The 100 Most Important People in Science Fiction

SPECIAL

100TH ISSUE

ALL-NEW EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS:
John Carpenter  Peter Cushing  George Lucas  Nichelle Nichols
Leonard Nimoy  Harlan Ellison  Ray Harryhausen
Irwin Allen  Richard Matheson  Gene Roddenberry
These are the 100 Most Important People in Science Fiction and Fantasy. These are the men and women whose creations, whose work, whose actions have had the greatest impact on the genre.

In some cases, that impact may be linked to a single act—as when Orson Welles brought H.G. Wells’ War of the Worlds to life via radio and panicked America. For others, such as Robert Heinlein and Isaac Asimov, it is a large body of work studded with impressive achievements. Still others—like George Melies, Hugo Gernsback, Jules Verne, Walt Disney—are trailblazers, pioneers whose efforts have laid the foundation for the fantasists and filmmakers to follow.

A number of these individuals have all but transcended their accomplishments, becoming “icons,” people whose names and faces have become closely identified with SF and fantasy not only by its fans, but by the general public—Buster Crabbe, Leonard Nimoy, Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Boris Karloff, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and others. And most appropriately, one “icon,” Nichelle Nichols, has transformed her SF-TV fantasy into scientific reality, selflessly using her image to attract and recruit new astronauts for NASA.

The ideas and visions of these 100—and the many significant others left unprofiled—have been responsible for science fiction’s yesterdays and today’s...and for the tomorrows yet to come.
watched "Where is Everybody?"—the first episode of The Twilight Zone—undeniably remember those initial goosebumps. Written by Rod Serling (1924-1975), it was new, it was fresh, and it was great.

A beady-eyed cynic with a low boiling point and a high affinity for biting drama, Serling spiked each episode with irony, sarcasm, and occasionally some hope for the future. With his cryptic narrations and on-camera introductions, Serling employed some of the best directors (John Brahm, Robert Parrish and others) and literary colleagues (Charles Beaumont, Richard Matheson). The first season Twilight Zones were the best fantastic dramas ever televised ("Time Enough at Last," "The Lonely," and "Mirror Image" come to mind), and Serling’s riveting episode "The Shelter"—about nuclear holocaust and the inescapable human condition—is still screened in schools as a lesson to counter feelings of greed and prejudice.

Serling was no newcomer to the airwaves—his authorship of the TV dramas Patterns and Requiem for a Heavyweight won critical acclaim during the ’50s and later became movies. Serling also did his share of screenwriting, scripting Planet of the Apes (1968). The Twilight Zone spawned several imitations—among these anthologies, Serling’s own Night Gallery—but none could match the punch of Rod Serling’s virgin material. Before his death, he made us believe that there was indeed a fifth dimension, as vast as space and as timeless as infinity.

—Paul Mandell

ROD SERLING

He showed us the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and before becoming a parody subject for Dan Aykroyd on Saturday Night Live, he was the best damned writer television ever had. Those who were glued to the picture tube one Friday evening in October 1959 and