



Helliconia Trilogy

Brian W. Aldiss

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Helliconia is a planet that, due to the massively eccentric orbit of its own sun around another star, experiences seasons that lasts eons. Whole civilisations grow in the Spring, flourish in the Summer and then die in the brutal winters. The human-like inhabitants have been profoundly changed by their experience of this harsh cycle.

In orbit above the planet a terran mission struggles to observe and understand the effects on society of such a massive climatic impact.

Massive, thoroughly researched, minutely organised, full of action, pulp references and deep drama this is a classic trilogy.

Helliconia Trilogy Details

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Author : Brian W. Aldiss

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From Reader Review Helliconia Trilogy for online ebook

Marie Winger says

Helliconia, a distant Earth-like planet with a year almost 2,000 years long. It's red dwarf star and other planets captured by a white giant resulting a very elliptical orbit. Freezing winters hundreds of years long followed by blistering searing Summer's causing vast swings in nature and the human and nonhuman species. Around the planet an Earth observation station occupied by humans studying all aspects of the planet and beaming the story back to Earth. Earth follows it although the transmissions take 1,000 years to reach them. These books are so complex, so many characters, so much detail, so many interrelated themes it's hard to write a quick review. I liked the first best, .Helliconia Spring. The middle book, Helliconia Summer not as much. The last book, Helliconia Winter, was better. If you want to immerse yourself in a fascinating world expertly built and sink into some pretty deep themes of ecology and society I encourage to try these.

Claudia says

This is one of the most complex SF novels read so far. It's not a space opera with interstellar battles and flights, don't expect one. And although it's supposed to be the story of the native civilizations throughout the great year of Helliconia, the main character is the planet itself.

The book is an encyclopedia in which are included all planet's features: geography, biology, climatic conditions, astronomy, you name it, there are all here. Ecology, religion, mysticism, politics are also present in the life of its inhabitants – but their continuous struggles and dramas are only emphasizing the implacable course of nature.

One surprising part is the role played by the orbiting space station from Earth which records every little detail and broadcasts all these observations as a soap opera back to a bored Earth which eventually... but you'll see for yourself if you are curious enough to read it :)

Even the vocabulary used contains a lot of Old English words, which gives the story a unique and authentic look.

In conclusion, though is not an easy reading, I cannot deny the fact that, given the unusual story and its astounding scientific data, I found myself eager to read it till the end and I don't regret a bit!

Note: this is the omnibus edition, which contains all three books in the trilogy: Helliconia Spring, Helliconia Summer & Helliconia Winter.

Brian says

The Helliconia Trilogy is a kindle edition including three more or less linked novels: Helliconia Spring, Helliconia Summer, and Helliconia Winter.

The novels were ok. I probably liked the middle one (Helliconia Summer) the most, although I don't think it would make sense to read it without reading Helliconia Spring first.

Aldiss generally seemed more interested in the world he built, rather than the characters he built. There were extensive descriptions throughout all the novels, as well as lots of ecological/philosophical musing, particularly in the third novel. At times, his writing style seemed a bit dated, or at least different from speculative fiction of the 21st century. Since my reading history dates back to the mid 20th, I didn't find it particularly off-putting, but someone younger might.

I suspect readers will tend to either love these novels or have trouble finishing them.

Abhishek says

I had more hopes from this trilogy considered a classic of world-building. To me, most of the Helliconia - Spring (Book 1) felt like a waste of time. It's a slow unimaginative tale of scattered primitive tribes. The rich potential of the concept (an earth-like planet revolving around twin suns) is not exploited as well as it could have been. Some other points, separately for each book, are below:

Book 1 - Helliconia Spring

1. The characters do not feel authentic and fully developed. Their actions are absurd to the point of being irritating and motivations not quite right.
2. The writer; perhaps in an attempt to give an alien feel; has used a lot of uncommon words. However it feels artificial, unnecessary and imposed.
3. The world-building is mediocre at best. The biology is all inconsistent, physics almost non-existent except for some rudimentary astronomical terms thrown in here and there. The terminologies; including the names of twin suns and the villages; are borrowed from Norse mythology another difficult to digest fact.
4. There is an undercurrent of 'sickness' in most of the Book 1. This in itself may seem like just a literary device; in the vein of Edgar Allan Poe; but in contrast to Poe's, here it is inelegant and poorly executed. The disgust that you feel while reading, just doesn't contribute to the story in anyway aside from making it more irritating and drab.
5. The science fiction element is sorely missing, and it feels more like a boring one-dimensional history of a bunch of primitive tribes for which you as reader just couldn't care less.

Book 2 - Helliconia Summer

As you move to Book 2, there is a marginal improvement. One reason being that Aldiss abandons the approach taken in the first book and sticks to a single set of characters throughout the Book 2. The first half suffers from the same defects as mentioned above for the Book 1, but the later part of the book is much better, mostly because of the central character comes into his groove near the end and lights up the lackluster plot. But the low point here is that Aldiss stoops to cliches and proven selling techniques at the cost of his original vision.

Book 1 - Helliconia Winter

... Coming shortly :)

Matthew Lloyd says

Helliconia is a massive read. It's pretty clear that this is the case just by looking at the volume I read, which includes all three books, but it deserves mention from the outset. I split my reading into the three books, reading other things in between them, which feels like the right way to do it as the whole thing might become overwhelming if read all at once. I recommend taking a look at the appendices before starting on the first volume. It contains a handful of things which might be considered to be "spoilers", but it also contains much handy information which you can refer to as the book progresses - such as the equivalent ages of Helliconian humans and Earth humans. A number of reviews which I've looked at suggest that "nothing happens" in this book. I disagree quite strongly. Although in various ways very little seems to go on in the three periods of Helliconian history presented in these books, they are all actually significant events in the development of world history in Helliconia. It is, in fact, a little surprising to me that there is no mention in any of the introductions or prefaces of the *Annales* School of history, into which *Helliconia* would fit quite well. Or, perhaps, the story would be stronger if this was something Aldiss had explored further. Although, it is not quite *Annales* history. (view spoiler)

Somewhat disappointingly, *Spring* was my favourite of the three novels. It probably deserves a four star review on its own merits. It is particularly the case in this volume that very much happens in terms of the social, scientific, and technological history of Helliconia - or at least Embruddock. The characters in this book - particularly Shay Tal and Vry, but also Laintal Ay and others - are all interested in exploring the expanding world around them, learning about things and figuring out what has happened to the old civilizations and how the new are developing. Its scale is considerably smaller than the others, as befits a society just emerging from an Ice Age, its focus mostly internal. It explores what power does to men in a big man society, and one can see the influence of the anthropologists Aldiss spoke to on this society. Furthermore, its women have more freedom than any of those in the later volumes. It is perhaps interesting to wonder how far this is the case of less-developed societies. In *Spring*, Aldiss gets the women of Helliconia right.

Summer was actually fairly effective in making me understand what the long, drawn-out, uncomfortable summers of Helliconia might feel like. There is a lot of interest going in in this book, too, but primarily on the Earth Observation Sattelite *Avernus*. The quest of the king JandolAnganol to divorce his popular queen, MyrdemIngala, while clearly historically relevant, grows tiresome fairly quickly. I enjoyed how it ultimately ends, though. The biggest problem is the difficulty I have imagining why the queen is so popular - although perhaps I ought to stress that this extends to the modern world as much as it does Helliconia. She seems to do very little, which is an easy way not to offend, but makes it difficult, as a reader, to grasp her importance. The minor characters of Helliconia, such as SartoriIrvrash and Ice Captain Muntrast, were more interesting again, but seemed to get less development than those in *Spring*. On its own merits, *Summer* probably deserves a rating around 2.5 stars, and I don't think I would have been impressed had it been the first volume.

