



Hothouse

Brian W. Aldiss , Matilde Horne (Translator)

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In this science fiction classic, we are transported millions of years from now, to the boughs of a colossal banyan tree that covers one face of the globe. The last remnants of humanity are fighting for survival, terrorised by the carnivorous plants and the grotesque insect life.

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Hothouse Details

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Download and Read Free Online Hothouse Brian W. Aldiss , Matilde Horne (Translator)

From Reader Review Hothouse for online ebook

Jan-Maat says

There is a trick to beginning reviews, and it's a pity that I've never learnt it.

My early impression reading this 1960 science fiction novel set on Earth in a far future, when our plant's rotation has stalled and weird, dynamic forms of vegetable life are dominant, leaving the rest - tiny humans, wasps, termites and a few others to battle on as best they can was to feel the similarities with J G Ballard's *The Drowned World*. Both imagine a future world that in some ways is more similar to the prehistoric past, the (Jungian?) notion of an inherited species memory is important in both, and the importance of the time that both authors spent in the Far East - Ballard as a boy, Aldiss - if I remember correctly - as part of his military service, is not something that you have to lift stones to see.

Both, and I suspect that is a particularly sharp feature in British writing when there is not just the taking into account of the reality of living with the possibility of destruction through atomic war but also an adaptation to the loss of Empire, have a sense of human societies and civilisations as transitory. Here I make plain my view that science fiction and fantasy writing is never about the fantastic nor the fictional possibilities of science but about contemporary concerns. In Aldiss this is a theme that is there also in *Earthworks* and most richly expressed in *The Helliconia Trilogy*. Aldiss here though doesn't have the same fixation that early Ballard does on the dramatic and sudden transition from one state to another. Aldiss's interest in the temporary and contingent nature of our human lives, I feel is more philosophical and certainly more abstract than Ballards which is as visceral as you would expect given his experiences as related in a slightly fictionalised form in *Empire of the Sun*. But I may well be misleading myself on the basis of Aldiss beginning and ending *The Helliconia Trilogy* with quotations from Lucretius, which no doubt predisposed me to assume an equally philosophical turn to Aldiss' mind.

Yet we could cut apart the cake in another couple of ways. Looking back we also have the example of H G Wells (view spoiler) and his concern with the far future of humanity, and further back with Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*. This I suppose could be expressed as: repent, for the end of the world is nigh or indeed as this.

For me a more satisfying slice is to be had by considering *Hothouse* as a response to the Far East, rather as Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast Trilogy* is a response to his youth in China and then having to learn to live in Britain. This presents it's own difficulties, as Aldiss writes here "*whereas I had adjusted to the squalor and poverty of India, I hated the squalor and poverty, allied to the depressing climate, of my homeland*" (p270). I'm not sure if it is a case of the author having to use fiction as a way of expressing the alien quality of another land and other people for themselves, or seizing on fiction as the best way to make us readers experience those alien qualities, but for me writing this today *Hothouse* is a fictional response to coming in to the real presence of a banyan tree. And for me that holds open a new promise of creativity - for what art will be created when people come from the land of the Banyan tree to the north sea islands with their soft and dismal drizzle, fried fish and steak and kidney pudding? What deep terrors, ancient anxieties or even wild hopes will they then need to impress upon the people they return to at home?

The story is also remarkable for its semi-sinister sentient fungus, & it's 'ignorance is bliss' ending, shown as preferable to species blending with a mind altering mushroom.

Adam says

If you put aside the shoddy science and employ your suspension of disbelief to the fullest, than this is a blast of a story. A distant future where humans are hunted by evolved plants and giant insects in a world that resembles a giant rainforest. I had so much fun reading about the setting that I didn't even care that the plot was flimsy. This is a fun tour through a very imaginative landscape.

Sara J. (kefuwa) says

One of my first memories of childhood was a trip to the planetarium at Jodrell Bank and the ending sequence of the 'presentation' was where they showed the theorised last stages of our Sun's life as a star with it's eventual supernova and decline into a red dwarf before inevitably dying out. That, for some strange reason, fascinated me terribly in an almost nightmarish way for weeks on end... all life on earth wiped out by a supernova - expanding sun swallows up the nearby planets! But the increased radiation alone would have wiped us out long before it went supernova? Eh?

Anyhow. Hothouse is set somewhere along that time, the sun is super hot and on it's last leg. The plant kingdom has taken over riotously and humanity has evolved (or should I say devolved) into... Little. Green. Men.

[cue image]

Literally. Also - the earth doesn't spin on it's axis anymore is tidally attached to the sun so that one half is perpetual day and the other perpetual night. Also, there are HUUUUGE spiders that spin webs between earth and the moon. o_O I kid you not.

Sound almost ridiculous. But who is to know that far into the future... I would have thought nothing would have survived the radiation and anything living would have to be underground or deep in the sea. But I digress.

The opening sequence and subsequent introduction to this world comes in the form of the most basic unit of humanity at the time - a matriarchal family unit of several adults and their offspring. Their forays brought to mind scenes from "Honey I Shrunk the Kids" with the climbing of giant stalks and nightmarish giant insects - but with, more often than not, less forgiving and more lethal repercussions - one wrong move equals death (and there are deaths aplenty).

While the first quarter focuses on this unit - the story, I feel, (eventually) ends up as a vehicle to transport us on a trip around the world to as many diverse locales & expose us to as many weird creatures as possible. And boy does it get weird. There is some great world building going on here. This part of the story almost brought to mind a Jules Verne's-esque fantastical quality of never before seen/unexplored frontiers. Though that could just be due to the talking fungus' encyclopaedic urge to explain everything. Yes, we also have talking fungus. Among other things... so many other things.

