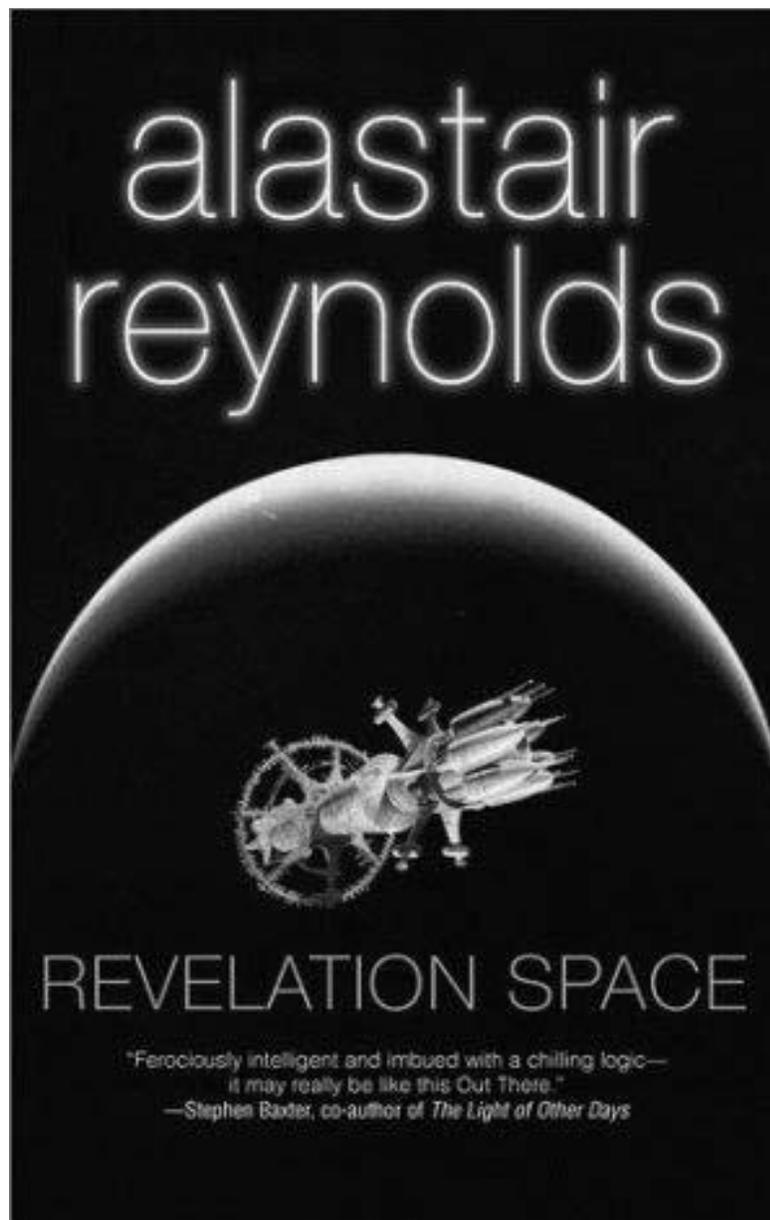


# Visions of Paradise

#108 Wondrous Stories



# Visions of Paradise #108: Wondrous Stories

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# *Triple Multiple Choice Quiz*

Match a first name in Column 1 with a last name in Column 2. Then select the correct story containing that character from Column 3. Solutions are at the end of the zine

<b>First Names</b>	<b>Last Names</b>	<b>Story Titles</b>
Charlie	Ai	Barrayar
Conrad	Atreides	Book of the Short Sun
Cordelia	Boles	Brittle Innings
Damon	Broadhead	A Case of Conscience
Danny	Calvin	Double Star
David	Gersen	Downbelow Station
Enoch	Gordon	Dune
Genly	Konstantin	Dying Inside
Kirth	Naismith	Flowers for Algernon
Lorenzo	Nimikos	Gateway
Lorq	Ruiz-Sanchez	Hyperion
Louis	Selig	I, Robot
Martin	Silenus	The Left Hand of Darkness
Maya	Silk	The Man Who Counts
Nicholas	Smythe	Nova
Patera	Toitovna	Red Mars
Paul	Van Rijn	Ringworld
Ramon	Von Ray	The Star King
Robinette	Wallace	This Immortal
Susan	Wu	Way Station

# Listmania

I have always loved lists and have managed to sneak several of them into the pages of **VoP** over the years, so it seems natural to introduce a regular feature consisting entirely of lists. The majority, although not all, will be f&sf lists. Some will be my own lists, but others will be blatantly stolen from other places. Hopefully all these lists will be of interest to you readers.

