



Poseidon's Wake

Alastair Reynolds

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This novel is a stand-alone story which takes two extraordinary characters and follows them as they, independently, begin to unravel some of the greatest mysteries of our universe.

Their missions are dangerous, and they are all venturing into the unknown ... and if they can uncover the secret to faster-than-light travel then new worlds will be at our fingertips.

Poseidon's Wake Details

Date : Published April 30th 2015 by Gollancz

ISBN : 9780575090491

Author : Alastair Reynolds

Format : Hardcover 598 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Space, Space Opera

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From Reader Review Poseidon's Wake for online ebook

Tudor Ciocarlie says

Not as good as the Revelation Series, but I've loved the way Alastair Reynolds imagined the birth of a galactic civilization. This trilogy brought me great joy, food for thought and optimism for the future of humanity.

Krispijn says

It's hit ("House Of Suns", "Diamond Dogs") and miss ("Century Rain") with Mr. Reynolds and unfortunately "Poseidon's Wake" may be his worst novel yet. If I were to summarize this book in one word, it would be "unnecessary".

As Reynolds is one of my favorite authors, I feel obligated to explain my 1-star rating. But where do I even start? There is so much wrong with this book. Let's start with the ideas pitched in this book.

Let me address the literal elephant in the room first. Uplifted elephants... I don't even. I had hoped we'd seen the last of them in "On The Steele Breeze", but they are back, more intelligent than before. The elephants proved to be a good explanation for Geoffrey's reluctance to participate in the family business; a detail, but vital to fleshing out his character. But using them as a main device for explaining why people venture into space and risk their wellbeing and that of their loved ones is simply silly. Silly. And silly is not something you base your book on. Yes, you have made dung, mr. author. I will leave it at that.

Many of the other plot devices aren't exactly novel; actually this book has a severe lack of new ideas. Anyone who has played "Mass Effect" will instantly be able to substitute "Mandala structure" with "Mass Relay" or "Watchkeeper" with "Reaper" (though in all fairness the Watchkeepers were already introduced in the first book). Not to mention the water world "Poseidon" and it's biomass islands seem to be taken from his own books in all but name ("Juggler world" anyone?).

But concepts aren't all that make a good book. Good story telling and character development make a scifi novel enjoyable even if the ideas aren't mind bending.

Unfortunately, Poseidon's Wake lacks in this department as well. The protagonists' personalities are almost as flat as cardboard; making me actually loath some of them. I am looking at you Ru and Goma! While that may be all well and good if the writer intends to make a despicable character, this was clearly not the intended goal with these two. It should come as no surprise that the way the characters' relationships develop are very hard to relate to.

Also, this thing goes on and on. I feel that at least 25% of this book is fluff, just stating the obvious or repeating things already explained. You would almost think the author had a contract to deliver a trilogy with a minimum number of words and after the second book he was running behind schedule.

Looking at the quality of the books, this trilogy is remarkably like The Matrix film trilogy. The first one, "Blue Remembered Earth", is refreshing: introducing a novel, African based, take on the genre. With some reservations, the second one, "On The Steele Breeze", was a solid continuation of the series. The third one,

this book, is so bad, it should never have been released in the first place.

Glenn Mcconnochie says

I have really tried with this trilogy but enough is enough, I can't do it anymore. The first book was quite good, the second was terrible and the third makes me want to curl up in a ball and die.

Julie says

What I expected:

I have already read the first two stories in the series and really enjoyed them, I have been eagerly awaiting the third. When I originally requested the e-ARC copy I hadn't realised that this was the third book, so I was really looking forward to reading this.

I expected it to continue in the advanced future, tracking the legacy of the Akinya family, left by Eunice, and including the development of Geoffrey's beloved elephants. The previous two books were not strictly linked in the normal sense where the same characters continue the story, which didn't detract from the tale for me. I expected this story to be equally different, but still reference Eunice and the elephants, perhaps.

And I believed Eunice might still have a trick or two up her sleeve as well!

What it was:

A thoroughly comprehensive follow-up to the first two books. I would most definitely recommend that readers do read the other two books first to give context and a sense of time and place to this story. Having said that it would be entirely possible to read it as a stand-alone, if you really wanted.

