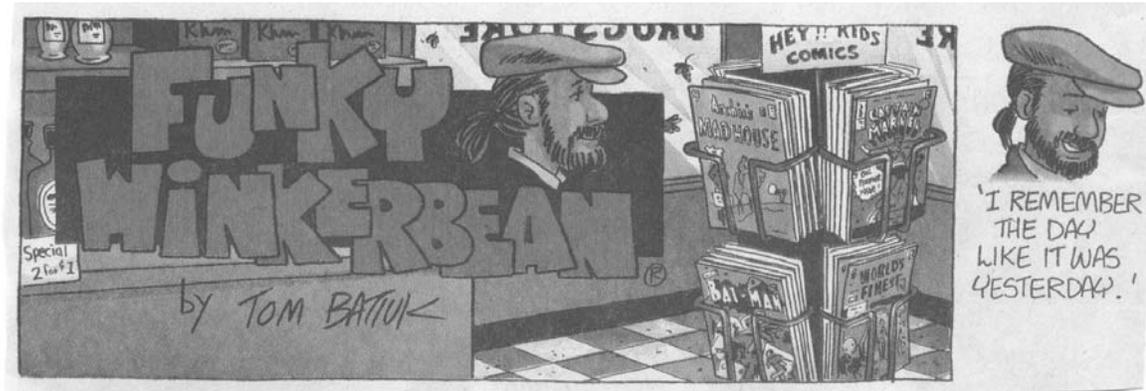


Visions of Paradise

#115: Wondrous Stories



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Whatever Happened To...?

By Terry Jeeves

Inventions come and go, but some inventions never come at all. I have in mind things like that perennial creation, the ever-lasting razor blade. This was usually given great credence by a report from a neighbour whose nephew had a girl friend who got it from her newsagent. With such authenticity one also got the statement that the wonder gadget had been bought up and suppressed by the razor manufacturers. A similar fate happened to another perpetual item, the electric light bulb. Of the same long chain of confirmation, the only difference being that it was bought and suppressed by the lighting manufacturers. Another invention that could have revolutionised our lives was the re-usable safety match. No need to carry a box full of the things, just the solitary one. Naturally we all know what happened to that one; although, to be fair, I was once shown a match which could be re-used half a dozen times. It was fatter than a normal match and had a sort of kebab-like arrangement of igniters separated by heat insulators. After using one segment, you blew it out, broke off the old bit and there was the next head all ready to be used. I

don't know who suppressed that one.

Top of the list for indispensable and much desired inventions must be the petrol saving pill. You simply filled your car's tank with water, dropped in the pill, started the engine and drove happily away. No prizes for guessing who squashed that one. Some useful inventions actually appeared on the market, had a fairly brief life and then vanished without being suppressed by any manufacturer. What happened to the Citizen's band radio? For a short time shops selling all the tranklements sprang up in ever city whilst users of the clumsy gadgets dotted the landscape of every beauty spot; nowadays their role in society has been taken over by the mobile phone which is as much a fashion accessory as designer jeans which everyone must have if they aspire to fame.

Following Cockerel's first hovercraft, the things found numerous markets and some manufacturers even advertised a normal, roadworthy car with its wheels replaced by the hovercraft's skirt and lift fans. I'm willing to bet these never got beyond the advertising brochure, since as excellent as they are over tricky terrain, they lack the precision turn control required by a street-going auto. One device which actually got into production was the rocket gun. This was a straightforward hand gun which fired bullets using a solid rocket in place of cordite. Unlike a normal bullet which slows down after leaving the gun's muzzle, the rocket powered version continued to accelerate until it hit its target with resounding force. Somewhere

I still have the brochure for this gadget complete with photos of the gun, its ammunition and shots of the damage it did to steel plates.

Less spectacular but more useful were the digital watches which almost took over the market as they flooded the windows of Jewellers` shops. Nowadays the good old analog variety are back in force and it is hard to find a digital one on offer.

Then whatever happened to those `scent organs` which were going to invade our cinemas along with 3D films. The scent of flowers would be sprayed into the auditorium to accompany films set in a garden, the pong of newly made bread would accompany shots of a bakery or petrol fumes to

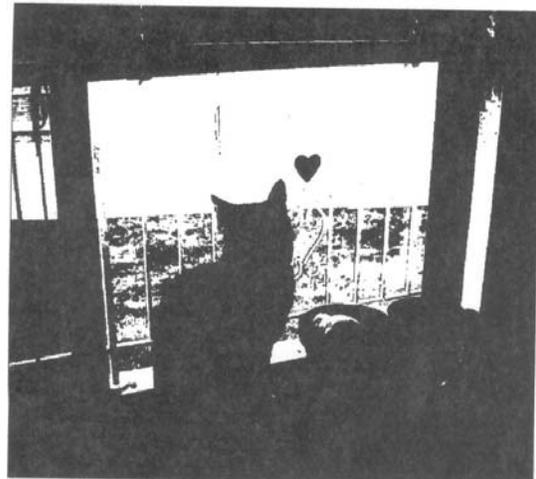
back a garage. Another great invention which came from the Buck Rogers` cartoon strip was the flying rocket belt. The American Army tried it out as a way of getting infantrymen to awkward places or across rivers. I suspect the short flight duration and vulnerability to sniper fire of the wearer might have been off-putting. James Bond tried one, but never repeated the experience.

