



## #118: Wondrous Stories



# Visions of Paradise

## #118: Wondrous Stories

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#### Artwork

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# *Shapers of Science Fiction*

## Leigh Brackett

One of the staples of the science fiction and fantasy genres is sword-and-sorcery. Its swashbuckling characters race through frenzied plots which are often little more than an endless series of colorful adventures, daring rescues, and exciting sword fights. This sub-genre's major influences include Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Barsoom* novels, Robert E. Howard's tales of *Conan the Barbarian*, C.S. Forrester's *Horatio Hornblower* novels, and Leigh Brackett's tales of *Eric John Stark*.

Although Leigh Brackett's first genre publication was in **Astounding Stories** in 1940, she soon switched to **Planet Stories** and **Thrilling Wonder Stories**, two publications where her exciting "science fantasies" were a more natural fit. In 1949 she began her colorful Eric John Stark series set on fantastic versions of Mars and Venus similar to Edgar Rice Burroughs' images of those planets. Her original novellas, such as *The Secret of Sinharat*, *Enchantress of Venus*, and *People of the Talisman* were colorful adventures much more literate than anything written by Burroughs. Brackett was also a master of imagery, immersing the reader in the feel of exotic, wondrous worlds. When she resumed the series in 1974, scientific plausibility made it impossible to continue it on those same two planets. Instead she set **The Ginger Star**, **The Hounds of Skaith**, and **The Reavers of Skaith** on the imaginary planet Skaith.

Leigh Brackett was an immediate influence on at least two other important science fiction writers. In 1941 she met the young Ray Bradbury. She soon became his advisor and teacher, helping him immensely in his fledgling writing career. In 1946 their collaborative story, "Lorelei of the Red Mist," was published in **Planet Stories**, one of the finest stories ever published in that magazine. It has since been reprinted in **The Best of Planet Stories**, edited by Brackett in 1975.

In 1946 Brackett married science fiction writer Edmond Hamilton, which influenced both their writing. One tangible result was that Hamilton expanded *The Secret of Sinharat* and *People of the Talisman* into novels which were published together in one volume as **Eric John Stark: Outlaw of Mars**.

Perhaps Brackett's best works were published in the late 1940s and early 1950s when she released her most successful novels, the space opera **The Sword of Rhiannon**, and the optimistic post-holocaust novel **The Long Tomorrow**. Much of her best short fiction was published in **The Best of Leigh Brackett** in 1977.

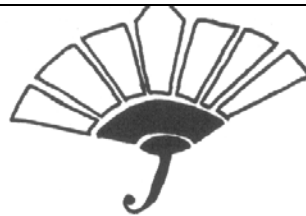
However, by the mid-1950s Leigh Brackett became a victim of her own versatility. Her first published novel had been a hard-boiled detective novel **No Good From A Corpse**, published in 1943. It led to a screenwriting role, which became her major writing career for the next twenty-five years. She authored or co-authored screenplays for such acclaimed movies as *The Big Sleep* (1946 with William Faulkner), *Rio Bravo* (1958), *Hatari!* (1962), *The Long Goodbye* (1973), and

*The Empire Strikes Back* (1979). By 1955 Brackett's screenwriting commitments took up so much of her writing time that she did little science fiction afterwards, until she returned to Eric John Stark in the 1970s.

Leigh Brackett was one of the most multi-talented writers to work in the science fiction genre. She wrote successful space operas, swashbucklers, detective novels, screenplays, even a western novel. Her death in 1978 was a stunning blow and a major loss for the genre. A major retrospective of her finest work is long overdue from one of the sf specialty publishers.

## A Leigh Brackett Chronology

1915	Born December 7, in Los Angeles, California
1940	First publication "Martian Quest" in <b>Astounding</b>
1943	Publication of first novel <b>No Good From A Corpse</b>
1946	Marries SF author Edmond Hamilton Co-authors screenplay for <b>The Big Sleep</b> with William Faulkner Publication of "Lorelei of the Red Mist," collaboration with Ray Bradbury, in <i>Planet Stories</i>
1949	<b>The Secret of Sinharat</b> published in <i>Planet Stories</i> <b>The Sword of Rhiannon</b> published in <i>Thrilling Wonder Stories</i>
1955	<b>The Long Tomorrow</b> published
1964	<b>Follow the Free Wind</b> Wins Western Writers of America Spur Award for Best Novel Guest of Honor at Oakland World Science Fiction Convention
1967	First collection <b>The Coming of the Terrans</b> published
1974	<b>The Ginger Star</b> published
1975	Edits <b>The Best of Planet Stories</b>
1977	<b>The Best of Leigh Brackett</b> published
1978	Co-authors screenplay of <i>The Empire Strikes Back</i> Dies March 24.