Observant readers will recognize that the title of this column *Listmania* is stolen from an issue of Bruce Gillespie's fine zine **SF Commentary**, although he reminded me that his title "was 'Listomania', in tribute to Ken Russell's wonderful film title *Lisztomania*." So my plagiaristic guilt is assuaged slightly. ☺

I have decided to start with a list published by Michael Bishop in a *Book of Days* published by the Quality Paperback Book Club a half-dozen years ago? This was when "best of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" lists were rampant, and Bishop was asked to produce his own list. He wrote a long introduction disclaiming any "best of" intent in the list, instead naming them 104 Really Cool Works of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fiction. I have only read 20 of the works listed by Bishop, but I generally agree with Bishop's assessment of them, so I am anticipating some more great reading someday...

The Malacia Tapestry	Brian W. Aldiss
The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven	Sherman Alexie
Bastard out of Carolina	Dorothy Allison
Empire of the Sun	J. G. Ballard
Continental Drift	Russell Banks
Timescape	Gregory Benford
Brazzaville Beach	William Boyd
A Medicine for Melancholy	Ray Bradbury
Rubyfruit Jungle	Rita Mae Brown
The Book of Bebb	Frederick Buechner
Jujitsu for Christ	Jack Butler
Wild Seed	Octavia Butler
A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain	Robert Olen Butler

Possession	A. S. Byatt
Saints and Strangers	Angela Carter
Where I'm Calling From	Raymond Carver
The Lady in the Lake	Raymond Chandler
Crazy in Alabama	Mark Childress
Childhood's End	Arthur C. Clarke
Shogun	James Clavell
Crazy Heart	Thomas Cobb
The Public Burning	Robert Coover
Little, Big	John Crowley
Atlantis: Three Tales	Samuel R. Delany
Blackburn	Bradley Denton
Paris Trout	Pete Dexter
The Man in the High Castle	Philip K. Dick
334	Thomas M. Disch
Geek Love	Katherine Dunn
The Floatplane Notebooks	Clyde Edgerton
Deathbird Stories	Harlan Ellison
The Black Dahlia	James Ellroy
A Fan's Notes	Frederick Exley
The Siege of Krishnapur	J. G. Ferrell
The Sportswriter	Richard Ford
Sarah Canary	Karen Joy Fowler
Cold Mountain	Charles Frazier
Bad Behavior	Mary Gaitskill
In the Land of Dreamy Dreams	Ellen Gilchrist
Snow Falling on Cedars	David Guterson
Atticus	Ron Hansen

The Silence of the Lambs	Thomas Harris
A Winter's Tale	Mark Helprin
The Child Buyer	John Hershey
The Swimming Pool Library	Alan Hillinghurst
Angels	Denis Johnson
Gaff Topsails	Patrick Kavanagh
Nine Hundred Grandmothers	R.A. Lafferty
Hard Laughter	Anne Lamott
The Left Hand of Darkness	Ursula K. Le Guin
Out of the Silent Planet	C.S. Lewis
Winter Count	Barry Holstun Lopez
Hard Trade	Arthur Lyons
The Drowning Pool	Ross Macdonald
At Play in the Fields of the Lord	Richard Matthiessen
Time Will Darken It	William Maxwell
Boy's Life	Robert R. McCammon
All The Pretty Horses	Cormac McCarthy
All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers	Larry McMurtry
Such a Long Journey	Rohinton Mistry
Towing Jehovah	James Morrow
Rats in the Trees	Jess Mowry
The Progress of Love	Alice Munro
Unassigned Territory	Kern Nunn
The Things they Carried	Tim O'Brien
The Gospel of Corax	Paul Park
The Dog of the South	Charles Portis
Edisto	Padgett Powell
Kate Vaiden	Reynolds Price

The Shipping News	E. Annie Proulx
V	Thomas Pynchon
Even Cowgirls Get the Blues	Tom Robbins
Call it Sleep	Henry Roth
The Female Man	Joanna Russ
The Sparrow	Mary Doria Russell
Was	Geoff Ryman
What Makes Sammy Run?	Budd Schulberg
The Golden Gate	Vikram Seth
The Jaguar Hunter	Lucius Shepard
Glimpses	Lewis Shiner
The Female of the Species	Lionel Shriver
Dying Inside	Robert Silverberg
Lives of the Dead	Charlie Smith
Stone City	Mitchell Smith
The Man Who Loved Children	Christina Stead
A Flag for Sunrise	Robert Stone
Waterland	Graham Swift
The Old Forest and Other Stories	Peter Taylor
The White Hotel	D. M. Thomas
Pop. 1280	Jim Thompson
Imagining Argentina	Lawrence Thornton
My Life and Hard Times	James Thurber
Her Smoke Went Up Forever	James Tiptree, Jr.
A Confederacy of Dunces	John Kennedy Toole
The Embedding	Ian Watson
Fields of Fire	James Webb
Fools Crow	James Welch

John Dollar	Marianne Wiggins
Modern Baptists	James Wilcox
Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang	Kate Wilhelm
Peace	Gene Wolfe
The Barracks Thief	Tobias Wolff
War and Remembrance	Herman Wouk
Eleven Kinds of Loneliness	Richard Yates

## *Wondrous Stories*

The biggest names in science fiction are not necessarily the most talented writers overall. Some writers are able to master a particular type of fiction so their fans know what to expect from each of their books and their popularity grows with each publication. Examples include Anne McCaffrey, Terry Pratchett, and Frank Herbert in his later years (whose many fine non-**Dune** novels are mostly forgotten now). Other writers can master so many different types of fiction that to some extent each book has a different audience than others, thus their overall audience becomes splintered among fans of the various types. Often these are the most acclaimed writers *inside* science fiction, but they rarely achieve the same mass popularity as their occasionally less-talented peers.

