The Science Fiction Hall of Fame: Volume II B

Ben Bova (Editor) , E.M. Forster , Frederik Pohl , James H. Schmitz , Clifford D. Simak , T.L. Sherred , Jack Vance , Wilmar H. Shiras , more... Isaac Asimov , James Blish , Algis Budrys , Theodore R. Cogswell ...less

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This volume is the definitive collection of the best science fiction novellas between 1929 to 1964 and contains eleven great classics. There is no better anthology that captures the birth of science fiction as a literary field.

Published in 1973 to honor stories that had come before the institution of the Nebula Awards, The Science Fiction Hall of Fame introduced tens of thousands of young readers to the wonders of science fiction and was a favorite of libraries across the country.

Eleven more classic novellas by the most honored authors of science fiction. Companion to Volume IIA.

Introduction · Ben Bova
The Martian Way · Isaac Asimov · na Galaxy Nov '52
Earthman, Come Home [Okie] · James Blish · nv Astounding Nov '53
Rogue Moon · Algis Budrys · na F&SF Dec '60
The Specter General · Theodore R. Cogswell · na Astounding Jun '52
The Machine Stops · E. M. Forster · nv Oxford and Cambridge Review Nov '09
The Midas Plague · Frederik Pohl · na Galaxy Apr '54
The Witches of Karres · James H. Schmitz · nv Astounding Dec '49
E for Effort · T. L. Sherred · nv Astounding May '47
In Hiding · Wilmar H. Shiras · nv Astounding Nov '48
The Big Front Yard · Clifford D. Simak · na Astounding Oct '58
The Moon Moth · Jack Vance · na Galaxy Aug '61

The Science Fiction Hall of Fame: Volume II B Details

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From Reader Review The Science Fiction Hall of Fame: Volume II B for online ebook

Charles says

Good stories, of Novella length, but not as good as Volume IIA.

Williwaw says

Gotta read this foundational series before matriculating to status of genuine sf geek. Two volumes down, one to go!

Stephen says

I have not read all the stories in this collection, so this review will cover only those I have read so far (and I will update periodically as I read more over them):

THE MIDAS PLAGUE by Frederic Pohl (4.5 stars): Great novella about the "consummerism" gone wild. In a future where cheap energy and robot workers have made the production of consumer products "easy and cheap" the "poor" are forced to spend all their time in constant consumption in order to keep pace with the robots' extravagant production. Funny and thought provoking. (Read on October 27, 2007)

THE MACHINE STOPS by E.M. Forster (4.5 to 5.0 stars): A classic, haunting short story (more like a novella) written in 1909. The story concerns a world in which humanity (long ago) lost the ability to live on the surface of the Earth (through War, disease, etc.). Now each person lives in almost complete "isolation" below ground in a "cell" where all their needs are taken care of by "the Machine." The Machine is an advanced computer created by humans in the distant past to assist mankind and on which mankind continued to rely on more and more until they became totaly dependant upon it. At the time of the story, people do not like to travel, all communicaiton is conducted via (can you believe it) instant messaging and video conferencing (remember this was written in 1909) and people are no longer "intellectually" curious.

The plot involves a member of the society who begins to distrust the way society is living, longs to visit the surface of the world and be free from the "assistance" of the Machine. I won't give any more away, but this is a powerful story (again written over 100 years ago) about the possible dangers of becoming over dependent on technology. (Read on July 23, 2009).

Mike says

Volume 2B of The Science Fiction Hall of Fame contains 11 novellas from before the age of the Nebula Award. All were published between 1909 and 1961. Because of their age they suffer from the fact

technology has moved on since they were written, but that doesn't distract from the stories, most of which were excellent and those that weren't were very good. The plots seem to be very original. A number of the stories had me thinking had I ever heard of anything similar, but I simply couldn't.

The Authors range from the well known Isaac Asimov and Fred Pohl to ones I hadn't heard of T. L. Sherrad and Wilmar H. Shiras and many others I was familiar with to varying degrees.

Overall a very good read, well worth the time spent.

Michael Tildsley says

This is a remarkable collection of science fiction novellas that completes the previous volume, IIA. Personally, I feel that it is a stronger collection than its predecessor. I thoroughly enjoyed several of the stories herein. Of the ones that I didn't care for as much, it can be said that each had a memorable, crafty, or unique issue that they focused upon.