On a totally different theme, do you UK readers remember the pre-war dealer, Ellisdons? They sold all sort of gadgetry for kids, stink bombs, fake ink blots, false noses and a host of other items such as the `Ventrilo` to make you a budding ventriloquist, the boy detective outfit which included a false beard which made you resemble a hedgehog, cut out scars, Plasticine for adding pimple and a bottle of stuff for blacking out teeth to obtain that Terry Thomas look. Ah, happy days, where have they gone? Another delight now gone forever was the collecting of cigarette cards. Manufacturers vied with their attempts to coax smokers to switch to their brands.

Flowers, Champions, Film Scenes, Aircraft, First Aid, History and even `silks`, which were designs printed on squares of silk. They all fell to the attack of wartime paper economy, but the surprise is that they never came back. I still have several sets, some dating from before WW1 and they make for nostalgic browsing. Falling to the march of public taste coupled with the march of progress, reel to reel tape recorders are now only available on the professional market at professional prices.

Similarly, the advent of video cameras sounded the death knell for the cine camera and its accompanying projector. If any enthusiast out there is interested, I have two 8mm cameras, a film editor and splicer, on offer as well as a projector. Offers welcome.

On a totally different line, whatever became of those very log-wearing roads which were to be surfaced with either shredded auto tyres or ground glass bottles? Both of which were going to cut the cost of road works and simultaneously solve the problems of disposal of old bottles and tyres, thus improving the environment. I wonder if old fanzines might do the job even better? That`s a long list of things which have strutted their brief hour on the stage, even if only in rumour. One wonders what current fashion icon will follow them into oblivion. An obvious first candidate is the mobile phone. It has all ready mutated from a hefty chunk of electronic gadgetry which required



a Charles Atlas to carry it around into a tiny gadget which can also send text messages or pictures. Will it give way to surgical implants capable of doing the same thing? Will computers merge into one small box holding printer, scanner, copier, and all the other gubbins currently cluttering up our desktops?

Whatever happens, you can be sure things will be different.

Shapers of Science Fiction

Welcome to a new feature of *Wondrous Stories* in which I will discuss important authors and editors who have influenced the shape of modern science fiction. As some of you might realize, these will primarily be people I discussed in my book **Who Shaped Science Fiction?**, although I do not expect to get to all 100 people discussed there.

Samuel R. Delany

What can you say about a teenager who writes a dozen unpublished novels before finally selling one at age nineteen? Or about a critic who writes a book-length analysis of a 7,800 word science fiction short story? Both of these are the same person, Samuel Ray Delany, one of the most critically-acclaimed writers in science fiction history. And with good reason since Delany did more to expand the borders of science fiction than any writer since Robert A. Heinlein, and was a leading influence on both 1980s *Cyberpunk* and 1990s *New Space Opera*.

Delany was a prolific writer for a half-dozen years in the mid-to-late 1960s following the publication of his first novel **The Jewels of Aptor**. During that period he published eight novels and a collection of short fiction. Most of the novels were published before Delany sold any short fiction. They included the acclaimed trilogy **The Fall of the Towers**—consisting of *Captives of the Flame*, *The Towers of Toron*, and *City of a Thousand Suns*—and the short novels **The Ballad of Beta-2** and **Empire Star**.

Most important for the development of future science fiction were the last three novels Delany published in the decade. First was **Babel-17**, which won a Nebula Award for Best Novel, immediately raising Delany from obscurity to the ranks of major science fiction writers. A space opera in form, its major concern is with the role of language in shaping reality. It is also one of the first major science fiction novels with a female protagonist.

Next came **The Einstein Intersection**, a second Nebula winner as Best Novel. It is basically the Orpheus legend retold by aliens who have taken human form in an attempt to understand extinct

humanity.

Lastly came **Nova**. Although it did not win any major awards, it is a superb accomplishment, and generally considered one of the best science fiction novels ever written. Like most of Delany's early sf, it unabashedly accepted the form of a space opera yet was still intended to be a serious work of fiction. It was heavily-influenced by Alfred Bester's **The Stars My Destination**, but it extends the earlier novel's pyrotechnics even further.

In 1967 Delany published his first piece of short science fiction, "The Star Pit." As complex and thought-provoking as his novels, it was the first of a series of major short works over the next three years. "Aye and Gomorrah" won a Nebula Award as Best Short Story. "We, In Some Strange Power's Employ, Move On a Rigorous Line" (under the considerably simpler title "Lines of Power") was both a Hugo and Nebula nominee for Best Novella. "Time Considered As A Helix of Semi-Precious Stones" won both Hugo and Nebula Awards for Best Novelette in spite of being published in the fairly obscure British science fiction prozine **New Worlds**.

Delany was mostly silent for six years following the publication of **Nova**. He re-emerged with the controversial novel **Dhalgren**. Over 800 pages long, it was an explicit analysis of an imaginary city on the verge of collapse. Hailed by many for its study of characters, images and relationships, others panned its long, convoluted plot structure that ends by completing a circle back to its opening scene.

Much more traditionally structured was **Triton**, which returned to many of Delany's concerns of the 1960s.

Following **Triton**, Delany turned his attention to heroic fantasy. He created a fantasy world **Neveryon** which he placed under the same careful scrutiny he had previously turned on space operas. The series included three collections **Tales of Neveryon**, **Flight From Neveryon**, **The Bridge of Lost Desire**, and the novel **Neveryóna**.

Delany returned to science fiction in 1984 with **Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand**, which was as much a quantum leap beyond most 1980s science fiction as **Nova** was in 1968. Unfortunately, it was intended to be the first of a diptych, but the second novel **The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities** was never published, apparently a victim of Delany's loss of interest in writing science fiction.

