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Fantastic Covers

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Cover design and illustration is one of the most important considerations in marketing and selling print publications. As with other types of product packaging, the cover attracts the prospective buyer, inviting a closer look at the book and encouraging its purchase.

Mass market paperbacks were produced using cheap wood pulp paper (hence the term “pulp fiction”). Due to their inexpensive cost and low-quality paper, these books were regarded as disposable. Their ephemeral nature may explain in part why cover illustrators were uncredited, at least in the early days, and remain relatively unknown. These days, however, the pop culture appeal of vintage cover art has contributed significantly to the growth of the field of paperback collecting and to increased recognition of many formerly anonymous artists.

In the post-WWII era, the design of a book cover was typically overseen by an art director, who would commission an illustration from a freelance commercial artist. For genre fiction, the illustration usually consisted of a single scene based on the plot and setting of the story, painted in a vividly-colored, soft-edged, realistic style. To accommodate retail displays, important text such as the title and publisher’s logo appeared toward the top of the cover, with the rest of the page devoted to the illustration. Though illustrations would occasionally be recycled, publishers more often commissioned new artwork for the covers of reissued titles—another marketing strategy to entice consumers.

The popularity of pulps peaked during the 1950s and 60s, and by the early 1970s economic changes had caused higher-quality trade paperbacks (softbound printings of hardcover books) to become the preferred paperback format of most publishing houses. This exhibit showcases the cover art of some of the major illustrators during the golden age of the mass market paperback.
Many well-known authors started their careers by writing fiction for pulp magazines and paperbacks. But until more recently, the artists responsible for the illustrations on the covers of vintage paperbacks have received little recognition, their names known only to collectors and genre aficionados. Even in its heyday, “pulp art” was disparaged as tawdry, garish and lurid. Not until the mid-1990s did these covers and the original artworks behind them begin to gain serious attention.

Paperback artists often traversed the worlds of fine art, comics, children's book illustration, and advertising and commercial art. While some of these talented illustrators are known for a signature look, others worked in several different styles, complicating the attribution of paperback cover art unless the illustrations were signed or credited. Further contributing to the problem of identification, the original paintings were rarely preserved after being reproduced on a smaller scale for the cover illustrations; in most cases, the canvases were reused, discarded, or destroyed.

The artists featured in this exhibit have been acknowledged, either contemporarily or posthumously, for their contributions to the field of science fiction and fantasy illustration. These artists have been awarded or nominated for the Hugo Award (presented annually by the World Science Fiction Convention), membership in the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame, or similar honors.

The majority of works on display are drawn from the covers of Ace Doubles. (Between 1952 and 1973, Ace Books published more than 600 Double books, two separate novels bound tête-bêche, i.e., back-to-back and inverted. Each novel had its own illustrated cover, making Ace Doubles especially popular with collectors.) Covers published by Avon, Ballantine, Bantam, Berkley, Fawcett Crest, Lancer, and Pyramid are also represented.
**VAUGHN BODÉ (1941-1975)**

*Galaxy Science Fiction* (February 1968)

The influence of the late Bodé, who worked primarily in the field of underground comics, is more appreciable in the realms of psychedelic art and graffiti than that of science fiction illustration. Nevertheless, his artistic contributions to science fiction fanzines earned him the Hugo Award for Best Fan Artist in 1969.

This magazine cover illustrates “The Planet Slummers” by Terry Carr and Alexei Panshin, one of the short stories included in this issue. In this story, stranded with a broken-down car on a dark, deserted road, a couple sees a UFO described as a “cross between a World War I airplane and a basketball.”

**ED ENSHWILLER (1925-1990)**

*Space Station #1* by Frank Belknap Long (Ace D-242, 1957)
*Sargasso of Space* by Andre Norton [as Andrew North] (Ace D-249, 1957)
*Star Ways* by Poul Anderson (Ace D-255, 1957)
*The Variable Man and Other Stories* by Philip K. Dick (Ace D-261, 1957)
*World Without Men* by Charles Eric Maine (Ace D-274, 1958)
*Stepsons of Terra* by Robert Silverberg (Ace D-311, 1958)
*The Invaders are Coming* by Alan E. Nourse & J.A. Meyer (Ace D-366, 1959)
*Slavers of Space* by John Brunner (Ace D-421, 1960)

Emshwiller studied art and graphic design at the University of Michigan, the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and the Art Students League of New York. Between 1953 and 1964, he won five Hugo Awards for Best Professional Artist. In the mid-1960s Emshwiller turned to experimental filmmaking and video art, serving as Dean of the School of Film/Video at the California Institute of the Arts from 1979 to 1990. He was posthumously inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in Seattle in 2007.

