility to fans today is the syndicated *The Adventures of Superman*, which starred George Reeves as



the Man of Steel. Episodes are available on both home video and cable (on TVLand). Twenty-four episodes of the series aired in 1953. Among the more notable episodes that year were "The Runaway Robot" (a stolen robot is used to rob banks), "Shot in the Dark" (a photographer gets an infra-red shot of Clark Kent changing into Superman), "The Defeat of Superman" (a bad guy discovers the power of Kryptonite), and "Superman in Exile" (our hero becomes radioactive and removes himself from humanity). A good source for tracking down individual television episodes is www.tvtome.com.

CARTOONS

The major studios were still producing shorts for theatrical exhibition and 1953 produced a bumper crop of eligible cartoons. The late, great Chuck Jones created two of his masterpieces that year. "Duck Amuck" is a surreal effort where Daffy keeps getting redrawn by an unseen hand that changes the background, the foreground, his body, and the very nature of the cartoon film we're watching. "Duck Dodgers in the 24th and a Half Century" is a space opera spoof (bottom) where the dashing duck is sent to Planet X in pursuit of the rare "shaving cream atom," setting a planetary course of "due up." Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd got their turn at SF with "Robot Rabbit," a Friz Freleng offering where a



mechanical bunny wreaks comic havoc.

Over at MGM, Tex Avery did "T.V. of Tomorrow," one of a continuing series of gag-driven films about some aspect of the future. Meanwhile Disney produced the half-hour "Ben and Me," the story of a mouse who becomes friends with Benjamin Franklin and helps him with his experiments.

Paramount was producing several cartoon series, including ones with Popeye, Casper the Friendly Ghost, and Herman and Katnip (a smart mouse and a not so smart cat). Popeye starred in his only 3D offering, "Popeye, the Ace of Space," where he's kidnapped by Martians, and shows them the true meaning of spinach. Presumably all of Casper's outings are fantastic enough to qualify for consideration including such titles as "Frightday the 13th," "Spook No Evil," "By the Old Mill Scream," and "Little Boo Peep." Herman and Katnip were more mundane characters, but were in two films of interest that year, "Of Mice and Magic" and "Herman the Cartoonist." The plot for the latter sounds suspiciously like "Duck Amuck." Rounding out the studio's SF offerings was "Invention Convention," a follow the bouncing ball singalong about fantastic devices.

Finally Terrytoons had their superhero Mighty Mouse in three entries in 1953: "When Mousehood Was in Flower," "Hot Rods" and "Hero for a Day." All these

cartoons might make for some interesting convention programming.

Readers seeking more information on animated shorts, including availability on video, should acquaint themselves with the Big Cartoon Database at www.bcdb.com/bcdb/page.cgi.

SERIALS

Fellow fan and serial buff Thomas Chenelle checked his references and came up with only four movie serials for 1953, a year very much at the end of the genre. Although Republic's "Canadian Mounties vs. Atomic Monsters" sounded promising, it's just the Mounties versus foreign spies who want to steal atomic secrets. Two others are even less likely, a pirate swashbuckler ("The Great Adventures of Captain Kidd") and another uranium chase, this time in the jungle ("Jungle Drums of Africa").

The only truly SF offering is Columbia's "The Lost Planet," which turns out to be the last SF movie serial produced. As might be expected, it suffers from poor production values and a "who cares?" attitude toward the material.

FEATURE FILMS

As a film critic, I have strong feelings about many of the films and their worthiness for consideration. Retro Hugo voters, of course, are invited to see the films for themselves. (Further details, including reviews of the films, can be found at the Internet Movie Database at www.imdb.com.)

Phil Hardy's eminently useful *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Movies* lists 20 titles for 1953. Let's start with the seven major contenders.

The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms—A giant beast menaces New York City in an exciting and intelligent monster movie with impeccable credentials. Director Eugene Lourie had previously worked

with Jean Renoir. The script was based on a Ray Bradbury short story called "The Fog Horn." The special effects were the premiere effort of Ray Harryhausen. And the cast includes Cecil Kellaway, Lee van Cleef, and the late Kenneth Tobey (who had starred in 1951's "The Thing").

Donovan's Brain—The second, and some consider the best, version of Curt Siodmak's novel about a scientist who keeps a human brain alive with unpleasant results. Lew Ayres starred, and his wife is played by Nancy Davis, who would go on to become Nancy Reagan.

Invaders from Mars—One of the scariest of the "aliens take over human bodies" movies, with the story seen through the eyes of a young boy who sees all the trustworthy figures of adult authority subverted: his parents, his teacher, the police. William Cameron Menzies ("Things to Come") directed, and the visuals are nightmarish. This





holds the place, according to Hardy, as the first “invasion” movie shot in color.

It Came from Outer Space—Besides providing the SF debut for director Jack Arnold, this movie provided another paycheck for Ray Bradbury, since it was based on his short story “The Meteor.” Aliens land and no one will believe astronomer Richard Carlson when he tries to warn them. Russell (“The Professor”) Johnson is also in the cast.