The story tracks Kanu Akinya and Goma Akinya, along with their companions, on their separate journeys from their lives on Mars and Crucible respectively. The elephants, or Tantors as they are known following their enhancement, make an early appearance in the book, hooray.

A summoning message is received from Gliese 163 and the journey begins of the various parties, across space and in time.

The tale is a long and twisting one, that I have no intention of spoiling for others by recounting.

I thoroughly enjoyed it, I like the scientific aspect of Alastair Reynolds' books even if I don't always grasp the technological ideas. I like the idea that humanity could have it in it to reach out and travel the universe. The characters had a realism to them, even the non-humans, that made the reading more compelling! Not everyone is who you think they are (as with many a tale). And I enjoyed visiting the Akinya family again, following the activities of the descendants and their links with the Tantors. Also, Eunice did not disappoint me!

I received an e-ARC of this novel through NetGalley.

5/5 Stars

Official description:-

This novel is a stand-alone story which takes two extraordinary characters and follows them as they, independently, begin to unravel some of the greatest mysteries of our universe.

Their missions are dangerous, and they are all venturing into the unknown ... and if they can uncover the secret to faster-than-light travel then new worlds will be at our fingertips.

But innovation and progress are not always embraced by everyone. There is a saboteur at work. Different factions disagree about the best way to move forward. And the mysterious Watchkeepers are ever-present.

Completing the informal trilogy which began with BLUE REMEMBERED EARTH and ON THE STEEL BREEZE, this is a powerful and effective story.

Chris says

"I will make dung, then you will assist me with the suit and the airlock"

I should start by saying that I am a huge Alastair Reynolds fan. The Revelation Space books are some of the most haunting, well written and engaging stories I've ever read. Literally years later, I still vividly recall many scenes from them. My appreciation of his novels and short stories has only grown with each new reading (including the non Revelations space books as well!) That is, up until this series and this book in particular.

On the Steel Breeze left some unsolved mysteries that Poseidon's Wake was presumably supposed to answer. Which it does, up to a point. Unfortunately the main story is completely drowned out by padded, cheesy, superfluous dialog that totally ruins the flow of the paragraph (e.g. the quote at the top of this review) and anti-climactic chase scenes with a few random deaths thrown in for good measure. Approximately 90% of the book is nothing more than humans and talking elephants sharing their feelings with each other. Riveting.

The remaining 10% dealing with the Watchkeeper's and the Mandala artifacts are basically randomly interspersed between the ongoing interspecies soap opera. Mostly when Eunice (who's now human, by the way) has some bright, random insight into their nature.

Put simply, this is one of the worst SF books I have ever read and it probably never should have been written.

Liviu says

very disappointing trilogy overall; good first book, mediocre second, fairly unreadable third (read first 50 or so pages, last 25 or so and in between and nothing hooked me, not to speak of being connected tightly with the earlier books despite the original plan of taking place at large intervals which didn't help at all as once book 2 disappointed me, almost guaranteed this one would go on the "tried but didn't care about" list, though I really, really wanted to like it - also the ending read very unlike Reynolds and the book was full of cliches

in the pages I read)

Johannes Punkt says

Man, what an anticlimax. I was looking up synonyms for "anticlimax" because the word didn't contain all the nuances I wanted and I stumbled over "bathos" under 'related words', and well, bathos is also an appropriate word to use when talking about this book. It's like the lack of awards and overwhelmingly positive hard-sci-fi reader responses fizzled out Reynolds' enthusiasm for this series and left all the characters flat and bathic, the emotional scenes mostly off-key. Though they hit a few notes right, that feels more like a statistical certainty than an understanding of humanity and emotions. I don't expect prose mastery from Reynolds and I get none. In this book's defence, I guess, it is very easy to read the sentences. Because there is no weight behind them, nothing that can make me stop and contemplate. I just don't believe the words.

And now you're thinking, why read space opera if you're looking for emotions and prose? Well, this is supposed to be Reynolds' softer sci-fi, and space opera is based on character, and I was led to believe based on the first -- amazing -- book in this series, and based on what the book is clearly aspiring to do, that I should expect at least some of these things from this series. Instead I get another one of Reynolds' signature moves: (view spoiler)

Chris says

Copy received from Netgalley in exchange for a review

Alastair Reynolds is known as an author with big ideas. From human modification, to techno-plagues, mega-crises to mega-structures, his writing has always contained big ideas. To get it out of the way, this book is no exception.

