

# On the Net

## James Patrick Kelly

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MASTERY

*lifetimes*

Have you ever read **Henryk Sienkiewicz** [[nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/1905/index.html](http://nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/1905/index.html)], one of Poland's most famous writers? His most famous novel was *Quo Vadis*, but his collected works fill sixty volumes! He won the **Nobel Prize for Literature** [[nobelprize.org/literature](http://nobelprize.org/literature)] in 1905.

How about **Pearl Buck** [[nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/1938/index.html](http://nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/1938/index.html)]? In her day she was arguably the most popular author in the United States. The movie version of her novel, *The Good Earth*, won a couple of Oscars in 1937. Her Nobel came in 1938.

**Eugenio Montale** [[nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/1975/index.html](http://nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/1975/index.html)], the existentialist poet and essayist, was made a lifetime member of the Italian Senate to honor his courageous opposition to Fascism. He was awarded the prize in 1975.

No science fiction writer has ever won the Nobel Prize for literature, unless you count **William Golding** [[www.william-golding.co.uk](http://www.william-golding.co.uk)] who was honored in 1983. However, the author of **Lord of the Flies** [[www.gerenser.com/lotf](http://www.gerenser.com/lotf)] and **The Inheritors** [[www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/14/alterman14art.htm](http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/14/alterman14art.htm)] is at best tangential to our enterprise, it says here; he is more of an allegorist than an extrapolator.

In 1975, the same year that Senatore Montale received his gold medal, the **Science Fiction Writers of America** [[www.sfwaweb.org](http://www.sfwaweb.org)] awarded the first Grand Master Award. Like the Nobel, it celebrates lifetime achievement rather than endorsing any single work. The Grand Master awards process is simple: the President of SFWA proposes a candidate for Grand Master and then a majority of the sitting officers must approve the nomination. Originally the Grand Master Award was called just that, but in 2002 the name was changed to the Damon Knight Memorial Grand Master Award to honor the founder of SFWA. While the Grand Master Award looks just like a **Nebula Award** [[www.sfwaweb.org/awards](http://www.sfwaweb.org/awards)], and is given at the Nebula banquet, it is not, in fact, a Nebula. Originally SFWA's plan was to name six Grand Masters every decade, but the pace has picked up of late, in part because so many worthy candidates are advancing in age. And there's the rub: you can't win the Grand Master posthumously. Thus ideal candidates like **Jules Verne** [[jv.gilead.org.il](http://jv.gilead.org.il)] and **H. G. Wells** [[www.hgwellsusa.com](http://www.hgwellsusa.com)] or more recently **Cyril Kornbluth** [[www.luna-city.com/sf/cmkn.htm](http://www.luna-city.com/sf/cmkn.htm)], **James Blish** [[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JamesBlish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JamesBlish)] and **James Tiptree, Jr.** [[mtsu32.mtsu.edu:11072/Tiptree](http://mtsu32.mtsu.edu:11072/Tiptree)] will never be Grand Masters.

I set out to write this column with some trepidation, worried that the genre greats that I read growing up would have little or no web presence. But I was pleasantly surprised: with a few exceptions, most of our Grand Masters have sites of some sort—and many of them are very wonderful indeed. So here, in chronological order, is a count up of science fiction's Grand Masters.

count up

1975: In the same way that George Washington *had* to be the first President of the United States, Robert A. Heinlein *had* to be our first Grand Master. It's no surprise that Heinlein is all over the net; he even has his own **web-ring** [<http://www.ringsurf.com/netring?ring=Heinlein;action=list>] of eleven sites. Oddly enough, the official and possibly the best Heinlein site, **The Heinlein Society** [

[www.heinleinsociety.org](http://www.heinleinsociety.org)] is not part of that ring.

1976: Although Jack Williamson appears to have no official website, you can read three different interviews with him at **Science Fiction Weekly** [[www.scifi.com/sfw/issue284/interview.html](http://www.scifi.com/sfw/issue284/interview.html)], **SF Site** [[www.sfsite.com/03b/jw77.htm](http://www.sfsite.com/03b/jw77.htm)], and **SF Crowsnest** [[www.computercrowsnest.com/sfnews/news1099.htm](http://www.computercrowsnest.com/sfnews/news1099.htm)].

1977: Clifford D. Simak is an under-rated writer whose work slips in and out of print, alas. Start your journey to Simak Country at the **Clifford Simak Fan Site** [<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~brams007/simak/default.htm>] and continue on to a fine English language site based in the Czech Republic, **Parallel Worlds of Clifford D. Simak** [[www.natur.cuni.cz/~vpetr/Simak1.htm](http://www.natur.cuni.cz/~vpetr/Simak1.htm)].

1979: L. Sprague de Camp was an elegant man and he has an elegant official site at **L. Sprague de Camp.com** [[www.lsprague.decamp.com](http://www.lsprague.decamp.com)]. It offers biographical and bibliographical pages, scans of cover art and a generous helping of family photographs.