The Magnetic Monster—Richard Carlson appears again in what was to have been a pilot for an “X Files” type series. Carlson plays a scientific investigator on the trail of a radioactive

isotope that eats energy and grows bigger and bigger. Curt Siodmak directed and co-wrote the script with Ivan Tors.

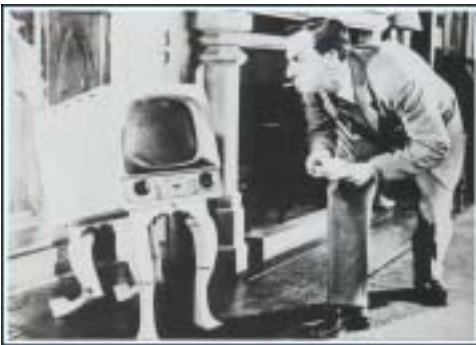
The Twonky (bottom left) — A real curio, this was based on a Henry Kuttner story about a man whose life is taken over by an intelligent TV set. Hans Conried is the man trying to escape from the dictatorial tube. Arch Oboler wrote and directed.

War of the Worlds—One of the best of the George Pal productions, based on the H.G. Wells novel. Gene Barry is the scientist who tries to figure out how to combat the invading Martians, who start tearing up the U.S. in sleek, manta ray-like spaceships. Byron Haskin directed.

Although it is likely that the feature films nominated will come from the above list, let’s take a quick look at the other thirteen SF releases that year. They can be divided into the bad and the obscure.

Abbott and Costello appeared in two features that year, and neither is worth considering. *Abbott and Costello Go to Mars* is generally recognized as one of their worst films. *Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* does have the advantage of Boris Karloff and some neat effects, but it’s a far cry from their glory days of such films as *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*.

Cat Women of the Moon featured Sonny Tufts and a lot of moon vixens in black leotards, running around sets left over from other movies. *Killer Ape* offered Johnny Weissmuller as Jungle Jim, looking for a mad scientist using experimental drugs on the apes. *The Mesa of Lost Women* has a pre-Uncle Fester Jackie Coogan as a mad scientist who is trying to create warrior women. *The Neanderthal Man* has Robert Shayne (Inspector Henderson from *The Adventures of Superman* TV show) as a scientist trying to regress animals—and



people—into prehistoric form. *Phantom from Space* has the authorities searching for an invisible alien. More interesting is that producer/director W. Lee Wilder was the brother of the much more prominent filmmaker Billy Wilder.

1953 is also the year of one of the worst films ever made, *Robot Monster*. This is the one where the alien is a guy in a gorilla suit with a diving helmet on his head, and where he communicates with the home world with a device that looks like a cross between a ham radio and a bubble machine. If this makes the ballot, look for mandatory drug testing for Hugo voters in the future.

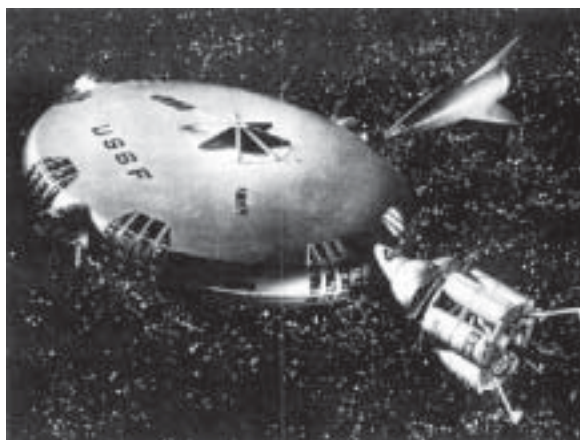
Among the obscurities—which could mean they are ripe for rediscovery or else deservedly forgotten—are *Alert in the South*, a French spy movie featuring Erich von Stroheim as a mad scientist with an atomic death ray, and *Four Sided Triangle*, a Hammer entry about a scientist who clones an unfaithful girlfriend and finds the duplicate doesn't care for him either. Mexico's first important SF film, *El Monstro Rescitado*, also had a mad scientist, only he was bringing the dead back to life. *Project Moonbase* (top right) has a script credited in part to Robert Heinlein and was patched together from the busted pilot for a proposed TV series.

Silver Dust is from the Soviet Union. The mad scientist—experimenting on people with atomic dust—is an American. He's being pursued by greedy businessmen, the military, and an ex-Nazi scientist. *Spaceways* is another Hammer entry, this one with American actor Howard Duff as a scientist accused of

murdering his wife and her lover, the lover being a Soviet spy. Duff and his lover take off into space to prove his innocence.

The dramatic category was easier the last time around for the Retros, since whatever its merits or faults, *Destination Moon* was clearly the outstanding dramatic SF presentation of 1950 and a landmark in a movie genre that was just in the process of being reborn. By contrast, one is hard pressed to pick any one 1953 release as the definitive SF dramatic presentation, but there's a lot more to choose from.

Daniel M. Kimmel is a professional film critic and lecturer. He recently taught a class on SF film, but only included one item from 1953.





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