# Listmania

I have been a faithful reader of **Locus** since 1971, and I consider it indispensable to the science fiction field for its breadth of news, interviews, and reviews. In recent years the growth of the internet has lessened **Locus**' indispensability because of the growing number of review and news outlets available. But **Locus** still serves a purpose, and one of them is its large number of readers who participate in annual polls whose results are often more representative of the core science fiction readership than the Hugo and Nebula Awards are.

In 1998 and 1999, **Locus**'s annual poll included several categories of Best All-time Science Fiction and Fantasy (restricting the results to works published prior to 1990, believing that recent works were too fresh in the voters' memories to make reliable judgments about). The categories included Best SF Novel, Fantasy Novel, Anthology, Collection, Novella, and Short Story.

While these results are certainly not definitive, they are interesting as a Required Reading lists of great science fiction. All the results are posted at the *Locus Online* website, but I will reprint several categories here in future issues of *Wondrous Stories*.

## Best All-Time Science Fiction Novel (Prior to 1990)

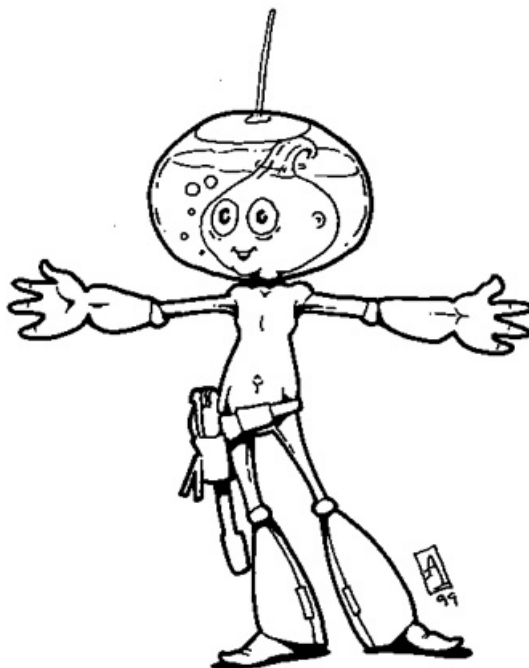
1	Dune	Frank Herbert
2	The Moon is a Harsh Mistress	Robert A. Heinlein
3	The Left Hand of Darkness	Ursula K. Le Guin
4	The Foundation Trilogy	Isaac Asimov
5	Stranger in a Strange Land	Robert A. Heinlein
6	The Stars My Destination	Alfred Bester
7	A Canticle for Leibowitz	Walter M. Miller Jr
8	Childhood's End	Arthur C. Clarke
9	Ender's Game	Orson Scott Card
10	Hyperion	Dan Simmons
11	Gateway	Frederik Pohl
12	The Forever War	Joe Haldeman
13	More Than Human	Theodore Sturgeon
14	Lord of Light	Roger Zelazny
15	Neuromancer	William Gibson

16	Startide Rising	David Brin
17	The Time Machine	H.G. Wells
18	The Man in the High Castle	Philip K. Dick
19	The Dispossessed	Ursula K. Le Guin
20	Stand on Zanzibar	John Brunner
21	1984	George Orwell
22	The Demolished Man	Alfred Bester
23	The Martian Chronicles	Ray Bradbury
24	Starship Troopers	Robert A. Heinlein
25*	Downbelow Station	C.J. Cherryh
25*	Ringworld	Larry Niven
27	2001: A Space Odyssey	Arthur C. Clarke
28	The War of the Worlds	H.G. Wells
29	Fahrenheit 451	Ray Bradbury
30	The Mote in God's Eye	Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle
31	Way Station	Clifford D. Simak
32	Star Maker	Olaf Stapledon
33	Dying Inside	Robert Silverberg
34	The City and the Stars	Arthur C. Clarke
35	Dhalgren	Samuel R. Delany
36	Rendezvous with Rama	Arthur C. Clarke
37	Mission of Gravity	Hal Clement
38*	City	Clifford D. Simak
38*	Cyteen	C.J. Cherryh
40	Flowers for Algernon	Daniel Keyes
41*	Double Star	Robert A. Heinlein
41*	Earth Abides	George R. Stewart
43*	The Door Into Summer	Robert A. Heinlein