After finishing it the only thought I had was... wow. What madness was that? Great stuff. The stuff of talking fungus' (may I never know their kind).

Rating this I am torn between giving it a 4 (I really like it) and 5 (It was AMAZING)... it is definitely a 4 for me... but falls just a bit short of a 5. It was AMAZING in the purely fantastically mind boggling imaginative sense... but a bit *too* fantastic maybe (plus I should mention the devolved dialogue of some of the devolved species does grate a bit after awhile). So... a 4.5?

*Originally Hothouse consisted of 5 short stories serialised in a magazine and eventually published as a whole. These 5 short stories were collectively awarded the 1962 Hugo Award for short fiction.

Disclaimer: I got this from Netgalley for the Open Road Media release of this novel.

Michael says

I was surprised how much I liked this riot of imagination of post-humans clinging to survival in a world where plants have taken over. Millions of years from now when the sun has gotten hotter and the earth's rotation is locked to keep one side always in its rays, the kingdom of plants has outcompeted animals for all the niches, evolving carnivorous and motile forms of seeming infinite variety. Humans have adapted to short brutish lives as small green creatures amid the jungle canopy.

The dangers are many, but with tribal knowledge and teamwork and enough focus on breeding some form of human life persists when nearly all other vertebrates and even most insects have become extinct. The action is nearly non-stop, with one set of characters falling by the wayside as we follow one couple go from one frying pan to the fire in places beyond the forest they know. These include alternate ecologies near the sea, the twilight zones between perpetual light and dark, and even a journey to the moon.

My knowledge of biology often stretched my ability to suspend disbelief, but I was able to keep riding on metaphorical or allegorical truths about things in human nature we take for granted. The value of cultural knowledge is left somewhat ambiguous. On one hand, the need for constant wariness against so many predators and parasites keeps these future humans so tuned into the present, there is little room for dwelling on higher or long term purposes to life. Through the somewhat silly device of a telepathic fungus that can glean genetic memories of humans of the past, one character gains some perspective. He seems doomed to die quick because of his tendency to try new ways of solving problems of survival, but such new strategies were for him the only to keep ahead of the game.

The book succeeds for me on its lasting psychological feelings about teeming life forms and its atmospherics of horror and wonder over the precariousness of the life of an individual and our species. After recent reads of science books on the current human caused threats to biological diversity of the planet, it was fascinating for me to experience a scenario where excessive diversity among plants puts us almost out of the picture.

I appreciate the publisher taking a chance on the re-release of this classic from 1961. It was provided to me as an e-book through the Netgalley program.

Claudia says

Although I can't say this one is a favorite of mine, like *Heliconia Trilogy*, it sure left a strong impression on me.

Millions of years in the future, Earth stopped spinning and it's tidally locked with the Sun, which is in its last days, before turning into a supernova and burn itself and its surroundings out. Animal life on Earth consists only in few humans - intellectually devolved and physically different from what they used to be – and a couple of insects. Vegetation covers the whole planet, plants are now omnivores and grown to unimaginable sizes and shapes. The jungle is formed from just one banyan tree which covers the entire Earth and within its branches and leaves numerous perils lie. Moon is connected to Earth through giant cobwebs, spin by mile-long plant-spiders, which act like a space elevators.

The worldbuilding is stupendous; the images are so vivid and well drawn, that one cannot but be amazed by it. And in this green world live the degenerate humans, green and small, reduced to primary instincts and trying to survive among all these enormous and great dangers.

Even though I loved the worldbuilding, the characters put me off. The various tribes, reduced to stupid creatures, were quite hard to root for. The tummybellies, which are supposed to be the fun part of the story, are the most annoying and I couldn't help resonating with Gren, our main character, on this, even if I didn't approve on his behaviour.

Actually, the main course of action is the journey of Gren, one strong-willed tribesman, which takes a different path away from his fellows. We follow him in his adventures, encounters, near death experiences and most of all, his symbiotic relation with a morel.

And although I didn't like the language, the behavior, the way the characters are shaped, I must admit they are perfectly integrated in the world. But I am just stating my enjoyment on the characters, which was rather low, than criticizing the way they are developed.

One fact I found to be very interesting and I was glad for the epilogue Aldiss wrote in this edition, because otherwise I might have never known this. The author lived many years in India and was particularly impressed by the great banyan tree which now occupies more than 4 acres (2 acres when Aldiss came across it) and looks like a forest; this majestic tree was the inspiration for this book:

More info in it: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gre...

Bottom line is that, even if I loved the worldbuilding and the message it carries, that Nature is the mighty ruler of this planet which will evolve and survive no matter what and humanity is just a tiny, insignificant speck in its kingdom, the characters annoyed me to no end; hence the three stars.

Stephen Curran says

As the dying sun blasts out immense levels of radiation, plant life has taken undeniable supremacy of the earth. The land is dominated by a single banyan tree that grows as high as the skyline, while the coast is populated with giant, battling seaweed. Above it all, a spider-like breed of traversers sling webs back and forth to the immobile moon: 'vegetable astronauts huge and insensible'.

Yup.

Reading Hothouse is like experiencing one of those all-too-occasional vivid dreams that are so richly detailed that you wake up feeling like you've been travelling: as if you have been mentally present somewhere vast and bizarre and new. The story takes the form of a journey of discovery, much like Gulliver's Travellers or Journey to the Centre of the Earth and, as is often the case, it is a story of conceptual breakthrough.