The narrative explores the journey of several scions of the Akinya family, who figured heavily in the previous two books in the same universe. Reynolds has done something clever here – setting each novel with protagonists from a new generation of the same family allows the reader to track societal changes, see shifts in viewpoints at the macro level as well as the personal, whilst retaining reader investment in the individual. In this particular case, we're given two initial strands to follow; one on Mars, the home of human ambassador's to the human-created AI civilisation now present there, and another on Crucible – a human colony, home to the mysterious artefact "The Mandala", as well as the remnants of a tribe of uplifted, intelligent elephants. Not to give the game away, but these two locations may act as the springboard for the rest of the text, but things do quite quickly change.

The Elephants, incidentally, are another key thread running through the series – their interactions with humanity showing the way in which we interact with other living beings unlike ourselves, even as the AI on Mars act as a mirror of how we might act when faced with a machine which is also, in some (or perhaps all) senses, alive.

The characters are a key facet of this novel. I've criticised Reynolds before for having characters that seemed to act more like generators of interesting conversations than actual people; he's done quite a lot to redress the

balance here. The Akinya's, their various friends, loves, and losses, have become quite believable over three books, and Reynolds has managed to avoid getting into the depths of technical exposition at the expense of character growth. Instead we get quite a lot of dialogue trying to build relationships around the characters, and more emotional reflection than might have been visible in earlier work. There's still a few awkward flashes, emotional responses and intensities which didn't quite ring true, but the characters do feel a great deal like people.

Worth noting that this is technically a standalone in a shared universe; honestly, I wouldn't try and read it without having read the other two books first to provide some context. It looks like it would be possible, but a great deal of the text, especially the initial setup, draws on events from the other two books, and the universe of the narrative is much richer, and far less confusing, if you come to this as a conclusion to a multi-generational saga, rather than on its own.

The text is full to bursting with answers to interesting questions, ranging from the philosophical - how do we act in a universe where we're not alone? How might we interact with artefacts from a civilisation aeons older than our own? To the philosophical - how do we define humanity? If we were told the ultimate truth of the universe, how might we react? Who are we, really, as a species, as individuals? The narrative approaches all of these questions unflinchingly, and does its best to provide an answer to them.

In that respect, it's a typical Reynolds book, and if you want to explore these questions, and their answers, within a well realised sci-fi universe, with plausible characters and a decent narrative, then this book is worth picking up.

Rushi says

Poseidon's Wake is the third volume in the Poseidon's Children series by Alastair Reynolds. The events of this book are set a few centuries in the future from the second book - On The Steel Breeze. The main protagonists are still part of the Akinya clan. We find Mpozi, Goma and Ndege on Crucible and Kanu in the Solar System.

The book explores the results of the arrival of the Watchkeepers and the aftermath of the Mandala event at the conclusion of "Steel Breeze".

Let me be honest - I found the book hard going, yet worthy of the four stars I have given it. There are long passages meditating on the meaning of life and the role of belief. Stay well clear if you are looking for action scenes or military science fiction. This is very much in the vein of Existence by David Brin. We have a McGuffin - vast alien artefacts on the planet Poseidon. The plot revolves around separate expeditions from the Solar System and from Crucible to the hitherto unvisited system following the receipt of a mysterious transmission.

Along the way, we find the machine civilisation explored in the first two books, we find super intelligent elephants as well as inscrutable aliens. Reading this reminded me of Rendezvous with Rama - it has the similar mix of hard science fiction as well the plot point of humans trying to figure out the motivations of an unknowable alien. It is a fitting conclusion to the series and a book that has stayed with me more than I expected it to.

SIDENOTE - There is one thing I never figured out about these books. Where are the White people? We have a future where all the conversation happens in Swahili, or Mandarin or Portugese - but no English. We have characters that are of different ethnicities, but no WASPS. Whats up with that?

Flow In says

I feel bad writing a negative review. I've been a fan of Alastair for a long time.