Besides being perhaps the most serious writer of science fiction ever, Delany has also been an important editor and critic of the genre. With his then-wife Marilyn Hatcher he edited a series of ground-breaking anthologies **Quark**. His nonfiction books include **The Jewel-Hinged Jaw**, a series of critical essays about science fiction; **The American Shore**, a book-length analysis of Thomas M. Disch's short story "Angouleme"; the semi-autobiographical novel **Heavenly Breakfast**; and the Hugo-winning autobiography **The Motion of Light in Water**.

Samuel R. Delany is one of the few science fiction writers to have successfully infused a new vision on the genre. H.G. Wells and Robert A. Heinlein are his peers in that regard. Most of the innovations in the genre of the past thirty years owe at least some of their inspiration to Delany.

It is hard to imagine John Varley's groundbreaking fiction without Delany's example. It is even harder to imagine the existence of Cyberpunk, the dominant movement of the 1980s, without Delany. And most of the New Space Opera writers owe a debt to Delany if only for his embracing what was considered bad, derivative hackwork and shining it until it sparkled as brightly as any of sf's other sub-genres.

Not only is Samuel R. Delany one of the most important science fiction writers ever, but one of the best as well. We can only dream that he rises phoenix-like and resumes writing science fiction, as Theodore Sturgeon, Fritz Leiber and Ursula K Le Guin all did in earlier generations.

A Samuel R. Delany Chronology

1942	Born April 1 in New York City
1962	First novel The Jewels of Aptor published
1967	Babel-17 wins Nebula Award as Best Novel First short fiction "The Star Pit" published in <i>Worlds of Tomorrow</i>
1968	The Einstein Intersection wins Nebula Award as Best Novel "Aye and Gomorrah" wins Nebula Award as Best Short Story Publication of Nova "Lines of Power" appears in <i>F&SF</i>
1970	"Time Considered As A Helix of Semi-Precious Stones" wins Hugo and Nebula Awards Publication of The Fall of the Towers , containing the trilogy <i>Out of the Dead City</i> , <i>The Towers of Toron</i> , and <i>City of a Thousand Suns</i>
1971	First collection Driftglass published
1973	Voted 10 th best All-time Science Fiction Novelist in Locus poll
1975	Dhalgren published
1976	Triton published
1979	Publication of Tales of Nevèrÿon
1984	Publication of Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand
1989	The Motion of Light in Water wins Hugo Award as Best Nonfiction
1995	They Fly At Ciron published
2007	On Writing nominated for Hugo Award as Best Nonfiction

Listmania

The John W. Campbell Memorial Award was established in 1975 to honor the memory of Campbell, the long-time editor of **Astounding Stories** (whose title he changed to **Analog** in 1960). It is a juried award whose choices have generally fallen into the “traditional” end of the sf spectrum, although there have been a few notable exceptions, such as the very first winner, Barry Malzberg’s **Beyond Apollo**, whose self-doubting astronaut was an atypical protagonist for a novel associated with Campbell.

Because the Campbell Award is not selected by popular vote, many of the winners have been deserving novels which have not gotten as much acclaim as they often deserved. The following list of winners might serve as a good “Recommended Reading” list for serious sf fans.

Year	Winning novel	Author
1973	Beyond Apollo	Barry N. Malzberg
1974	(tie) Rendezvous with Rama / Malevil	Arthur C. Clarke / Robert Merle
1975	Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said	Philip K. Dick
1976	The Year of the Quiet Sun (published in 1970)	Wilson Tucker
1977	The Alteration	Kingsley Amis
1978	Gateway	Frederik Pohl
1979	Gloriana	Michael Moorcock
1980	On Wings of Song	Thomas M. Disch
1981	Timescape	Gregory Benford
1982	Riddley Walker	Russell Hoban
1983	Helliconia Spring	Brian W. Aldiss
1984	The Citadel of the Autarch	Gene Wolfe



1985	The Years of the City	Frederik Pohl
1986	The Postman	David Brin
1987	A Door into Ocean	Joan Slonczewski
1988	Lincoln's Dreams	Connie Willis
1989	Islands in the Net	Bruce Sterling
1990	The Child Garden	Geoff Ryman
1991	Pacific Edge	Kim Stanley Robinson
1992	Buddy Holly Is Alive and Well on Ganymede	Bradley Denton
1993	Brother to Dragons	Charles Sheffield
1994	No award	
1995	Permutation City	Greg Egan
1996	The Time Ships	Stephen Baxter
1997	Fairyland	Paul McAuley
1998	Forever Peace	Joe Haldeman
1999	Brute Orbits	George Zebrowski
2000	A Deepness in the Sky	Vernor Vinge
2001	Genesis	Poul Anderson
2002	(tie) Terraforming Earth /The Chronoliths	Jack Williamson / Robert Charles Wilson
2003	Probability Space	Nancy Kress
2004	Omega	Jack McDevitt
2005	Market Forces	Richard K. Morgan
2006	Mindscan	Robert J. Sawyer

Wondrous Stories

After I finished reading Stephen Baxter's superb collection **Resplendent** (reviewed in #112), I moved onto another "New Space Opera" collection, Alastair Reynolds' **Galactic North**. I began this series with high aspirations for several reasons: I really loved Reynolds' trilogy **Revelation Space, Redemption Ark** and **Absolution Gap**, to which this collection is closely related, and I have read several Reynolds' short stories previously and I enjoyed all of them a lot.

The first story in **Galactic North** was "Great Wall of Mars," which was the first Reynolds story I ever read a half-dozen years ago in a Gardner Dozois-edited **Year's Best Science Fiction**. The story has even more resonance now since it is the first story about Nevil Clavain, the main character in the **Revelation Space** trilogy. As the story opens, Clavain is on the side of the Coalition in their Cold War with the Conjoiners, those enhanced humans whose minds are interconnected almost like a hive mind. Clavain is on a diplomatic mission with a representative of the Demarchists, a third group of humans who remained neutral during the recent Coalition-Conjoiner war who hope to bring peace to the solar system.

