



# Appleseed

*John Clute*

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## Appleseed John Clute

It is the dawn of the fourth millennium, and for trader Nathanael Freer it is business as usual. Tile Dance, his ship, is in the safe hands of KathKirtt, an AI with two minds, and a loyal krewe of cybernetic and android helpers. His latest commission-to deliver a shipment of nano-forges to the planet Eolhxir--is routine enough. All seems okey dokey.

But it is not. A virulent data plague is infecting the local spiral arm of the galaxy all the way from Old Earth. Universal darkness threatens the vast concord of living civilizations. And a trap has been laid that will draw Freer and his lover, Ferocity Monthly-Niece, into an eons-old conflict. His new contract is, in fact, far from routine, and Eolhxir holds the key to everything.

Appleseed is filled with wild high tech, weird aliens, and wonderful vistas. It will dazzle, amaze and delight you.

## Appleseed Details

Date : Published January 5th 2002 by Tom Doherty Associates (first published January 1st 2001)

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Author : John Clute

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# From Reader Review Appleseed for online ebook

## Wally says

One of the most interesting sf books I've read in a long time, even though the language makes this a difficult climb. The quest story is fairly straightforward, but understanding it could take quite a slow reading.

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## Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog [here](#) in December 2002.

Until the publication of this, his début novel, John Clute has been best known for writing about science fiction rather than in the genre, and his wide ranging knowledge shows in Appleseed's cross references. The most obvious link, as far as a reader is concerned, is not within the genre, but to the novels at the more flamboyant end of stream of consciousness, to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, for example, or to the richness of Jorge Luis Borges.

The plot is less important than the imagery and, indeed, is pretty rudimentary; the novel describes a trip to a world on which a cure might possibly be found for plaque, a disease which attacks both machine and organic intelligence. The densely packed allusive style in which Appleseed is written also makes it hard to read, particularly when it comes to picking up the details of the plot. (Stream of consciousness novels are frequently difficult to read, and in each case the reader must decide whether it is worth the effort to decode them; a typical snippet of Appleseed, for instance, reads: "A mask bearing the fist appaumpy spoke. 'Queens have died', said the Uncle Sam, 'young and fair.'")

One of the biggest technical challenges in science fiction writing is to find a way to represent the alien, whether it is a non-human intelligence or the effects of new technology on human psychology and culture. (You could in fact argue that this is the very essence of the genre.) This is the purpose for which Clute has chosen to use this style, to render an almost incomprehensible universe (and there is, after all, no particular reason why we should understand the real universe) - home to many aliens and a bizarre mix of reality and virtual reality. It's a clever idea, and often works well (for example, in the humorous description of the rituals following an alien birth, which is the best passage in the novel). In general, though, I didn't feel that Clute was a good enough writer to carry it off, and this combines with the minimal plot to make some sections seem more about flashy prose than substantial content. There are many interesting ideas, particularly the use of this style to convey alienness, so Appleseed is worth a read if you're interested in literary technique. I can't help feeling that Clute would have done better to attempt something less ambitious for his debut.

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## Mike says

Way too many obscure adverbs and adjectives. So much so that I will not finish reading it! It's just too difficult to follow the story line with all the excessive verbage thrown in! It is too much like a vocabulary test, requiring a dictionary at all times.

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## **Brian Richardson says**

Strange, surreal, hypercool far future novel where humans are the hottest (literally) thing walking the worlds, aliens worship strange gods buried in the seas of Earth, and information plaque spreads like disease across planets. Highly recommended if you're looking for sci-fi that's way out of the ordinary.

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## **Macha says**

4 stars at least. John Clute is more noted for his sf criticism than for his fiction. but lock early Samuel Delany, R.A. Lafferty, and Rudy Rucker in a room together, and this hallucinatory tall tale might result. yes, there are characters, in fact there's a hero and a villain; there's even a plot. but it's demanding to read, reveling in settings and language the far future might really throw up in a universe where earth is long gone and homo sap has almost been superceded by AIs and versions of nanotech. persevere: it's a tour de force, and John Clute's ultra-literate brain is worth following down more than a few rabbit holes of archetype and even art.

