

REMEMBERING FREDERIK POHL

Daily visits to www.SFsignal.com keep me up on our field's latest news. Checking in on my phone on the last day of LoneStarCon 3—this year's Worldcon—I discovered that Frederik Pohl had died. Although I knew he was ninety-three and had been in failing health, I was shocked and saddened by the news.

Fred Pohl, author, editor, even agent, blogger, and SF ambassador to almost every corner of the world, helped fashion the field as we know it. Rather than try to capture his whole life, I thought I would reflect on this talented grandmaster from my own point of view as an editor.

Long before there was a Hugo Award, Fred edited the 1940 and most of the 1941 issues of two pulp magazines—*Astonishing Stories* and *Super Science Stories*. Authors whose first stories appeared in these issues included Isaac Asimov, James Blish, and Wilson Tucker. Although Fred was operating with an excruciatingly low budget, he was also able to procure work from L. Sprague de Camp, Robert Heinlein, Henry Kuttner, and other well-known writers. Fred worked on some later issues as assistant editor before enlisting in the army in 1943.

He returned to editing magazines at the helm of *If* and *Galaxy* in 1959. During his tenure, *If* won three Hugos for Best Professional Magazine. Works published under Fred's tutelage included Larry Niven's "Neutron Star," Harlan Ellison's "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream," Cordwainer Smith's "The Ballad of Lost C'mell," and Roger Zelazny's "Damnation Alley." He published numerous pieces by Poul Anderson and Robert Silverberg as well as Gardner Dozois and Bruce McAllister's first stories and Gene Wolfe's second published tale.

Harlan Ellison has said that Fred "remains one of the truest judges of writing ability the field of imaginative literature has ever produced." In his book, *Transformations: The Story of Science Fiction Magazines from 1950 to 1970*, Mike Ashley adds, "that ability, along with his perspicacity and tenacity [allowed Pohl] to shepherd his magazines through the wilderness of the early sixties and make them among the most exciting and rewarding publications of their day."

The seventies found this man of many hats busily editing brilliant novels for Bantam (Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* and Samuel Delany's *Dhalgren* both came out in 1975), as well as producing his own award winning books—the 1976 Nebula award winner *Man Plus*, the 1977 Hugo and Nebula winner *Gateway* and 1979's National Book Award winner *Jem*. He also managed to be supportive of a fledgling publication then-called *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. Three of his tales appeared in 1979 issues of *Asimov's*. Although there are some gaps, Fred averaged roughly a story a year in *Asimov's* from 1979 through 1994. These include the March 1979 Nebula finalist "Mars Masked" and January 1985's Hugo award winner "Fermi and Frost."

Perhaps because of his renown, very little bio information accompanies these stories. The few that carry interesting tidbits mention his wife, "the least stern of professors, Betty Ann Hull," his devotion to the internationalization of SF, and his apprehension about humanity's future. The introduction to "Fermi and Frost" stresses his concern about nuclear winter; the intro to the November 1986 story, "Iriadeska's Martians" mentions that Fred "has represented the U.S. State Department in such diverse countries as Singapore, the Soviet Union, and New Zealand, and he has attended international conferences in far flung places like the People's Republic of China, Brazil, and Yugoslavia." The intro to Fred's 1992 story, "The Martians," says that, "Mr. Pohl's latest book, *Our Angry Earth* [written in collaboration with Isaac

Asimov], is a nonfiction work about the damage we're doing to our environment, and the consequences and remedies thereof."

I never knew Fred very well, but I always felt connected to him. In 2002, when I was pregnant with my younger daughter, I was suddenly hospitalized for a suspected blood clot. I was cross. The situation had upended my routine. I had a very frightened eight-year-old at home and I was on the phone with my assistant figuring out how deadlines were going to be met when a hospital chaplain showed up at my bedside. I'm not religious and I wasn't thrilled, but somehow the good angel on one of my shoulders decked the little devil on the other. Rather than coldly turning her away, I decided to engage the chaplain in conversation.

She was astonished to learn that I managed an SF magazine. Before she'd become a minister, she told me she'd once worked as an editorial assistant for Fred at *Galaxy* and *If*. This news lightened my mood. I took it as a good omen and was unsurprised when test results later showed that I was fine. Although I didn't catch her name and Fred and I never did figure out who she was, it seemed obvious to me that there is a secret cabal of SF editors who look out for their own.

Fred sent me a new story a few months after I became editor of *Asimov's*. As always, it was a pleasure to work with him. "Generations" appeared in the September 2005 issue. It was his first story for us in more than ten years. The accompanying intro says, "Frederik Pohl's current principal activity is traveling around the world as much as possible—he visited his seventh (and last, because that's all there are) continent in 2004, and hopes to get to his fifty-first and fifty-second countries in 2006—but he keeps on writing when he can find the time. His short story collection, *Platinum Pohl*, out this year from Tor, is his one hundred and thirty-fifth book." Fred kept on traveling, but, alas, this was his final story for *Asimov's*.

Late in the evening on the last day of LoneStarCon 3, I met Gardner Dozois, Kim Stanley Robinson, Susan Casper, Tor editor Beth Meacham, and others in our hotel bar. We all lifted our glasses in salute to the life and legacy of the multifaceted Frederik Pohl.