Emshwiller was responsible for a significant number of Ace Doubles cover illustrations between 1956 and 1965; his covers were frequently paired with those by Ed Valigursky on D-Series titles, and also with several by Jack Gaughan in the F-Series. Emshwiller was one of the few cover artists to sign his works (as EMSH), often cleverly hiding the signature somewhere within the illustration.
Although covers were typically commissioned after the fact, Emshwiller’s imagination and talent were such that editors often assigned authors to write stories based on his narrative paintings. His creativity and vision were also held in high regard by Stanley Kubrick, who asked Emshwiller to design the final sequence for *2001: A Space Odyssey*; Emshwiller had to decline, however, as he was making his own *Project Apollo* film for NASA.

*Threshold of Eternity* by John Brunner (Ace D-355, 1959)

Cover illustrations were occasionally reappropriated: In the early 1960s, Badger Books reused a number of illustrations originally produced by Emshwiller and other Ace artists. (Inset: *Juggernaut* by Fane Bron, Badger Books, 1960.)

**VIRGIL FINLAY (1914-1971)**

*Fantastic Universe Science Fiction* (February 1958)

*Fantastic Universe Science Fiction* (March 1959)

Finlay was a prolific illustrator for pulp magazines, particularly in the science fiction, fantasy, and horror genres. During his 35-year career, he created an estimated 2,500–2,800 works of art, including both covers and interior illustrations. Several collections of his works have been published.

*Fantastic Universe Science Fiction* (January 1958)

This magazine cover only hints at the detailed linework of which Finlay, a self-taught artist, was capable. Though at first the eye may be drawn to the Escher-like stairs, the polygonal ray-emitting face emerges as the focus of the composition.

*Fantastic Universe Science Fiction* (August 1958)

In Finlay’s illustration for this magazine cover, robots reenact human customs in a posthuman world: A pair of robots, designed in the image of woman and man, waits amid decaying buildings for a bus—traditionally yellow in color, but in the form of a spherical flying object.
FRANK FRAZETTA (1928- )†

The Secret People by John Wyndham (Lancer 72-155, 1964)

Frazetta is regarded as one of the most popular and influential artists in the SF&F field. He has received numerous honors for his work, including the Hugo Award for Best Professional Artist (1966), the Chesley Award presented by the Association of Science Fiction & Fantasy Artists (1988, 1995, 1997), Spectrum Grand Master of Fantastic Art Award (1995), and the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame (1998). He was also the subject of the 2003 documentary film Frazetta: Painting With Fire.

To see more of Frazetta's art, consult the retrospective monograph Icon (Booth Library Book Stacks 4000 Level NC975.5.F73 A4 1998x).

† Frazetta died in 2010.

FRANK KELLY FREAS (1922-2005)

Six Worlds Yonder by Eric Frank Russell (Ace 77785, 1971)

The legendary Kelly Freas was one of the most beloved and award-winning SF&F illustrators of all time. Winner of 11 Hugo Awards and a member of the Science Fiction Hall of Fame, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Arts degree by his alma mater, the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, in 2003. Career highlights include his contributions to MAD magazine and a NASA commission to design the insignia and posters for Skylab I. His illustrations can often be identified by his monogram (the initials KF inside a circle).

On the cover for this collection of six stories are six glowing celestial orbs, one of which is nearly obscured by the trail from the shuttle flying through the starry space.

