



Worlds of Exile and Illusion: Rocannon's World / Planet of Exile / City of Illusions

Ursula K. Le Guin

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Ursula K. Le Guin is one of the greatest science fiction writers and many times the winner of the Hugo and Nebula Awards. her career as a novelist was launched by the three novels contained in Worlds of Exile and Illusion. These novels, Rocannon's world, Planet of Exile, and City of Illusions, are set in the same universe as Le Guin's groundbreaking classic, The Left Hand of Darkness.

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Worlds of Exile and Illusion: Rocannon's World / Planet of Exile / City of Illusions Details

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From Reader Review Worlds of Exile and Illusion: Rocannon's World / Planet of Exile / City of Illusions for online ebook

Marie says

Somewhat uneven. Parts were delightful, but there were parts I just wanted to skip. LeGuin sure loves to have her heroes trek over winter landscapes, which makes for nice lonely, rainy day reading. I was somewhat disturbed at how all the female characters are passive and secondary, most often left behind lovers of the hero who must struggle alone (across a cold landscape) against all odds to save... something.

It's when the against-all-odds battles are happening that she's strongest, and because of this I enjoyed the middle book best, which is nearly all a siege.

Helpful hint; if it's in italics or labeled as an excerpt from a book, you absolutely do not have to read it, and in fact should not, because it will only slow you down. She does eventually reveal everything.

Liviu Szoke says

Am a?teptat cu mare ner?bdare acest volum înc? de când s-a anun?at c? va ap?rea ?i la noi în traducere, pentru c? este un ciclu ce n-a fost niciodat? publicat începând cu primul volum. A?teptarea a meritat, pentru c? Urslua Le Guin creeaz? lumi absolut fascinante în interiorul unor lumi la fel de fascinante, ?i asta nu în romane de mare întindere, de 500-600 de pagini, ci în trei nuvele care de-abia se întind pe 400 ?i ceva de pagini. Îns? scriitura este atât de dens? ?i de compact?, plin? de idei ?i de întreb?ri, încât sim?i c? participi la un adev?rat maraton. De genialitate, bineîn?eles. Un pic datate nuvelele, dar la fel de profunde. Recenzia, aici: <https://fansf.wordpress.com/2015/10/3....>

Xavi says

No me han gustado todas las novelas por igual, pero como la lectura va de menos a más, me quedo con la última nota. Mi primer contacto real con Le Guin, muy satisfactorio. Ahora a por sus obras más premiadas en este interesante universo.
<https://dreamsofex.blogspot.com/20...>

unperspicacious says

Reading her more mature work has spoilt me. These are good in their own right, but lack the sheer simplicity, panache and confidence that the others had to make you believe these worlds actually exist. Too much artifice...just a little, but already too much. These three novellas are also much less coherently and overtly political than her later books, drifting away from the kind of fiction that I had been originally searching for. They are not even that anthropological...too much of looking from the outside in, compared to the later work.

Diminishing returns is setting in...time to move on to other stuff for awhile...

Sunil says

I know it's a crime that I've never read any Ursula K. Le Guin, and I also know that none of the three books contained in this omnibus are considered her finest work, up to the level of her well-known classics, but I was still happy to receive it as a gift so I could finally see what all the fuss was about.

Rocannon's World is an interesting hybrid of science fiction and fantasy, taking a very traditional high fantasy setting and presenting it through the lens of an ethnologist (Rocannon), who views the creatures as alien species. The combination of spaceships and dwarves causes more cognitive dissonance than I hoped, largely because of Le Guin's dense prose that leans more toward summary than scene and rarely explains what's going on. In fact, I almost never had any idea what was going on or what the actual plot was or what Rocannon's character arc was supposed to be as he went through the motions of a typical fantasy adventure. The fantasy elements were so generic and familiar; it was the science fiction elements that interested me. This is the book that coined "ansible," for crying out loud! I love the ansibles in the Enderverse! I didn't realize Le Guin created them! But I never cared about the story at all and in the end it kind of felt like a White Savior narrative, which left a bad taste in my mouth.