Poul Anderson is a quintessential example of the latter type of writer. He has won numerous awards for his writing, but his books are scattered across the entire spectrum of f&sf: high fantasy, historical fantasy, hard science, and, my favorite type of his fiction, worldbuilding (which, to me, is not the Hal Clement type of *physical* worldbuilding, but the C.J. Cherryh type of culture-building).

While I truly enjoyed some of Anderson's other science fiction, such as **Tau Zero** and the *Time Patrol* series, I have a special fondness for his *Polesotechnic League* stories. Those stories combine outstanding storytelling ability with his knack for creating truly alien races, both in physical characteristics and cultures. Think of a faster-paced C.J. Cherryh and you have some idea what I mean.

The Earth Book of Stormgate was a large 1978 collection containing much of the *Polesotechnic League* short fiction, as well as perhaps the fine novel **The Man Who Counts**. The best stories in the book, as well as the novel, feature Nicholas van Rijn, perhaps the most unlikely hero in sf, an aging, brash, insulting, overweight master trader in the Polesotechnic League who even when he is rallying his underlings to victory manages to alienate many of

them.

On the surface, **The Man Who Counts** is a problem-solving novel as a group of traders, including van Rijn, are stranded on a world in the midst of a civil war. Since they cannot eat the native food, it is urgent they be rescued before their own food runs out, but the natives are too pre-occupied with their war to spend time seeking help for the humans.

As is typical in many Poul Anderson stories, the plot itself is the foundation for a multi-faceted story. **The Man Who Counts** is a study of evolutionary diversity, a look at the causes of war as well as the difficulties of overcoming them, an examination of leadership roles (between van Rijn and his underling Wace), as well as true leadership versus fake leadership (in the persons of two aliens, one who is the hereditary ruler and the other who is the respected leader).

The most impressive part of the novel is the development of the alien race and its twin cultures. The novel's original paperback title was *War of the Wing-Men*, which was a terrible title in the way it simplified the splendid creation of the winged aliens and their well-thought-out cultures.

**The Man Who Counts** is an award-worthy novel, and would have been worth the entire book if there were not several other equally-superb stories in it. My other favorite was "Day of Burning" (which was originally published in **Analog** as "Supernova"). This is another problem-solving story—how the heck can you get a bunch of independent rulers to work together to save their world from a supernova which has already exploded and whose devastating effects are approaching rapidly?—but again the development of the alien culture is the true star of the story.

If you can find a copy of **The Earth Book of Stormgate**, you owe it to yourself to buy and read it. And if not, why the heck is somebody as good as Poul Anderson not in print anymore? (I know the economic reasons why, but that does not satisfy my sense of fair play).

\*

I admit up front that my background in the classics is pathetically weak. That is why I read *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* for the first time this summer. The first chapter of **Hunchback** sets the premise, showing us the nature of 15<sup>th</sup> century Paris and its denizens during a feast day when the public is invited to watch the debut performance of a new play. The production proves to be a dismal failure, not due to any flaw in the play itself, but due to a series of events out of the control of the playwright: the late arrival of the cardinal and the distinguished group of Flemish ambassadors who are his guests, who first anger the audience due to their lateness, then disrupt the play itself by their arrival. This ultimately causes total chaos in the theater, eventually leading to a mock election of a fool's pope while the playwright struggles futilely to continue the performance of the play.

This is an incredibly well-done scene which demonstrates many of Hugo's strengths as a writer and the inspired choice of his setting for the novel. The scene also introduces all the main characters:

- Gringoire, the suffering playwright;
- Quasimodo, the deaf, hunchbacked bell-ringer of Notre Dame Cathedral who is chosen as fool's pope;
- Claude Frollo, intellectual and tortured priest who rescued Quasimodo as a child and serves as his beloved surrogate parent;
- Captain Phoebus, who rescues the girl Esmeralda from the clutches of Quasimodo, setting off most of the book's events that follow;
- Esmeralda, the innocent and lovely gypsy girl whose effect on each of the above characters causes most of the emotional foundation of the book.

Basically, **Hunchback** is a morality play, which is obvious in the first scene since Gringoire's badly-received play is itself a morality play. All the characters are suffering in some manner, and their reactions to Esmeralda increase their emotional pain.

Hugo is an outstanding writer whose ability to create a totally convincing 15<sup>th</sup> century Paris was worth the entire book. He is also a satirist, showing us in somewhat exaggerated form (or at least we can hope it was) the darker side of medieval life, both involving powerful people such as King Louis XI himself as well as city judges and ordinary people as far down the economic scale as the homeless gypsies.