Besides introducing several of the important characters in the series—such as Clavain, Galiana who is one of the Conjoiner leaders, and Felka, a brain-damaged Conjoiner child—this story also shows how Clavain, one of the leading members of the Coalition, is practically forced into the Conjoiner camp by the double-dealing of his brother Warren who seeks a resumption of the war more than the chance of peace.

"Great Wall of Mars" exhibits Reynolds' strength at telling a full story rich in technological development while keeping the pace moving briskly. This early story boded well both for Reynolds' career as a writer and for the rest of the collection.

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a pirate ship, and manages to not only fight them off but destroy the pirate ship itself. The only survivor is a Conjoiner who was a captive of the pirates. She is taken aboard the trading ship where one of the crew members—who are Ultras, humans who live exclusively on ships in space and have adapted to that lifestyle by becoming almost a distinct group of humans besides Conjoiners, Demarchists, and the Coalition—falls in love with the girl. The love affair was not totally convincing; Inigo, the Ultra, fell in love with Weather, the Conjoiner, much too easily, and he let his feelings cause a rift between him and his captain much too quickly. This process needed to be drawn out a bit more, and examined more in depth, to be totally successful.

However, accepting the depth of the romance, the story still had an exciting plot as the trading ship's engines were damaged in the battle with the pirate ship, and they were at risk from another approaching vessel unless Weather can somehow help them repair the engines, since all engines were built by Conjoiners who protect the secrets of their inner functions closely. There is also a scene of true humanity, one of Reynolds' best human interest scenes ever, when the ship's captain confronts his own prejudice against Conjoiners in a meeting with Weather. This scene was the highlight of the story, followed closely by the secret of the ship's engine, and made for a successful story overall.

Alastair Reynolds enjoys mixing genres, and the two genres he seems to enjoy the most are noir mysteries and horror fiction. Both novellas new to this collection "Grafenwalder's Bestiary" and "Nightingale" show strong elements of horror, but fortunately both stories are also stronger and deeper than the typical "fear for the sake of fear" of many horror stories.

"Grafenwalder's Bestiary" is the story of a collector of rare beings which he has gathered from the entire settled region of Reynolds' future history. The story has a Vancean quality as it tours what is in effect a freak show of Reynolds' future. Grafenwalder is part of a "circle" of collectors whose main *raison d'être* seems to be one-upping each other with the exotica gathered into their collections. Grafenwalder's main *objet d'art* is a denizen, a creature so renowned none of the collectors are sure whether it is real or a creature from legend.

This story is primarily mystery for its first two-thirds, as we wonder why Grafenwalder so desires a denizen, and how his arch-enemy will one-up him when he obtains one. The ending is a clever construction on Reynolds' part, combining equal parts horror and artistic justice, a fitting conclusion for a Vancean story.

"Nightingale" tells of a famous hospital ship which was a port of neutrality during a long interstellar war, a place where combatants from both sides went for healing before being returned to the war. Now, years later, a group of former combatants are returning to the ship seeking the body of the most infamous war criminal who is apparently hiding on the now nonfunctional ship. The middle portion of "Nightingale" is primarily horror, as the group travels through what borders on being a haunted ship, but it returns to mystery and an ending both gruesome and, like "Bestiary," fitting, with a strong anti-war message. Another good story.

The final story in the book is "Galactic North," which like the last story in Stephen Baxter's collection **Resplendent**, roams from the relatively-near future into the depths of eternity in its tale of two former lovers who became foes after being captured by space pirates when one of

them betrayed the other seemingly to save his own life. For various reasons both their intelligences are grafted into different spaceships, which leads to a chase through the millennia and ultimately a place in future legend for the starcrossed lovers. This is another romance by Reynolds and, while not the finest story in the book, it does provide a fitting coda for all the precedes it.

While **Galactic North** is not as stunning as Reynolds' three novels set in the same future, several of the stories fill in gaps in the future history, while others are fine stories regardless of what universe in which they are set. This collection reinforced my opinion of Alastair Reynolds as one of the finest current sf writers.

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Ironically, I am reviewing a book this issue with the same title *Forbidden Planets* as a book I reviewed in the last *Wondrous Stories*. Where the former book was an SFBC original theme anthology of 6 novellas, this book is the latest theme anthology edited by Peter Crowther. Crowther is one of the finest editors currently working in the f&sf field. He first achieved fame editing a series of original novella chapbooks for PS Publishing—several of which have been gathered in book form with titles such as **Cities** and **Futures**—before moving onto the quarterly prozine **Postscripts** and a wider range of books, including single author collections and novels.

Simultaneously, he has edited an annual series of original theme anthologies for DAW Books with titles **Moon Shot**, **Mars Probe**, **Constellations** and now **Forbidden Planets**. The previous collections have all garnered positive reviews, and provided more than their fair share of recommended short fiction. The premise of this collection is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1956 movie *Forbidden Planets*. My initial thought reading the book was bemusement that nearly all the authors in the book expressed considerable fondness for the movie, going so far as to credit it as a major influence on them as sf writers. Certainly *Forbidden Planet* was one of the more interesting sf movies of the 1950s, one of a few that broke the mold of sf movies treating sf as either horror or thriller movies having as much depth as the first thin sheet of winter ice on a pond (other exceptions being *The Day The Earth Stood Still* and the two George Pal movies of H.G. Wells novels *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*). But as science fiction, the movie was little more than a typical **Analog**-style planetary mystery in which a group of spacemen land on some forgotten planet and spend 30 pages trying to decipher exactly what-the-heck is happening here?

