



# The Mind Pool

*Charles Sheffield*

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## **The Mind Pool** Charles Sheffield

In the 23rd Century, out of all the races of the galaxy, only humanity has discovered the secret of travel between the stars - not so much because we're smart, but because we are incredibly gadget-orientated. We are also, compared to the galaxy's highest sophisticated norms, very, very tough, which most of the time does nothing for our social acceptability. But when a threat to all life in the galaxy arises from non-living biological constructs, suddenly the peculiar human virtues of valor and stubbornness make us the sword-wielding saviours of All...

## **The Mind Pool Details**

Date : Published May 1995 by Baen Publishing Enterprises (first published 1986)

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Author : Charles Sheffield

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## From Reader Review The Mind Pool for online ebook

### Mike S says

This book was surprisingly good, quite imaginative, great subplots, totally believable characters you will definitely feel for, what a great writer! It will keep you guessing until the end. I'll definitely read more work by this author.

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### Wes says

This is one of Sheffield's better works.

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### Jim says

I like Charles Sheffield but this book rates only a three as I seemed to have to work to stay interested. It was an interesting story about the future but just to the level of 3 stars.

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### Roddy Williams says

The original version of this novel was The Nimrod Hunt, written as a tribute to Alfred Bester and attempting a Besterite style. This was revised and re-released with the title of 'The Mind Pool' as Sheffield was apparently not happy with the original ending.

Centuries from now, Man has moved out into space and formed alliances with a group of alien races. The aliens are all, it appears, mentally unable to accept the concept of killing sentient life and are both appalled and fascinated by Humanity's casual attitude to killing even members of its own species.

A human scientist, Livia Morgan, under the command of Esro Mondrian, Head of Border Security, has been experimenting with sentient constructs to patrol the borders of Human space as a precaution against contact with hostile aliens.

The constructs turn on their master however and are destroyed, but not before one escapes through a Mattin Link (a matter transmitter essentially) to another part of Human space.

The alien council, having been notified, determine that teams, each one containing members of each alien race, be trained to hunt the construct.

The aliens have stipulated that the human elements must have no prior military training, which makes selection practically impossible unless one searches on the most lawless planet in space, which happens to be Earth.

Esro Mondrian has two other reasons for visiting Earth. One is to meet his lover, Lady Tatiana, a woman addicted to the Paradox drug. The other is revealed later in the novel.

Luther Brachis has a friendly but competitive work relationship with Esro, but employs devious means to achieve his ends, actions which set in motion a complex series of events.

There's an awful lot going on in this novel which is a lot more complex - structurally and in terms of plot - than other Sheffield works. We have troubled and complex relationships, trips to other worlds, space station laboratories, the grotesques of the warrens of Earth and a set of aliens that are biologically fascinating, but

imbued with cosy Simak-esque personalities. Indeed, there are elements of this that remind one of 'The Werewolf Principle' particularly when we encounter the Mind Pool phenomenon, whereby a mental gestalt is achieved.

We have three couples, all of whom have issues of one sort or another, the male halves being irrevocably changed by the end of the novel. Indeed, some characters undergo a form of role reversal.

We meet Chan Dalton, central figure of the sequel 'The Spheres of Heaven' as a physically perfect male but with the mental development of a small child. Since his childhood he has been looked after by Leah, who loves him. Mondrian, desperate for recruits, and having bought Leah and Dalton's indenture without having realised Dalton's deficiencies, decides to employ banned technology to try and stimulate Chan's mind into growth.

By the end of the novel Chan is a mature intelligent individual while Brachis and Mondrian, for different reasons, have been left in a mentally vegetative state, now being cared for by their respective partners, as Leah once cared for Chan.

The Morgan Construct itself is almost immaterial to the story. It is a Maguffin around which this complex interplay of politics and relationships is wound.

It has its flaws. There's a certain retro SF style to it, in keeping with Sheffield's claim that the novel is an Alfred Bester tribute. This works well enough in all the locations barring Earth itself which is roughly sketched with little depth and containing characters that border on parody.

The Mind Pool element is introduced very late in the story and its genesis and method of operation is a little unclear, at least to me.

On balance though, it's a great bit of space opera featuring a set of main characters with unusually complex motivations.

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## **Wendy says**

I'm not sure if I really knew what was going on the entire time. But I didn't care too much. It didn't seem to end real well for any of the characters. There was a silly sex scene that the author forced into the plot. If you are melding with 3 other alien minds, is it necessary for the human to have sex? Why do the 3 aliens get to experience human sex? Why didn't the human experience 3 types of alien sex? Thus, it didn't make sense and was just contrived to have a sex scene.

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## **Rosa Chacón García says**

Pensé en dejar el libro muchas veces y otras tantas decían vale lo dejo pero un ratito mas un ratito más. Muy bien hecha la descripción de personajes con sus características y su forma de ser de cada especie, y muy bien descritas las distintas zonas y planetas. El libro es muy recomendable pero si no te gusta mucho la ciencia-ficción ni te acerques.

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## **Jen says**

Not a bad book. I would go half a star up if they had half stars. Solid 3.5. I wasn't overly happy with the ending, as most of the characters other than Nimrod and Amas had no development or learning of any kind. It kind of reminded me of a Greek tragedy, where the characters all had a fatal flaw that ultimately brought about their own destruction. Also, the women were kind of weak, giving in to the men over and over again,

where even at the end, they ended up being nursemaids. Though arguably, it's almost better to give to someone who can't say thank you due to a mental issue, than to give and give to someone who doesn't appreciate it because they are a jerk. At least the person with mental issues had a valid excuse and is pardonable. Sorry, I'm being vague to try not to give spoilers. All in all, a good book, worth the read, though I probably won't re-read it.