On our fantastic voyage, we encounter a sentient and manipulating fungus, which has specialised in intelligence while the planet's plants have specialised in size. Latching itself to the brains of two human outcasts it learns our collective history from 'the extraordinary ancestral compost heap' of their unconscious minds. Harbours ambitions of world domination, this morel represents (and finally explains) man's urge to power.

Other stuff seems to be going on about class, but the pleasure of Hothouse lies not in allegory, but in its wild and hallucinatory invention.

Apatt says

I seldom reread books because there are too many interesting unread books in the world to catch up with but some books just haunt me, demanding to be reread because I have forgotten too many details. I was walking around in a lush garden and I was reminded of this book and felt the need to reread it. This book is set on a far future Earth near the end of its existence, the sun is imminently going nova, human society and civilization have crumbled long ago. Plants and vegetable reign supreme, and human beings have devolved into primitive little green people the size of monkeys.

"Only five great families survived among the rampant green life; the tigerflies, the treebees, the plantants and the termights were social insects mighty and invincible. And the fifth family was man, lowly and easily killed, not organized as the insects were, but not extinct, the last animal species in all the all-conquering vegetable world."

As you can see, things look pretty grim for mankind! This book gives us a fascinating look at devolution in action, beside the little green people who are our direct descendants, there are subspecies of man who are presumably descended from crossbreeding of unknown origin. The most interesting example being the tummy-belly men who have a symbiosis relationship with a tree that feeds and control them through a tail which functions like an umbilical cord. When this is cut the tummy-belly men become clumsy, floundering and almost mindless; with a speech pattern which is particularly hilarious (much funnier than Yoda's). Aldiss' plant dominated Earth is full of ambulatory mostly carnivorous plants, John Wyndham's Triffids would have some very stiff competition here.

The best thing about this book is the vivid world-building that you can really submerge in. This is the most fascinating post-apocalyptic future Earth I have ever seen depicted in science fiction. I almost want to be

there, except I don't fancy my chances in that environment, certainly I would like to see it portrayed in a decent movie. The aggressive environment reminds me of the action-packed Deathworld 1 by Harry Harrison (long-time collaborator of Brian Aldiss), the aforementioned The Day of the Triffids, and - strangely enough - my favorite computer game Plants vs. Zombies. The naivety of the human protagonists reminds me of William Golding's Lord of the Flies at times. The characters are not "deep" but they are believable, the weird plants tend to have oddly whimsical names in spite of their deadliness, and the whole thing is written in very nice literate English prose.

I am not sure about the profundity that some other reviewers mentioned in their reviews of this book if there is a subtext it is not obvious to me, but for sheer escapism, you can not beat this one. A very firm 5 stars rating from me.

Update: Sadly Brian Aldiss just passed away (Aug 21, 2017), we just lost another sci-fi legend.

Stephen says

A **FAR-FUTURE** Earth where **PLANTS** are at the **TOP** of the **FOOD CHAIN**, **HUMANS** are **MEALS** and **GIANT, SPIDER-LIKE PLANTS** travel on webs between the **MOON** and **EARTH**...that is not just **COOL**....that's **BLACK DYNAMITE COOL!!**

4.5 to 5.0 stars. This book is all about **WORLD-BUILDING** and Brian Aldiss has created a **TRI**ptastically **SUPERB** vision of a "far future" Earth unlike anything I have ever read. In the distant future, evolution has decided to **BOOT** the "Animal Kingdom" square in the nether-regions...

...and plants have developed into the dominant "Kingdom" on Earth. *** *Side note: I wanted to just say "species" rather than "Kingdom" but then I was sure some science "troll nerd" with an overactive sense of self would take issue with my review for using improper jargon, forcing me to call him an Asst and posting his picture all over goodreads....*
...and who needs that.

Anyway, in this far future, the world is basically one giant "rain forest" of densely packed plant-life that has evolved some serious "don't mess with me" offensive and defensive capabilities. From the ability to move with razor sharp teeth, to spitting poison to just being able to gobble you the hell up. These new "rambo" plants are also fairly intelligent and adept at problem solving and setting traps. In other words, they have become all kinds of big, ugly nastiness and have developed a hankering for human-ka-bobs(or ka-Ricks, ka-Dans, or ka-Marys for that matter). These new plants are mobile, agile, lethal and hostile and they are here to chew bubble-gum and kick-ass and they are all out of bubble-gum.

(Sorry, I couldn't pass up a chance at a Rowdy Roddy Piper reference. How often does that present itself?

Anyway, how the Earth got this way is discussed in some detail and I thought it was very interesting. Please note that this is not "hard SF" and the explanations for how the world developed into the Garden of Hell are not plausible but that is not the point. This is plain old fashion "dying earth" style science fiction and you just

need to strap in and go along for the ride.

The plot itself is mostly an excuse to travel the planet and observe and comment on the strange new world the Earth has become. The main character, Gren, is part of a human tribe that decides to seek a better, safer place to live far from their current home. While plants have grown bigger, stronger, smarter and more aggressive, humans are now only one-fifth of their original size and live on the edge of extinction.

Along the journey, Gren and his group (and the reader) are shown a whole host of very interesting creatures and plants and that is really where this book hits it out of the park. I was fascinated by the world from the very beginning and pretty much stayed that way through to the end. The characters are not particularly well developed and you never really “identify” with them which may cause some people to be less engaged with the story. However, for me it was all about the amazingly imagined environment Aldiss created and that is the reason to read this book. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!!**

Winner Hugo Award (1962) (NOTE: it was actually the five short stories that make up this novel that were awarded the Hugo Award for best short fiction).