43*	Last and First Men	Olaf Stapledon
43*	Ubik	Philip K. Dick
46*	Norstrilia	Cordwainer Smith
46*	The Witches of Karres	James H. Schmitz
48*	Frankenstein	Mary Shelley
48*	Have Space Suit __ Will Travel	Robert A. Heinlein
48*	Time Enough for Love	Robert A. Heinlein
51	Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?,	Philip K. Dick
52*	The Gods Themselves	Isaac Asimov
52*	<i>Riverworld</i> series	Philip Jose Farmer

\* means two works were tied in points received

Of my personal ranking of the top 12 sf novels (which were published here in VoP #105), 8 were sf published prior to 1990, but only 5 made the above list: **Lord of Light**, **Gateway**, **The Stars My Destination**, **Way Station** and **Dying Inside**. The unfortunate 3 were Robert Silverberg's **Nightwings**, Orson Scott Card's **Speaker for the Dead** (which I consider far superior to **Ender's Game**, which did make the above list), and Michael Bishop's **No Enemy But Time**. It just goes to show how many outstanding sf novels have been published over the decades.



# *Wondrous Stories*

For over a decade I have been reading excellent reviews of Iain M. Banks' *Culture* novels, many describing it as intelligent, thoughtful, literary space opera. Since that covers both ends of the sf spectrum, Banks was one of the first authors I decided to read when I began looking for new futuristic sf about a year ago. Since the back cover blurb of **Look To Windward** described it as "an excellent hopping-on point," it seemed as good a place as any for me to start.

The Culture is a vast, sprawling agglomeration of worlds with 31 trillion inhabitants which eight centuries ago inadvertently sparked a devastating civil war among the Chelgrians. Relations between the two are still fragile, although generally-peaceful. **Windward** is set on the Mاسaq' Hub, a huge orbital structure which resembles a ringworld and contains 50 billion inhabitants. Among them are two nonhuman visitors: Kabe is a journalist sending back regular observations to his homeworld; and Ziller is a Chelgrian composer who defected to the Culture. The two of them are told that a Chelgrian ship is approaching Mاسaq' Hub containing an emissary whose assumed purpose is convincing Ziller to return home. What they do not realize is that the emissary is carrying in his brain the mind of a dead general from that 800-year ago war.

**Look to Windward** is a very introspective novel, using the characters' thoughts and conversations to develop both their personalities and the universe of the Culture itself. The novel is paced very deliberately, its main concern being to use its plot to develop both the setting and its many inhabitants, both humans and fascinating nonhumans. While the pace lends itself to depth and thoughtfulness, it never slows down or holds up the story, a talent not all writers of such serious fiction possess.

The main storyline running through the novel is a mystery based around one question: why is there so much secrecy in Major Quilan's mission to convince Ziller to return to Chel, when it seems so straightforward on the surface? Interwoven into the main events is a series of scenes examining Quilan's past, including how he was chosen for the mission to the Culture, but even this portion does not get to the root of the mystery for several hundred pages.

**Look to Windward** contains considerable sense of wonder in its rich and exotic universe, and much depth in the nature of its inhabitants. An examination of religious belief is a major focus of the novel, and much of the underlying rationale of the plot is in the nature of a jihad. Interestingly, **Windward** was published in 2000, a year before 9/11, and Banks himself lives in Scotland, so I suspect its impetus springs from the struggles in Northern Ireland rather than in the Middle East.

As the novel progresses, the tension increases steadily, but Banks wisely resists the urge to succumb to the type of mindless thriller which is so popular, but which I find ultimately boring. Instead **Windward's** climax is as deliberate and thought-provoking as the rest of the novel and, in my opinion, succeeds totally.



**Look to Windward** succeeds on nearly every level, and I feel confident it will appeal to all readers who enjoy literate, thought-provoking science fiction set in an exotic future. It is one of those rare novels that successfully combines sense of wonder with successful plotting, characterization and considerable thoughtfulness. Since I began my search for wondrous science fiction approximately one year ago, I have been thrilled to discover works by Alastair Reynolds, Stephen Baxter, Jack McDevitt, and now Iain M. Banks, who might be the finest writer of the group. I await more *Culture* novels eagerly.

\*

In lieu of subscribing to prozines—which tied down so much of my reading that it left me little time for books—I read several best-of-the-year and original anthologies each year. Recently two new publishers issued anthologies of stories mostly by their own writers, Pyr’s **Fast Forward** and **The Solaris Book of New Science Fiction**. I bought the latter book because most of its authors are less-familiar British names, and it’s always nice to try new authors.