Finally, *Winter* is again a mixed bag. Luterin is a mediocre protagonist, usually one of those saps one has little affection for but who can carry the plot of the story while the side characters provide the actual entertainment, but for two aspects: the way he treats women, (view spoiler); and, towards the end of the

novel, when (view spoiler). This would be less of an issue if the surrounding characters were better - Eedap Mun Odim is pleasant, if a little dull; Besi Besamitikahl is perhaps the most interesting (view spoiler); Captain Harbin Fashnalgid might come across as a charming rogue, until he (view spoiler). Toress Lahl really suffers the brunt of *Winter*'s problems, however - she gets little development, for a character so prominent, and is treated so badly, until (view spoiler) It's hard to come away from this feeling positive.

Where *Winter* does score well is the history of Earth and Avernus, always in the background of the volume as a whole, but interesting. True, the people of Earth come across more like characters from Golden Age SF of the 50s and 60s, but it is the events which are most interesting. Indeed, many of the themes which resonate throughout the volume - the wildlife of Helliconia, human/phangor relations, the workings of the Original Beholder - are much more interesting than the activities of the humans, at least in the second two novels. One wishes for a more in-depth discussion of the phangors in particular, and appreciate the world building which goes on for this world building has a point - to present a message about our own world. As an SF story based on a contemporary scientific hypothesis - for Gaia Theory can only be called a hypothesis, despite its misnomer - *Helliconia* is something of a triumph.

Helliconia will broadly appeal to those who don't mind massive narratives in which not much happens and women are, broadly speaking, treated pretty poorly - basically any fan of epic fantasy. It is perhaps worth noting that an enjoyment of SF tropes and conventions is also helpful - *Helliconia* was not included in the SF Masterworks (as opposed to the Fantasy Masterworks) for no reason. But it is certainly more Fantasy, albeit a Fantasy without any recourse to magic or mysticism, with the exception of pauk. While I have not read *A Song of Ice and Fire*, it seems unlikely, from what I have read, that *Helliconia* did not have some influence on it. I am glad to have read it, but I wish that there could have been more to it.

Paul says

Ignore the 1 star ratings that claim 'nothing happens' you've just been given a whole world to read about! Geology, history, action, zoology, metaphysics I wonder if Brian Aldiss hoped to create the War And Peace of sci-fi the grand sweeps of time, the individual fate versus the bigger picture of civilisation and historical 'progress'. I think it's a magnificent novel, not always successful, but for scale and ambition I have to salute the author.

Mark says

A reread this one. Gollancz have just republished this huge tome (1328 pages) as part of their SF Masterworks branding, of which this is number 80.

I did read them back in the 1980's when they were released as three separate books: *Helliconia Spring*, *Helliconia Summer* and *Helliconia Winter*, in 1982, 1983 and 1985 respectively. Hereafter I'm going to see them as one book, which is for all intents and purposes is how they read, as a uniform body of work (albeit in three parts.)

At the time of original writing they were a surprise, if I remember right. Here was a writer known for his SF writing (*Hothouse*, *Greybeard*, *Report on Probability A*, etc) writing what seemed (at first) to be a fantasy.

And if I remember right, a glacially slow series. Which made them a little disappointing.

However, there is an SF element to the books. For those who don't know, Helliconia is a planet. The tales are told from the perspective of the inhabitants as they go through the world's seasons. The twist in the tale here is that the seasons are very long: centuries long, long enough for species to live and die within one season, and especially in the long, cruel, bitter winters.

As the tale unfolds the perspective is drawn further back to the point where we realise that all that is being told is actually part of a planetary research report from the Earth ship Avernus. It is here that the reader discovers that, as part of a binary star system, all / most life on Helliconia will be extinguished. Much of the books are spent in the debate over whether Humans should interfere with the rise and fall of civilisations on the planet, which is an interesting counterpoint to what goes on in the research ship and on Earth.