Bradley says

I'm really impressed with this 1962 classic. I was fully prepared to assume it would be outdated and skimpy on the characters, but what I actually got was a thought-provoking tale that was so heavy on the worldbuilding that the worldbuilding was more like three or four characters in its own right.

I mean, you know its some serious science fiction if we're transported a billion years in the future, where men and women are a fifth our current size, where the earth and the moon are locked to constantly face the sun and the world had devolved and mixed and blurred lines between animals and vegetables. The prose was more than strong enough to prevent such a monstrosity of a novel from collapsing, filled with tantalizing images of truly odd creatures and situations I can barely guess at.

I only had a few issues with some of the characters. Some of the species of man were really dumb, and that was kind of the point, but I just couldn't believe that they'd have no sense of self-preservation. That point irked me. But other than that, I understood why the main characters didn't get much of a chance to grow or change. It was an outright adventure novel, exploring new lands, trying to survive while being driven by the mortal enemy of mankind.... his brain.

My god, that aspect of this novel was pretty damn cool. Mankind entered into a contract with a parasite that gave us our intelligence in the deep past. A fungus that, when combined with another living creature, makes it smarter. With time, it moved from being a crown of spongy fungus that looked like a brain to inhabit the slowly enlarged cavity of our modern heads, until all man thought this was the natural order. When the sun aged and became deadly to the fungus, mankind fell into the state of beasts again.

To have a hardy and evolved fungus drop upon you in the middle of the jungle to give you heightened intelligence, you'd think that would be a good thing, right?

Intelligence is overrated. :)

What a mess it caused for Gren.

The world was fantastic, spanning from spiderwebs that spanned between the earth and the moon, twilight zones where wolfmen roam, trees that shoot fire, and fishmen that rise up from the waters to preach about civilization and the coming nova of our sun. Too cool.

There's one more thing. These stories were written in 1961 before they were put together as one novel the next year. As I was reading it, I kept thinking to myself that this novel was the inspiration for Dune. The Morel could access our genetic memories into the deep past. The ecological concerns were breathtaking and very well thought out and developed, whether or not they're inaccurate. There were so many links and ties between the two novels that I had to put it down and do a little research. I kept assuming that this was a homage to Dune, for heaven's sake. Nope. It came out 4 years before Dune, and does an awesome job at outperforming Dune in these ways.

Is that high praise? Yes. Do I see why one of the short stories that made up this novel won the Hugo in '62? Yes. Can I imagine that during the 5 year time that Frank Herbert was writing Dune, he got inspired while reading the magazines these stories were published? Yes.

What a fantastic coincidence. :)

Dan Schwent says

Millions of years into the future, the Earth is tidally locked with the sun and the sunny side is dominated by a banyan tree of mind-boggling size. Mile-wide plant spiders crawl from the Earth to the moon on vast webs. As for man, he is now a foot and a half high, green, and running scared all the time...

I got this from Netgalley.

I was pretty conflicted about this book. On one hand, I love the setting. Come on! A far-future earth dominated by colossal plants with giant spiders crawling from the earth to the moon and back! Telepathic mushrooms! Flying plants! Giant insects! What's not to like?

Well, there isn't much of a plot to speak of. The story starts with one band of humans, moves on to the kids they leave behind when they Go Up, and then follows two of them. I think some of this is due to the book being a patchwork of several of Aldiss' stories set on the Hothouse earth.

Still, it's not without its charms. There's a wackiness to it that I enjoyed. It reminded me of Philip Jose Farmer's Dark is the Sun quite a bit. Also, the setting reminded me a bit of Harry Harrison's Deathworld 1.

I guess I should wrap this up somehow. I love the setting but I don't think the story ever came close to doing it justice. Two out of five stars.

Ben says

Written in 1962, Brian Aldiss' Hothouse is similar to works like Jack Vance's "Dying Earth" series and Gene Wolfe's Book of the New Sun. In most novels of this dying earth genre, the world is gasping under the

weight of civilization; a million years of customs and artifacts, countless empires risen and fallen, cities piled upon cities. In Hothouse, it's nature, not culture which dominates the last days of Man.

Far in the future, under a swollen red sun, the Earth and Moon have long since dragged each other to a halt, leaving one side of Earth permanently lit and the other in permanent darkness. Under the plentiful radiation on the lit side, plants have become the primary inhabitants of the land, diversifying into thousands of forms to fill every available ecological niche. Of the animal kingdom, only a few species remain: one or two insect-like predators, and a much-altered humanity. These humans are tribal hunter-gatherers, living in the canopy of a continent-spanning forest.

The novel follows Gren, who is forced out of his tribe (for, essentially, excessive cleverness) and so begins a journey to seek a new home. Actually, "journey" is perhaps too charitable. Gren is more often driven from place to place by forces he can't control. Early in the novel, he is infected by a parasitic, sentient fungus which slowly takes control of his mind and plans to use Gren to conquer the world. Over the course of the book, Gren travels to the dark side of the Earth, meets a variety of strange creatures, is helped and threatened to various degrees, manages to free himself from the fungus, returns with the fungus--now as a sort of advisory partner--to the light side, is given the choice to flee the first stages of the sun's explosion by riding to the stars inside an interstellar spider-plant, and chooses ultimately to return to the jungle and make babies because--hey--he'll be dead by the time the s**t hits the fan in any case.