I started the book reading a story by one of my favorite current authors. Stephen Baxter is seemingly omnipresent in every anthology published nowadays, and his story “Last Contact” is a quintessentially-British story about a cozy end-of-the-world, in which the main characters are primarily concerned with having time to care for their garden before the end comes, as compared to a similar American story which would probably descend into hysteria and violence. Although the story was basically pointless beyond displaying the advantages of calmness in the most violent-prone situations, it was pleasant-enough reading.

Mike Resnick and David Gerrold combined for “Jellyfish,” which for nearly half its length seemed little more than a spoof on the nature of science fiction writers. It was not until the authors started dropping a bunch of names and descriptions obviously based on specific famous sf writers that it dawned on me that the title character was a spoof as well, so I checked back on his name—“Dillon K. Filk. The K stood for Kurvis”—and I belatedly realized this story was not merely a spoof on all sf writers, but specifically a satire on Philip K. Dick. That has been done several times before, perhaps most notably in Michael Bishop’s superb novel **The Secret Ascension (Philip K. Dick is Dead, Alas)** which is a heavy shadow to crawl out under from. While Resnick and Gerrold did a decent job of satire, it was hard to see where the emotional stake in this story was. A good tribute should have some depth besides mere cleverness.

Paul DiFilippo’s major strength as a writer is also his major weakness: his imagination is so fertile that his stories tend to run all-over-the-place, sometimes even changing direction abruptly between start and finish. You never know what to expect in one of his stories, some of which are clever but shallow, while others show surprising depth. “Personal Jesus” posits that everybody in the world is permanently connected to personal *godpods*, which enable them to talk directly to God. Because of this, the world has become virtually idyllic as God advises people while also keeping them emotionally stable. The story was cute until a totally unexpected ending gave it a much tangier bite than I expected, and a fairly successful bite at that. I cannot say much more without giving away the ending, except perhaps that the moral of the story is TANSTAAFL.

Three stories stood out as my favorites in the book.

Mary A. Turzillo's "Zora and the Land Ethic Nomads" was a fairly traditional story. Turzillo is one of those writers whose stories appear very infrequently, but when one does it is inevitably a notable event. One of her novelettes, "Mars is No Place for Children" was a Nebula Winner in 2000, and this latest is another story about the difficulties of settling Mars. It is a strong adventure about how a radical Land Ethic Nomad tries to drive off-planet all settlers by seemingly sabotaging their nuclear plants. In some ways it reminded me of Cyril M. Kornbluth & Judith Merrill's 1951 serial **Mars Child** (which has been republished under several lesser titles since) in that it combined strong plotting (Kornbluth) with sensitive characterization (Merrill), but Turzillo seems to have the entire package. This story intrigued me enough that I looked up Turzillo's bibliography. Besides a handful of short stories, she has published one serial *An Old Fashioned Martian Girl* in **Analog** which, unless my search engines fail me, has never had a book publication. That seems very strange for a Nebula winner. I recommend this story highly.

I was a big fan of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. One of their greatest strengths was the ability to devise an outlandish situation and then push it as far as possible while faithfully taking the premise seriously each step of the way. Rarely have I seen a story which demonstrates that same ability, but James Lovegrove's "The Bowdler Strain" succeeds at it very well. The premise is that a deep secret British research lab has discovered a virus which prevents people from swearing. The virus is so contagious that anybody who listens to anybody stricken with it trying to swear is immediately infected. Soon after the virus leaks out of the lab, it spreads across the entire country within days. It is a ludicrous premise, but Lovegrove plays it totally straight, as he does its equally-outrageous consequences, so that "The Bowdler Strain" ends up being a very effective satire on obscure scientific think tanks.

Eric Browne's "The Farewell Party" is a very intriguing story about a mysterious race of aliens named the Kéthani who resurrect all humans who die, then give them the option of either returning to Earth or beginning a new life among the stars. The setting for the story is a bar in a small English village where a group of friends meet each Tuesday night for drinking and camaraderie. A writer from London moves to the village and joins the group, and soon thereafter the other members begin reading his books, which are all about the Kéthani. They become enamored with the books, with the mysterious aliens, and with the fact that more and more people who die are choosing to remain among the stars rather than return to Earth.