Planet of Exile causes less cognitive dissonance since it doesn't use so many high fantasy tropes, even though it feels like the climax of *A Song of Ice and Fire* in that it's about putting aside the conflict between two realms to focus on fighting off a common invading force. Le Guin again provides a neat perspective, as the two main races are the native humans of the planet and the "farborn" aliens...who are also basically humans as far as I can tell. But darker. And with telepathy. Each one considers the other, well, Other, which provides some unspoken racial commentary. At the center is a star-crossed romance, and also lots of battles. The plot is a bit easier to follow here, and the characters feel like characters and not walking archetypes. I enjoyed the worldbuilding in this one; again, Le Guin's science fiction concepts and ideas are really interesting. Out of the three books, it's the shortest and most satisfying. Strangely enough, this story also seemed to end up being about a man finding a sense of belonging in a foreign land.

City of Illusions begins with a family who discovers a mysterious stranger with catlike eyes and no memory of who he is. The family is completely irrelevant, however, as the story focuses on the man, Falk, who goes in search of his true identity. It's a typical quest narrative, complete with quaint forest folk and talking animals...except this is the first book in the series that takes place on *Earth*. A lot has changed on Earth, it seems. Like *Rocannon's World*, it feels like fantasy disguised as science fiction, and it's similarly meandering and kind of boring. But halfway through the book, Falk reaches his destination, and he finds out what happened to him, and there are Big Reveals—that connect this book to *Planet of Exile* in a very cool way, making it a real treat to have read these books together—and it becomes All Science Fiction All the Time, telling a story about intergalactic civilizations, the evolution of humanity, and personal identity. There are more plot twists in the second half of this book than in all three books combined. Shame about that incredibly dull first half.

It's clear Ursula K. Le Guin is incredible at worldbuilding; I loved that the three books were set in the same world, but in very different times and locations. And the hard sci-fi is great. But I felt like the compelling ideas about humanity, aliens, colonialism, and the like were buried under less than engaging characters and plots. It was rare that I felt an actual urge to continue reading. Part of it is that Le Guin throws *so much information* at the reader without bothering to explain; part of it is that so much is summarized that the prose

becomes incredibly dense.

If I didn't know that the true classics awaited me, this book wouldn't have me rushing out to read more Le Guin, as I'm not sure her style works for me. But the classics are classics for a reason, I presume, and I hope they're more accessible.

Helena Sorensen says

It's so difficult to describe Ursula LeGuin's writing style. Sometimes I feel as if she's shoved me off a cliff, and I am falling into an unfamiliar world, snatching at fragments, falling through darkness and stars and treetops. At other times it seems that she speaks from an immeasurably great distance, that I'm straining with all that's in me to hear and understand her. Such is the sharp, spare complexity of her writing.

This collection was remarkable.

Ivan says

"El mundo de Rocannon" es sencillito, sin mucha profundidad ni originalidad argumental; sin embargo, entretenido y una buena novela para meterte en el universo de la Liga de Todos los Mundos, pese a que no tiene ningún tipo de continuidad con los demás. "El planeta del exilio" es mucho mejor, una novela corta muy entretenida y con unos temas más definidos (para saber más, aquí). "Ciudad de ilusiones" es el mejor de todos, pese a que le cuesta arrancar, pero cuando lo hace, más o menos hacia la mitad, se vuelve mucho más complejo de lo que aparentemente parecía, tanto argumentalmente como temáticamente, todo lo anterior cobra sentido y se convierte en un libro de diez y uno de los mejores libros de sci-fi que he leído nunca.

Vamos, que el conjunto hace de este tomo recopilatorio una excelente opción si quieres leer ciencia-ficción y fantasía de la buena.

Richard Buro says

The short version first . . .