We meet a variety of people/creatures on this journey: In Helliconia Spring, Yuli is a humanoid hunter-gatherer, one of the Freyr, who, as the world reawakens, we find experiences the development of an urban civilisation. Helliconia Spring tells of Yuli and his descendants as Helliconia Winter turns to Spring and the Freyr develop from hunters to urban dwellers. By the second book we have the dominance of the human-like species in a fantasy setting. We also encounter more about the Phagors, a Morlock-like furred white humanoid species, who begin in Helliconia Spring as seemingly simple hunters and carry off Yuri's father. As the story deepens, however, in Summer and Winter we find that they have a richer background and culture and seem to have been on Helliconia long before the emergence of the human-like dominant species. The fantasy feel is quite strong as we discover about their lifestyles. To confirm this further, there's even a dragon-like creature, the Wutra's Worm, with an enormous lifespan.

The book is a case study in worldbuilding: evidently Aldiss spent time with physicists, astronomers, ecologists, climatologists, sociologists and microbiologists in creating a credible environment. Most importantly (according to Aldiss's introduction) is Lovelock's idea of Gaia, once fairly new in the 1980's, and now seems to be increasingly plausible. Perhaps, as a result, this book doesn't seem as way out as it did when I first read it, though just as epic and majestic. Part of the joy of this book is to see how the world changes through the seasons and how the landscape and landforms adapt accordingly.

In the style of Olaf Stapledon's First and Last Men, or some of HG Wells' work, this book is perhaps the ultimate planetary romance, and deliberately so. In such a framework the writer writes as an observer rather than as part of the narrative. Consequently, the book seems written in a rather detached style. Though this can give a feeling of weight and gravity to the long tale, it can also create a coolness that distances the reader from the world and creatures within. They are being studied rather than interacted with.

In the 25 years or so since originally reading this, I now see where Aldiss is going. It is his view on civilisations, their ability to grow and decline and the causes and effects of such development. It also raises the question of whether in the grand scheme of things Mankind in the future may be worth preserving.

Though it is still slow to develop, it is surprisingly engaging. Do not expect it to be a fast-paced romp. Instead, it is a book where you expect to be immersed and be slowly awakened to the opportunities within.

It may be my greater age and experience, it may be that in these days of global warming and biomes the world's just caught up with the concepts herein. However this was a much more satisfying read second time around. And good to see the background details given as Appendices here too.

Consequently, very much recommended.

Mark Yon, August 2010.

Andrew says

phew. I feel like I've been reading this book forever... it's a hugely ambitious piece of Sci Fi, actually more like a historical epic than a traditional piece of Sci Fi really, with a lot to like about it but at all over 1000 pages and covering generations of characters (some much more interesting than others) it can be rather a slog.

Ashley says

1305 pages of unnecessary and unrelenting nouns, set on a beautifully realised vision of an alien world. The first and third books where the cold snow and ice are in force are the strongest parts but the middle book is a real slog. It's epic and is worth the read if you have plenty of spare time and enjoy learning huge lists of pointless names.

Ilya Kochetov says

Was probably moderately good at the time it came out.

Does nothing for a modern reader as since then better books came out, the genre evolved, the storytelling evolved.

Most of the tropes are by now so overused by other authors you recognize them from the start and so even the small amount of entertainment this book could bring disappears.

Philosophically speaking the book does not deliver as well, as it fails to be even moderately sound on this front.

So everything you encounter in this book is just unexciting and the book itself is too long for the simple stuff it contains.

In general what was at some point potentially readable now tastes like a stale chewing gum.

My recommendation - don't waste your time and pick something better

Jan-Maat says

Hiking across the countryside I notice the seeds that have caught onto my clothing as I unwittingly become an agent of the ecosystem, spreading biological diversity as I go, and this from time to time brings back to mind the Ucts, dense corridors of plant life which criss-cross the surface of Brian Aldiss' fictional Helliconia built up over generations by migrating herders and their flocks.