By comparison, 2006 is also the 50th anniversary of Alfred Bester's landmark novel **The Stars My Destination** in its original serialization in **Galaxy**, but I have not seen any tributes to that fabulous novel. Now granted, I am prejudiced since Alfred Bester was one of my favorite sf writers during my personal "Golden Age" in the 1960s, and **The Stars My Destination** is still one of my all-time favorite novels. But does the movie *Forbidden Planets* really deserve memorialization with two 50th anniversary collections while **The Stars My Destination** deserves none?

Putting aside that quibble, I found the overall quality of the anthology **Forbidden Planets** worthwhile reading, if several of the stories had little, if anything, to do with the source material

(which is not necessarily a bad thing for any theme anthology).

The first two stories I read were two of the better stories, not surprisingly since they were written by two of sf's current superstars: "Dreamers' Lake," by Stephen Baxter, and "Tiger, Burning," by Alastair Reynolds. While both authors are considered writers of "New Space Opera," their stories are very different in both intent and execution. Reynolds is perhaps the finest creator of wondrous futures, and his stories push the outer limits of technological development. "Tiger, Burning" uses the relatively new science of branes (which, as simply as possible, are parallel universes to our own which occasionally brush against our universe, causing "big bangs") and how humans might possibly explore and settle them in the future. Like much of his fiction, the story is primarily a mystery.

Baxter, on the other hand, does not use technological ideas quite as cutting-edge as Reynolds does, but his storytelling is more involving and he tends to examine big philosophical ideas which leave both the characters and the reader deep in thought. "Dreamers' Lake" is concerned with non-thinking lifeforms which nevertheless have feelings, and how this impacts on a group of scientists visiting a world all of whose lifeforms are soon to be demolished by a crashing meteor.

Matthew Hughes' "Passion Ploy" is a typical Hughes story, a lighthearted Vancean adventure about a con artist trying to carry out a sale which causes ramifications far beyond his control. The underlying theme of the story is greed and its occasional unintentional effects. Good, light fun.

Jay Lake's "Lehr, Rex," a rather cheesy title blatantly pointing at Shakespeare as well as movie **Forbidden Planet**, tells an interesting planetary adventure about a space captain named Lehr who fancies himself king of a planet occupied by his crew. It reminds me of an old A. Bertram Chandler story, and competes fairly well on that basis.

Paul McAuley's "Dust," tells of an attempted rescue of stranded explorers on an inhospitable planet which turns into a trap instead. I was not impressed by the ending, too much about inevitability rather than the actions of the protagonists resolving anything, but otherwise the story was interesting.

Ian McDonald is one of the finest writers of contemporary sf, but occasionally he stumbles when his playful language and love of exoticism overwhelm the story itself. In such stories I find myself reading sentences and descriptions written in such a pell-mell manner that the story, whatever it might be, gets totally lost beneath. That was my opinion of "Kyle Meets the River," which was enjoyable reading but, ultimately, enjoyable words about nothing much at all.

The final story in the book is a novelet "Me·Topia," by Adam Roberts, which has some very strange premises: a group of neanderthal scientists in a spacecraft abruptly crash on the surface of a planet which seemingly appeared out of nowhere directly in front of their ship. The scientists behave in a totally non-scientific manner while periodically reminding themselves that they are scientists in spite of being neanderthals (evolved neanderthals who apparently have anxiety about not being truly intelligent, something I cannot imagine modern humans ever

doing), and the world has a sun which rises in the west and sets in the east, while the night stars do not move at all.

All this strangeness give the story a sense of not being taken seriously by the author, but in fact it is a gripping scientific mystery which was probably the most interesting story in the book overall. It does reach a conclusion, albeit a not very scientific one, and raises a few questions about the nature of modern humans as well.

Overall, **Forbidden Planets** resembled a good issue of a prozine. What held it back from being truly outstanding was the lack of a single top-notch story, but overall it was a typical Peter Crowther quality anthology, which I recommend.

So where is the memorial to **The Stars My Destination**?

*

I had a four-day weekend recently during which I indulged myself in one of my very favorite authors, Jack McDevitt. *Infinity Beach* is not part of his *Alex Benedict* series, but it is still a far-future sf mystery with all the ingredients which push my entertainment buttons:

- ▶ the mystery is basically historical in nature, although while the *Alex Benedict* stories involve mysteries hundreds of years old, this one is only two decades in the past, but solving the mystery requires the same type of historical research as McDevitt's other novels;
- ▶ the far-future setting is fascinating enough to be wondrous without being so intentionally cutting-edge as to be slightly offsetting in its strangeness; for me, at least, too much deliberate strangeness interferes with my ability to relate to the book's main characters and their world;
- ▶ there is almost a total lack of action/adventure, nor any thriller aspect to the novel; all of the mystery's thrills all come from its thoughtfulness;
- ▶ I love sf stories based on passionate people, whether artists or scientists; **Infinity Beach** concerns space exploration, specifically the search for extraterrestrial lifeforms, a topic McDevitt used previously in **The Hercules Text**.

Kim Brandywine is a scientist serving as a public relations spokesperson for a scientific organization, one of whose main functions is seeking nonhuman life. Twenty years ago, a small expedition of four people returned from such a mission, and immediately afterwards two of the crew vanished mysteriously while a third died in an equally-mysterious explosion. One of the crew who vanished was Kim's older sister Emily.