1982: A dedicated British fan of Fritz Leiber has created the **Lank-hmar** [[www.lankhmar.demon.co.uk](http://www.lankhmar.demon.co.uk)] site, but the best thing on the web about the creator of Fa-fhrd and the Gray Mouser is Justin Leiber's **reminiscence** [[www.hfac.uh.edu/phil/leiber/fritz.htm](http://www.hfac.uh.edu/phil/leiber/fritz.htm)] of his father and grandfather.

1984: Andre Norton fan Matt Zaleski has built the comprehensive **Andre-Norton.org** [[www.andre-norton.org](http://www.andre-norton.org)]. His links page points to thirteen other Norton sites.

1986: Arthur C. Clarke readers have their pick of many fine sites. Although the **Arthur C. Clarke Unauthorized Homepage** is Google's top link [[www.lsi.usp.br/~rbianchi/clarke](http://www.lsi.usp.br/~rbianchi/clarke)], it was last updated in 2000. **Sir Arthur C. Clarke** [[www.geocities.com=jcsherwood/ACClinks2.htm](http://www.geocities.com=jcsherwood/ACClinks2.htm)] is a much better bet. **The Arthur C. Clarke Foundation** [[www.clarkefoundation.org](http://www.clarkefoundation.org)] is worth a look if you're interested in Sir Arthur's extra-literary projects.

1987: There is no better resource on Isaac Asimov than the **Isaac Asimov Home Page** [[www.asimovonline.com](http://www.asimovonline.com)], although I must say that the ambition of **Jenkins's™ Spoiler-Laden Guide to Isaac Asimov** [[home.page.mac.com/jhjenkins/Asimov/Asimov.html](http://home.page.mac.com/jhjenkins/Asimov/Asimov.html)] has always impressed me.

1988: I was disappointed to discover that the great Alfred Bester is not well represented on the web. There are the beginnings of a **wiki-pedia** entry [[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AlfredBester%28author%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AlfredBester%28author%29)], an all-too-short **Templeton Gate page** [[members.tripod.com/templetongate/bester.htm](http://members.tripod.com/templetongate/bester.htm)], and a couple of **appreciations** [[www.ansible.co.uk/writing/bester.html](http://www.ansible.co.uk/writing/bester.html)] by the irreplaceable **Dave Langford** [[www.ansible.co.uk/index.html](http://www.ansible.co.uk/index.html)]. Alfred Bester was one of the most influential of all the Grand Masters. He deserves better!

1989: **Ray Bradbury's** [[www.raybradbury.com](http://www.raybradbury.com)] site has major wow factor. This is the kind of site every writer dreams of having; lots of free and interesting content, including generous excerpts from many of Ray's classics. It even has Quicktime clips of Ray discussing his life and work.

1991: Lester del Rey is another Grand Master whose work has been unjustly overlooked by netizens. There's a glance at his career at **Spacelight** [[www.gwillick.com/Spacelight/delrey.html](http://www.gwillick.com/Spacelight/delrey.html)] and a decent **CyberSpace Spinner Bibliography** [[www.hycyber.com/SF/delreylester.html](http://www.hycyber.com/SF/delreylester.html)]. Perhaps the most interesting del Rey site is Lester's pungent and wrong-headed **review of 2001, a Space Odyssey** [[www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/doc/0045.html](http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/doc/0045.html)]. "It will probably be a box-office disaster, too, and thus set major science-fiction movie making back another ten years."

1993: We definitely need more Frederik Pohl sites. The **wiki-pedia** entry [[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FrederikPohl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FrederikPohl)] is pretty barebones. Elsewhere, look for the **SF Site interview** [[www](http://www)].

[scifi.com/sfw/issue240/interview.html](http://scifi.com/sfw/issue240/interview.html)] and a transcription of a **talk** [[www.testermanscifi.org/FredPohlPart1.html](http://www.testermanscifi.org/FredPohlPart1.html)] he gave at RoVaCon in 1988, followed by lively Q and A.

1995: We come now to the most inexplicable gap of all. The Grand Master Award is named after Damon Knight. The founder of SFWA and co-founder of Clarion influenced three generations of writers by his teaching and his writing, especially his short fiction. He was one of our best critics. Yet his **wikipedia** entry [[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DamonKnight](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DamonKnight)] is shamefully brief. There's an okay bibliography at **Fantastic Fiction** [[www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/authors/DamonKnight.htm](http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/authors/DamonKnight.htm)] and we have a website that Damon himself designed **Will the Real Hieronymus Bosch Please Stand Up** [<http://www.fictionwise.com/knight>]. But to understand the impact the man had on our genre, check out the tributes on **In Loving Memory of Damon Knight** [[www.kaatspaw.com/Damon.htm](http://www.kaatspaw.com/Damon.htm)].