The Helliconia trilogy is ambitious work of science-fiction. In its determination to address ideas about the development of societies and their interrelationship with the environment as well as issues of power, myth and culture it can be mentioned in the same breathe as Foundation or Dune but written in a more stylish manner. All of these books abandon a traditional narrative because the protagonists are time and human consciousness. Plots, cabals, secret missions, visitors from alien worlds, wars, political crises become transient in the readers perception while myth or history reveal old friends from several hundred pages earlier. What is clear to the reader remains mysterious to those stuck within the pages, so the reader becomes an accomplice in the author's adventure in consciousness, not everybody's cup of tea but then what is.

The planet Helliconia is discovered in the distant future. This planet is locked in a binary orbit, around two suns which gives it a 'normal' year and a 'long' year which determines the seasons each many hundreds of years long - this has various curious effects on the ecology and way of the life. Two dominant species have evolved on the planet - a bipedal bovine with basic metal working technologies and an intelligent bipedal ape. As the planet emerges from a centuries long winter the crew of an exploration ship from Earth establish an observational platform that sends a continuous broadcast film of the creatures struggling to survive on the planet's harsh surface. This broadcast is consumed, hundreds of years later, on Earth partly as educational programming, partly as reality TV.

While watching the broadcasts environmental developments bring about massive social changes among the human population on earth changing how they view what they see taking place on the surface of a very distant planet.

All of this would be incidental to what happens on Helliconia but for the parallels between the two - how the cultures develop within and in relation to an environment.

So over the course of the trilogy (continuing with Helliconia Summer and concluding with Helliconia Winter) we see the evolution of life on the observational station, the effect on Earth of what they observe and the effect on Helliconia of being observed.

The story however follows groups of Helliconians and shows the implications that the extreme environmental changes causes by the double orbit has upon the ecology of the planet. Naturally a key focus is the social and cultural implications for the two intelligent species.

By follows groups I mean it is rather more like Azimov's first three Foundation books. We might see the descendants of one group of characters in subsequent stories or come across fleeting mentions of them hundreds of years later.

All that sounds rather arid which the series is not, but you are forced to be very aware of how the individuals are formed and react to their environment (in the broadest possible conceptions of that word).

Throughout the series the simple course of the narrative is chopped up and served to us out of order. However in Helliconia Summer this is taken to an extreme and makes the book what it is. We know the futility of the decisions made (rather as in Nostromo), we know that certain courses of action will end in failure. This pushes us to think about the context of events, the systems and structures.

As with all the Helliconia stories that context, those systems and structures start with the planetary orbit. High Summer approaches. Temperatures at the equator will be intense. Changes in ecology and climate have severe political ramifications.

Woven into this is the story of the King's divorce, science and heresy, a visitor from the orbiting Earth Observation Vessel who has won the right to die on the surface in a lottery.

The most traditional in its structure is the last book in the series *Helliconia Winter*, the tenure of the work featuring one hero all the way through is almost a quest novel in the vein of the old romances in which the hero's quest is to discover their own identity. The final volume of the *Helliconia* series is the simplest told and defiance is its key tone. Defiance against the coming winter, against the conformity of a society structured to withstand massive climatic change and the obligations of family.

The series as a whole is deeply indebted to James Lovelock's Gaia theory and has much which will recommend itself to fans of the *longue durée*.

Jak says

This book was utter hell. 1,200 pages of absolutely nothing happening. Why did I persevere? God alone knows as I didn't even feel a sense of accomplishment when I'd finished reading it. Just the mourning of a couple months lost time when I could have been doing something I enjoyed.

It's a trilogy that happens (for want of a better word) on a planet that has a super extended orbit of its sun (several thousands of years if memory servers) which means its season last longer, centuries in fact. And during its orbit it gets further away and closer to its sun making the summers blisteringly hot and winters Arctic cold.

Therefore the whole planet is constantly dying and renewing itself never being able to build upon the progress of the previous season as everything becomes destroyed by the seasonal extremes.