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## **Flying\_Monkey says**

John Clute is a singular SF critic: he writes with verve and style and with a unashamedly vaste vocabulary. Indeed his unapologetically fertile use of words, his love of language as a sensuous and liquid thing, alienate some who prefer a more direct and uncomplicated approach. His knowledge of the genre is also unmatched, and would be called 'encylopaedic' had he not in fact edited the definitive encyclopaedia in the field.

Given this background one might expect his first SF novel, a dense and intense reimagining of the classic space opera, to be a unique confection, and this it certainly is in these two respects at least.

This book delights in words, it explodes with linguistic pyrotechnics, it exalts in unexpected juxtapositions of the obscure and the mundane, of the arcane and the obscene, it drowns the reader in an almost cloyingly rich thesauric stew. In this sense it is an astonishing book, a novel whose language both makes and mirrors the baroque universe in which it is set. Because the language does work. It is not simply filagree, it is the substance and structure of the book and it does its job: I have never read a more utterly atmospheric and engulfing description of the process of landing on an alien trading world as Clute presents in the first two dozen pages of Applesseed.

Secondly, Clute's vast knowledge of SF enables him to play with tropes, concepts and situations in away that is a delight for the aficionado. There are references everywhere, only some of which are credited in the afterword. There are also some fascinating inventions of his own: the azulejaria tiles which line 'Tile Dance', the ship piloted by the protagonist, Nathaniel Freer, and which are simultaneously story and storage; the world of Klavier as a multi-dimensional palimpsest, layer upon layer, twist within turn; and the hilarious treatment of human odour and sexuality within a universe where most species find sex offensive and use smell to communicate subtle and complex matters.

But... and this is a big 'but'...

Some of the borrowings are more than references. The central notion of the entropic data 'plaque' infecting

the universe, and indeed many of the situations, species, and general 'feel' of Clute's universe, while by no means exactly the same, certainly appear to have a lot in common with Vernor Vinge's 'A Fire upon the Deep', a work that is not mentioned by Clute in his afterword. While I would never go so far as to accuse SF's greatest critic of plagiarism, I would say that Clute certainly owes more of a debt to Vinge, who is neither as culturally-central or as highly-regarded as those whom Clute does namecheck, than he admits. In addition, his 'made-minds', Artificial Intelligences, are also strongly reminiscent of Iain M. Bank's darkly witty and bizarre Culture minds.

Most importantly of all however, the plot and resolution, character development - such as it is possible in a universe where identity is so malleable - and emotional content, are flimsy and ramshackle affairs when stripped of the dense superstructure of description. The lack of connection to what we know of as human emotion is a common and perhaps insoluble problem in any reasonable far future setting - it seems to go with the territory - although Attanasio's 'Last legends of Earth' is a magnificent exception. However Appleseed's lack of substantial 'story' is far less forgivable.

Still, this book should be read. For all its failings as a tale, stylistically there isn't much like it in SF (or elsewhere), and in many ways it is brave: the outrageous lovechild of a menage a trois between Vernor Vinge, Iain M. Banks and the Oxford English Dictionary, it won't be easily read, but certainly not easily forgotten.

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### **Craig says**

Clute has an amazingly large vocabulary, and shows it off in virtually every sentence. (E.g., almost at random, "The theophrasts of the inner stars designate the masking of a Made Mind as a form of kenosis--the ultimately fatal incarnation of the divine into the progeria of mortal flesh.") While this enables very dense description, it is also overwhelming--I feel I need to have a dictionary beside me to read this book. The story and characterization are somewhat left behind; there are story points that I think I'm missing because of the word games Clute plays.

At 1/4 of the way through this book, I'm giving up. Clute had to work really hard to make this novel so difficult to read.