We see much of this strange world through Gren's eyes, and he knows no more than any of his race. Many things he encounters during his journey remain mysterious, though some of human history is glimpsed in flashback as the mushroom probes (somewhat improbably) through Gren's racial memories, and at times it is possible to guess at the possible origins of species or artifacts.

In addition to being delightfully strange, Hothouse takes full advantage of the philosophical possibilities of the Dying Earth setting. The fungus, perhaps, stands in for one part of contemporary human nature: though it is clearly base, cruel, selfish, perhaps even evil--it ultimately is the key to whatever salvation humanity is offered. Our hero, too, is no noble Odysseus; he is often petty, mean, or irresponsible. Yet for all that, or perhaps because of it, he seems more human than his companions--who are generally either passive or completely incomprehensible. The nature of time is also explored: the end of the world is an intellectual threat to the fungus, merely one more incomprehensible event to Gren, who wants mostly to find a good tree and settle down with a woman or two. The end of time, while tragic and romantic, is also suggested as a kind of rebirth. The "green streamers...." escaping from the planet as it dies are beautiful, and it's hard not to read hope into them. As one phase passes, so another begins.

These are not particularly profound observations, although they do place the book in the realm of "cerebral" SF. But for me, the greatest achievement of Hothouse is in its depiction of a nature "green in tooth and claw" as Aldiss puts it in the book. Science fiction does not lack for scary monsters; many-tentacled aliens are a dime a dozen. But the biological horror of a relentless, vegetal Earth is something memorable. I find Venus Flytraps slightly unsettling, and a little malevolent. Hothouse takes that feeling and multiplies it to fill a planetary landscape.

Henry Avila says

In the far distant future with the dying Sun above, all the Earth has been overrun by vegetation. Old Sol stays in the same position in the sky. Shining on half the Earth. The other part is a frozen wasteland, in perpetual

darkness...It's a plant world for sure. The few humans left, have returned to the trees, (there is just one, a Banyan, in reality), and turned green, the humans I mean. A "Hothouse" (the name of the novel originally), in fact Terra has become. These people are primitive. Living high above and not even being able to see the ground. No technology, no knowledge of their past, ignoramuses, trying to survive against man eating plants. Lily-yo, is the leader of a small band of humans. Always alert against the plants, who are more animal (almost extinct here), than vegetable. The tribe has pieces of carved wood which they carry around, and call their souls! When one of them dies, which happens often. The humans climb the tree, to the top level and leave the "souls" there. Hopefully soon, to be taken to heaven. The biggest organism in the world are called Traversers, mile long flying vegetation. Lily-yo and some of her band are transported by the Traversers, all the way to the Moon. Gren, a boy man rebel and others, are left behind to form a new group. On Luna, where life is much easier, and safer, oxygen in abundance, made by the plant life there, which had arrived in earlier trips. Fruit, water, a paradise compared to the old Earth. Ruled by Flymen, humans that have grown wings. Back on Earth Gren is expelled from the new group. With just a female along to survive the perils of this strange land. He'll need help, but where can he get it? Weird but very entertaining tale of what might be in the future, I hope not! Imaginative science fiction book, with enough plausibility, to keep it always from being silly...

Manny says

Hallucinatory 60s novel, possibly written on drugs, which depicts a far-future Earth in which humans have evolved into tiny creatures who live in a giant forest that covers the globe. Oh, and there are spider-webs that stretch up to the moon... a sort of biological space elevator. Read the book to find out what the deal is with the fungi. None of it makes sense, but the images are striking.

Ivana Books Are Magic says

This book might give you a tan, if you're the suggestive type. I mean if you really imagine yourself being in this hot, hot, hot world. I'm only kidding, but really I don't know, maybe it is even plausible, people do it with self-hypnosis, don't they? When I was in high school, I read mostly SF (when it came to books of my own selection). We had to read a lot of classic for school (our state school curriculum is such) so I guess that a part of me was looking for something different. But it could also be that, back then, I loved SF for the same reasons I love it now (for the power of its imagination, depth of its philosophy and in some case for its science- I'm not really fluent in science but I do know something about it and probably I awe that something to SF). Anyhow, I do remember enjoying reading this novel way back and it stayed in my mind ever since. I even remember discussing this book with friends, especially that fungus concept (I'll get into that later). So, imagine how happy I was when my brother gave me this book for Christmas and it was such a pretty edition too. Now I can re-read it whenever I feel like it.

Hothouse is set in future. Far, far away kind of future- with practically no ties with our civilization as we know it. Here are the facts of this new world that bears almost no resemblance to our own. The Earth has stopped rotating (that part is not very plausible but hey you can't have it all) a while back hence life on Earth is now very different from our own. The sun has been growing and growing, until it has grown enormous. So, as the Sun approaches its natural end, the life on Earth is mostly plant life engaged in a crazy frenzy of eating and being eaten, speedy growth and decay, something like a tropical forest on steroids. It's a jungle of

the wildest sort and the writer does a great job describing it. Is there a place for us in this crazy place? What happens with the humans? Human beings are small in size, they're only a fraction of our present size. That's not the most significant change at all. Human evolution seems to have taken a back tour, so mentally these humans have returned to the early days of human civilization- organized in tribes ruled by matriarchs and being driven mostly by their instincts. These humans don't ponder much, when they face loss and death, they shrug their shoulders and move on. They live in a fast-paced jungle where there is no time for mediation. Not if you want to survive. Consequently, our protagonists have little time to experience any deep thoughts, being mainly preoccupied with staying alive. That's the beginning of the story.