Jacqie says

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

This is a book that I read a loooong time ago and came back to a generation later. It's a really original series (or was at the time) and the writing and imagery is quite beautiful. The bones are science fiction, but you have to go through lots of layers and pages to see that. The atmosphere is fantasy. It's the original "winter is coming" series, with winter lasting aeons and spring a miracle. The gender issues are quite dated and fall into the range of problematic. It's a bit psychedelic.

John says

Helliconia is a massive tripartite work about which extensive, rigorous scholarly essays have been written. This is not going to be such an essay.

Eight million years or so ago, the sol-type star Batalix was captured by the much younger and brighter supergiant Freyr. Since then, the inhabitants of *Helliconia*, Batalix's sole life-bearing planet, have endured a

short year of 480 days as their world orbits Batalix and a great year of 1,825 years (about 2,500 terrestrial years) as Batalix, planetary retinue in tow, orbits Freyr. Over the great year the climate varies hugely, from the centuries-long winter, which is almost too cold for the survival of Helliconia's humanoid population but ideal for its population of phagors, the other dominant intelligent lifeform, to the centuries-long summer, which is almost too hot for the survival of humans and phagors alike.

An important additional element of the environment is the helico (*sic* with one "l") virus, which is spread by the ticks that habitually cover the phagors but affects humans. It's active just twice a year, in the spring and fall, when it manifests as, respectively, bone fever and the fat death. Both diseases infect almost the entirety of the human population, with perhaps a 50% mortality rate. Survivors of bone fever emerge in slimmed-down form, and thus better able to survive the summer; survivors of the fat death emerge, after a period of obsessive eating that may even involve cannibalism, with vastly increased body mass, and thus better able to survive the rigors of winter.

Also of note is that a satellite built by people from earth, *Avernus*, orbits Helliconia, observing all the surface goings-on and beaming the images back home to earth in a continuous stream.

Volume 1, *Helliconia Spring*, is really a (very) protracted exercise in world-building, as we're introduced to the workings of Helliconia and a staggering amount of its flora and fauna. There are bits and pieces of coherent story thrown into the mix, especially in the first hundred or more pages, but nothing that one might really regard as an overall story arc; they all seem somehow inconsequential, petering out when their usefulness is done rather than coming to a proper conclusion. Although I'm sure this wasn't Aldiss's intention, the stories and story fragments feel as if they've been tossed in merely to keep us reading through the long expository passages.

Add in that the text is frequently marred by effusions of unwisely pretentious vocabulary ("Alehaw arranged himself with one befurred elbow on the rock, so that he could tuck his thumb deep into the hollow of his left cheek, propping the weight of his skull on his zygomatic bone" -- and precisely which bloody bone is *that* one, prithee?), and it's not surprising that, at the end of the very long Volume 1, I looked at the oncoming, even longer Volume 2 with something less than a song of glee in my heart.

Helliconia Summer was, however, a far easier and more enjoyable read. There are still eruptions of daftly obscure vocabulary and tracts of exposition, but they're all held together by a multi-stranded plot that sustains the interest -- a plot that, while its events are changing the course of Helliconian-human history, is full of incidents at the smaller, individual scale. One strand of this plot is that the tribes of the *Avernus* have begun a lottery whose prize is that the winner is sent down to the planet's surface. There s/he will inevitably die fairly soon, if not by hostile action then by infection with the helico virus, which is always fatal to terrestrials, but in the interim will at least have the chance to *live*. This time the winner is young Billy, and he does indeed do some livin' even as he's caught up in the periphery of the political/religious drama that's molding the fates of millions.

Helliconia Winter, shorter than the other two, sees the world speeding back toward icy conditions once more. The phagors, who've spent much of the summer in uneasy coexistence with the humans, or more often in servitude to them, are beginning to flex their muscles once more, the fat death is spreading, and a completely ruthless oligarchy is planning the survival of human civilization through the winter by destroying all dissidence and exterminating the phagors. We suspect this scheme is going to fail, just like every other previous pre-winter scheme, and that next spring is going to be very much like the one we've already seen . . .