The Naked Sun by Isaac Asimov (Lancer 72-108, 1969)

A blazing sun is at the center of this cover for the second novel in Asimov's Robot series. As in the previous novel, human detective Elijah Baley is partnered with robot R. Daneel Olivaw. The man-machine dichotomy is represented symbolically in the two faces on the cover; although the character of Olivaw is humanoid in the story, Freas depicts the robot with a face composed of gears.
**Jack Gaughan (1930-1985)**

*Beyond the Stars* by Ray Cummings (Ace F-248, 1963)

*The Twisted Men* by A.E. Van Vogt (Ace F-253, 1964)

Gaughan, who produced many covers and interior illustrations for Ace Books during the 1960s, won three consecutive Hugo Awards for Best Professional Artist in 1967 (also winning the first Best Fan Artist award the same year), 1968, and 1969. The New England Science Fiction Association presents the Jack Gaughan Award, named in his honor, annually to an emerging artist.

*Alpha Yes, Terra No!* by Emil Petaja (Ace M-121, 1965)

Gaughan was tutored by established science fiction artist Hannes Bok. Perhaps coincidentally, he also illustrated this cover for the first published novel by Bok’s lifelong friend Emil Petaja.

*Time and Again* by Clifford D. Simak (Ace D-283, 1963)

Though an airship-like craft appears on this cover of this novel, the story contained within is more about travel through time than space. Gaughan conveys this concept by capturing the figure at four separate moments as he travels in time.

**Mitchell Hooks (1923- )**

*The Big Eye* by Max Ehrlich (Bantam A1860, 1958)

Hooks’s illustrations have graced the covers of paperbacks published by Ace, Avon, Bantam, Crest, Dell, Gold Medal, and others. Another claim to fame is his poster design for the James Bond/007 film *Dr. No*. Hooks was inducted into the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame in 1999.

The “big eye” of the title refers to a gigantic telescope, through which astronomers observe a planet on course to collide with and destroy Earth. For this cover, Hooks reinterprets the title by depicting a celestial phenomenon resembling an eye looming over a cityscape—similar in concept to Earle Bergey’s illustration for the 1950 Popular Library publication of Ehrlich’s novel (inset).
JEFF JONES (1944- )†

Derai by E.C. Tubb (Ace H-77, 1968)

Though Jones's earliest work was strongly influenced by the art of Frank Frazetta, he came to develop his own erotically-charged style of fantasy illustration. His career flourished during the 1960s and 1970s, but he left the commercial art field in the 1980s. A retrospective monograph of his work was published by Underwood Books in 2002.

† Jeffrey Catherine Jones died in 2011.

PAUL LEHR (1930-1998)

No Place on Earth by Louis Charbonneau (Fawcett Crest s342, 1959)

Lehr studied under illustrator Stanley Meltzoff at the Pratt Institute. His work for Analog magazine earned him nominations for the Hugo Award for Best Professional Artists in 1980 and 1981.

DAVIS MELTZER (c.1930- )

The Midnight Dancers by Gerard F. Conway (Ace 52975, 1971)

In addition to paperback covers, Meltzer is known for scientific illustrations that have appeared in National Geographic and elsewhere. The son of the late artists Arthur Meltzer and Paulette Van Roekens, he lives out of the spotlight in Pennsylvania.

STANLEY MELTZOFF (1917-2006)

Who Speaks of Conquest? by Lan Wright (Ace D-205, 1957)
Meltzoff earned his Master of Arts degree from the New York University Institute of Fine Arts and also attended the Art Students League of New York. His students at the Pratt Institute included Paul Lehr and John Schoenherr (also featured in this exhibit). An avid diver, he turned to marine life painting beginning in 1960, producing illustrations for magazines including *Sports Illustrated*, *Scientific American*, *National Geographic*, and *Field & Stream*.

**GRAY MORROW (1934-2001)**

*Star Quest* by Dean Koontz (Ace H-70, 1968)

Morrow is known for his work in the comics field as well as for his science-fiction illustrations. He was nominated for the Hugo Award for Best Professional Artist in 1966, 1967, and 1968. Additional examples of his illustration can be found in Booth Library’s Ballenger Teachers Center.

**JEROME PODWIL (1938- )**


Admired by paperback collectors for his 1960s covers, Podwil is still active in the field of illustration, working in both traditional and digital media.