For two decades Kim has missed her sister terribly, but never considered pursuing her disappearance until a former professor contacts Kim with circumstantial evidence that the mission actually did encounter something alien, but for some reason chose to repress it. At first

Kim makes a half-hearted attempt to investigate, but as the circumstantial evidence grows stronger, so does Kim's determination to learn what really happened on the mission, and why her sister vanished as well. Typical of a McDevitt book, the mystery slowly unpeels like an onion, growing more gripping as it does. As Kim learns more and more about her sister's mysterious disappearance, she also begins to unravel what exactly happened on the ship's mission to seek extraterrestrial life.

The novel is not perfect. Some of Kim's information comes a bit too easily, and at times the consequences of her actions should be stronger than they actually are. Nor is the characterization terrific, but that seems to be an overall weakness with space operas in general, shared with McDevitt by the likes of Alastair Reynolds and Stephen Baxter. All these flaws fade away under McDevitt's strong storytelling ability and his talent for combining a gripping historical mystery with steadily-growing sense of wonder.

What is most impressive about **Infinity Beach** is how naturally both the mystery and the growing sense of wonder converge at the same point, achieving a joint emotional and successful denouement to all that happened previously. It is easy to see why McDevitt novels are a regular presence on the Nebula Best Novel lists. He is perhaps the finest pure storyteller working both the traditional end of the sf spectrum and the sf/mystery overlap. He might not have the range of a Poul Anderson, but his novels provide just as much satisfaction. I recommend this novel as highly as his *Alex Benedict* novels.

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Naomi Novik made quite a splash in the f&sf genre a year ago with the publication of three novels in three consecutive months which combined C.S. Forrester's *Horatio Hornblower* with Anne McCaffrey's *Pern*. Their premise was that most nations' military during the Napoleonic Wars included an Air Force consisting of dragons. A few sub-species of dragons had their own natural weapons of breathing fire or spitting acid, but most of them were the equivalent of carriers and bombers, hovering above ships and land forces dropping bombs on the enemy below.

The first novel is *Her Majesty's Dragon*, although it had the title **Temeraire** in England, a title which now serves as the composite title of the Science Fiction Book Club edition which gathers all three novels under one cover. As the novel begins, a British navy ship is engaged in battle with a French ship, but the battle's outcome is foreordained by the terrible condition of the French ship and its occupants, so that the British defeat them easily. After taking the ship, the British forces find a box hidden in the ship's bowels which contains the ship's treasure: a huge dragon egg. This is a rare find since dragons are not numerous and the French forces have many more fighting dragons than the British and their allies have. The egg is taken aboard the British ship where the ship's surgeon realizes it is close to hatching. This is important since newly-hatched dragons typically bond irrevocably with the first person they see. So a ship's officer is chosen by lot to wait for the egg to hatch, after which he will become the dragon's mate and forcibly leave naval service to become an aviator.

But the dragon rejects the anxious youth and instead stalks across the deck, stopping in front of

Laurence, the ship's captain. They bond, and Laurence has no choice but to turn over the captaincy of the ship to his second-in-command, and begin the process of becoming an aviator.

Her Majesty's Dragon is pleasant reading overall. While it is ostensibly a military novel, fighting actually occupies a small portion of the novel, and the majority of it can best be described as "a man and his dragon". While Laurence is the novel's main character, the story is dominated by Temeraire, a highly-intelligent, English-speaking dragon. In fact, Temeraire is too perfect to be totally believable. Like all dragons, he is born already totally aware and fully-speaking (something to do with absorbing language while in the egg). Not only is he as intelligent as Laurence, but he is a voracious learner, who unfortunately is unable to read books because he cannot turn pages with his huge claws, so Laurence spends many long evenings reading to him. What they often read are books too complex for Laurence himself to comprehend, such as a book on Laplace Transforms, so that while Laurence does the actual reading, it is often Temeraire who serves the role of teacher.

While this aspect of dragon intelligence seemingly from the moment of its birth is unbelievable, I was able to accept it since it simplified the story by freeing the author of the need to ground the novel's first half in raising a dragon baby. But that is not the book's only simplification, rather a template for the entire novel. For example, Laurence was a devoted navy man, having risen to captain while fairly young, and throwing all that away to become the nursemaid for a dragon should be a somewhat traumatic change (which even he realizes at the outset of his switch to aviator). But we see no trauma at all. Almost from their first day together, Laurence and Temeraire are like an old married couple (even to the extent that Laurence nearly always addresses the dragon as "dear"). There is no emotional tugging in Laurence, nor is there any emotional growth or development in his feelings toward Temeraire. Novik needed the "man and his dragon" aspect for her novel, so it happened immediately and without any equivocation on Laurence's part. His dragon is his all, so much so that he immediately attacks anybody, either verbally or physically, who dares to say anything less than wonderful about Temeraire. Alas, this is not characterization, it is simplification.

I have a few other complaints: for a novel set during the Napoleonic Wars, there is very little sense of either place or time in the novel. Novik so devotes herself to watching Laurence and Temeraire that she ignores the wonders of the early 19th century world surrounding them. Even the plotting is paper-thin: Napoleon wants to invade Europe, so the dragons are training to defend the isles against him; and the story's one attempt at a true villain's identity is telegraphed almost from his first appearance.

And yet, after all these complaints, in one late scene in which a dragon actually dies, I was genuinely touched, moreso than I am in most novels entirely about humans. I am still not sure if that was because of the author's successful manipulation of my emotions, or the pet lover in me being affected by those damned dragons!