I was particularly struck by the intriguing world-view of "The Machine Stops," as well as the visionary qualities of its author. Although it was originally published in 1909, the novella does not stand out like a sore thumb amongst its more recently conceived brethren. In it, E. M. Forster depicts a future of comfort and vice in the form of a global network of devices, known as The Machine. In no uncertain terms, Forster predicts things such as television, the internet, and face-talk calling as mediums that aid in the isolation of each individual human being from every other. What unbelievable foresight! It is a great read.

My favorites from this collection include:

"Rogue Moon"
"The Machine Stops"
"The Midas Plague"
"E for Effort"
"The Big Front Yard"

Stephanie "Jedigal" says

Volume II (Parts A and B) are "The Greatest Science Fiction Novellas of All Time".

Erin says

This Volume is the weakest of the three. I was not interested in a majority of the stories in this compilation, and I found it difficult to finish.

Four stories stood out to me: *Martian Way* by Isaac Asimov, *Earthman Come Home* by James Blish, *E for Effort* by T. L. Sherred, and *In Hiding* by Wilmar H. Shiras. These stories saved this from being two stars. I particulary enjoyed the political quibble in *Martian Way* and feel it's somewhat in relevant today's political climate.

Other stories had potential like *The Machine Stops* by E. M. Forster, however I felt the story was underdeveloped. If it had furthered the backstory of the technologically coddled human race and its infant like intellectual state, it could have been the dichotomic rival of Ayn Rand's *Anthem*. As is, it fell short of the individualist point and half-baked the religion of the machine.

Then there were stories I just had to grit my teeth and power through: *Rogue Moon* by Algis Budrys and *The Big Front Yard* by Clifford D. Simak. *Rogue Moon* seemed to go on forever. That was the story that would not end. And when it did, it wasn't a real ending! The rest of the shorts were "eh" and not that memorable.

In the end, I think it's worth listening to, but feel free to skip around. It is my foibal that I must read something straight through, cover to cover, or listen via audiobook to every chapter. Don't follow in my footsteps!

Jerry says

As a collection, this is interesting; not sure I'd call them the "greatest science fiction novellas of all time" in the way that the same series collects the best science fiction short stories.

Isaac Asimov's *The Martian Way* starts out as a standard, moderately clumsy early fifties science fiction adventure. Quickly transforms into a beautiful description of working in space, and the real interactions of real people.

The description of the journey to Saturn is alone worth the read.

James Blish's *Earthman Come Home* is a far-future adventure story in which a city of immortals, after leaving Earth ages past, has decided for economic reasons that it is now time to settle down on a new planet. But there's a lot more to it than that. It's a good, solid, adventure in which one side needs to outwit another side, when both of them are on the run from the law.

Algis Budrys's *Rogue Moon* takes the other side of an adventure tale. Teleportation works like in Star Trek: a person is dissolved into their component parts, which are recorded and discarded and the recording reassembled at the other end. But since it is all a matter of reassembling a recording, it can be done twice, creating duplicates of the person. Duplicates also have a melded mind for a five to ten minutes or so, which means one can perceive what the other perceives.

There is an artifact on the moon which acts like a D&D dungeon; people are duplicated, one on the moon, one on earth. Their moon duplicate goes in, dies in a strange way, and then the earth duplicate is duplicated again knowing what the previous pair discovered.

Normally this would be a videogame-style story, covering the repeated attempts to beat the dungeon. But in Algis Budrys's story, the focus is on the people running the transmitter, killing the same person over and over, slowly learning more about this alien unknown in the most cold-hearted manner possible.

Next up are two stories that show that socialism can even screw up plenty. E.M. Forster's classic *The Machine Stops* in which people forget what ideas are and, like Budrys's story, forget how things work; but they also develop either laws or culture that forbid doing anything that might upset the presumably precarious distribution chain. Because despite all this plenty, the central board makes everything the same.

> The bed was not to her liking. It was too large, and she had a feeling for a small bed. Complaint was useless, for beds had the same dimension all over the world, and to have had an alternative size would have involved vast alterations in the Machine.

