



Denvention 3

The 66th World Science Fiction Convention Denver, Colorado – August 6th–10th, 2008

A Mile Closer to the Stars

Classics of Science Fiction

Book discussions led by John Hertz

also selection → notes by me
Happy to have you along JAH

We are in the golden-anniversary year of 1958, a golden year for science fiction. We'll celebrate with five Classics of SF book discussions on books published that year and still famous, often reprinted, worth re-reading or first reading now. Look for them in the program grid as "Wonders of 1958."

James Blish, *A Case of Conscience* and *The Triumph of Time*

Some call *Conscience* Blish's finest book. Is it science fiction? Is it a story? Is its best moment when the Pope says "What did you do about it?" In the same year came the last of the four *Cities in Flight* novels. Is it a success standing alone? How does *Time* compare to *Conscience*?

Algis Budrys, *Who?*

This penetrating study of identity, loyalty, uncertainty may be both more bleak and more hopeful than it seems. If there is a sermon, it is preached by silence. Budrys is known for his deftness and timing; here too are poetry, a fundamental grasp of tragedy, and the surprises of love.

Robert Heinlein, *Methuselah's Children*

By painting portraits Heinlein repeatedly asks the next question. What if your lifespan was two hundred years? What if you didn't care? If you are hunted, should you run? Where should you go? Here too is the first and perhaps best of Lazarus Long. Extra credit: compare the carefully rewritten 1941 version in the July-September *Astounding*.

Fritz Leiber, *The Big Time*

Spiders are the good guys, and our hero is a woman. The first Hero was a woman too, go look up Leander. Indeed this is a very classical book; it preserves the unities of time, place, and persons, which is mighty strange, considering. There's slashing drama, and if you've never been a party girl, it might not be what you think.

Jack Vance, *The Languages of Pao*

With four worlds in the spotlight, one populated by fifteen billion, this is a story of one boy and one man. Knowledge may be power. Concentration and diversity may each be extreme. The characters say linguistics is the science here; perhaps it is really cross-cultural study, or patience. Vance's own language is the gold.