Then the writer gives them copies of his latest book **The Suicide Club**, in which a group of friends similar to the bar group decide they are finished with life on Earth and wish to join the other resurrected humans traveling through the universe. You can guess what happens from there without my giving away a spoiler here. The story is not totally successful in that the weekly group makes its own momentous decision too easily and too glibly. Plus the skepticism of one group member is an obvious hint of what lies ahead. Sometimes an extensive reading of prior science fiction can be a hindrance to the enjoyment of a new story, as memories of Damon Knight's classic "To Serve Man" fueled my own natural cynicism while reading this story. Still it was interesting reading, and a good closer for the collection. It seems that Browne has written other stories about the Kéthani as well, and a collection of those stories will be published sometime soon. That is definitely a book worth looking for.

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A few years ago F&SF editor Gordon Van Gelder released three anthologies of stories published in that magazine during its nearly 60 years of existence. One contained alternate history stories (**One Lamp**), another sword and sorcery (**In Lands That Never Were**), but the one which intrigued me the most was **Fourth Planet From the Sun**, stories set on the planet Mars. Not because I have any particular fascination with the god of war, but because it was the most snaf of the three books.

The book began fittingly with Ray Bradbury's "The Wilderness," one of his *Martian Chronicles* about two women debating whether to join their husbands on the Martian colony. While this story could as easily have been about immigrant women joining their husbands in America or 19<sup>th</sup> century New Yorkers joining their husbands on the frontier, it epitomized the personal side of immigration and colonization, especially to a new world so distant one cannot possibly return even for a visit. Bradbury's sense of melancholy and nostalgia make this story more thought-provoking than it would have been as a pure plotted tale.

This was immediately followed by Alfred Coppel's "Mars is Ours" which dwells on the darker side of colonization as it reminds us that the same petty feuds and wars which ruin life on Earth for so many people will likely follow humanity into space, as Americans and Russians take their Cold War to Mars. This story was somewhat discouraging for the future of humanity, if more factual than others in the book.

Two back-to-back stories were highlights of the book for overlapping reasons. Leigh Brackett's "Purple Priestess of the Mad Moon" was rich in exoticism and alienness, as well as Brackett's typical lush writing, in its glimpse at a visitor to Mars who tries to get past the accepted human regions and explore the "real" Martian society. What he finds is both horrific and a reminder that true alienness is nothing that humans can really understand, or often accept.

Following this was Roger Zelazny's "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," which is one of the finest science fiction stories ever written. The SFWA selected it as the 6<sup>th</sup> best sf story prior to 1965, praise which might actually underrate the story a bit. Gallinger, the arrogant genius poet, is one of the finest narrators ever devised for an sf story, and the story itself is equally worthy of his character. As is much early Zelazny, "Rose" is basically a love story, but embedded in a truly alien society as Gallinger, much like the protagonist of "Purple Priestess", is invited into the depths of Martian society to observe and study where all other humans have been forbidden. Zelazny's society is more developed than Brackett's, and while his writing is sparser, it is equally lush and exotic, leading to an ending which succeeds in being both upbeat and downbeat, a rare trick indeed. If you have never read "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," it alone is worth the price of the book.

Two stories from the 1970s were concerned with the search for life on Mars, Gordon Eklund and Greg Benford's "Hellas is Florida," and John Varley's "In the Hall of the Martian Kings." "Hellas" is more serious, based on the modern view of Mars according to non-manned space missions sent there. "Kings" starts from that premise, but a more melodramatic story flows from it: after a mysterious explosion kills the majority of the crew, 5 people survive but are trapped on the surface of Mars without a trained pilot. They have resources for 1-2 years but rescue is at

least 4-5 years away. What transpires is a combination of gritty survival mingled with a totally fantastic premise which somehow works.

The concluding novella is Alex Irvine's "Pictures From an Expedition," another story of—guess what?—an expedition to seek Martian life. The basic story is fascinating, a study of the interplay between five astronauts stuck together in a small, somewhat claustrophobic space capsule for nearly three years, two years in transit and one on the red planet itself. Where the story lets down is in Irvine's decision to make the story a reflection of the celebrity cult on Earth. So one of the astronauts is sex symbol of the group, the only astronaut that reporters on Earth seem concerned with, to the extent that when two other astronauts discover primitive Martian life, they are totally ignored as the reports prefer to interview "Barbarella" instead.

Irvine also sprinkles the story with extensive excerpts from online forums (in which we see the most obnoxious side of its participants) and betting odds for such things as

- Odds that a crew member will be murdered: 12 to 1
- Odds that the murdered crew member will be Jami Salter: 6 to 5

Such interruptions add little to the story, while taking away from the serious breakdowns of the relationships among the crew. Perhaps if such snippets had been done as well as John Brunner did in his classic **Stand on Zanzibar**, they would not have been so annoying and unnecessary. Fortunately the story itself was strong enough as to survive the intrusions.