The story that develops soon after the start, makes this novel quite a page-turner! It is all very exciting stuff. Right from the beginning to the end, the novel is action packed- there's always something going on. The character's development is somewhat limited, possibly due to them being somewhat limited in terms of intelligence themselves. However, there is some character development, so it is not like it is only action, all the time. It is true that these tiny humans start off as being little more than animals, but they do progress to some extent and they're likeable. They do the best they can and in many ways, they hold onto their humanity- that's the feeling I got anyway. Their lives often end tragically- yes, there are some tragic moments but there is stubbornness in them that doesn't seem to be all due to survival instincts. I felt there is more than instincts to them, more complexity. In other words, I felt that the characters of Hothouse had soul and I liked them.

So, what do you do when you have this premise in which humans aren't highly intelligent but you still want to make an interesting dialogue? Well, you invent a way in which one of the protagonist suddenly becomes smarter (and with no help from personal evolution because that wouldn't make sense in the story). The fungus (or the morel)- what a brilliant idea! The morel is a sentient fungus that enhances the intelligence of creatures it forms symbiotic relationships with. I guess it could also be called a parasite. It isn't exactly friendly. The whole concept of this smart fungus fascinated me. There is even an indication that that is how people became smart in the first place- and it was a cheeky and fun (if not a credible) idea. As a thing, character or villain- I don't know what to call it-it's well-thought and incorporated into a story. Those parts when the fungus tried to take over the life of one of the protagonists was probably my favourite part of the novel.

One of the things I absolutely loved about this novel were the vivid descriptions of this future world. I had a feeling like I got a tan while I was reading this book. The author is so wildly imaginative when he writes about different life forms. I think that biologists would enjoy this one. You almost feel like you're watching a really great nature documentary. It feels that real! There is originally both in the setting and in the story. That feeling of life growing fanatically in the final days of a dying sun- it's there, you can feel it. That is what I loved the most. I really felt a part of this world.

Hothouse is not exactly hard sf, but it's really fun to read. It has many twists and turns. It makes you feel for the characters. It develops a great and exciting story. I've read somewhere that the editor sought scientific advice about the scientific aspect of the book (the part about the planet standing still) and that he had been told that the orbital dynamics involved meant that it was nonsense, but the image of the earth and moon side by side in orbit, shrouded with cobwebs woven by giant vegetable spiders, was so outrageous and appealing that he published it anyway. He made the right decision! This novel is a gem. It is amazingly original and widely imaginative. Highly recommended to all SF fans! It is such a unique and valuable work in this genre.

Ivana says

I remember enjoying reading this novel way back in high school. Recently when it was given to me as a present, I had a chance to reread it- and I really liked it again.

Hothouse is set in far, far future. The sun has grown enormous as it approaches its end, and the life on Earth (that has stopped rotating around the sun btw) is mostly plant life engaged in a crazy frenzy of eating and being eaten, speedy growth and decay, something like a tropical forest on steroids. Human beings are small and mentally they've returned to the early days of human civilization- organized in tribes ruled by matriarchs and being driven by their instincts. They live in a fast pace jungle and have little time to experience any deep thoughts, being mainly preoccupied with staying alive. That's the beginning.

The story that develops soon after the start, makes this novel a page-turner, from the beginning to the end, the novel is action packed- there's always something going on. The character's development is somewhat limited in terms of intelligence, they start off as being little more than animals, but they do progress to some extent and they're likeable. They do the best they can and often it ends tragically- yes, there are tragic moments.

The fungus (or the morel)- what a brilliant idea! The morel is a sentient fungus that enhances the intelligence of creatures it forms symbiotic relationships with. (There is even an indication that that is how people became smart in the first place) As a thing, character or villain- I don't know what to call it- it's well-thought and incorporated into a story.

The best part about the novel are the descriptions, the author is so wildly imaginative when he writes about different life forms. You almost feel like you're watching a really great nature documentary. There is originality in this story. The feeling of life growing fanatically in the final days of a dying sun- it's there.

Hothouse is not exactly hard sf, but it's really fun to read. I've read somewhere that the editor sought scientific advice about the scientific aspect of the book (the part about the planet standing still) and that he had been told that the orbital dynamics involved meant that it was nonsense, but the image of the earth and moon side by side in orbit, shrouded with cobwebs woven by giant vegetable spiders, was so outrageous and appealing that he published it anyway. He made the right decision!

Rhys says

One of the best novels I have read this year. In fact I think it is the best novel I read in 2010. Brian Aldiss' second SF novel, less intricate in terms of plot than many of his other books, but packed full of highly original ideas and very strange situations. The main character, Gren, embarks on a journey in a far-future version of Earth where the sun has grown vast in the sky and carnivorous plants have come to dominate the food-chain. Imagine *The Day of the Triffids* on a truly global scale with thousands of different species of malevolent plant attempting to devour our distant descendants, who have returned to the trees to live and are now no bigger than monkeys. Gren's adventures are paralleled by the adventures of some other members of his tribe who ride a mile-wide vegetable spider to a moon attached to Earth by means of enormous cobwebs... This novel is fantastic in every sense of the word. Highly recommended!

Althea Ann says

It's not just pulp fiction - it's vegetable-pulp fiction!