Turns out, not only is everything the same size but in typical socialist fashion the solution in this world is to mold the person to match the product, rather than the product to match the fashion.

In Frederik Pohl's *The Midas Plague*, there's a similar solution. Again, the problem is that the things created by committee under socialism are usually not the things desired by consumers, or are in the wrong quantities, but boy do that have a lot of it. Pohl's society solves this by rationing, as most socialists are fond of, but by rationing non-consumption instead of things. Every person has a minimum consumption that they must meet in order to hide the massive failures of the production boards.

James H. Schmitz's *The Witches of Karres*, on the other hand, is pure old-school wonder. It could well have been the start of a series (and apparently was). A young man trying to impress his future father-in-law's family by turning their space trading vessel into a profit runs across three slave children with special powers and no understanding of how civilized culture works. Hijinx ensue. It's a lot of fun and more than a bit weird both in how it treats space travel and the culture it must have been written in.

T.L. Sherred's *E for Effort* is a fun, if naive, story about a machine that can see anywhere in time—at least in the present and past—across the surface of the earth. Anything and anyone can be spied on by someone possessing the machine. They use it, first, to make epic movies of ancient history, but they have bigger plans for it. What remains unexplained throughout is why it was able to be built on practically no money but couldn't be repeated (except that it must have been) when they were wealthy; the ramble in the beginning about being unable to capitalize on it because he had no money showed very little imagination for someone who could imagine the machine.

Wilmar H. Shiras's *In Hiding* tells about a child psychologist who happens upon a child who not only is a child prodigy, but who is so far above all other child prodigies that he has learned to hide his skills in order to avoid scaring the adults around him.

Oh, and he's an orphan, living with his grandparents.

Cliff Simak's *The Big Front Yard* is another of Simak's tales of meeting alien races for the first time. An antiques dealer and fix-it man finds his home taken over by tiny, unknown creatures who seem to want to do nothing but help. Why are they there? And why him? It's a typical Simak story in that nobody's particularly evil and everyone is human.

Jack Vance's *The Moon Moth* is probably the most unique space western I've ever read. His "sheriff" lands on a very strange world where everyone wears masks and speaks accompanied by musical instruments—a truly tonal language where different instruments drastically change the meaning of spoken/sung words.

This is the only one of these stories that I remember reading before, probably not because it's the only one I've read before but because it is so memorable.

Ross says

Some really excellent novellas in this volume, including one of my favorites (*Rogue Moon*). There were a couple that I completely glossed over and some others that were interesting in premise but I didn't like the execution. Given that most of them were written before 1950, I think that's to be expected, however.

Ted says

3 1/2

This contains eleven novellas, advertised as the Greatest Science Fiction Novellas of All Time. But (leaving aside the issue of what is a novella, what a short story) that can't be right. Even though the selections were chosen by polling the SF Writers of America, the problem is that the book was published in 1973, and contains no selections individually published after 1961. All but one of the stories was published after 1946.

So what we really have is great SF novellas from the period 1947-1961, and this is why many of the stories, perhaps most, seem so dated. Actually, the *science* aspect of the stories is not so dated as one might guess. These are, after all, authors who were to some extent at least looking into the future, with quite far-seeing eyes. No, the stories are dated more by their style and feeling.

Several stories are characterized by their surprise, happy endings, what we might call a "cheerful resolution". (A good example is the first selection, "The Martian Way", by Asimov.) The "surprise ending" or "twist" at the finish of a science fiction story is of course a hallmark of the genre, and points out the close connection that the SF short story has with the mystery story. But the *happy* ending, the twist that produces the "See, everything turned out all right!" finale, is a bit off-putting to me. No doubt many non-SF stories, by many authors, fit this mold. But I prefer stories that, if not outright grim, even at their most cheerful say nothing more than "Well, that's life … not dreadful, but not particularly uplifting either!" I'm thinking here of stories I've read by such writers as Poe, Chekhov, Dinesen, Faulkner, Joyce, Henry James, Hemingway, Mann, Salinger and Maugham. These writers do not often produce cheerful resolutions.