1996: A.E. Van Vogt was fortunate to have a fan like Magnus Axelsson, whose **The Weird Worlds of A.E. Van Vogt** [[vanvogt.www4.mmedia.is](http://vanvogt.www4.mmedia.is)] is just about the perfect fan site. Yes, there is a bibliography and jpgs of book covers and some first rate criticism, but what I like best is that Magnus has posted the first chapters of four of Van Vogt's best known novels.

1997: The place to start looking for Jack Vance on the web is Mike Berro's **The Jack Vance Information Page** [[www.massmedia.com/~mikeb/jvm](http://www.massmedia.com/~mikeb/jvm)]. It's timely and comprehensive and oh-so-well-designed. But don't forget **The Jack Vance Archive** [<http://www.jackvance.com>] which effectively makes the case that Jack Vance is an international publishing phenomenon.

1998: Another puzzling gap—Poul Anderson remained an artistic force in the genre up until his death in 2001, but he has no definitive website that I could find—the **wikipedia** [[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PoulAnderson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PoulAnderson)] is short on biography and offers only a partial bibliography. About the best bio you'll find is at **The Templeton Gate** [[members.tripod.com/templetongate/anderson.htm](http://members.tripod.com/templetongate/anderson.htm)].

1999: A simple but effective site for **Hal Clement** [[www.sff.net/people/hal-clement](http://www.sff.net/people/hal-clement)], the pseudonym of Harry Stubbs, who was a fixture of the New England SF scene ever since I was knee high to an adjective, was created by Tania Ruiz. It has photos and a bibliography and an essay Hal wrote about the science in science fiction. There's also a very cool page about Hal at **Testerman Sci-Fi Site** [[www.testerman-scifi.org/ClementPage.html](http://www.testerman-scifi.org/ClementPage.html)].

2000: **The Official Brian Aldiss Site** [[www.brianwaldiss.com/index.htm](http://www.brianwaldiss.com/index.htm)] is yet another exemplar of what a professional writer's site should be. It's timely and generous with free content, including several audio files. To get a sense of what Brian is really like, though, read his witty interview at **SF Crownsnest** [[www.computercrownsnest.com/sfnews2/03jan/news01031.shtml](http://www.computercrownsnest.com/sfnews2/03jan/news01031.shtml)].

2001: **Philip José Farmer** [[www.pjfarmer.com](http://www.pjfarmer.com)] gets it. Here's a first rate author's website overseen by a first rate author. I was particularly pleased by the photos and the time line and the reading lists.

2003: **Ursula K. Le Guin's** [[www.ursulaklequin.com](http://www.ursulaklequin.com)] site is as thoughtful and elegant as her wonderful stories. This is a deeply personal site, most, if not all, of which is written by Ursula herself. If you read nothing else here, check the FAQ section. Lovely!

2004: I have mentioned Jon Davis's **Quasi-Official Robert Silverberg Home Page** [[www.majipoor.com](http://www.majipoor.com)] so many times in this space that I ought to be put on his payroll. This is a great site, okay? Meanwhile, according to Jon's links page, our very own Grand Master has at least twenty other sites devoted to his prodigious output.

2005: Our newest Grand Master, Anne McCaffrey, has a definitive official site: **The Worlds of Anne McCaffrey** [[www.anne-mccaffrey.net](http://www.anne-mccaffrey.net)]. It has all the features you'd expect, and some interesting twists as well. For example, on the Poll Page, you can vote for which actors you'd like to see cast in the movie

version of various of Anne's books and stories. Her works have inspired many fans to write fan fiction, create fan art, and build on and offline games and virtual realities. The newsgroup **alt.fan.pern** [[kumo.swcp.com/~quirk/afp-index.shtml](mailto:kumo.swcp.com/~quirk/afp-index.shtml)] is devoted to discussion of works by Anne and her fans.

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Here's a quick plug for a couple of fine compendium sites mentioned in passing above. Galen Strickland, the webmaster of **The Templeton Gate** [[members.tripod.com/templetongate/main\\_page.htm](http://members.tripod.com/templetongate/main_page.htm)], is in the process of building a useful critical site. He writes that "It is my intention to devote space to some writers whose works might be a bit obscure to all but the most die-hard SF fans." • George C. Willick's **SPACELIGHT** [[www.gwillick.com/Space light](http://www.gwillick.com/Space_light)] advertises itself as "The library of fantasy and science fiction vital statistics and personal data."

Last and certainly not least, there's the **Wikipedia** [[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MainPage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MainPage)], a Web-based, free-content encyclopedia, which is written collaboratively by volunteers, i.e., *you*. That's right, gentle reader; if you want to edit an entry, go for it!

To quote from Wikipedia's entry on itself: "Its status as a reference work has been controversial. It has received praise for being free, editable, and covering a wide range of topics. It has been criticized for lack of authority when compared with a traditional encyclopedia, systemic bias, and for deficiencies in traditional encyclopedic topics."

To which Wikipedians might reply, if you don't like it, you can fix it. That's the beauty of wiki.

Here's hoping that some Alfred Bester, Lester del Rey, Damon Knight, Fred Pohl, and Poul Anderson fans might soon rise to the occasion.

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