**Hunchback** contains numerous powerful individual scenes, the opening scene being an example. So was the scene in which the gypsy girl is sentenced to death but is rescued by Quasimodo who takes her to the legal sanctuary of Notre-Dame de Paris. A third scene is when the gypsies attempt to break into the cathedral to rescue the girl, but Quasimodo believes they intend to kill her so he fights them off single-handedly.

The book also contains several detailed historical asides which generally deepen the book's background, although occasionally they are too long and rambling, Hugo's only glaring weakness as a novelist.

The novel's ending is distressful, but inevitable considering all that led up to it. **Hunchback of Notre-Dame** was a powerful and successful book overall, and I recommend it highly to anybody who, like me, has not read it yet.

\*

Robert Charles Wilson's *Spin* begins with a typical Wilson plot: a mysterious unexplained event has happened on Earth, and the inhabitants struggle to survive the changes caused by it. Immediately this reminded me of **Darwinia** and **The Chronoliths**, and I wondered if Wilson had gotten himself into a rut.

It was obvious early in the book that Wilson has two simultaneous concerns in **Spin**: the sfnal mystery he created and the personal lives of his cast of characters. The book could very easily have become a character study under the guise of a science fiction novel, so the book's success depended to a large part on Wilson's ability to make the personal story and sfnal story support

each other rather than be independent entities.

Upon finishing **Spin**, I can safely say that both my fears were groundless. Wilson did not show any signs of being in a rut, and the book's two aspects were intertwined so well that the personal stories and the sfnal mystery were totally dependent on each other.

The basic premise is that one night a "membrane" appears around the Earth, blocking out the stars totally. Shortly thereafter it is determined that time is passing at a rate ten billion times faster outside the membrane than it passes inside it. This type of apocalyptic event obviously causes major disruptions in life on Earth, but Wilson wisely concentrates on a small group of people involved in studying the membrane and trying to learn both its cause and the identity of the beings who created it. The main focus is three childhood friends who witness the appearance of the membrane together:

- Jason is a scientific genius who becomes the scientific head of Perihelion, a government-affiliated company spearheading the study of the membrane;
- Tyler becomes a physician and eventually Jason's chief physician at Perihelion, his most important task being to keep Jason functioning after he develops a variant of MS;
- Diane becomes involved with apocalyptic cultists who view the membrane as a sign of the approaching end of the world; she marries a wide-eyed zealot named Simon who totally dominates her life.

One of Perihelion's projects in trying to understand the membrane is terraforming Mars and seeding it with human life, knowing that the time differential outside the membrane will cause human life to develop on Mars at a much faster rate than on Earth, so that a few decades later highly-intelligent Martians might be able to interpret the membrane. Thus we are introduced to Wun Ngo Wen, a Martian linguist who travels to Earth with a plan to study the membrane. While on Earth he becomes a confidante of both Jason and Tyler, although the federal government naturally tries to use him for their own purposes.

**Spin** is told in alternating chapters, the majority following the growth and activities of Jason, Tyler and Diane. Interspersed with this main storyline are chapters about Tyler and Diane thirty years after the membrane appears, and while at first it is unclear what is happening in those chapters, as Wilson's main storyline approaches that time period it gradually becomes clearer what is happening in those portions. Slowly we realize these are the climactic chapters of the book when thirty years' worth of personal and sfnal development are all coming together.

Science fiction novels which begin with "big dumb objects" rarely offer any explanation at the end, or even a glimpse at the mysterious alien builders. Think of Arthur C. Clarke's **Rendezvous with Rama** or Frederik Pohl's **Gateway**. Wilson avoids that frustration for the reader by having his scientists determine the cause of the membrane's creation, and also finding a way to use the membrane for the advancement of much of the human race.

**Spin** is a strong, well-developed novel which satisfies on a literary level, on a sfnal level, and on a plotting level. The novel's conclusion is strong and suitable, totally unexpected yet ultimately satisfying. **Spin** deserved its numerous award nominations, and I was pleased that it won this

year's Hugo Award.

\*

I have enjoyed much of Alastair Reynolds' short fiction in recent years, stories such as "Great Wall of Mars" and "Zima Blue," so when I was seeking more "wondrous" science fiction set in the far future away from contemporary Earth, he was the first author I tried. I began reading *Revelation Space*, the first of his *Galactic North* series, soon after finishing Poul Anderson's **The Earth Book of Stormgate**, so I knew Reynolds had a tough act to follow. Suffice it to say Reynolds not only passed his test with flying colors, but he impressed me even more at novel length than he did at shorter lengths.

At the outset of the book there are three plotlines:

- Sylveste is a scientist studying the ancient Amarantin culture which was wiped out one hundred thousand years ago by a mysterious undetermined Event;
- *Nostalgia for Infinity* is a starship whose crew are Ultras, human-cyborg combinations who have spent their entire lives in space, so that they are almost nonhuman beings;
- Khouri is an assassin who is being blackmailed to seek out and kill Sylveste.

