



Happy New Year! 17016 ה'00



Commentary: Hugo Nominations for Best Dramatic Presentation for 1999

By Raz Greenberg

The nominated films were *Being John Malkovich*, *Galaxy Quest*, *The Iron Giant*, *The Matrix*, and *The Sixth Sense*.

It's hard for me to comment on this list, since I've yet to see three of the films in it (*Being John Malkovich*, *Galaxy Quest* and *The Sixth Sense*). If I had to guess which movie will win, I'd put my money on *The Matrix* which is considered an "Ideal" winner for such contests (being both a commercial and critical success). Still, I would love it if *The Iron Giant* wins. It's one of the first American big screen animated science fiction films, with a lot of emotion (something *The Matrix* really lacked). Still, the list disappointed me, not so much with what was in it, but also what wasn't. Since they are clearly not shy of nominating fantasy films (*The Sixth Sense* and *Being John Malkovich*). I wonder why they didn't include *Sleepy Hollow* as a nominee. And what about *Princess Mononoke*? True, the film originally came out in 1997 (in Japan) but was released worldwide only in the

past year. And in my opinion, it's one of the best fantasy films ever done (go see it if you still haven't, BTW). Also, why aren't there any Television episodes nominated? What, Science Fiction TV died along with *Babylon 5*? Please. I could fill the list with at least 5 episodes of *Futurama*. I have also seen several episodes of *Farscape* (recommended by Ted Henderson in the June issue of *CyberCozen*) and I think the show definitely deserves a nomination. Another show, which I haven't seen yet (but heard good comments on) is *Now and Again*. From what I was told, it's Hugo material (none of these shows is running in Israel - but that's a different story). Also, *Crusade* left me overall disappointed, but I think "Patterns of the Soul" deserves at least a nomination. And while it's true that *The X-Files* has deteriorated badly this year, the pseudo-documentary episode "X-Cops" could have made a good nominee. That's two movies, three TV shows and two episodes that I think deserved to be nominated, but weren't.

Ed. Note: In order to submit a nomination for a Hugo award, you first have to be an advance registrant to the World Science Fiction Convention, which is held every year at the end of August. And that means submitting your nominations many months in advance, so that the final awards can be voted on before the end of July. A continuing problem is that not enough people submit nominations. For "Best Dramatic Presentation for 1999" only 304 nominations were made for a total of 106 dramatic presentations.

And the winner?

The Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation of 1999 went to *Galaxy Quest*.

**The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy
ICon 2000: Contact**

The annual Sci-Fi and Fantasy convention will be held once again in the Tel Aviv Cinemateque on Sukkoth and will deal this year with First Contact issues.

The ICon will begin on Sunday, October 15th at 20:00 and will end on Thursday, October 19th at 24:00. (All days but Sunday will start at 10:00).

For more information, refer to the ICon web site at <http://go.to/icon2000>



01.01.01 - The end is also the beginning..

www.armageddoncon.org





Two Fun Juveniles by Robert A. Heinlein

Tunnel in the Sky by Robert A. Heinlein (1955), 214 pages.

Reviewed by **Gal Haimovich**

This is one of Heinlein's juvenile books (i.e. books aimed at young readers).

In the not so far future space colonization is possible due to Tunnel technology - a "tunnel" through space that enables quick passage through space (sort of like StarGate or a wormhole I guess). Many virgin planets are now open to the human race. But, people going OutWorld must know how to survive there. So, to get a job OutWorld, a person has to go through a survival course, usually taken in high school or college.

Rod Walker, a high school senior, is taking the course and now has to face the final examination - he has to survive on his own on an unknown planet for 2 to 10 days. He can bring anything he wants (from Swiss army knife to a bazooka) and can also team with fellow students.

So, along with about 100 other kids, Rod went through the Tunnel.

Unfortunately, something went wrong. When the 10 days were up, there was no recall and the Tunnel did not open. After a month, Rod realized that they would not be rescued.

Rod decided to gather all the other kids (those who were still alive) and create a colony that would be able to survive.

What I found most interesting is how these kids form their colony and their own rules and regulations (from posting guards to littering). Heinlein is known for his unorthodox ideas on government (see *Starship Troopers*, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, *Stranger in a Strange Land*) and he has employed some of them in this book.