Ursula K. Le Guin is one of today's most famous living science fiction/fantasy authors. The titles of her works are frequently in contention for if not announced as winners of the coveted Hugo and Nebula Awards for Excellence in Science Fiction. Her writing consistently reflects her adherence to the cutting edge of the hard sciences, so her works are imminently believable as well as plausible. Her fans and critics have named a group of her works as "The Hainish Cycle," something which Ms. Le Guin refutes consistently. Goodreads profile of the Hainish Cycle or Saga or series quotes Ms. Le Guin specifically saying, "People write me nice letters asking what order they ought to read my science fiction books in — the ones that are called the Hainish or Ekumen cycle or saga or something. The thing is, they aren't a cycle or a saga. They do not form a coherent history. There are some clear connections among them, yes, but also some extremely murky ones. And some great discontinuities..." > Regardless of its correct "status," there are currently 10 primary of 16 total works related in some degree to the Hainish or the Ekumen, a governance body of the Hainish explorations.

The three books compiled to create Worlds of Exile and Illusion are considered to be both the beginning of the Hainish Cycle as well as some of the initial works regarded by many as Ms. Le Guin's groundbreaking initial contributions in the field of science fiction. The titles included in the compilation are Rocannon's World, Planet of Exile, and City of Illusion. Next, let's look at each of these works individually and then how they carry the markers for the Hainish.

Book 1 - Rocannon's World -- the longer version

In Rocannon's World, the reader will find a small reconnaissance team from the “benevolent” side (the Hain) in an ongoing conflict between two interstellar civilizations exploring planets for their possible use for colonization and for basing construction privileges. The Hain sent a small team who selected one member Rocannon, who (in the past) worked as an ethnologist on the planet under investigation. Rocannon approaches the mission with anticipation and the comfort that comes from working in the past on this world rich with intelligent life forms. Rocannon's work results in a series of adventures both involved and taxing in which he learns the meaning of knowing too much about events to come, caring too much about the “locals,” and fearing too much about being left marooned in the midst of indigenous peoples who suddenly turn from benevolent to belligerent. Similar in many ways to some of the away and shore party missions of the Trekiverse, Rocannon experiences first hand his own response to Trek's Kobayashi Maru test, with undesirable results in most respects. While he might expect help from home, faster than light technology cannot transport living beings and expect them to live over the experience. While ansible (a special transmitter) communication is instantaneous, it is an 8 year, one-way trip to rescue Rocannon. As the title implies, the world bears his name as recognition for his service and sacrifice for the peoples of “his” world. I finished Rocannon's World on August 22, 2015.

Book 2 -- Planet of Exile -- the longer version

Imagine. . .you are the leader of a colony of spacefarers who have been placed on a planet that is specifically proscribed as far as the use of your superior technology. In fact, you are being exiled here never again to return to your former existence. The level of civilization is early medieval Europe at the best, and barely above cave men at the worst. There are indigenous high-intelligence life forms (HILFs) and indigenous predatory lifeforms as well. You can keep only the technology that is not under sanction by the accords of the League of Worlds. In short you have been exiled to a world many centuries of time behind in technological prowess. You must adapt or die. This is the setting for Ursula K. Le Guin's Planet of Exile.

There are three diverse groups that appear in Planet of Exile, the Tevarans, the farborn (exiles), and the Gaal. The Tevarans have an early medieval lifestyle where management of community farms and herds of animals is the primary means of existence. They have some specialists in some of the societal arts, but for the most part it is primarily an agrarian community who have banded together for mutual protection and support.

The farborn are exiles from the League of Worlds and the Ekumen (although the term is never used in the book), the basic elements of the Hainish Cycle appear early and often. Mindspeech is a form of telepathic communication that the farborn use with frequency and with almost everyone and everything, at least those that can understand. The name of the farborn leader is Jakob Agat Alterra. The use of the name “Alterra” to refer to the “farborns” is also an indication of Hainish or League of Worlds involvement with the “farborns.”

The invading Gaal are beings that inhabit the northern areas of the planet. The problem with their location for living is that for half of the orbit of the planet, the northern reaches are uninhabitable due to the storms and incredibly cold conditions. In addition to the migration, the Gaal also forage as they migrate taking the harvests and herds of others for their own use leaving desolation and carcasses in their wake, and leaving any

survivors ill equipped and under fed to stand up to the fierce winter ahead, resulting in starvation and death for the weak, ill, or injured.