Besides being a scientist, Sylveste is an important political figure on Resurgam, and finds himself on the wrong side of a political upheaval twice during the novel. The captain of *Nostalgia for Infinity* is a strange being who is gradually melding with the starship itself. The only person who can save his life is Sylveste's dead father, whose consciousness has been saved as an upload which can be downloaded into Sylveste's mind when necessary, although at great cost to Sylveste himself.

The basic format of the novel is basically two mysteries: what was the Event which destroyed the Amarantin civilization, and why is everybody so interested in Sylveste, including those who wish to murder him?

**Revelation Space** is a rich, information-deep story, but Reynolds keeps all of it well under control, never letting the technobabble overwhelm the story (which, as you might realize, is one of my main turn-offs in some "hard" science fiction). The best way to describe Reynolds' novel is by a few comparisons. I enjoy reading novels which explore future history, such as the works of Robert Silverberg and Jack McDevitt. I also enjoy writers who create breathing, thriving future cultures, both human and alien, such as Poul Anderson and C.J. Cherryh. Alastair Reynolds does both things in the same novel, and does them well. He exceeds McDevitt whose futures tend to be simple reflections of our contemporary world, while Reynolds' future is truly an extrapolation based on current trends in technological development. He exceeds Cherryh because Reynolds is a better storyteller able to weave together fascinating scenarios so that they merge into one complex whole which both makes perfect sense and carries you along to an exciting conclusion (without being a mindless thriller in any sense).

**Revelation Space** is packed with sense of wonder. The galaxy Reynolds creates is rich and detailed, both stunning in its creativity and believable in its development. As a historical

mystery it is fascinating how Reynolds slowly peels away layers of its past even as the plotlines themselves slowly merge and unravel.

While Reynolds is not a master of characterization, he does not populate **Revelation Space** with mere spear carriers. He takes care to develop many of his cast, particularly Sylveste, his biographer-turned-wife Pascale, and crewmembers Volyova, and Khouri. The better I understand the people in a novel, the more involved I become in it, and that happened in **Revelation Space**.

Overall **Revelation Space** was an optimistic novel about the future of science fiction, since it showed that a writer can expand on the current developments of science and technology while still building a rich galaxy, develop both human and alien cultures, and tell a great story in the grand tradition of science fiction. All the secondary storylines are resolved, so that only the overarching scenario awaits the next two volumes in the series. It made me very anxious to read those two books as soon as possible.

\*

Middle novels of trilogies are traditionally problematic since they need to set up the exciting climactic third novel, so sometimes they are primarily long connectors. Alastair Reynolds tried to avoid that problem as much as possible by structuring *Redemption Ark* in a similar manner to how he wrote **Revelation Space**. Again he began with parallel storylines which he developed simultaneously while gradually merging them into one complete entity.

The main focus of **Redemption Ark** is a war between two groups of human offsprings: the Conjoiners, who are a form of hive mind humans, and Demarchists, a totalitarian group. Most of the novel is told from the point of view of two Conjoiners: Skade is a member of the “inner sanctum” group of Conjoiners, while Clavain joined the Conjoiners four hundred years ago after first fighting against them. The Conjoiners realize that the Inhibitors (whom they refer to as “wolves”) were responsible for the destruction of the Amarantin civilization and are now initiating similar activities against modern human civilization in that same region of space.

A second storyline involves the two Ultras Volyova, and Khouri, who also recognize the threat of the Inhibitors and are involved in organizing a mass exodus from Resurgam, the planet which is the focus of the impending attack.

What brings the two storylines together is a group of 40 weapons which were developed by the Conjoiners hundreds of years ago, but which were so powerful that they were hidden away for safety’s sake. However, a century ago the weapons were stolen by somebody who, it turns out, was Volyova who hid the weapons on *Nostalgia for Infinity*. The Conjoiners learn this, and are determined to recover the weapons for possible use against the wolves/Inhibitors.

The twin plotlines of **Redemption Ark** merge into an exciting combination of interstellar chase and space war against the wolves. But Reynolds is not writing military sf, nor is he a knee-jerk action-adventure writer, so the fighting is not the focus of the novel and all the issues raised are ultimately settled due to human interaction.

Overall, there were more weaknesses in **Redemption Ark** than in **Revelation Space**. Spade was not a particularly believable character, and her scenes were generally the weakest in the book. There was an entire 50 page portion approximately in the book's middle where I thought Reynolds had slipped into silly thriller-type writing. On one hand he relates the actions of the "mysterious" Mr. Clock and Mr. Pink who act like sfnal "Men in Black", alternating with Clavain's dealings with the equally-mysterious H who seems like a secret master of the galaxy. The novel would have been better served if both these portions had been replaced with more realistic passages better in keeping with the rest of the novel.

Another weakness was that Clavain, who is ultimately Reynolds' main focus character, keeps falling into the hands of different characters in ways that are not always totally believable.