This book is less a space opera and more a laboured bit of philosophy. Philosophy wrapped up in sci-fi isn't always a bad thing, if it is done well. In this case, we are subjected to:

Bad writing style. Word usage, for example. "Boisterous". Not a common word, and so one you don't expect to find repeated within the first twenty minutes. It was amusing the first time, jarring the second. Perhaps because the scenes were so different, but the use of the word tied them together in an awkward way? On top of that, Alastair has protagonists repeat phrases almost verbatim. Is it deliberate? Are those thrice or more uttered musings critical to the plot? I think not. I think, perhaps, it is simply rushed writing and lazy proof reading. which leads us to...

The belaboured issue, that of inscrutable machine godlets being 'empty' because they've passed some theoretical point of 'forward processing' that has left them without consciousness. What a let down. Of all the places the the enigmatic blue beasties could have gone, that was sureley the emptiest. I'm not even sure the idea has legs. Apparently we are supposed to believe that linear processing (and the associated unfeasible power requirements) are a valid progression for an AI. Given that google currently has D-Wave qbit based processing coming on line, which defeats the basis for that idea by being quantum in nature, i'm not buying it. As soon as Alastair raised the 'limit' the first time, the problems jumped to awareness, and they coalesced at each repetition. The idea may have been a consideration back in the 1970's (and how strange that these future peoples are obsessed by 20th century ideas), but it makes no sense in the context of modern understanding. We have proof of macroscopic quantum superpositions in brain structures, so what AI would bother modelling that process using billions of linear processes when they can just utilise their own quantum systems? Sure, Sci-fi is about the suspension of disbelief, but to be so obviously dated at publication is sad. I'll accept fancy spinning sampling systems (as the picture of one approaching is cool). I'll accept 'skipover' and chiming (at a stretch). I'll even go with AIs hiding in the patterns in neural activity (for the sake of a good tale) but i'm not going to buy such a self-defeating limitation.

Moving on.

Boring talking heads. So this is a philosophy book. Characters need to espouse the ideas Alastair is exploring. But do they have to be so BORING? We have a post human diplomat, seeing the positive in everyone. A machiavellian elephant, driven by the aforementioned soulless machine godlets. A resurrected grumpy AI and a bunch of tedious supporting roles who flimmy flam about with paper thin motivations and endless, endless, self justifications and incomprehensible stances, followed by rapid changes of personality. The sci-fi part is tedious, strapped around the yammering bores almost as an afterthought. There were a few good moments. Maybe three or four. Before we headed to Europa, the sol system thread of the tale was great. Then it lost its way in a weird murder mystery that was simply filler, lots of people being arses to each other whilst allowing self righteous (and tonally indistinguishable) cutouts to drone on, before coming to the crux of the novel...

The "Terror". I'm not sure what is extra special about knowing that life is void of purpose, and that we are all going to die. Whether it is a speeding train, old age or a vacuum fluctuation, all of us have to deal with our own mortality at some point. Here, Alastair projects the concept into what appears, superficially, to be an epic scale. Our vast and vanished M-builders, long departed creators of logic problems and deadly toys, discover that the universe might end one day. Unexpectedly. Apparently it is a big deal. I think i was 15 when i first ran into existential, nihilist angst. Some german philosopher blathers on about it at length too. At any rate, the scale of the tale rapidly collapsed when the true horror of the mystery Alastair had been hinting at was revealed. My reaction was "Oh, is that all?".

At this point I have to confess I didn't actually finish the book. I got maybe 8/10ths of the way through. Our stalwart heroes were swimming towards giant rings revolving through the sea, otherwise known as plot device, one of many. I realised that i truly didn't care what happened next. The novel had been crashing hard, both from Blue Remembered Earth, and also from its own lofty beginning. Oh, how i missed our merman, from when he was three dimensional. Whatever cleverness Alastair had to justify the morass i'd slogged through simply wouldn't be enough to rescue the book. Like most of us, i've faced the void and my own inevitable end and i'm perfectly happy with what I brought back from that, so what could Alastair offer? If the rest of the book had been stunning, then sure, i'd go along for the ride. With the dismal prelude. Nope, This is one of the very rare times when i shut the book and put it aside, never to open again.

Please, Alastair, don't destroy your awesome legacy.