There are loose connections between the books' groups into the Hainish Cycle the explorers/colonizers called the Starlords in Rocannon's World are the farborn in this work Same general idea, just a different way of saying it owing to the lower level of technology on Planet of Exile rather than Rocannon's World. There are inferences to telepathic communications, referred to as mindspeech in both works. While it proves useful in both situations, Planet of Exile shows it in action in several scenes. This increasing of the knowledge and capabilities of indigenous societies to be taught these techniques is a common thread at least through the first three books of the series. The introduction of forested worlds also appears to be a common thread with later books allude to forested planets such as in the title of Hainish Cycle # 6 The Word for World is Forest.

Although Ms. Le Guin claims there is no Hainish Cycle, per se, it has still become a de facto series in the eyes of some sci-fi groups and book groups, as well as a large following of her fans. The Hain and their League of Worlds bring a relatively innocuous group of explorers to a planet first using remote sensing to gather as much information from orbit as possible. The explorers followed by small reconnaissance teams (usually only one person or possibly two) who come down to look and learn first hand from the highly intelligent life forms (HILFs or hilfs) about their customs, culture, and level of technological sophistication. Their actions are similar to those used by the United Federation of Planets (the Federation) familiar to those who have watched any of the films or television series in the Star Trek franchise. Adherence to their "Prime Directive" of non-interference in more primitive cultures is similar to the League of Worlds mandate of no technology on a planet more advanced than the existing culture knows and uses on its own volition and initiative. So what does all this mean?

It means that technology in its various forms can provide the means and the impetus for a civilization to reach for the stars, destroy itself, or maybe a bit of both. On Earth, the both has taken us to the brink of the catastrophe of World War III on several occasions, to all the planets of our star system and beyond, to the depths of the oceans on our planet, and to the surfaces of the inner rocky planets as well as comets and some asteroids. In the case of the Hain and the League of Worlds, it seems to have taken them to the edge of destruction and quite possibly through it. As the Planet of Exile ends, we see the victors emerge into a new world. A world that in many ways is not like the old one, and in some ways it is more barren than any world has ever been before.

Recommendations? Well, the nicest part about reading work by Ms. Le Guin is the fact that you do not have to wade through a morass of profanity, depravity, horror, or anything that is questionable. There may be a scene or two of adults being adults, but nothing is ever overt. Her writing style emphasizes the beauty of existence, the wonder of the human condition, and the optimism that we will be alright in the end. If a reader can handle her vocabulary, they can read this book with very little difficulty. Its story is one of overcoming evil in whatever form it might take, survival in the worst conditions imaginable, and ingenuity that is the hallmark of men and women everywhere. I give it a well deserved 5 out of 5 stars in rating. I finished this book on August 30, 2015.

Book 3 – City of Illusions -- the longer version

You find yourself emerging from darkness and unconsciousness into a world of light, trees, and lifeforms. You can't remember your name, how you got here, and what was in the past. All you know is you are here as a blank slate of a person, a true Homo tabula rasa. This is condition the antagonist of Ursula K. Le Guin's City of Illusions finds himself. He has total amnesia, no home, no companions, no food, no water, and very little hope. He is befriended by the indigenous population who teach him the ways of the forest, the

companionship of the hearth, and the beginnings of to whom he is indebted for his survival and continued existence. The new friends name him Falk and a young girl named Parth helps to train him in things academic of sorts, while Jove helps him learn skills along with others who teach him a form of fieldcraft suitable for survival from the land. In the teachings, Falk learns of a city called Es Toch, and he discovers that others similar to himself may be found there.

The majority of the first half of the book covers Falk's trek to the west to find Es Toch. As he travels he has been given a laser gun which were considered essential to use in the survival training he had. He also learned how to construct shelter from available materials at hand. He encounters more primitive cultures and equivalent cultures in technology but far more primitive in social graces as well. Falk eventually meets up with a Wanderer and Estrel, a girl with a keen sense of survival as well as how to deal with an individual like Falk. They share the journey west together, becoming closer as the miles and time pass. In their travels that cross through the Kansas Enclave, Mzurra Clan, and Basnasskan Tribe.