A fun book with a lot of action and a bit of thinking material.

The Star Beast by Robert A. Heinlein (1954), 253 pages.

Reviewed by **Aharon Sheer**

In his younger days, when Heinlein was the best (or, at least, the most important) science fiction writer in the world (a title which Larry Niven took over, 15 years later, in his younger days), he wrote some wonderful books for teenagers. This book is great fun. There is so much knowledge of life in here, that to say it is for teenagers is not quite fair. I certainly enjoyed it. But when the hero is an older teenaged boy, and the subject is what is going to happen to that boy's pet alien, it's hard to avoid the feeling that its intended audience is teenagers. Heinlein's experience in politics (he was deeply involved in trying to get someone elected in California in the 30s) gives the book a strong flavor of ironic contempt for the worst of politicians, and great respect for the best of the bureaucrats who know how to twist the politicians around their fingers. There's a lot of

good advice here for people involved in government, and they don't have to be teenagers to appreciate it. The book is part of Heinlein's **Future History** series, which developed a very convincing picture of what things might be like for the next hundreds of years. It is true that almost none of his future actually came true. We are not going to settle Venus. We are not going to be using flying vehicles for transportation, if only because of all the traffic accidents it would cause - look how hard it is to keep an eye on all the cars to your left, right, front and back while driving, and think of adding to that looking left up, left down, right up, right down, etc. However, this only slightly spoils the story. If you can find a copy, read it first, just for fun, before you pass it on to your favorite teenager, male or female.



Short Book Review by Aharon Sheer



The Golden Globe by John Varley (1998), 517 pages. Recommended by Bill Silverman.

If you like Shakespeare, you will find a lot to like in this book. It is a tragedy, which, like many good Shakespearean tragedies, has a lot of

comic scenes. In fact, at first, I didn't realize it was a tragedy, for the early part of the book is quite amusing. The story takes place in Varley's

future in which earth has been driven back into the Stone Age by aliens who don't like company (they found out about us by finding the Voyager space ship with its message to the universe). Luckily the aliens only wiped out all civilization on earth, leaving earth's (mostly American) space colonies untouched. Thus man and his high technology has survived on the moon (mainly under the surface), on the asteroids, on various frozen moons, on space stations, and has even expanded to Pluto and its moon Charon.

The story is of an itinerant actor (the son and grandson and nephew of actors, part of a great acting tradition) who travels from moon to moon to asteroid to planet to space habitat, appearing in plays and putting on street theater. He has his genetically engineered dog always with him, who is able to count to five and has the intelligence of a monkey but the spirit of an enthusiastic dog. Ever play in Romeo and Juliet, playing **both** Romeo and Juliet? Our hero has done it. Ever fought a sword fight in zero gravity? Our hero has done it. All this is good

fun, but we gradually learn that our hero has a past, and there is much pain in that past. The more we learn, the more painful it gets. Worse yet is the pain in his future.

One problem with this book is that it is all told in the first person (except for a few passages where the hero is talking about himself in his childhood). This has the disadvantage that there is only one viewpoint, and it is always that of the hero. One would like to know what other people in his life are thinking and feeling, but we never really know, although he does a good job of presenting his actor father. On second thought, perhaps this is natural for the subject. An actor is the most self-centered person on the earth – always standing on a stage in front of the world and presenting himself to it. So perhaps this is the right way of presenting this character and his world, but it does make for a narrow and limiting a worldview.

Still this is a very good novel (like most of Varley's books), and I highly recommend it.



Book Review: *Mission Earth*
 by **L. Ron Hubbard** (1985-87 – posthumous)
 Reviewed by **Gal Haimovich**

"*Mission Earth*" is a decalogy consisting of:

Vol.	Name	Pages	Vol.	Name	pages
	<i>The invaders plan</i>	615		<i>Death quest</i>	385
	<i>Black genesis</i>	477		<i>Voyage of vengeance</i>	419
	<i>The enemy within</i>	424		<i>Disaster</i>	357
	<i>An alien affair</i>	347		<i>Villainy victorious</i>	459
	<i>Fortune of fear</i>	390		<i>The doomed planet</i>	355

"The reader is alerted and warned that Earth, also known by the name Blito-P3, is completely fictional, fabricated and fallacious, and that contact with such a planet (if it ever existed) is dangerous to your health" (From the introduction to Vol. 2).