I did enjoy several of the selections. "The Machine Stops", by E.M. Forster (the oldest selection, from 1928, by the author of A Passage to India!) is chilling; "The Midas Plague", by Frederik Pohl, is a delightful twist on consumerism; "In Hiding", by Wilmar H. Shiras, is a clever story of role –reversal involving an all-knowing psychiatrist and a troubled boy; and "The Moon Moth", by Jack Vance, *despite* its cheerful resolution, is probably the most inventive story of the lot, taking place on a world with remarkable customs.

But I have read better collections, even collections from *earlier* periods of SF, thus having fewer stories to pick from. Adventures in Time and Space Famous Science Fiction Stories is a collection of thirty-some stories first published in 1946 as a Modern Library Giant; most of the stories first appeared in John W. Campbell's *Astounding Stories* magazine in the period 1937-1945, the so-called Golden Age of SF. Destination Universe is a shorter collection of stories from the decade of the '40s by a single author, the Canadian writer A.E. Van Vogt. Both of these books, which I read in my teens, made a stronger impression on me than the book under review.

Incidentally, to check whether the memories I have of these earlier collections could stand the test of time, I reread a couple stories from the larger book: "Nightfall" by Asimov, and "Black Destroyer" by Van Vogt.

The former story absolutely destroys the Asimov selection in the Hall of Fame book, and the latter, although actually having a fairly cheerful resolution (the "good guys" win, but fewer than half of them are alive when the curtain falls), is an early forerunner of the "Alien" type of story, with the humans facing an adversary having immense powers.

For anyone looking for a solid collection of SF stories written before 1960, I would recommend either of these two collections over the Hall of Fame book.

Finally, I must quote the opening lines of the very first story in the Famous SF collection - "Requiem", by Robert Heinlein.

On a high hill in Samoa there is a grave. Inscribed on the marker are these words:

"Under the wide and starry sky
Dig my grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die
And I lay me down with a will!

This be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be,
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill."

I've never fogotten this epigraph, which was written by Robert Louis Stevenson for his own tombstone. According to Wiki, it was translated to a Samoan song of grief which is well-known and still sung in Samoa.

Jeffrey Dannaldson says

These books changed my life. Without picking up the best short stories and novellas volumes in the early 1980s, I doubt I would have become the ravenous SF fan I became. The selection of stories and novellas is impeccable. READ IT.

James says

A collection of the best SF novellas of the past 80 years. Some of my favorites from this collection include

Algis Budrys's "Rogue Moon", E. M. Forster's "The Machine Stops", and T. L. Sherred's "E For Effort".

Craig says

This second volume of classic novellas may be even better than the first. Great stuff from Pohl and Theodore Cogswell, favorites from Algis Budrys and Clifford Simak, the original Karres story by James H. Schmitz, Blish and Asimov... you can't go wrong with this collection.

Rasheed says

The Martian Way (1952) by Isaac Asimov 5/5
Earthman, Come Home (1953) by James Blish 5/5
Rogue Moon (1960) by Algis Budrys 3/5
The Specter General (1952) by Theodore Cogswell 5/5
The Machine Stops (1909) by E.M. Forster 5/5
The Midas Plague (1954) by Frederik Pohl 4/5
The Witches of Karres (1949) by James H. Schmitz 5/5
E for Effort (1947) by T.L. Sherred 5/5
In Hiding (1948) by Wilmar H. Shiras 5/5
The Big Front Yard (1958) by Clifford D. Simak 5/5
The Moon Moth (1961) by Jack Vance 4/5

Mark says

This collection, edited by Ben Bova, is actually broken into two books. This volume contains eleven short novels and the other has thirteen.

The first story, **"The Martian Way,"** by Isaac Asimov, has me dumbfounded. Not because it's confusing or intricate, but because I can't understand how *this* story is the one chosen to represent the work of possibly the greatest science-fiction writer of all time. It's a counter-environmentalist piece about Martian scavengers who heroically journey to Saturn's rings in order to return with a mile-long chunk of ice, thereby shoving Earth's water embargo in its face and ensuring new life, a future, and preservation of the Martian way of life. Politics and rebellion in the galactic colonization era.