Overall, **Fourth Planet From the Sun** was a strong, highly-recommended collection, so long as you do not tire of repeated searches for life on Mars. If nothing else, this collection proved there is snal life in the red planet after all.

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Ross King's **Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling** is a fascinating nonfiction story about how autocratic pope Julius II summoned the most famous artist of early 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It covers the entire four-year period which Michelangelo spent in Rome, and spreads its concerns across all aspects of 16<sup>th</sup> century European life affecting the historic events taking place in the chapel.

A large part of the drama in the book comes from the conflicting personalities of temperamental artist Michelangelo and autocratic pope Julius. Michelangelo was sullen, self-indulgent, having little concern for the people he dealt with on a daily basis. This is shown best in his dealings with the artist Raphael, one of Michelangelo's rivals who was painting the walls of a Vatican bedchamber simultaneously while Michelangelo was working on the Sistine Chapel. Raphael is portrayed as sociable and popular, the *yin* to Michelangelo's *yan*. According to the author,

*On one occasion, legend has it, Raphael was leaving the Vatican in the company of his vast entourage when he encountered Michelangelo—who, typically, was alone—in the middle of the Piazza San Pietro. "You with your band, like a bravo," sneered Michelangelo. "And you alone, like the hangman," retorted Raphael.*

Julius was as much feared for his temper and domineering personality as he was respected as pope. Perhaps the best scene in the book was in the chapter “The Warrior Pope” when Julius summoned the College of Cardinals and announced to them they were going to lead an army against the city of Bologna to win it back for the Vatican. And they did precisely that, with Julius at the head of the army. Imagine what a wondrous scene that would make in an epic movie.

The book offers fascinating lessons in art history, especially religious and Renaissance art. The author explains precisely how fresco painting is done, including how various pigments are produced, and how teams of artists work together on such a massive project as the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. He shows Michelangelo’s growth during the period he worked on the ceiling, developing from primarily a sculptor to the most influential artist of the era, perhaps in history.

We also learn a lot of European history of that period, and the intricate relationship between Italian city-states, European powers who were anxious to control portions of Italy themselves, and the Catholic Church which not only strived to dominate them but, in several instances, actually control them. Although this was the time of the Italian Renaissance, perhaps the height of European culture, it was also an era of bickering powers, conflicts between religion and governments, and seemingly a constant state of warfare.

Several famous historical personages have walk-on roles in the book, such as Leonardo Da Vinci, another rival of Michelangelo. At one point those two artists are placed into conflict painting frescoes on different walls in the same building, but through circumstances neither artist ever finishes his work. And a young Augustinian monk named Martin Luthor travels to Rome to speak with one of Pope Julius’ closest advisors concerning proposed reforms within the Augustinian order. Luthor has considerable time to explore Rome and,

*grew steadily more disillusioned with the city...It allowed him to see for himself, he claimed, how Rome was the seat of the devil and the pope worse than the Ottoman sultan.*

All of this was told in story form rather than as dry historical facts. The 300 pages flew by, always interesting, and always intriguing. By the time the book was finished, I had a much better understanding of the importance of Michelangelo in the history of art than I did previously, as well as understanding how life during the Italian Renaissance was certainly no luxury compared to the Middle Ages which preceded it, but I also enjoyed a fascinating story set in a wondrous era. This book should appeal to many readers, and is highly recommended for all of them.

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I tend to read science fiction which is basically serious, emphasizing characterization and thought-fulness more than simplistic adventures. That is why I prefer the “new space opera” rather than the old-fashioned type of shoot ‘em ups in space, and why I prefer planetary adventures involving culture-building more than space opera. But there are still times when I enjoy light entertainment. I subscribed to **Worlds of IF** from 1963 through its demise in the

mid-70s, and it was usually pleasant reading, a light-hearted counterpart to the more serious **Galaxy**.

One of the stalwarts of **IF** was A. Bertram Chandler with his John Grimes space adventures. Having not read any of those stories for 40 years, my memory of them was not particularly flattering: simplistic plots with stereotypical characters engaging in Ludlum-like adventures. But recently the Science Fiction Book Club released all the Grimes stories in a series of 6 volumes, accompanied by some rave reviews by assistant editor Andrew Wheeler who is one of the underrated editors working in the sf field. He has created quite a few outstanding compilations of classic f&sf, such as the Fritz Leiber *Fahfrd and the Grey Mouser* stories, collections of all the Heinlein juveniles, as well as a collection of all the Heinlein non-Future History short fiction. Wheeler also created a series of anthologies containing original novellas on broad-based themes, written by the top writers in the field. Unfortunately, Wheeler lost his job recently in the midst of all the changes undergone by the book clubs as a money-saving move by their parent company. Hopefully he will pop up somewhere else in the sf-publishing world.