Long aeons in Earth's future, an Age of Plants has risen. Dangerous, carnivorous plants are everywhere - some species are even mobile hunters! The remaining humans are a dwarfed, shrunken species. With greatly reduced intelligence and a simple, tribal lifestyle, they struggle to stay alive long enough to maintain their population.

It's an interesting premise... sadly, the execution is, quite frankly, terrible. The writing is clunky. The plot, practically non-existent. The characters are (at times, quite literally) interchangeable, with no depth or even an attempt at giving them individual personalities. Basically, there's a group of these future humans, and they wander around, encountering one monster or other hazard after another, and gradually getting picked off.

The main *raison-d'être* of the book is to imaginatively describe these alien organisms, one after another. They're created from a purely fantastic perspective, not an actual 'scientific speculation' attempt. Nothing about the world described makes any logical sense. That's fine - except nothing about the book is strong enough to carry it as a fantasy, either.

It's also quite offensively sexist. Not in the way of many golden-age SF books, with nubile alien slave girls and sexy sorceresses - I love those! No, it's more of an insidious and constant flow of: every time an incident is portrayed, the female characters are less intelligent, less assertive, more timid, unable to come up with their own ideas, shown as interchangeable as lovers. Hey, they're good at 'giving comfort' though. Even though the future society, we are told, is matriarchal, it's the male characters that have to take charge in every situation and are the main 'do-ers' throughout. It is very clear that Aldiss never even considered that a woman might bother to read his book.

The content here was originally published in five installments in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* in 1961. Unbelievably, they were collectively awarded a Hugo for 'Best Short Fiction.' An abridged version was previously published as 'The Long Afternoon of Earth.'

Michael Fierce says

After reaching the halfway mark, I threw this book down (you can read later why) only to pick it up again because **1)** I think it unfair when someone rates/reviews a book they haven't finished, as I have never felt that was a fair way to judge a book, potentially destroying an author's chance to reach an audience, perhaps even ruining their career, and **2)** This was a **HUGO AWARD WINNING BOOK** and I strongly believed there must have been a good reason why!

But, I didn't follow my own rules of doing things and thus originally rated it a 2, and reviewed it in full.

I wanted so badly to like it, believing it had several things going for it.

Here are the **5 reasons** why I felt it would be an awesome read:

1. It's set in the future in which the Earth's elliptical rotation around the sun has come to a complete standstill, with the moon's orbit around the Earth **MIA** as well. One half of the Earth is forever caught in the full blast of 24/7 sunlight, while the other side is evidently in complete darkness. The results? After man and all life on Earth faced a post-apocalyptic radiation scenario, the sun-side of our planet re-invented itself into a lush, tropical **cryptobotanical** (I think I made that word up) **forest-world where all plant-life and vegetation evolved into sentience**, of lesser and greater degrees.

2. The plants and vegetation evolved so greatly that many lifeforms mirrored and imitated animals from our time-period, not only in behavioral patterns and functionality, but in many cases, even in their physical description.

3. Man has (d)evolved into almost fairy-like versions of ourselves, originally without wings, very light on their feet, with climbing skills that would put most orangutans, spider monkeys, and lemurs to shame. They're only about 1 1/2 feet tall, and not an ounce of fat on them. To top it off, they're green!

4a. Because of the harsh environment, these proto-humans live in the middle of the upper & lower reaches of their web-like forest-world, ~ much in the way the Wookiees do in Star Wars on their jungle/forest-world home planet, Kashyyyk.
;)

4b. Due to this, they live predictably short life-spans, maturing rapidly in order to survive, mate/have sex usually by the time they are 10 yrs old! and die, or should I say, ***DROP OFF INTO THE GREEN***, at an alarming rate.

5. And, once again, this may be the most important reason why this should be a killer to read:

It's a **HUGO AWARD WINNING NOVEL!**

Further, Harlan Ellison - whose short story collection, Deathbird Stories, I like a lot - just **LOVED IT!!**

Here are the **5 reasons** why I initially struggled greatly with it:

1. From the beginning pages, the world, though interesting, isn't as understandably descriptive as I needed it to be.

2. The characters I liked most from the outset either died off or were **MIA** for all or most of the remainder of

the book, like the too few insects, such as the bee-creature on the book cover, seen here:

3. The plot was....*uhhh*...there was no plot! Or, at least there didn't seem to be for over half of the book (more on that later); just a bunch of fairy-sized proto-humans running around trying to survive.

4. Some characters had really annoying YA-ish - well, *bad* YA-ish - names that grated on my nerves to NO END, like, **Poyly** and **Veggy** (which made me constantly axe myself: *Veggie* as in *veg-e-ta-ble* ? or more like as if you put a **V** in front of *egg* , throwing a **Y** on the end of it? Arrrghhh!

5. It would have kids mating in the middle of a strange scenario, and at other times, the younger, and less mature of the group, would show off their genitals to the elder kids to display their *manhood* and ability to mate ~ thus clearly proving this isn't a kid's book(!) ~ only for this adult book to decline into hella weak sauce children's book dialogue, the likes of which I couldn't force myself to digest any longer, *right after* I was just patting myself on the back for having gotten past the halfway mark. And then I read this:

"Great herder, we see you since you come. We Tummy-tree chaps are seeing your size. So know you will soon love to kill us when you go up from playing the sandwich game along with your lady in the leaves. We clever chaps are no fools, and not fools are clever to make glad for you. All the Tummy-men have no feeding and pray you give us feeding because we have no mummy Tummy-feeding--" </i>

Gren gestured impatiently.

