

Frank Kelly Freas 1922-2005

Science Fiction's Best Loved Artist

By John Hertz [Reprinted by permission from Vanamonde 608]

He had vision and he could portray it. He loved life and he portrayed that. He designed the insignia for Skylab I; having won ten Hugo Awards illustrating Asimov and Heinlein, he sat in the Dealers' Room at s-f conventions doing caricatures. We wrote songs about him. Karen Anderson says his portrait of Poul was the best she's ever seen. He served as President of the Association of S-F Artists and was made a Fellow of the International Association of Astronomical Artists. He was made Artist Guest of Honor by two Worldcons. He won a Retro-Hugo, three Chesleys, the Inkpot, the Skylark, and a doctorate *honoris causa* from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. He did five hundred saints for the Franciscans, five dozen covers for Laser Books, and seven years as the main cover artist for *Mad*. Life with a *Mad* artist was never boring.

His own word was *illustrator*. He relished the task. After he had grown famous he said, to encourage others, "There is a real need for intelligent artists who can understand what has been written and illustrate it in a way that is related to the real world and means something. A piece of art which does that becomes treasure beyond price." Here, while reaching the most ordinary life, is the challenge and inspiration of our field.

He had a Shakespearean zest for holding nobility in one hand and

comedy in the other. Like Shakespeare he knew that either could be down to earth or exalted. His people and machines were brave and beautiful, tender and terrifying. We may discuss whether he was better at color or monochrome; see his two covers and his fifteen interiors for *Double Star*. From first to last he made memorable pictures, "The Gulf Between" and *Martians Go Home* in the 1950s, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, *She* and *The Left Hand of Darkness* in the 1990s. As Ulrika O'Brien said, he was a master of reflected light. My doctor, who also died recently, had been Kelly's too; prominent in the office was "Presenting the Bill", with which Jerry Pournelle once cracked up a flight surgeon, and which *The New York Times* thought to have put an air mechanic's Go - No Go gauge in the doctor's black bag *by mistake*.

He knew to lead and teach. He did it to me. I started arranging Art Show tours because a con committee asked me to lead one. "Why me?" I asked, falling right into the pit: "I can't draw!" They said "Well, someone told us you'd be good at it." I said "Maybe you'd better tell me just who that was." They said "Kelly Freas." I said "Gulp," and "Okay, if Kelly thinks I can, I will." When I asked him "Why me?" he said — and I hope I never forget this — "You seem to be able to say what you see." There are a hundred stories of those who could draw, not least since he was the founding Coördinating Judge, and a tireless help, in the Illustrators of the Future contest, whose magnanimity he respected. It takes one to know one. May his memory be for a blessing.