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## **Wendy says**

My main question after reading *The Mind Pool* is why is there a cat's head on the cover? I didn't notice it until I was almost all the way through the book, and I haven't been able to come up with a decent explanation for it.

To start off, I have not read *The Nimrod Hunt* so I cannot compare the two versions of this story. I enjoyed reading *The Mind Pool*, but it felt a bit choppy between the story lines towards the end. I am sure that I missed at least a few things and I look forward to reading the book again.

There were a couple of places where I figured things out chapters ahead of the characters which was nice to be able to do. However, I was also left with questions and not just because of the ending. For example, why are Froppers illegal?, why is Kubo Flammarion so fiercely loyal to Esro Mondrian?, and what really happened with the Morgan Construct? Instead of simply being frustrating and detracting from the novel, these questions actually helped to fill out the book for me. I like having something to wonder about, and I wouldn't have to do much thinking if everything was explained for me.

I grew quickly attached to some of the characters and found them to be quirky and interesting. I have seen that some readers were frustrated by a lack of individual character development. I barely noticed any such lack because I was too busy being fascinated by the interactions between the characters.

All in all, *The Mind Pool* is a great read.

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## **Gendou says**

This story is a trip. There's some unstoppable space monsters and they send a rag-tag team of different alien species to try and stop them. For some reason, of all the races in the galaxy, humans are unique in their violent tendencies. I don't know why other species would have evolved without the means of self-defense. It doesn't make any sense. Also, for some reason, in the future, computers can't beat humans at chess. I don't think Sheffield knows much about the human condition.

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## **John Loyd says**

Sheffield wrote *The Nimrod Hunt* (1986) first, then added one story line and changed the ending a bit to get *The Mind Pool* (1993). Without putting any spoilers in, I'll try to describe the book. He created a universe where humans have started to explore space, and have found three alien races. The races that humanity has met are totally peaceful, so peaceful in fact that the concept of killing another sentient being is painful for them.

Of course humanity is worried about threats from unexplored regions and is developing a way to protect ourselves. Esro Mondrian starts a project, based at a station in the Oort cloud to develop an artificial intelligent ship/being/weapon that will expand our sphere of known space, and protect us if need be. It gets loose, some people die. A council of the four races decides that a team, one member of each of the four races, will go after the device. I'm not going to go any further. It's set up to be like a Frankenstein's monster, but is it really? There is the interplay between the four races. Exploring Mondrian's psyche. Following the teams that they send after the device.

It was definitely an enjoyable book, rather, both were enjoyable. I wouldn't go out and pay full price for the second one, but I'm sure I picked these up at the used book store, so I'm OK. I think I liked his Proteus novels slightly more. Those are getting foggy in my memory, I read Proteus Unbound and Sight of Proteus in 2001, but I do remember that I thought they were fantastic.

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### **J. D. says**

An entertaining science-fiction novel about the search for an escaped intelligent defensive weapon.

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### **Michael Hall says**

This book had a lot of great ideas and scenes, but it failed to deliver in the character department. I kept wanting to skip sections of it that were focused on certain individuals that I felt were extraneous story tangents. It was hard to like any of the characters to be honest, they were all leaden and felt more like caricatures than actual people. That said, the plot itself had massive potential and I kept forcing myself to read, despite the face pacing, until the too quick, and depressing end.

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### **Thomas says**

This is a deeply weird book, touted on the cover as being "as far out as *hard* science fiction can go." The cover itself is wild. I like some of Sheffield's other work, but this one never really gets going.

The back cover reads:

"The Nimrod Hunt" is...

- One of the most stunningly original novels of 1986
- High adventure for High IQs
- So far out that only a master of Science fiction could of written it
- So technically correct that only a master of *science* could have written it
- Awash with conceptions, any one of which would form the core of a lesser work
- Filled with the most intriguing combination of humans, aliens, bio constructs and mechanical intelligences in the history of science fiction
- An introduction to the galaxy's only perfect woman.

ANSWER: ALL OF THE ABOVE!

Wow. That's quite a blurb. Promises a lot, but the book does not deliver, on any of the above counts. It is a very jumbled and disjointed combinatoion of several of the above, but never coalesces around a theme or idea. Nothing seems important. The characters are obviously intended to be interesting, but they aren't.

Having read it, for apparently the second time, I'm starting to wonder if it was published under legal requirements - it feels contractually mandated. Crap to fulfill a contract. Sheffield's other works are much better. Stay away!

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### **Peter Tillman says**

Good (3.5 stars) but not a keeper. Rewrite of his earlier NIMROD HUNT. Read 7-93.

Quite a cover! NIMROD definitely had the edge re cover art.

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### **Dave Heberer says**

This book is an older one, but was recommended and loaned to me by a friend when I asked for an example of good sci-fi writing. I found the story to be pretty engaging and it had several side stories that described a vision of the future I thought was decently believable. No magic dressed up as science, and I enjoyed the examination of what alien life might be like. It didn't get too crazy into details, but imagined several distinct life forms that weren't just humanoid things with antennae. I'm happy I read it.

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