Wheeler's raves about A. Bertram Chandler's *John Grimes* stories encouraged me to reread one of them. I dug out two 1966 issues of **IF** containing Chandler's serial **Edge of Night**, which was much more interesting than I had expected. Grimes and his crew accidentally slip into an alternate universe where mutated rats have formed a society which endangers all human life in the settled galaxy. True, the characterization was thin, but the plot was both logical and enjoyable, and there was genuine thoughtfulness beneath it all.

Thus encouraged, I bought one of the SFBC compilations entitled **John Grimes: Survey Captain**. The first novel **The Broken Cycle** did not appeal to me much. It was mostly a case of not much happening of interest. But the second novel **The Big Black Mark** was much better. Grimes is given the captaincy of a ship of malcontents who have always been thorns in the side of the military, and who have been grouped together to hopefully keep them out of trouble. Obviously that is not the case as they end up mutinying against Grimes' leadership so they can emigrate to a colony of free spirits more to their liking. The characterization is still thin, with only Flannery the telepath showing growth as a person, but the story is interesting and non-clichéd, and there are some moments of real drama and pathos.

I liked **The Big Black Mark** enough to forge ahead to the next novel, **Far Traveler**. This novel is actually a series of planetary adventures as Grimes, who was stranded on a "lost colony" at the end of **The Big Black Mark**, escapes possible court martial for his inadvertent role in the mutineers' escape by becoming captain *de jure* if not *de facto* on the luxurious space yacht of a very rich, arrogant woman who is a minor royalty on her home planet and insists on being addressed at all times as "Your Excellency." She is also a researcher exploring lost colonies whose societies evolved, for one reason or another, out of contact with the mainstream of galactic life. Each planet they visit poses a problem for Grimes and the ship owner, and the ship intelligence, Big Sister, who is one of the major characters in the novel.

The worlds they visit include Far Haven, populated by drugged religious zealots; a world whose young inhabitants re-enact a centuries' old battle between human invaders and the native humanoids (which, when Grimes realizes no humans remain on the surface, reveals who exactly

were the winners in that ancient battle); and Morrowvia with its “underpeople” descended from genetically-enhanced cats and its North Australian setting, which exposes Chandler as a likely fan of Cordwainer Smith.

The individual stories are interesting, tending to be mysteries in nature, some of which are solved by Grimes, but some of them by Big Sister. Chandler never pushes disbelief too far, and is never predictable or boring. While these stories could not be ranked with the likes of Stephen Baxter or Alastair Reynolds, they are always pleasant and worthwhile light reading, just the type of stuff I look forward to sometimes after a long, tired day of work.

\*

While I was cruising through **Worlds of IF** I reread Robert A. Heinlein’s 1964 serialized novel **Farnham’s Freehold**, also following a forty year lapse. This was typical late career Heinlein, being as much polemic as story, with paper-thin characterization, many characters little more than stereotypes, but such natural storytelling that it was still enjoyable reading in spite of all its flaws.

The premise is that Hugh Farnham builds a shelter beneath his house during the height of the Cold War, which becomes useful when the bombs drop a few miles away on a government defense complex. Somehow, in the story’s major imaginative leap, the Farnham family find themselves transported centuries into the future, long after Earth has recovered from the war which destroyed virtually all life north of the equator.

What they find is a society ruled by blacks in which the few remaining whites are slaves. The society is rigid and totalitarian, virtually a mirror image of our own sexist society, but with a secret at its core which ultimately makes it worse than our own flawed society (seemingly a necessity for Heinlein who, at least in this story, cannot accept a black society being less evil than a predominantly white society).

The story is mostly fast-moving plot stopped for occasional lectures. The most grating flaw is the characterization problems. The narrator Hugh needs to be reliable for the reader to place any trust in his narration, and mostly he is, but he is also an obsessive-compulsive control freak whose behavior is occasionally so illogical that it brings the story to a jarring halt. Ponce, the authority figure in control of Farnham’s family in the future, veers between totalitarian and supportive, also exhibiting behavior that is often unbelievable but convenient for forwarding the story.

Hugh’s family members are primarily stereotypes who serve the author’s purposes in his polemic. Hugh’s wife is a drunken, self-absorbed bitch. His son is selfish to the point of arrogance, and a lawyer as well (I guess Heinlein is taking no chances that the reader might actually like the boor). Both Hugh’s daughter and her sexy friend are near-perfect ideal women. The daughter dies horrendously in childbirth while the friend becomes Hugh’s mistress.