"We've no food either,"</i> he said. We are humans like you. We too must fend for ourselves."</i>

"Alas, we did not dare to have any hopes you would share your food with us, for your food is sacred and you wish to see us starve. You are very clever to hide from us the jumpvil food we know you always carry. We are glad great herder, that you make us starve if our dying makes you have a laugh and a gay song and another sandwich game. Because we are humble, we do not need food to die with..."</i>

YEP.

I wanted to chuck this mutherfunker as hard as I could across the room! Or, better yet, after composing myself, let it ***DROP OFF INTO THE GREEN* ORGANICS WASTE MANAGEMENT TRASH BIN** outside...to let this book serve a better purpose than waste any more of my time.

LUCKILY, I didn't! I picked it up again, and although I never came to like the 'tummy-belly' men, or most of the names of the creatures and characters; the carry-catchy-kind, the Traversers, the Arablers, etc., I was shocked at how engaged I became in the story, even liking the plot that somehow, subtly, snuck right up into

the story with an ease and grace I feel was either genius or wonderfully accidental!

It even went so far as to have this great scientific philosophy wrap-up detailed in only a few pages as to why all life on our future Earth had evolved so, and where it was quickly heading. One theory really made sense to me and made me think Brian was either a mad scientist-turned-author or had an LSD trip one evening that sent his thoughts off to the moon like a rocket, and somehow either remembered it, or, wrote part of it down, incorporating it into this sci-fi fantasy story.

So, I'm giving it a final rating of 4 stars for the fact it got better and better as I got more into it, culminating in a very enjoyable read I couldn't put down, and, call it material reasons if you will, for all the beautiful imagery I got in my head while reading it, along with the gorgeous paintings and artwork associated with this novel.

Don't get me wrong. It had several things I could've done without, especially the 'tummy-belly' men, some horrible names as I said earlier, and the writing sometimes had me wondering if it was translated from a different language into English because it often felt disjointed, and I would've really liked to have had more focus on certain creatures other than a few that were in the story too much, but, it was very entertaining and makes me crave a sequel or something similar.

***Here are a few books said to be of the same sub-genre.**

Stuart says

Hothouse: Plant creatures gone wild! Human characters wooden

Originally posted at Fantasy Literature

Yeah, Hothouse (1962) was definitely written with some chemical assistance. Maybe some LSD-spiked vegetable juice? It may have been written as a set of five short stories in 1961, but it's a timeless and bizarre story of a million years in the future when the plants have completely taken over the planet, which has stopped rotating, and humans are little green creatures hustling to avoid becoming plant food.

There are hundreds of fearsome carnivorous plants that would love to eat human morsels, but will gladly settle for eating each other instead. As the planet has come to a stop, a massive banyan tree now covers the sunny-side of the planet, with all other plants surviving in it's shade. But there are gargantuan plant-based spiders called traversers who dwell above the plant layer and actually spin webs across space to the moon and other planets. Yeah, the science here is, well, complete and utter bollocks! But who cares when you can come up with the most bizzare plant species ever conceived in an amazing dying earth setting?

And this book never lets up on the crazy vegetable creatures and pitiful rat-like humans. The main characters are continuously fleeing from one crisis to the next, and never have the upper hand. They encounter the most annoying creatures ever created, including the tummy-belly men, whose speech mannerisms make Jar-Jar Binks sound like Shakespeare. Then there is the fish creature carried by a crippled human called the Catch-Carry-Kind, a prophet who knows the sun is dying and Earth is doomed. He has great wisdom but meets his

match with an intelligent, parasitic fungus called a Morel. In fact, the fungi is really a pretty fun-...no, I won't go there. But, Aldiss was definitely tripping on some fecund and fertile thoughts.

However, his human characters and dialogue are dreadful! This is the most amazing world-building but the most god-awful characters ever created. The storyline is so episodic it drove me crazy, but the malevolent Black Mouth with its irresistible siren cry and a brooding cliff with a 1,000 staring eyes were so cool that I was rooting against the puny humans. If only some other author like Jack Vance were allowed to use this world (like the Dying Earth), this could have been a contender. Oh, the humanity...or is it vegetality?

Aldiss' Non-Stop (1958), Hothouse (1962), and Greybeard (1964) were chosen by David Pringle for his Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels, and they've been on my TBR list for years. In fact, the five short stories that make up Hothouse collectively were awarded the 1962 Hugo for Best Short Fiction. Last year I tried to read Non-Stop, one of the original generational starship stories, but I found the characters so clumsily-drawn that I couldn't get past the first 100 pages. I don't want to make an unfair assessment, but I feel that Aldiss, who has some great ideas, really isn't very gifted in the characterization department. He's been a major figure in British SF, and wrote a well-regarded history of the SF genre called Trillion Year Spree (2001), but I feel like he's not one of the top authors from the 1960s.

Jamie Rose says

I found this really hard to rate. It is extremely odd and not so much a story with characters as much as a fantastical travelogue. Some of the more comic scenes reminded me of Candide (recently read, fresh in the memory!) in the 'buffoons in an allegory' stakes, but Hothouse is also in turn violent and nightmarish, hallucinatory in the extreme (an accidental astral journey through the cosmos via a psychic building anyone?), hugely inventive and quite often really gross. Science fiction is I guess reliant on effective world-building and I have never read anything quite like the world Aldiss describes, with its Jabberwocky-esque vegetable predators, mile-long spiders that spin webs to the moon and Machiavellian fungi. A truly bizarre book that thinks on a different scale than most.

I enjoyed it a lot, and I feel weird now.