The Voltar confederacy, 125,000 years old, controls 110 planets. Planet Earth is scheduled for invasion in another 100 years. Unfortunately, Earth is in bad shape, with pollution and the threat of nuclear war; if this continues, in another 100 years Earth will be inhabitable!

Jettero Heller, Combat engineer, the most popular and successful Fleet officer on Voltar, is sent by the grand council to fix things on Earth. Soltan Gris, an officer of the Coordinated Information Apparatus and head of Section 451 (Blito-P3) was sent to stop him. You might wonder why? Well, the Apparatus is the lowest and filthiest organization on Voltar. It uses criminals for officers and troops, and (no wonder) uses criminal means to get things done.

"The apparatus has the prime duty of undermining a civilization. It must be thorough. One must make the maximum amount of trouble for the maximal number of people for the minimal number of reasons. The rule holds true for governments, governmental organizations and governmental officers" (Vol. 6, p.188).

Lombar Hisst heads the Apparatus. He has a plan: using drugs transported from Earth, he will addict all the high officials (including the Emperor) thus paving the road to the throne. The supply of drugs

depends on Earth's most powerful man - Delbert John Rockcenter. He controls all the drugs, oil industry and governments on Earth. If Heller succeeds (e.g. introducing non-polluting cheap fuel), Rockcenter's empire will crash, and Lombar's supply of drugs with it.

Volumes 1 to middle of 8 consist of Gris' confession from the royal prison, regarding all that happened from the moment **Mission Earth** was devised till the day he ended up in prison (the other 2 and 1/2 volumes are additions by a young writer, 100 years after **Mission Earth**, telling us what happened after Gris went to prison). Gris is a model apparatus officer - always thinks of others before himself. ("The hell with how other people felt. Once you got to worrying about that, you never could serve in the Apparatus" vol. 8, p.68). Gris is always clean and tidy. ("[Heller] was splashing in the shower. His fleet passion for cleanliness grated on my nerves.... I was certainly more sweaty and dirty and rumpled than he had been, yet I didn't have to shower! The man was clearly mad" Vol. 2, p. 230). Gris is the optimistic type. ("Whenever the treacherously optimistic thought occurs to you that things can't get any worse, watch out!" Vol. 7, p. 48; "A dented, rusty bucket in which fish scales were sloshing around in [one's] vomit makes a remarkably good crystal ball. One can see quite clearly that much future of this kind was definitely hazardous to one's future health" Vol. 5, p. 270).

In Gris's confession you might come across some strange topics:

IRS - "you have the right to testify to whatever the IRS wants you to testify. You have to swear to anything the IRS tells you to swear to and sign anything you are told by IRS to sign..." (Vol. 2, p. 374).

Psychiatry books: "*Irrational Psychiatry* - all about how to cure people by killing them; *Psychology of Women, or, how to trick your wife and mistress into getting into bed with your best friend;* *Child Psychology* - all about the techniques of turning children into perverts." (Vol. 5, p. 193)

Earth Media - "the primary purpose of Earth media was to make people go mad." (Vol. 9, p. 196)

Earth Justice - "when the courts fail to return a favorable verdict, there is always the Bazooka" (Vol. 3, p. 359)

Public Relations - "What does *PR* have to do with truth, Smith? News today is entertainment. Ask NBC, CBS, ABC. Ask all the major papers.... Now let me ask you, how can you entertain anybody by telling the truth?" (Vol. 5, p. 325).

As you probably noticed, *Mission Earth* is a work of satire, and, in my opinion, Hubbard does a very good job. It's been a long time since I've had so much fun with a book. Especially since this is a high tension, fast action SF satire. Since Jettero Heller is a combat engineer - specializing in penetrating enemy forts and blowing them up, and Gris is an apparatus officer, specializing in murder, blackmail, kidnapping and any other crime you can think of, there is not a dull moment in the story.

You will also encounter many other interesting characters:

The Countess Krak - Heller's girl friend and a convicted murderess.