They eventually make it to Es Toch, and the reception is far from friendly. Torture, both mental and physical, are the norm from the beginning of their time there. Falk and Estrel are separated early and are never really re-united in any true sense of the word. For reasons beyond understanding, after the torture and mistreatment, Falk is eventually accepted with what amounts to open arms. The individuals are now accommodating and pleasant. He is given food, water, clothing, a private room, and basically what amounts to a "vacation" of sorts, all alone. He is introduced to a person quite similar to himself in physical characteristics (eyes, skin color, etc.) but several years younger. This child, Har Orry, calls him Prech Ramarren, a type of honorific resulting in Orry treating him with much respect and honor. Falk takes this situation in stride, but a bit taken aback as the attitude toward his presence appears to have been totally changed, admittedly for the better, but still inexplicably changed.

As the story progresses, Falk discovers that he is indeed one of two survivors of a space vessel that crash landed on the planet. The other is the boy Har Orry. Falk realizes also that he is truly Prech Ramarren as Orry has said from the beginning of their time together. They also discover that the planet beneath their feet is Earth, the planet that Ramarren, the crew of the ship, Alterra, and its passengers were part of an exploration expedition that was shot from the sky by an invading alien race called the Shing. Not only that, but in Chapter 7, the entire first two books of the compendium are summarized into a cohesive lead-in to the current read. So what are the connections? What do the citizen of Es Toch expect from Ramarren? What do they expect from Ramarren? Are the Shing involved in some way? You will need to read the book for the answer to these and many more questions.

Highly recommended, *City of Illusions* is fully deserving of my 5 stars as well. If anything brings the first three books together to beg to be called a series or cycle, it is Chapter 7 of this work. It clearly sums up the works as part and parcel of a unified exploration by a group called the League of Worlds who share common philosophy, common threats, and a diverse but similar (up to a point) biology. A fitting culmination to a great first three books of the "Hainish cycle." I finished this book on September 9, 2015.

As a total compendium, *Worlds of Exile and Illusion* by Ursula K. Le Guin provides an excellent way to "get one's feet wet" in the Hainish works of Ms. Le Guin. Her writing style is unmatched in its serenity, beauty, and clarity. It is at one time calm, and the next deadly, then switching to surprising, and her transitions from scene to scene are so well developed, you cannot help but marvel at how things can move and resolve in the ways that they do. It is truly her artistry and her talent that allows the fortunate reader to be transported by her work to the worlds of exile and illusion. The only question left to ask is "what is reality and how can that be?" Remarkable talent, superior writer, and consummate story teller, this is a one=cover trilogy that really delivers!! Strong recommendation for any and all readers old enough to understand the vocabulary. Trust me

– it will be a sweet read!!!

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Zanna says

I am glad I made the decision to read the Hainish cycle from the start, even though I owe this to my OCD reading style. While each novel is entirely capable of standing alone, has very different protagonists and raises very different issues, the continuity of the world-building was satisfying. I especially liked how protagonists from each novel became so legendary that they are mentioned much later in time in subsequent novels. The ethical concerns become deeper and more elaborate over the course of the cycle. To me what's most impressive is how deftly Le Guin navigates and celebrates cultural difference.

Tatiana says

Just finished the first of these, Rocannon's World, and enjoyed it a great deal. This is very early LeGuin, and her powers, while evident, are not yet fully developed here. It's rather interesting the number of different societies she sites on this single world, with multiple intelligent building and technology-using species. In many ways it's much more a typical or even formula science fiction story than her usual. But still you can hear her sparse poetic voice, her simple language that goes straight to the heart and spirit, and the power of her words. She was showing us then what she would become, a master writer, adept, wizard, mage. She has the sort of deep and simple wisdom that the earth has, or the water, just a pure and powerful presence that shines through behind and despite, even, the words. All her work comes highly recommended from me. I've started the second novel, Planet of Exile, already.