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### **Will says**

Almost entirely unintelligible. Not in the sense of a Gene Wolfe artistry, but more like a twisted version of Mary Gentle and M. John Harrison. A combination of a refusal to use a simple word where a complicated one would do and a tendency to ignore quotation marks and full stops lead to an interesting, if somewhat anonymous experience. Of course, if you're describing a world where identity is mutable and there is no clear distinction between thought and speech then it all makes sense, but it makes a mockery of asking what is happening to whom.

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### **Raj says**

Nathaniel Freer is a trader who's been lucky enough to find a commission in a time of hardship, when a data virus, plaque, is slowly encompassing the galaxy. He barely escapes from the planet Trencher when the

plaque engulfs it but it seems that his cargo is more than it appears, and Freer must run for his life towards his destination planet that seems to be at the centre of everything.

This is a hard science fiction novel with lots of interesting world-building. From the twinned AIs, pleasingly termed 'Made Minds', to the hints of plaque apocalypse that overtook Earth in the distant past. This apocalypse has meant that Humans have had to abandon Earth but they have been welcomed by the Galactic community because aliens can get high on Human smell. However, it's also a very dense book. It's full of very evocative imagery but it gets tiring having to turn to a dictionary every other paragraph. There's a lot packed into the words which I suspect would reward rereading, but which made the first reading difficult.

A lot is just thrown at the reader with no explanation or context and while some of it eventually starts making sense, some is just left as general background noise which I found somewhat irritating, although I can see the point of it. I think that at some point I would like to reread it though and see if it's an easier read next time round.

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### **Peter Goodman says**

“Appleseed,” by John Clute (Tor, 2001). I suppose this is steampunk, but far beyond that. It’s the language, the language. Clute is another one of the wealth of great SF writers whom I’ve never heard of. There is a story, indeed there is a plot and some interesting characters, but the most interesting thing here is the writing. It’s Joycean, even Gerard Manley Hopkinsian, wildly allusive, full of puns, strange combinations, complicated, some of it I never really understood. Story: 3,000 years or so in the future, homo sapiens is a rare and almost sacred species among all the different creatures of the galaxy, the artificial intelligences, the cyberworld. The galaxy is slowly being strangled by plaque, an Alzheimer’s of space, which rains down on planets and chokes them of all intelligence and comprehension. Meanwhile, there still is a vital, chaotic interstellar civilization. Nathaniel Freer, a space trader, has his ship, Tile Dancer, which is controlled and navigated by KathKirtt, his AI, and a crew of androids and cybernetic beings. They travel to the planet Trencher to pick up an order of nanoforges for the planet Eolhxir. But things get very strange. The planet, which is orbited by Insort Geront arks full of sapient senior citizens dozing away their dotage, is suddenly under attack. Freer (Kath calls him Stinky) manages to get away with his cargo, and an unexpected passenger named Cunning Earth Link, headed the same way. Cunning EL tells them that planet is full of lenses that can destroy plaque. Meanwhile, Trencher is assaulted by plaque and is destroyed. The rest of the way Freer and crew try to get to Eolhxir. Along the way they meet up with Johnny Appleseed and battle the villains of Geront in a war to save the galaxy, if not the universe. That’s the story, and a good one. But it’s the language that make this book special. I am going to wait to read another, this one was exhausting.

<http://www.johnclute.co.uk/>

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### **Chris says**

Clute writes powerful prose. I wanted to love this novel--I love the setting, the artificial intelligences, even the idea that humans are the most terrifying beasts in the galaxy--yet I was so busy looking up words and trying to make sense of individual sentences (much the time) that I failed to love the experience. I was left

with a sense of what happened, not a concrete recollection--which may have been his intent. Perhaps he wanted a novel that left impressions instead of concrete memories. I will probably try it again one day.

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## Jacques says

Brought a borrowed copy on a long plane trip and read the whole thing, despite the availability of other books, so that's something. I can sort of imagine liking it, but I didn't really. Well written, though I bet I could convince you otherwise by quoting from almost any page. Atmospheric, densely allusive, novel. Over-the-top flashy. The characters seemed static. The plot felt predestined. The anthropocentrism was tiresome. Maybe I was too tired and cranky when I read this! Who knows?