Claudia says

The epic saga of Akinya family reached the end. Not a definite ending, from my point of view; it could easily have more adventures written from this point. But it definitely has a closure.

There were moments when I thought that I will not give it five stars because of too many conversations between the characters and I rather prefer world building and introspection. But I just can't not give it the maximum rating: Al R created a marvelous universe, full of hopes even if verging on futility.

Between the adventures in deep space, there are also real themes approached:

> discrimination:

'But you and I saw a better path, Kanu! Reconciliation, cooperation – the sharing of resources and knowledge. We are here precisely because we believe in something better, something bolder. An answer to the oldest question – how do I get along with my neighbours, even if they are not the same as me?'

> philosophy/science:

'I cannot accept a purposeless universe. Science is a wonderful edifice of knowledge, beautiful in its self-consistency. But it cannot simply be the means to its own end. Nor is it an accident that mathematics is supremely efficient at describing the play of matter, energy and force in our universe. They fit together like hand in glove – and that cannot be coincidence. Our minds have been given science for a reason, Goma – to guide us as we progress towards an understanding of the true purpose of our own existence.'

> survival:

'We'll come – no matter how long it takes. We won't rest until we've found you.' 'None of us shall,' Dakota said. 'But answer me this, Kanu – who is this "we" you speak of?' 'Whatever we make of ourselves, Dakota.'

Humans, merfolk. Tantors. Machines. Whatever we manage to salvage from this. We're all orphans of the storm now, all Poseidon's children. We either find a way to live with what we are, with all our differences, or we face oblivion. I know which I'd rather.'

All spiced with a bit of humor from time to time:

'Worms!' 'Mealworms,' their host corrected. 'Very tasty. Very good source of protein. Practically all we ate on Mars in the early days. You should try them. Go well with a little curry powder – stops them wriggling off your chopsticks, too.'

I hold in high regard how he made elephants (but it could have been any other animal) the equals of humans and by that he raised awareness about their unique features, feelings and possible extinction.

And even if I like more the Revelation Space universe, I cannot but respect the versatility of his writing style, because this trilogy has nothing in common with his other works, other than being sci-fi and taking place mostly in space. He really is one of the greatest sci-fi writers ever and my favorite.

And if you want a glimpse in how wonderful he is with words, I'll leave you with one fragment that kept me awake the night I read it:

'They? Us. What are we? What were we? [...] Life is short, against all the mute measures of the cosmos. A star barely draws breath. A world turns around that star a hundred times. The galaxy is frozen in an instant of its turning, like a jammed clock. A life begins, a life ends – nothing changes. The clock unjams itself for one vast, godlike tick and a billion souls know their fierce, fast moment in the light. Until the clock jams again. Until the next tick. And yet . . . We are more than the sum of all those short seconds that make up our span. We learn, we give, we love, we are loved. We stir ripples into the wider fabric of social discourse. We are in turn moved by the ripples of other lives. We open books and know the thoughts of those who have lived before us – the hopes and sorrows and golden joys of earlier lives. They move us to laughter or to tears. Their days are over, but in the marks they have left behind their lives continue to resonate. In that sense, their days are limitless. They have lived again, in us. So it is with all our deeds, all our acts of cleverness and stupidity. Our wars and inventions, our stories and our songs. The houses we make, the worlds we change, the truths we unearth. We end, we conclude, but our deeds continue. In this continuation, a retrospective meaning is shed onto every living moment. There is a point to love, if love itself is remembered. There is a point to the creation of beauty, because beauty will endure. All words, all thoughts, have a chance of transcending death and time. There is no heaven or hell, no afterlife, no divine creator, no great will behind the universe, no meaning beyond that revealed by our senses and our intellects. This is a hard thing to accept. Yet there is still a point to being alive, and that makes the acceptance bearable. But the universe withholds even this bleak consolation. Within its deepest structure, written like a curse into the very mathematics out of which it is forged, the universe contains a suicidal imperative. Vacuum itself is poised in an unstable condition. Given time – and the one certainty is that there will always be time – the vacuum instability will tip the universe into a new state of being. In that instant of un-creation, all information encoded in the present universe will be erased. No memory of anything will endure. No single experience of any living organism will be preserved. Nothing learned or discovered or made will survive. No art, no science, no history, no deed, no kindness, no fond thought, not a single moment of human happiness. Nothing will last. Nothing will matter. Nothing has ever mattered.'