Overall **Her Majesty's Dragon** was enjoyable in spite of its weaknesses, ideal for late nights after a long day of work. Since this was Novik's first novel, there is hope she will grow as a writer so that subsequent novels in the series will show increased emotional depth and plot development. For now, I enjoyed the ride upon a dragon's back and will be better prepared for

the next novel with lesser expectations than I had for this one considering all its critical hype.

*

I have always loved novellas more than any other length for all the traditional reasons: they are long enough to create a fleshed-out world with strong characters and an intricate plot, yet without all the padding that makes so many (although obviously not all) novels 20% lean meat embedded in 80% fat. In fact, I generally prefer “mosaic” novels which are groupings of several novellas/novelettes set in the same milieu, each exploring one facet of a created world, while all of them together form a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts.

My science fiction collection is not immense compared to many other longtime fans, but it does contain several outstanding collections of novellas. The highlight is the two-volume **Science Fiction Hall of Fame**, edited by Ben Bova, and containing 22 novellas which were the top vote-getters by the SFWA honoring science fiction published prior to the inauguration of the Nebula Awards in 1965. Other anthologies include two edited by Robert Silverberg, the relatively short **Great Short Novels of Science Fiction** (6 novellas) and the longer **Arbor House Treasury of Great Science Fiction Short Novels** (15 novellas). An interesting fact is that all three books contain different novellas written by Jack Vance, none of which are his most famous novellas “The Dragon Masters” and “The Last Castle.”

Other gatherings of novellas include Isaac Asimov & Martin Greenberg’s series **Mammoth Book of (fill in the adjective) Science Fiction**, running from the 1930s through the 1970s, containing 10 novellas each. Gardner Dozois joined the bandwagon with **Modern Classic Short Novels of Science Fiction** (13 novellas), as did Terry Carr with **Great Science Fiction Short Novels of the Year** (6 novellas). Recently Jonathan Strahan has edited a series of **Best Short Novels**, from 2004 through 2007 having 9-10 novellas each.

More? In the 1970s it was fashionable for publishers to release original anthologies containing 3 novellas each. I have such anthologies edited by Terry Carr (**An Exaltation of Stars**) and Robert Silverberg (**Three for Tomorrow, The Day the Earth Stood Still, The Threads of Time, Chains of the Sea, The New Atlantis, The Crystal Ship** and **Triax**). Recently the Science Fiction Book Club has revived that trend, although with 6 novellas each (**Between Worlds, Down These Dark Spaceways, One Million B.C.,** and **Forbidden Planets**).

There are many other novellas in my collection; in fact, the 23 volumes of Gardner Dozois’ **Best Science Fiction of the Year** generally contain 2-4 novellas each. Just counting the volumes listed above, there are nearly 200 classic novellas in my collection (with some overlap, of course) eager to be reread. And why not? Sometimes it’s easy to get so hung up trying to keep up with new science fiction that the classic stuff gets shoved into a corner and forgotten.

Recently I got an urge to reread some of those classic novellas. I guess the inspiration started when I reread Samuel R. Delany’s “Empire Star” in **The Space Opera Renaissance** (also reviewed here last issue). What a great novella that was, although it set a standard that few classic novellas could possibly maintain. Still, last week I arbitrarily selected Volume Two B of **The Science Fiction Hall of Fame**, and picked out two novellas to read. Coincidentally, both of

them were later expanded into book form, one as part of a four-volume “fix-up,” and the other expanded into novel form.

The first novella was James Blish’s “Earthman, Go Home,” part of his fabulous *Okie* series about gypsy cities which travel through space looking for work. I read the entire series 30 years ago, but not surprisingly I recall few of the specifics about it. In this novella, one such city’s spindizzies (the pseudo-scientific basis for the cities’ ability to travel through space) finally fail and the city is forced to make permanent landfall on a colonized world. Not only do colonies distrust such visitors, but there are intergalactic police which frown on Okies invading colonized worlds.

“Earthman, Come Home” is a combination problem-solving story (How do the Okies deal with the threat from the police since they are unable to leave the world?) and mystery (What is the origin of the world’s colonists and what are they hiding from the Okies?). The solution is fairly easy, more typical of 50s sf than of recent stuff, but it was enjoyable reading.

The other novella was James H. Schmitz’ “The Witches of Karres,” whose title sounds like a fantasy, but in fact was pure science fiction. When a few months ago I was reading old issues of **Analog** from the late 1960s I enjoyed several Schmitz stories, particularly “The Tuvela,” (which was released in book form as **The Demon Breed**), and I have fond memories of the novel version of “Witches.” This is the story of a space captain of a one-man trading vessel who on one of the worlds of the star-spanning empire encounters three very young witches Maleen, Goth, and the Leewit, all of whom are slaves. They are each treated badly by their owners although, because of their supernatural talents, they successfully torment their owners as well. Feeling sorry for them, the captain purchases all three witches with the intent of returning them to their world of Karres.

The trip to Karres turns into quite an adventure since Goth is a kleptomaniac who keeps stealing riches for the captain as repayment for his purchasing them. Overall, this novella is an antic romp, whose rapid pace and exoticism are reminiscent of Jack Vance at his best (although “The Witches of Karres” was originally published in 1949, while Vance did not make his first big splash in the genre until the publication of **The Dying Earth** in 1950). This was a much less serious story than “Earthman, Come Home,” but deliberately so and it succeeded excellently in its intent.