Dr Crobe - a Voltarian Cellologist, specializing in making freaks for the circus.

The Widow Tayl - a nymphomaniac.

Bury - Rockcenter's lawyer.

Bang Bang Rimbombo - a free lance car bomber.

Izzy Epstein - Heller's suicidal, neurotic, pessimistic financial adviser on Earth.

And many, many other colorful characters.

So, Go! Read it now. And don't worry about the problem that, since the author is dead, there're holes in the story, unsolved mysteries and unanswered questions (like, e.g. the *Amber* series). At the end of Vol. 10, All the questions are answered, all the mysteries are solved, we know the fate of every person in the book and we are lead into a Grand Finale. So read it and enjoy. I did.

P.S. There are no curses or lewd words in these books. Being a member of the Machine Purity League, the robotbrain in the translaphon replaced any such word with the sound (word) "BLEEP".

PPS It is worth mentioning that author L. Ron Hubbard is the founder of the religion of **Scientology**, and that a movie based on his book *Battlefield Earth* has recently come out in the US starring and produced by John Travolta - an enthusiastic Scientologist. It should reach Israel soon.



Film Review: *Dark city*

reviewed by Aharon Sheer

Raz Greenberg reviewed this film here in March, 1999. This is one of the strangest films I've ever seen. I bought it and showed it to half a dozen people. They all liked it, were very surprised that it was never shown in the theaters in Israel. Although the film starts with a voiceover purporting to explain the basic idea of the film, the voiceover doesn't work. In fact, during the course of the film everything is explained, and in a consistent fashion. We didn't find any serious failings of logic in the film, if you accept the basic (happily unlikely) premise. So if you need any warning at the beginning, it is "Have patience, everything will be made clear." Because for the first half of the movie things are really weird! I'm not going to spoil the film for you. The fun is in finding out, step by step, just what is going on. The hero,

played by Rufus Sewell, who finds himself in a world that has gone crazy, is well acted indeed. Writer/Director Alex Proyas has done a superb job. The movie is rather depressing, but they have tacked on a happy ending, which, while it seems awfully fishy, really does prevent you from getting up at the end in a sense of depression. I have compared the film to *Blade Runner*: maybe there will later on be a Director's Cut, in which they will remove the voiceover at the beginning and the happy ending. However, in this case that would be a mistake, because in the case of *Blade Runner* the most moving and beautiful scene is the death of Roy Batty, near the end, but there is nothing to compare to that in *Dark City*. In any case, I definitely recommend seeing this movie. It's not a great movie, nor does it have any deep moral lessons, but it's certainly well done.



Film Review: *The X Men*

reviewed by Guy Eldar

My excitement building up towards the upcoming release of *The X Men* was followed by a great disappointment when I heard that the movie will reach Israel only in October (13th, I believe). At that moment I decided that one of the things I must do on my US trip (last month) was to see *The X Men*.

For those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, *The X Men* movie is based on a comics' series later transformed into a famous TV animated series. The story is that of mutants, led by Professor X, who fight evil mutants in order to get the rest of the world to accept them.

Like other comics-based first time movies, *The X Men* tries to tell us the whole story in an hour and 45 minutes and too much information leaves little time to tell a really good story. Specifically, we meet a young mutant named Rouge, who tries to find a place where she can feel at home. That place is the school for the "gifted", run by Professor Charles Francis Xavier. We soon find out that the school is only

a front for a top-secret force called The X Men. With their mutant powers they try to stop the evil doings of Magneto and his evil mutant followers.

As every action Sci-Fi movie should, *The X Men* is filled with special effects and grand settings. The problem is that most of them have been seen before (again with *The Matrix* look-a-like effects). An additional disappointment is the costumes. How can one make an *X Men* movie and not dress Wolverine in yellow spandex or Storm in her white cape?

The movie's only strong suite is the excellent cast that might make it worth while to go to the cinema. With *Patrick Stewart (Star Trek)*, *Ian McKellen (Gods and Monsters)*, *Anna Paquin (The Piano)*, *Halle Berry* (This years Golden Globe and Emmy Winner for TV's *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge*) and others, I thought they couldn't go wrong. I guess they did! As fans of the genre, you should see this. Just lower your expectations a lot before you do.

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