**RICHARD M. POWERS (1921-1996)**

*Worlds Apart* by J.T. McIntosh (Avon T-249, 1954)

*Those Idiots from Earth* by Richard Wilson (Ballantine 237, 1957)

*Away and Beyond* by A.E. Van Vogt (Berkley G-125, 1959)

*E Pluribus Unicorn* by Theodore Sturgeon (Ballantine U2247, 1965)

Powers was a groundbreaking artist in the world of paperback illustration, as his abstract covers strove for atmosphere and mood rather than literal representation. His illustrations have been compared to the work of surrealist Yves Tanguy, whose subject matter frequently
consisted of otherworldly landscapes populated by biomorphic formations. (Inset: Tanguy's 1943 painting titled “Through Birds, Through Fire and Not Through Glass”)

Powers is especially associated with Ballantine Books, having functioned as unofficial art director for the publishing house during the 1950s. Ballantine granted him the freedom to experiment with style, revealing his unconventional, avant-garde tendencies. He was posthumously inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in 2008. *The Art of Richard Powers*, published by Paper Tiger Books in 2001, is currently out of print.

**JOHN SCHOENHERR (1935–)**

*The Stainless Steel Rat* by Harry Harrison (Pyramid F672, 1961)

Schoenherr studied art at the Art Students League of New York and earned a BFA degree from the Pratt Institute, where his teachers included Stanley Meltzoff. He is also known as a wildlife artist and a children's book illustrator. Among the honors he has received are Hugo Award for Best Professional Artist (1965) and the Caldecott Medal (for his illustration of Jane Yolen's *Owl Moon*, 1988). Several examples of his illustration can be found in the Ballenger Teachers Center's Juvenile Collection.

† Schoenherr died in 2010.

**ALEX SCHOMBURG (1905-1998)**

*Fantastic Stories of Imagination* (November 1960)

Dubbed the "Norman Rockwell of comic books" by Stan Lee, Schomburg began his career by producing covers for Marvel's predecessor Timely Comics in the 1940s, making the transition to science-fiction illustration in the 1950s.

The illustration for this magazine cover accompanies Fritz Leiber's story "Deadly Moon": An astronomer sends his daughter to a psychiatrist after she begins to have nightmares about the moon breaking into fragments. Schomburg provides a succinct visual synopsis of the story, depicting the faces of the three central characters staring in awe beneath a crumbling moon.
**ROBERT EMIL SCHULZ (1928-1978)**

*The Tomorrow People* by Judith Merril (Pyramid G-502, 1960)

Though Schulz worked across genres, he is perhaps best known as an illustrator of westerns. He earned a degree in architecture from Princeton University, later studying and teaching at the Art Students League of New York.

**ROBERT STANLEY (1918-1996)**

*Space Prison* by Tom Godwin (Pyramid G480, 1960)

Stanley is most strongly associated with his work on the Dell Publishing paperback covers of the 1950s. As pulp artists were unable to afford live models, they often based the appearance of their cover characters on movie stars or themselves; Stanley and his wife Rhoda frequently appear in his illustrations.

**ED VALIGURSKY (1926- †)**

*The Blue Atom* by Robert Moore Williams (Ace D-322, 1958)

*Dr. Futurity* by Philip K. Dick (Ace D-421, 1960)

Valigursky created cover art for numerous science-fiction paperbacks and magazines, including the early Ace Doubles, *If*, and *Amazing Stories*. As a cover artist, he is particularly noted for his detailed illustrations of technological equipment as well as his distinctive robots. His ability to render realistic representations of scientific apparatus served him well later in his career as an illustrator for the magazine *Popular Mechanics*. A monograph of his work, *Worlds at War: The Art of Ed Valigursky*, was published by Ken Steacy in 2007.

† Valigursky died in 2009.

*Across Time* by Donald A. Wollheim [as David Grinnell] (Ace D-286, 1958)

*A Man Called Destiny* by Lan Wright (Ace D-311, 1958)

*Starhaven* by Ivar Jorgenson (Ace D-351, 1959)
These covers show examples of Valigursky's prototypical representations of spacecraft, from rockets to spherical one-man pods.

*City* by Clifford D. Simak (Ace D-283, 1958)

*City* is a “fix-up,” consisting of eight loosely-connected stories that were collected and reworked into novel form. The only character to appear in every story is the robot Jenkins.