None of these faults are fatal, or more than somewhat annoying considering the overall quality of the novel. As in **Revelation Space**, the main storylines are concluded well, although this time there is a lot more open-endedness at the end of the book, so that it does lead directly into the concluding volume **Absolution Gap**. I am anxious to read that book in hopes of finding a satisfying conclusion to the entire trilogy.

\*

So we sequé into **Absolution Gap**, the concluding volume in Alastair Reynolds' *Galactic North* trilogy. Almost immediately at the novel's outset I was impressed again at Reynolds' ability to create exciting new scenarios which at first seem totally unrelated to the previous novel, but which eventually flow naturally into it. **Absolution Gap** begins with three scenarios which are explored in alternating sequences:

- An explorer named Quaiche discovers an uninhabited world whose moon Hela contains a strange nonhuman bridge which, when Quaiche tries exploring it, attacks him with hidden defenses;
- a century later Hela is the home of one of the strangest religions ever developed in sf as caravans of cathedral trains travel across its surface at a speed slow enough that observers lying on the roofs can keep the planet itself constantly in view;
- the survivors of the war in **Revelation Space** have settled on a planet which itself is now under attack itself by the wolves/Inhibitors.

Some characters from the previous two novels return, including Khouri, Clavain, Scorpio (who has grown from a human-hating pig to one of the leaders of the colony settled by the survivors of the space war) and the captain of *Nostalgia for Infinity* who by now has evolved into a mostly nonhuman entity.

New characters include Khouri's daughter Aura, Quiache himself who is the prophet of the new religion on Hela, and Rashmika, the viewpoint character in the latter sequence on Hela.

I found more visual sense of wonder in **Absolution Gap** than in either of its predecessors, especially a scene in which one caravan passes through an immense canyon, and another scene

when *Nostalgia for Infinity* lifts off from the planet where it has been the past two decades.

Reynolds did fall a bit into the same trap he created in **Redemption Ark** by having one sequence which was more horror thriller than serious, but where that sequences was largely irrelevant in the prior novel, in this instance it was one of the more important scenes in the novel, the climactic confrontation between Clavain and Skade. Fortunately it was the only weakness in the midst of lots of good, thought-provoking and exciting stuff.

Throughout the novel Reynolds manages to keep sucking the reader in deeper and deeper with new surprises that meld well with everything that happened before: the “shadows” hoping to cross into our universe; the skrimsuit; the attempt by Quaiche to take over *Nostalgia for Infinity*.

The novel’s pace quickens as Quaiche’s caravan reaches the bridge and attempts to be the first cathedral to cross over it successfully almost simultaneously to the struggle to rescue humanity from the Inhibitors reaching its climactic moments.

The *Galactic North* trilogy may not be great literature, but it is a grand adventure filled with sense of wonder and set in a wild and colorful milieu filled with fascinating characters, all partaking in a series of plots which move as inexorably as Quaiche’s caravans towards fascinating conclusions. Anybody who loves classic sf adventures should enjoy this series as well.

\*

I like reading Best-of-the-Year anthologies, and I love novellas, so Jonathan Strahan’s annual Best Short Novels 2006 is must reading for me. Reading the book is easy pleasure, but writing its review is a bit more difficult, since all the stories in the book must be considered on two criteria: are they worthwhile reading, and do they deserve inclusion in a “best of the year” volume? All of the stories in this book succeed on the former basis, but not necessarily so on the latter. Of course, some of that is due to the editor’s taste being somewhat different than the reviewer’s taste. Strahan obviously enjoys clever writing and near-future development rising out of current technological trends, both more so than I do myself.

Ian McDonald’s “The Little Goddess” excels in its creation of a future India, but the plot is disjointed: the main character becomes a goddess at age 5, draws blood at age 12 due to an unfortunate accident and thus loses her divinity, is put into a bride pool where she marries an immortal who at age 20 resembles a baby half her age, flees and becomes a smuggler. While the novella is somewhat pointless as a story, it certainly succeeds in its glimpses of the future and its energy never weakens.

Harry Turtledove’s “Audubon in Atlantis” examines an alternate world in which Columbus reached Atlantis, a continent lying between Europe and America (the latter which is called Terranova in the story). As befits the title, the story is concerned with Audubon’s search for near-legendary animal life, specifically the giant gooselike honkers. The story has some nice scenery, with an expected ending, but it is not really a story as much as a fanciful travelogue.

Cory Doctorow's "Human Readable" is a political drama in the near future concerning human rights in the face of encroaching technology. The technology is a bit overwhelming, not so much part of the story's foundation as its sole *raison d'être*, but it is still readable overall.

"The Policeman's Daughter," by Wil McCarthy, is a legal story about the individual rights of uploaded copies of humans. The setup is nicely-done, as two complementary storylines weave together, but there is little attempt on the part of the author to have the main character actually struggle to solve his twin dilemmas. Things just kind of happen routinely without any conflict.