Next I switched to **Arbor House Treasury of Great Science Fiction Short Novels** for A. Bertram Chandler’s “Giant Killer,” since I have also been reading back issues of **Worlds of IF** from the 1960s and I enjoyed his serial “Edge of Night” (published in book form under the abysmal title **Contraband from Otherspace**). “Giant Killers” is Chandler’s most famous non-Grimes story, the tale of intelligent rat-like creatures living in the walls of a house inhabited by giant human-like beings. The rats live in tribes which fight amongst themselves while fearing the Giants living “inside” the building. The main character was born a “Different One” who normally would have been killed by the tribe and eaten. Instead he escapes and becomes one of the “New People,” outcast mutants who shun their fellow rats as much as they do the Giants.

The main character was named Shrick at birth, but NoFur among the New People because of his

body's hairlessness. When he encounters Wesel, who is seemingly normal and thus should be killed by the New People (who kill normals just as the normals kill Different Ones), her mutant mental abilities convince NoFur to keep her, and together they challenge the leader of the New People, kill him in battle, and become the leaders of the tribe. This leads to a war against all the other tribes, as NoFur attempts to become "Lord of the Outside."

While "Giant Killer" seems destined to be a glorified sword-and-sorcery story, it changes direction abruptly when Wesel is captured by one of the Giants who prepares to dissect her as an experimental subject. Her ability to prophesize the future opens up the story into a much bigger, more thoughtful one involving the fate of the New People when the Giants realize they are overrun with vermin. What began as a fairly routine adventure grows into a taut, well-plotted thriller about survival and the inevitable fate when small encounters big. This was a better story than Chandler's John Grimes stories, some of which were very good as well. But it is nice to be reminded that he was able to write serious fiction as well as adventure stories.

The In-Box

Alexiad / Lisa & Joseph Major / 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204-2040 / very regular reviewzine concerned with sf, nonfiction, horse racing and candy! Joe is a current Hugo nominee for his book **Heinlein's Children**

Argentus / Steven Silver / 707 Sapling Lane, Deerfield, IL 60015-3969 / shsilver@sfsite.com / <http://www.efanzines.com> / genzine

Askance / John Purcell / <http://www.efanzines.com> / new genzine replacing his personalzine **In a Prior Lifetime**

As the Crow Flies / Frank Denton / 14654 - 8th Ave. S.W., Seattle, WA 98166 / personalzine

Ben's Beat / Ben Indick, 428 Sagamore Ave., Teaneck, NJ 07666 / personalzinewith an emphasis on plays and books

Celtic Seasons / Rita & Richard Shader / 2593 Chapparal Drive, Melbourne, FL 32934-8275 / fascinating glimpses of Scottish history and culture

Challenger / The Zine Dump / Guy H. Lillian III / P.O. Box 53092, New Orleans, LA 70153-3092 / www.challzine.net / one of the finest genzines being published, currently nominated for a Hugo Award as Best Fanzine for the 8th time

The Drink Tank / Chris Garcia / www.efanzine.com / perhaps the most regular online personalzine. Nominated for a Hugo Award, as was Garcia as Best Fan Writer

File 770 / Mike Glycer / <http://www.efanzines.com> / 705 Valley View Ave., Monrovia, CA 01016

/ fannish news and reviews

For The Clerisy / Brant Kresovich / P.O. Box 404, Getzville, NY 14068 / perhaps the most interesting

It Goes on the Shelf / Ned Brooks / 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, GA 30047-4720 / book reviews

The Knarley Knews / Henry Welch / 1525 16th Ave., Grafton, WI 53024-2017 / ever-faithful genzine; Knarley spumes, Sue Welch travels, and Terry Jeeves' memoirs

Lofgeornost / Fred Lerner / 81 Worcester Ave., White River Junction, VT 05001 / personalzine with a penchant for international travel

Opuntia / Dale Speirs / Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2E7 / reviews, articles, and letters by one of the finest current fanwriters

Peregrine Nations / Janine Stinson / <http://www.efanzines.com> / PO Box 248, Eastlake, MI 49626-0248 / genzine including book reviews and lots of locs

Pixel / David Burton / 5227 Emma Drive, Lawrence, IN 46236-2742 / <http://www.efanzines.com> / genzine

The Resplendent Fool / Tom Sadler / 422 W. Maple Ave, Adrian, MI 49221-1627 / welcome return of a long-dormant genzine (under a new title)

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

Southern Fandom Confederation Bulletin / R.B. Cleary / 470 Ridge Road, Birmingham, AL 35206-2816 / clubzine with news, conreports and reviews

Vanamonde / John Hertz / 236 S. Coronado St., No 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057 / two-page APAzine with brief comments on a variety of interesting topics. John is a Hugo nominee as Best Fan Writer

On the Lighter Side

The following jokes are courtesy of Bob 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, her husband 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."

*

Three men died and went to heaven. Heaven had a new policy that whatever good or bad things a

person did in his or her life, he, or she, would get a car accordingly. When the first man arrived, an angel asked him, "How many years were you married?"

The first man responded, "Twenty years."

"How many times did you cheat on your wife?"

"Five times," the man said.

"Okay," the angel said, "you can go in but you will only get a Fiat."

As the first man drove away in his Fiat, the second man arrived.

"How many years were you married, young man?" the angel asked.

"Ten years."

"How many times did you cheat on your wife?"

"Two times," he responded.

"Well done. Here is your Volvo S40."

As the second man drove away, the third man arrived. He was a very old man.

The angel asked him, "How many years were you married, old man?"

"Forty years."

"And how many times did you cheat on your wife?"

"Never."

The angel smiled and held out a set of shining keys. "Excellent, Here is your Jaguar 2000."

One day in heaven, the first and second men were driving and they came across the old man, who

was crying and really depressed. They went over and asked him why he was very sad even though he had a very nice car. He told them that he just saw his wife and she was on rollerblades.