The robot on this cover has many of the features characteristic of the stylized robots for which Valigursky is best known—a domed head with a grille over the lower portion of the face, a corrugated neck, and spindly arms with claws for hands.

*Eye in the Sky* by Philip K. Dick (Ace D-211, 1957)

In this novel by Philip K. Dick, after an accident involving a particle accelerator, Jack Hamilton and seven others journey through alternate worlds created by their individual psyches. This cover by Valigursky depicts the titular “eye in the sky,” as Hamilton perceives God during an encounter in a Ptolemaic universe.
Ed Emshwiller (EMSH)
This Fortress World by James E. Gunn (Ace D-223, 1957)
Vanguard from Alpha by Brian W. Aldiss (Ace D-369, 1959)

Between 1952 and 1973, Ace Books published more than 600 Double books, two separate novels bound tête-bêche, i.e., back-to-back and inverted. Each novel had its own illustrated cover, making Ace Doubles especially popular with collectors. Illustrations by Emshwiller and Valigursky were paired on the covers of several D-Series doubles: This Fortress World and The 13th Immortal were issued in such a fashion, as were Vanguard from Alpha and The Changeling Worlds.

Ed Valigursky
The 13th Immortal by Robert Silverberg (Ace D-223, 1957)
The Changeling Worlds by Kenneth Bulmer (Ace D-369, 1959)

In addition to robots in classic Valigursky style, these covers also share compositional elements: Both scenes are dominated by a robot holding a man while a second robot is framed by an aperture in the background. The Pietà-influenced pose of the foreground figures on the cover of The 13th Immortal also recalls the poster art for the 1956 movie Forbidden Planet (inset).
Ed Emshwiller (EMSH)
_The Pirates of Zan_ by Murray Leinster (Ace D-403, 1959)

Artist unknown
_The Pirates of Zan_ (Ace 66525, 1971)

Publishers often commissioned new artwork for the covers of reissued titles. These two illustrations for _The Pirates of Zan_ are remarkably similar, with a space pirate much like his typical maritime counterpart in appearance—a bearded man, wearing a kerchief on his head and a knife on his belt. One notable difference, aside from the perspective, is the direction of movement: Emshwiller’s pirate appears exiting a round portal, while the pirate on the later cover is in the act of entering.

Dean Ellis
_The Mutant Weapon_ by Murray Leinster (Ace 66525, 1971)

Artist unknown
_The Mutant Weapon_ (Ace D-403, 1959)

Murray Leinster’s novels _The Pirates of Zan_ and _The Mutant Weapon_ were paired as Ace Doubles for the original 1959 publication as well as the 1971 reissue. On the earlier _Mutant Weapon_ cover, a spherical medical probe serves as the focal point of the composition. In the later illustration by Ellis, the spacecraft—a needle-nosed vessel, alluding perhaps to vaccination—becomes secondary to a dramatically-angled extraterrestrial landscape. Despite compositional and stylistic differences, both visually capture the sense of isolation conveyed by the unchanged tagline “Quarantine for an Empty Planet.”
Freelance commercial artists were normally commissioned by art directors to produce the cover art for these paperbacks, basing their illustrations on the story as specified. Emshwiller, on the other hand, approached publishers with ready-made paintings. Consequently, his cover images often had no direct relationship to the text, and could be used or repurposed as publishers saw fit (although the artist objected to any modifications).

In this instance, the EMSH cover has no apparent connection to any of the six stories in the collection, serving instead as a general reference to the exploration of distant worlds. By contrast, Freas’s illustration visually paraphrases the collection title as six luminous planetary bodies.

In Asimov’s novel, the inhabitants of Earth dwell in underground cities, never venturing into the outside world for fear of exposure to the sun. The Bantam cover conveys this tension by casting a beam of light down on a lone figure: Half of the figure remains in shadow, while the half caught in the light is literally exposed, the internal structure of the body made visible. Although the sun itself is central in Freas’s composition, it serves as a backdrop to the more prominent faces representing the two main characters, one human and one robot.

Both covers feature a humanoid figure (the protagonist Kincar) and the artist’s interpretation of a mord (a hybrid hawk-lizard creature) set against a bold monochromatic background, but the similarities end there. The later cover has been inconclusively attributed to both Jeff Jones and John Schoenherr.