



[Home](#) > A Darkling Plain

A Darkling Plain

Books Reviewed:

[A Darkling Plain](#) [1]

Issue:

[158](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This is the eagerly awaited final chapter in Reeve's brilliantly sustained account of the rise and fall of Municipal Darwinism. By far the longest of the quartet, it witnesses the final apocalyptic battle between the ravenous mobile cities of the west and the ruthless sedentary Anti-Tractionists of the East, and brings its intrepid and long suffering cast of 'once-borns' and much resurrected Stalker killing machines finally to rest. The four books have embraced two generations of daring Natsworthys; and here sensitive Tom, ruthless Hester and their reckless daughter Wren roam the bird-roads again, in stories that make patterns like airships in a dog fight: careering in parallel, circling, colliding, and sometimes momentarily disappearing entirely out of the reader's sight. Characters ricochet from danger to danger, trapped in a pinball narrative that at any moment threatens to send them out of the game forever. As in any good adventure, cruelty, ambition, greed, betrayal and human frailty are everywhere. But in this last book, tenderness steadily grows. It is a time for returning, remembering and new beginnings. Tom goes back to London, the city of his youth, a pile of wreckage that stretches for kilometres but in which new life is stirring. The Stalker Fang, clumsily rebuilt, reverts occasionally but unpredictably to Anna, the human in its machine. Mr Shrike, the Stalker who loves Hester, and who can no longer kill, finds a soul unaccountably growing within his circuits. Nimrod Pennyroyal, charlatan, coward and renegade, at last achieves a kind of heroism (while losing nearly everything else). Lovers are together at last in life and in death; and, in a lyrical epilogue, as centuries roll by, nature and technology are reunited. Witty and thrilling, serious and sensitive, never self-important, the quartet as a whole is one of the most daring and imaginative science fiction adventures ever written for young readers. This is a fitting climax. CB

Running Order:

58

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[2] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/158>

[3] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/clive-barnes>