The second novella is **"Earthman, Come Home"** by James Blish. Mildly interesting story about flying colonial cities by an author I had no prior knowledge of. Started to really doubt the validity of this book's "Greatest... of All Time" claim.

Third story, **"Rogue Moon,"** by Budrys, is about as sci-fi as "Flowers for Algernon," and almost as good.

The fourth story is probably the worst in the book, and easily one of the dumbest novellas I've ever bothered to finish. Theodore Cogswell's **"The Spectre General"** reads like the novelization of a Marvin the Martian cartoon.

The fifth entry in this collection doesn't seem to fit -- because it's brilliant. E.M. Forster's **"The Machine Stops,"** written in 1909, is much more than an early tale of a post-apocalyptic Earth. It's a revelation, and points to Forster as one of the preeminent futurists of the twentieth century.

I have no doubt that the idea of humanity living below ground, reverentially linked to The Machine, was a tremendous influence on the Wachowski Bros' *Matrix*. But the haunting prescience goes beyond that.

Communicating as one always does, via The Machine, a son tells his mother, "The Machine is much, but it is not everything. I see something like you in this plate, but I do not see you. I hear something like you through this telephone, but I do not hear you." The impersonal dehumanization of social media.

The modern "productive" era is foretold in the mother's frustration: "she replied with irritation -- a growing quality in that accelerated age... she had no ideas of her own..." The concept of only "knowing" what someone else tells you is underscored while looking out a window during her air-ship trip: "'No ideas here,' and hid Greece behind a metal blind."

The Machine, worshipped to the point of religiosity, is our submission to technology, and virtual substitutions for reality. Real contact is referred to more than once as "terrors of direct experience." In fact, "People never touched one another. The custom had become obsolete, owing to The Machine."

Even the modern evolution of amateur information peddlers, from bloggers to WikiAuthors is eerily prophesied. "Let your ideas be secondhand, and if possible tenth-hand, for then they will be removed from that disturbing element -- direct observation."

And in the story's climax, one of the most beautifully tragic sentences ever written: "Man, the flower of all flesh, the noblest of all creatures visible, man who had once made god in his image, and had mirrored his strength on the constellations, beautiful naked man was dying, strangled in the garments that he had woven."

The next story is pretty good: **"The Midas Plague"** by Frederick Pohl. It's a fairly clever response to skyrocketing capitalism and overproduction in the mid-twentieth century. In this future, ration books are used to chart that you consume your required quota. The wealthiest, most prominent of citizens "get" to live in small houses and don't have to eat, wear, or use up their goods with regularity. Our duty, in the future, is to do nothing but consume.

Theft is unthinkable, since no one wants to have more stuff; wedding gifts are exchanged in reverse; and the subversives plot ways to have civilization's legion of robots covertly consume the very goods they produce. "Adjustable satisfaction of circuits..." Is that what the twentieth century has created of us? "...satisfaction from possession, and the craving can be regulated according to the glut in various industries..."

Next up, another stupid story. **"The Witches of Karres"** by James H. Schmitz seems to prove that inane mediocrity is the norm in this anthology, and gems like the Forster story are exceptions.

But the next novella is somewhat redemptive. **"E for Effort"** by T.L. Sherred is the second-best in the book. A time-travel story (somewhat) that is part Jack Finney's "Third Level" and part Philip K. Dick paranoia. Mixed in is a heavy dose of social responsibility and second-guessing of world governments that would make Howard Zinn proud. And, to my surprise, it was first published in 1947.

"In Hiding" by Wilmar H. Shiras is a 1948 story of "positive" radiation effects on mutated births, and was probably more influential in the long run than meritorious in its own right. Stan Lee probably read it before

dreaming up The X-Men.

"The Big Front Yard" could have been an interesting piece on government involvement in the extraterrestrial, but then it just ends, abruptly. This, after far too much build-up.

Finally, **"The Moon Moth"** by Jack Vance is like a campy sci-fi predecessor to *The Usual Suspects*, but, again, could have been much more if Vance had developed his Sirenese mythos -- prestige-based, perpetually masked society where communication must be accompanied by the appropriate selection from at least a half-dozen different hand instruments.

But it was good enough for me to take note of the author... and, as luck, would have it, The Box Under the Stairs contained an entire novel by Jack Vance.