Jesse says

Alastair Reynolds is one of my favorite sci-fi authors, but his quality is uneven. House of Suns is one of the best sci-fi books ever, Terminal Worlds is very mediocre. The first two Revelation Space books were great, the last one not very. In keeping with this tradition, the quality of the Poseidon's Children books were trending upward, but the final book ends up being much closer in quality to Terminal Worlds. There are a variety of reasons for this. The constant paean to elephants is simply tiresome, and serves poorly as a motivation for people to attempt to cross interstellar space, start assassination plots, or form romances. Babar did the talking elephant thing much better. The pervasive political correctness is self-indulgent and irritating. After the main characters fail to escape a planet's gravity well (again, they could have done it, they just didn't want to subject some talking elephants to high Gs), the plot starts to feel predictable and padded just to lengthen the book. The main thrust of the novel is over about halfway though, once the characters figure out the Deus Ex Machina of the series.

I gave the book two stars instead of one, because the author suddenly attempts to turn the series into a discussion of existential anguish. It turns out that the super-advanced aliens instigated everything in an attempt to deal with the fact that they discovered existence is finite. Personally, I don't subscribe to this view, but I think it's interesting to read the works of those who do from time to time. I don't think Reynolds gives a very convincing argument for those views here, but it was an interesting twist, and it gave the characters something to argue about other than which of them loves talking elephants more.

Pass on this series is my advice.

Johan Haneveld says

3,5 stars. The half star for the ambition itself. I thought this book lacked a bit of the focus on characters from the first two books. Maybe this is because it spans less time (or more, but it is spent in hibernation mostly), focussing instead on exploration. The conflicts are not political as in the earlier books, but more philosophical/abstract. Some conflict was forced, almost as if the author was searching for interpersonal problems to add some spice to the story. That being said: this book has elephants in space (what more do you want?), a robot personality programmed in someone's brain and dressing as a 18th century gentleman when he shows himself, adventures under the ice of Europe where an otherworldly society has developed, a water planet where aliens have constructed 200 km high wheels sticking out from the atmosphere, murder by nanotechnology, a very tense and exciting rescue operation and to me fascinating ruminations on physics, meaning and the fate of the universe. This novel takes on one of the conundrums of modern sci-fi, i.e. that a purely materialistic view of life and the universe, must believe that ultimately all will end, which means that our lives have no lasting significance. When Calvin in Calvin and Hobbes is asked to make a sum, he answers: 'but what would be the meaning if the sun will swallow up the earth anyway?' And notes to the reader: 'no one likes a person with a long term vision'. It's something that creeps up on me too, that the ultimate end of the universe (or of my life) negates the meaning it has, which to me needs to be something objective, because due to depression I cannot always 'feel like' my life has meaning. I thought it refreshing to see this taken on in a mainstream SF novel. And even though there are no easy answers given, the terror of being a consciousness in this materialistic universe is convincingly described. Like the best SF-novels it gave food for thought, and I would not mind seeing the series continue, maybe in the form of short stories, to see more of this fascinating universe!

Kate says

Outstanding. Everything I want from science fiction and more. Including elephants! Loved every single page.

Bradley says

Reynolds continues to amaze. I remembered Blue Remembered Earth very fondly and this third book, taking place several hundred years after the events taking place there, captures more than just the spirit, but gives us one hell of an adventure among the stars.

Best points?

The Watchmakers, a race of sublime intelligences that went too far and are no longer fully conscious. :)
The uplifted elephants. :)

The sheer scope of the adventure, discovery, horror, and amazing courage. :)

This is Reynolds. Never doubt it. His world building and tech are some of the very, very best in Hard-SF. These characters, in particular, are also some of his most interesting and well developed. From the Savanna to the oceanic human-mods to the Mars takeover of machine intelligences to deep space exploration, the settings prove to be more than good spice for the treat that is his characters.

ELEPHANTS IN SPACE!!!

And let me make one caveat, here. This is not Barsk. Barsk came out 4 years after Blue Remembered Earth and one year after this third book. :) And I Reynolds's tales better. :)