There is also Joseph, the Farnham family servant who in the story’s beginning talks in an almost-slave patois, although Heinlein describes him as a valued member of the family. In the future

Joseph is immediately accepted by the black ruling elite, but he still remains loyal to the Farnhams, helping them as much as possible until Hugh's anger and jealousy drives Joseph away emotionally.

Keep in mind that I did not enter sf through Heinlein's young adult novels, so the first Heinlein stories I encountered were his Sixties novels **Stranger in a Strange Land**, **Podkayne of Mars**, **Farnham's Freehold**, and **The Moon is a Harsh Mistress**. The first three were all seriously-flawed, and all the major innovations which Heinlein brought to sf in the "Golden Age" were so commonplace by the 1960s that I found nothing particularly innovative or awe-inspiring in latter-day Heinlein. My initial impression of his fiction forty years ago was wonder at why he was considered the finest sf writer ever. Later, when I learned more about the history of sf, and read early Heinlein as well, I was able to appreciate what he brought to the field in the late 1930s. But my relative objectivity at reading his fiction often gives me a different point of view on his mid-to-late career fiction than readers who were Heinlein's children.

So while I enjoyed rereading **Farnham's Freehold**, I found nothing in it which made it any more a major novel than his other **Worlds of IF** serial, **Podkayne of Mars**, or one of the strongest 1960s prozine serials I have read in the past year. **Farnham's Freehold** ranks slightly below Poul Anderson's **Three Worlds to Conquer**, James H. Schmitz' **The Tuvela** and A. Bertram Chandler's **Edge of Night**.





# *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! Highly recommended.

**Argentus** / Steven Silver / 707 Sapling Lane, Deerfield, IL 60015-3969 / available at [shsilver@sfsite.com](mailto:shsilver@sfsite.com) and <http://www.efanzines.com> / annual genzine.

**Askance** / John Purcell / available at <http://www.efanzines.com> / promising new genzine.

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

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

**Challenger** / The Zine Dump / Guy H. Lillian III / P.O. Box 53092, New Orleans, LA 70153-3092 / available at [www.challzine.net](http://www.challzine.net) / one of the finest genzines being published, deserving of a Hugo Award.

**The Drink Tank** / Chris Garcia / available at <http://www.efanzines.com> / perhaps the most regular online personalzine. Always interesting reading.

**For The Clerisy** / Brant Kresovich / P.O. Box 404, Getzville, NY 14068 / always chockful of interesting book reviews. Highly recommended.

**The Knarley Knews** / Henry Welch / 1525 16<sup>th</sup> Ave., Grafton, WI 53024-2017 / available at <http://www.efanzines.com> and <http://people.msoe.edu/~welch/tkk.html> / very regular genzine.

**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.

**Pixel** / David Burton / 5227 Emma Drive, Lawrence, IN 46236-2742 / available at <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.

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

**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.

## *On the Lighter Side*

After a long night of making love, he notices a photo of another man on her nightstand by the bed. He begins to worry.

"Is this your husband?" he nervously asks.

"No, silly," she replies, snuggling up to him.

"Your boyfriend, then?" he continues.

"No, not at all," she says, nibbling away at his ear.

"Is it your dad or your brother?" he inquires, hoping to be reassured.

"No, no, no!!!" she answers.

"Well, who in the hell is he, then?" he demands.

"That's me before the surgery."

\*

The wise old Mother Superior from county Tipperary was dying. The nuns gathered around her bed trying to make her comfortable. They gave her some warm milk to drink, but she refused it. Then one nun took the glass back to the kitchen.

Remembering a bottle of Irish whiskey received as a gift the previous Christmas, she opened and poured a generous amount into the warm milk. Back at Mother Superior's bed, she held the glass to her lips. Mother drank a little, then a little more. Before they knew it, she had drunk the glass down to the last drop.

"Mother," the nuns asked earnestly, "Please give us some wisdom before you die."

The wise old Mother Superior raised herself up in bed and, with a pious look on her face, said, "Don't sell that cow."

\*

A highway patrolman pulled alongside a speeding car on the freeway. Glancing at the car, he was astounded to see that the elderly woman behind the wheel was knitting! Realizing that she was oblivious to his flashing lights and siren, the trooper cranked down his window, turned on his bullhorn and yelled, "PULL OVER!"

"NO!" the woman yelled back, "IT'S A SCARF!"