By far the best story in the book is Jeffrey Ford's masterful "The Cosmology of the Wider World," whose plot summary, like much of the best f&sf, sounds almost ludicrous: Belius is a farmboy who was born a minotaur because his mother had been terrified by a bull during her pregnancy. The story combines two simultaneous plotlines: one concerns Belius growing up, learning to deal with his difference and the reaction of other people to him; the other concerns Belius as an adult living in some alternate "wider world" inhabited exclusively by intelligent animals. Belius has problems coping in the wider world, some of them arising from his loneliness, and others from his determination to write a cosmology of the wider world.

The story combines parts pathos, philosophy, romance, Shakespearean tragedy, even slapstick humor, into a whole which is definitely more than the sum of its parts. This is one of the finest stories I have read in several years. I thought Ford could never surpass "The Empire of Ice Cream," but I believe he has done it with this story.

\*

Robert Sheckley was certainly sf's finest satirist, and he was often laugh-out-loud funny. Over the past few years I have been slowly reading the novels in the **Dimensions of Sheckley** collection. I reviewed **Dimension of Miracles** in VoP #100 and **Journey Beyond Tomorrow** in VoP #104. Both were outstanding novels, showing Sheckley at his madcap best, combining outrageous moments with his typical biting jabs at the foibles of humans and human society.

Several such moments occurred in **Mindswap**. Sheckley succeeded in making a comedy out of a poor man who is evicted from his body and doomed to die unless he finds a replacement body for himself in six hours. The first two-thirds was typical Sheckley with some excellent scenes. My favorite was when the main character Flynn, desperate for a body to occupy, accepts a job as a four-legged Melden hunter of ganzer eggs on a totally inhospitable. While there he encounters a massive adult ganzer who turns out to also be a mindswapped human from upper New York State who has entered its body for the sole purpose of hunting Meldens. The moment when the two adversaries are exchanging hometowns had me laughing out loud.

Unfortunately, the novel could not maintain this level, and shortly afterwards degenerated into a rather tedious sword and sorcery spoof which lacked the cleverness of what preceded it. In fact, I could not avoid feeling that Sheckley grew tired of the novel and quickly wrapped it up in a hasty, somewhat dull conclusion.

But the first two-thirds of **Mindswap** are joyous indeed, and provide one more reason to read the

entire collection **Dimensions of Sheckley**.

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I'm not really a mathematician; I dropped out of a phd program before I even started it because I realized I loved science fiction more than I enjoyed math. But I have a fondness for the mathematical process, and an understanding of the type of personality that succeeds in that field. But mathematics is not a particularly self-reflective field, so that movies about math are very rare indeed. *Stand By Me* was a movie about teaching which used math rather than examined it. *A Brilliant Mind* was a movie about a schizophrenia who happened to be a mathematician. *Good Will Hunting* was an up-by-his-bootstraps movie whose hero could as easily been an artist as a mathematician.

*Proof*, on the other hand, is a movie purely about math. It spends much of its length examining the creative process as well as the not-quite stereotypical fear that mathematical genius is not far from insanity (I say "not-quite-stereotypical" because of George Cantor, one of the finest mathematicians ever who experienced numerous periods of mental instability which was aggravated, if not caused, by his studies of infinity; and we all know about John Nash and the Unabomber).

Gwyneth Paltrow was very convincing as a young mathematician struggled with her fears that because she inherited her math ability from her unstable father Anthony Hopkins that she had also inherited his mental instability. Most of the math scenes were believable, if a bit overly-emotional, and I was convinced by the scenes of Paltrow writing the proof which was the crux of the movie.

You don't need to be an artist to appreciate books or movies about passionate artists, so I do not think the appeal of **Proof** is necessarily limited to mathematicians. But I loved the movie partly because of its dramatic strengths, and partly because of its illustration of the mathematical life. Too bad its realism prevented it being as popular as *A Brilliant Mind* and *Good Will Hunting*, both of which were inferior movies in many ways.

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## *The In-Box*

These are the fanzines I have read in the past quarter, either in print or online. I only list ones which I enjoy, so all of these are recommended reading.

**Alexiad** / Lisa & Joseph Major / 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204-2040 / very

regular reviewzine. Highly recommended.

**The Blind Man's Rainbow** / Melody Sherosky / P.O. Box 1557, Erie, PA 16507-0557 / [www.bmrpoetry.com](http://www.bmrpoetry.com) / poetry and art

**brg** / SF Commentary / Bruce Gillespie / 59 Keele Street, Collingwood VIC 3066 / Bruce's ANZAPA personalzine

**Celtic Seasons** / Rita & Richard Shader / 2593 Chapparral Drive, Melbourne, FL 32934-8275 / Scottish history and culture

**Chunga** / Andy Hooper, Randy Byers, carl juarez / 1013 North 36<sup>th</sup> St., Seattle, WA 98103 / probably the most traditional fanzine currently being published; a Hugo nominee