(Later) Planet of Exile is better than the first novel. It was a page turner. Not sure when this was originally published, but it must be an early work of hers because the language is the old sexist language that used to be

standard until the 1970s or 80s. She uses "man" for "human" and so on. All the leaders of both societies shown are male. In many ways this is pre-gender-awakened UKL. She did have a great female viewpoint character who was very strong and definite in her choices and actions. I liked her a great deal. We can also see the beginnings of UKL's later moral complexity. Her characters are thoughtful but very much people of their time and place. However, the badguys aren't really shown at all. They aren't given any real humanity in the book, or not that any of her viewpoint characters are exposed to. They are rather like orcs, attacking in huge numbers and pretty easy to kill. This changes later in UKL's work, as pretty much all the characters are shown as real people, and even given sympathetic viewpoints which are nevertheless in conflict with the main characters. That is a hallmark of her later work, I think. In this one there's still a feeling of being more of a standard, normal work of science fiction. Her palpable sense of reality is starting to develop here, and her ability to show nuanced emotions and make us really feel them is still in nascent form. The love story in this one is nice, but not as organic and convincing as her love stories usually are. She's at the early stages, here, of learning how to say so much so powerfully without using words, as she does later.

Between the first and second novel in this book, I also reread the Annals of the Western Shore trilogy and loved it. UKL continues to develop as a writer, getting better and better with time. Now on to novel 3 in this book, which is called City of Illusions.

(later still) Just finished the last one, City of Illusions, and here she's getting to be a very good writer. I really couldn't put it down from the first to the end. Within the first page I already cared about the viewpoint character, and his family, the group with which he shared a home. By the way, these novels were written in the 1960s, so that explains the jarring sexism that runs through them, even though, obviously, written by a woman. The main characters are mostly male, the actors and do-ers, the ones we identify with. The women are strangely passive throughout, with a few notable exceptions. Hard to believe things can change so profoundly about our worldview in a few decades, and what an enormous relief it is to see how much better things have become in that time.

UKL's made up words have always sounded to me not at all made up. They're like Tolkien's words. They're part of the fabric of the world she's telling about, discovered and not invented. In this story, though, while there are many of the organic, realistic names and words, a few strike me as odd and made-up-sounding. There's also a false note of cheeziness introduced by the reference to the Tao Te Ching, all that far in the future long after the fall of any civilization we know. This brought to mind, hilariously, Captain Kirk reciting the preamble to the U.S. Constitution in the year 26 hundred whatever, apparently a cherished document of Federation history. UKL is a philosophical Taoist, of course, and it's rather sweet that she invokes its central text, but also somewhat of a false note to my ear. The more experienced UKL who wrote the Earthsea books never hit any notes that didn't ring completely clear to me. So it's rather neat to see her development.

Though I seem to be finding a lot to complain about here, that's deceptive. I loved this third novel, and on the basis of it I believe I'll raise my rating another star. The things that matter most she gets exactly right here. An uncanny ability to make me care about a character within the first couple of pages of the story, and a narrative that has depth, originality, variety, and great interest. Definitely recommended for fans of UKL, and for science fiction fans in general! This is a fascinating read.

Jake says

This is actually reprinted in a collection called World's of Exile and Illusion, which collects three of LeGuin's earlier works into a single book. I haven't gotten around to reading the other two yet, and since I'm

not sure when I'll get back to it, I figured I'd just review this one now. The publishing info/ISBN is for the collection.

All three books are part of LeGuin's ongoing "Hanish" universe. The conceit of the universe is pretty simple; long ago, there was an enormous interstellar human empire (Hain), which collapsed (as empires are wont to do). Thousands of years later, the Hanish people are rediscovering their universe, and the lost colonies that have survived without them...some in very odd and interesting ways.

The Basics: *Rocannon's World* is really a story in two parts. The prologue, which was originally published as "Semley's Necklace", is a fairy tale with sci-fi trappings. It tells the story of the princess Semley, who goes on a quest to find her ancestral necklace. Her journey takes her to strange lands, and eventually into the kingdom of the Claymen, cave dwelling humanoids with fantastic technology. After much negotiation, they agree to take her to where the necklace is, and she is transported to a strange place, where she meets a man named Rocannon, who gives her the necklace, and sends her home. Though the journey lasts only a night, she returns to find that eight years have passed, and that her husband has since passed away.

That's the prologue.