It's easy enough to describe *Helliconia* as one of science fiction's great triumphs of world-building, because that's what everybody else has done, but I have my doubts. While there are some interestingly alien components of Helliconia's flora and fauna -- the phagors themselves might just about qualify, with their odd articulation, their commensal relationship with the cowbirds and their ichorous blood (although they're bipedal, laterally symmetrical, have facial features in the places where you'd expect them in terrestrial animals, etc.) -- far too many seem to be just slightly different versions of earth species, such as the elk-like creatures called, imaginatively, "yelk" (and once, presumably *in typo veritas*, "deer"). In some cases there's not even a name-change.

To take a different example: While the lifecycle of the creatures called hoxneys over the great year is fascinatingly worked out -- they spend the cold centuries as a crystal chrysalis before re-emerging as the world warms -- this doesn't alter the fact that, for most of the relevant time, they're horses.

Of course, there are plenty of famous fantasy worlds, some regarded as Towering Achievements, no less, that are largely populated with familiar plants, animals, customs, emotions and so forth, but one expects sciencefictional worlds to be a bit more *alien*. Aldiss, seemingly as if to distract attention from this concern, in the second and third volumes especially gives people and places extraordinarily long and silly names: Gravabagalinien, Queen MyrdemInggala, Princess TatromanAdala, JandolAnganol . . . Me, I remained less distracted than irritated by the stratagem: it's difficult to relate to a character when you have difficulty sounding their name in your reading mind.

Despite all of these things, and despite some patches of decidedly bad writing and embarrassingly declamatory dialogue, I did come away from *Helliconia* with a definite feeling of awe at Aldiss's achievement. I do genuinely feel as if I've been immersed in another world for quite some while, even if my favorite "character" is neither any of the humans nor the planet itself but the helico virus. There are ideas all over the place -- some of them just throwaways, others emerging as *di ex machina* -- which is one mark of good science fiction (although not always of good fiction).

In other words, *Helliconia* isn't just an enormous book but one with a hell of a lot in it. Hence the long and scholarly essays I mentioned at the outset.

Adrian Leaf says

Unfortunately I couldn't finish it and it was my second attempt.

Rory McKay says

The Helliconia series is an amazingly vast story, spanning thousands of years, and two (and a bit) worlds.

Brian Aldiss has a beautiful prose, a deep sensitivity for the complexities of human nature, and a rare ability to maintain an incredible, can't-put-it-down pace that makes a large book like this flow easily.

A very fast, enjoyable read. Wonderful characters, an expansive and well crafted universe, and enough science to keep the sic-fi junkies happy, without slowing the story down.

Highly recommended!

Huw Evans says

I am late to reading Aldiss, which is my fault. This book is magnificent. It is also a masterpiece of otherworld invention. A planet, unwittingly observed by a Terran satellite, goes through its prolonged life cycle in three parts. during which the complete imaginings of a world totally unlike earth become apparent. The characters, of whom there are many, play second fiddle to the ecology of the planet. Because to the prolonged cycle (equivalent to 2.5 thousand earth years) nobody remembers what went before; the fat death and bone fever that allow you to survive the change in seasons if you survive, the winter that favours the Phagors and the summer that favours the human equivalent. The ecology is thought through carefully and appears flawless. The only problem with this book is its size; being a compendium it is definitely a two handed read but worth every page and pulled muscle.

Chris says

The Helliconian trilogy is a multi-layered composition, as long and as rich as *The Lord of the Rings*, as colourful as a medieval tapestry and as polemical as an eco-warrior's handbook. Aldiss is a prolific author in various genres, not just in science fiction; but SF at its best can itself include a great many genres, and this trilogy therefore has aspects of romance, epic, fantasy, prose poetry and science writing all flourishing in symbiosis with each other. And, like any great narrative, it is not only a great page-turner but has you caring about its characters.