**confuSon** / Shelby Vick / [www.efanzine.com](http://www.efanzine.com) / online genzine

**The Drink Tank** / Chris Garcia / [www.efanzine.com](http://www.efanzine.com) / online genzine

**For The Clerisy** / Brant Kresovich / P.O. Box 404, Getzville, NY 14068 / discussion of books

**In a Prior Lifetime / and furthermore...** / John Purcell / [www.efanzine.com](http://www.efanzine.com) / online personalzines

**The Knarley Knews** / Henry Welch / 1525 16<sup>th</sup> Ave., Grafton, WI 53024-2017 / genzine

**Pablo Lennis** / John Thiel / 30 N. 19<sup>th</sup> St., Lafayette, IN 47904 / fan fiction

**Peregrine Nations** / Janine Stinson / PO Box 248, Eastlake, MI 49626-0248 / genzine

**Some Fantastic** / Matthew Appleton / <http://www.somefantastic.us/> online zine devoted to f&sf

**Vanamonde** / John Hertz / 236 S. Coronado St., No 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057 / two-page APazine with comments on everything from reviews to obituaries.

**Vegas Fandom Weekly** / Arnie Katz [www.efanzine.com](http://www.efanzine.com) / online genzine

## *On the Lighter Side*

One dark night in the small town of Garfield, NJ, a fire started inside the local sausage factory. In a blink the building was engulfed in flames. The alarm went out to all the fire departments for miles around. When the first volunteer fire fighters appeared on the scene, the sausage company president rushed to the fire chief and said, "All of our secret sausage recipes are in the vault in

the center of the plant. They must be saved. I will donate \$50,000 to the fire department that brings them out and delivers them to me."

But the roaring flames held the firefighters off. Soon more fire departments had to be called in because the situation became desperate. As the firemen arrived, the president shouted out that the offer to save the secret recipes was now \$100,000.

Suddenly from up the road, a lone siren was heard as another fire truck came into sight. It was the fire engine of the nearby Lodi, NJ volunteer fire department composed of firefighters over the age of 65.

To everyone's amazement, the little run-down fire engine passed the fire engines outside the plant, and drove straight into the middle of the inferno. The other firemen watched in amazement as the old-timers jumped off and began to fight the fire with a performance that was as if they were fighting to save their own lives. Within a short time, they had extinguished the fire and saved the secret recipes.

The grateful sausage company president joyfully announced that for such a brave accomplishment he was upping the reward to \$200,000, and he personally thanked each of the brave firefighters.

A TV news crew rushed in after capturing the event on film. The 'on camera' reporter asked the fire chief, "What are you going to do with all that money?"

"Well," said the 70-year-old fire chief, "The first thing we plan to do is fix the brakes on that damned truck!"

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### **Jokes sent me by Robert Kennedy**

One day, a man came home and was greeted by his wife dressed in a very sexy nightie. "Tie me up," she purred, "and you can do anything you want." So he tied her up and went golfing.

\*

A woman came home, screeching her car into the driveway, and ran into the house. She slammed the door and shouted at the top of her lungs, "Honey, pack your bags. I won the lottery!"

The husband said, "Oh my God! What should I pack, beach stuff or mountain stuff?"

"Doesn't matter," she said. "Just get the hell out."

\*

\*Mother Superior called all the nuns together and said to them, "I must tell you all something. We have a case of gonorrhoea in the convent."

"Thank God," said an elderly nun at the back. "I'm so tired of chardonnay."

\*

A wife was making a breakfast of fried eggs for her husband. Suddenly, he burst into the kitchen.

"Careful," he said, "CAREFUL! Put in some more butter! Oh my GOD! You're cooking too many at once. TOO MANY! Turn them! TURN THEM NOW! We need more butter. Oh my GOD! WHERE are we going to get MORE BUTTER? They're going to STICK! Careful. CAREFUL! I said be CAREFUL! You NEVER listen to me when you're cooking! Never! Turn them! Hurry up! Are you CRAZY? Have you LOST your mind? Don't forget to salt them. You know you always forget to salt them. Use the salt. USE THE SALT! THE SALT!"

The wife stared at him. "What in the world is wrong with you? You think I don't know how to fry a couple of eggs?"

The husband calmly replied with a grin, "I just wanted to show you what it feels like when I'm driving."

### Solution to Science Fiction Quiz

David	Selig	Dying Inside
Enoch	Wallace	Way Station
Susan	Calvin	I, Robot
Paul	Atreides	Dune
Nicholas	Van Rijn	The Man Who Counts
Kirth	Gersen	The Star King
Conrad	Nimikos	This Immortal
Louis	Wu	Ringworld
Danny	Boles	Brittle Innings
Damon	Konstantin	Downbelow Station
Lorenzo	Smythe	Double Star
Robinette	Broadhead	Gateway
Maya	Toitovna	Red Mars
Cordelia	Naismith	Barrayar
Genly	Ai	The Left Hand of Darkness
Martin	Silenus	Hyperion
Lorq	Von Ray	Nova

Patera	Silk	Book of the Short Sun
Charlie	Gordon	Flowers for Algernon
Ramon	Ruiz-Sanchez	A Case of Conscience