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## nostalgebraist says

When I finished this book I was too dazed and worn out to give it anything like the kind of review it deserved. I ended up just resorting to the worst reviewer's cliché in the book -- "what was this guy *on*?"

I still don't feel like writing a real review, but in lieu of that I can at least throw some quotes at you. Quotes are specially informative here because what distinguishes this book from all the other science fiction I've read isn't plot or characterization or worldbuilding -- all pretty good, mind you -- but its use of language to disorient and dazzle the reader. I've always been confused by the preference many science fiction writers and fans have for plain, unadorned language -- isn't science fiction all about going to new and strange places where people may think, and thus talk, differently? The future will break the world apart into categories along different lines than the present, and those categories will be embodied in words. Well, Appleseed's style is anything but plain, and it is one of the only works of science fiction I've read that really *sounds* like the future. The future sounds like this:

*A timorous sibling tched softly within striking distance of the breakfast head of the Harpe in command of the great ark in orbit around Trencher with its stuffing of deep-sleeps snoring through their brainchip tasks. The sibling masticated with tiny nibbles the real-paper printouts in its glutinous ticklers, which it extended, perhaps hoping to donate an extensor limb. The commanding officer -- a grown sibling of Opsophagos -- took the printout in the mouth of its slack-eyed famished breakfast head, read the co-ordinates displayed, pulled down a three-horned screen and punched out the designated location. Chip-sluggish, the screen cleared, in time to reveal Number One Son wobble bare-arsed into the homo sapiens braid. Controlling their aversion to sigilla, the commanding officer began to jubilate.*

*They almost ate himself alive with joy.*

Or sometimes like this:

*Flitting from the stories that held them, other masks exfoliated themselves for the nonce to become memes, hiked themselves through the grouting slots, janiform and doppelgänger-pale from the prison of the dance of tiles, and into the gimbal-shot free space of Glass Island, where they loured over the scene from fittings atop brass herms, shot antic bat glances around toggles, crouched over a braced scroll beaded with the sweat of attar, through which the Prime Copy of the Universal Book might be accessed ceremonially and at points of crisis.*

Or like this:

*--Upsydowndaisy lamentoso, death-bound froggies! whispered the transitus tessera out of the mouths of all the magi and the sages and the kings and queens and lower cards of conclave space in one single voice as though they had all suddenly remembered at the one same time the one same thing to say. The memory theatre of the conclave space of Tile Dance had not spoken ensemble for a Trillion Heartbeats, since before homo sapiens began to talk right, since before the Caduceus Wars.*

What you think of these passages is a pretty reliable determinant of what you will think of the whole book. If you are the sort of SF fan who won't be able to enjoy the book unless you can determine precisely what each of Clute's funny words means and what basis it has in real science, then you won't like Appleseed. (I'm still not clear on whether there's a difference between "flesh sapients" and "flesh sophonts," and it took me a long time just to figure out that "sigils" and "sigilla" are different things in Clute's world. Which they are, by the way. Caveat lector.) On the other hand, if these quotes make you hungry for more psychedelic future-speak, Clute is your man. This is not a book that science fiction fandom received with a great deal of warmth, but it is nonetheless a book that should probably be read more often than it is.

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Original "review":

John Clute must be on some pretty fantastic drugs.

Also, was I imagining it, or was a lot of that book some sort of twisted parody of *Stranger in a Strange Land*? Maybe it's just a consequence of having read the two in close proximity.

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### **Tera Nikolaos says**

This book made very little sense. I have no idea what actually happened. Perhaps it is too clever for my brain to comprehend.

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### **R\_ VanHal says**

Wow. This is really something. One of the most challenging books I read - not because of the story, no, because the setting, the future is so advanced, that it appears, as Arthur C. Clarke said, as magic, and Clute's style in writing is unique. The whole book is like a trip printed on paper, in a universe full of wonders, amazement and magic.

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