Helliconia is a planet many light-years away being monitored by a manned observation station called the Avernus; perhaps significantly, the station is named after an Italian crater famed for its noxious fumes and reputed in classical times to be an entrance to the Ancient Roman Underworld, and Aldiss has borrowed the word for his own publishing imprint. Contrary to current non-interventionist ethics the Avernus can and does occasionally send down one of its inhabitants on a one-way trip to the surface of the planet; here the individual interacts briefly with the human Helliconians before succumbing to a breakdown in their own immune system. However, the Helliconian humans are largely unaware and unaffected by scientific considerations beyond their limited lives (rather like terrestrial humans in this regard), relying on religious beliefs and institutions to provide the philosophic and practical frameworks to their lives; the trilogy is in fact a thinly-veiled critique of institutionalised religions as well as superstition.

The frameworks are necessary to cope with the environments the Helliconians are part of, environments that bring changes in matters of climate, dominant species and fundamental human conditions. Aldiss explores ethical matters such as the misuse of political power, irrational beliefs, gender issues and the health of ecosystems abused by human rapaciousness, and all this can give pause for thought to those who are sensitive to such issues. But while this is a scientific romance we are also aware that within its narrative threads the trilogy holds up a mirror to our own experiences, cultures and passions: for me, for example, 'Spring', in two phases, is a story combining quest themes with re-births; 'Summer' is a Shakespearian comedy with echoes of *A Winter's Tale* (though Aldiss claims re-reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was his preparation before writing the second novel); and 'Helliconia Winter' has almost as broad a canvas as *War and Peace*.

Constantly punctuating the text are images of circularity (the Avernus, the Great Wheel of Kharnabhar, the

glyph carved on the mysterious standing stones) and of the measurement of time (the hourly geyser of Oldorado, the timepiece of the Avernian traveller Billy Xiao Pin, Odim's beautiful clock), echoing the underlying cyclic nature of Aldiss' vast creation. Re-reading the three volumes a quarter of a century later I remain struck not only by the abiding and powerful images of weather and landscape but also by the captivating stories of the fragile and yet very human aliens of that world. It is a world I may yet re-visit in another quarter-century, or even sooner.

Helliconia is not an unqualified success, however. The broad-brush sweep of Earth's future in the third novel, for example, is a bit simplistic and preachy in its Lovelockian message and sits awkwardly as a counterpoint to the minutiae of individual Helliconian lives. In addition, the flashback device in the second novel and the rapid spring thaw combined with accelerating cultural innovations of the first novel either distort or telescope the chronology of the narratives. But these are minor flaws in the grand sheme of things, and 'Helliconia' remains one of those works one feels the better for having read. This one-volume edition, first published in 1996, includes introductions, appendices and a map by Margaret Aldiss.

Pablo Flores says

This is a masterpiece of worldbuilding and storytelling. It has its weak spots (an overly long prologue with almost no apparent relation to the rest, a couple of somewhat absurd/surreal turns of events in the third volume) but all in all, *Helliconia* is a delight to read. The characters will stay with you, even though THE character is the planet itself. It's not easy to write a sci-fi saga of planetary cycles with a global scope that is also a collection of engaging personal stories, but Aldiss manages to do both.

Henry Gee says

Helliconia is a faraway planet which, with its own sun, orbits a very much brighter star in a highly elliptical orbit that takes almost 3000 years to complete. In the course of each 'Great Year', then, Helliconia alternates between an almost intolerably torrid hothouse when the giant star is closest, to an Ice Age at apastron during which civilization is all but extinguished. Helliconia Spring is set at a time when the planet is waking up from its long winter and springtime bursts out to the consternation and wonderment of the protagonists. Helliconia Summer is set just before closest approach, and Helliconia Winter when the world is once again just starting to hibernate.

The trick of *Helliconia* is the world-building, which is as far from the vague and lackluster background to *A Game of Thrones* as might be imagined. However, it would be sterile without good stories and characters to populate it, and these are as abundant as the intricate ecologies of creatures adapted to life cycles and seasons that last for centuries. Not everyone will like this kind of thing, but to me, *Helliconia* is breathtaking.