The rest of the book picks up years later, with the story of Rocannon himself, who is now living on that world, doing research on the people who live there. When a group of men with helicopters and other advanced weaponry begin destroying local villages, Rocannon sets out with some companions to try and stop them. Like the prologue, it's a fantasy epic shrouded in sci-fi trappings (or perhaps the other way around). Rocannon's technology makes him more powerful than mortal men, he encounters violent men, strange creatures, and has all sorts of adventures before finally reaching his destination.

The Good: As stated earlier, I love LeGuin's prose. It's just gorgeous. Very simple, but it flows beautifully. This is the sort of story you can just glide through, enjoying every minute of it, and not realizing just how many minutes it's really been.

LeGuin is a great world builder, and while *Rocannon's World* isn't her most unique creation, she still does a marvelous job of filling in the details in a believable way. And there are a few surprising twists about the world, especially regarding the nature of the "fourth sentient race" that is hinted at from the prologue on...

Rocannon himself is an interesting character—he's an anthropologist and scientist who has had a fight thrust on him, and is not entirely glad about it. He definitely fills the "reluctant hero" role, but he does it well. The supporting characters are all equally interesting.

The Bad: I wasn't bothered by this, but *Rocannon's World* really is a fantasy novel with some sci-fi trappings. This might bother some readers.

The ending is a little vague; not awful, certainly not JMS level of disappointing, but definitely vague. Could have been better.

The Ugly: Meh. I got nothing.

Overall, it was a good read. It's particularly impressive when you consider that this was one of LeGuin's early offerings—her later stuff is even better.

Kyle Racette says

Overall Rating - 4/5

A collection of UKL's first three novels, and first three in the Hainish Universe, *World's of Exile and Illusion* does a wonderful job of showcasing LeGuin's progression as an early writer of science fiction. From *Rocannon's World* to *City of Illusions*, it was fun watching her develop her style and complexity of ideas, and the seeds of her masterpieces are all there, quite visible. I recommend this book to any fan of LeGuin, but if you enjoyed *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* and are looking for more of that caliber, then you won't quite find it here.

Rocannon's World - 3.5/5

Overall, I would give the story about 3.5/5 stars. Very much in the spirit of LeGuin, the story takes place on a world in which several different but intelligent species reside. While none of them have advanced far beyond Bronze Age technology, one cave-dwelling species has learned to use the technologies left by "The League of All Worlds" (possibly the precursor to *The Ecumen*). In the prologue, which reads much like a fable (and was originally published as a standalone short story :https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dow...), a woman of the planet Formalhaut II finds her way to a planet in The League, 8 light years away, where she meets Rocannon who is an ethnographic surveyor. Perplexed by her, he begins an expedition to explore the world, which is a haven for a group of rebels that is currently at war with The League. The rebels rain havoc on the native peoples, destroying their landscapes and their economies. Rocannon is quickly stranded there with them and embarks on a mission to find the rebel base, where the last working ansible exists, and send a message back to his people at The League, telling them the location of the base.

The story feels very much like a practice or inspiration for *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which is considered by many to be her biggest masterpiece. *Rocannon's World*, while short, is an adventure tale in which members of different species learn about one another and become close. There is love, loss, and sacrifice, and the characters are pushed to their limits in order to live out their purpose. It has a much stronger fantasy vibe than it does science fiction, but I have no problem with that. Some of the technology is quite unconvincing, but it was consistent, and I feel that is ok too.

Rocannon's World is a fun and engaging adventure novel, but far from ground breaking. If you are interested in Ursula K LeGuin and enjoy her writing style, you will probably enjoy reading this book, but don't expect another *Left Hand of Darkness*.

Planet of Exile - 4/5

This story was a clear improvement over *Rocannon's World*, and I enjoyed it very much. *Planet of Exile* shows the interactions between an old and primitive tribe of natives with a society of aliens who had been exiled on the planet from The League six generations ago. The Exiles, living in a city they called Landin, had records of their people and their history, their technology, etc, but abided by the rules that prevented them from using it. The neighboring city of Tevar was largely friendly, but viewed the exiles as outsiders who were alien and could use magic (the native bacteria and viruses did not affect them, and they had the ability of mindspeech).

In this story, the planet is plagued by long and harsh winters which last half a lifetime. Winter is coming, and with it, the raiders from the north who pose a threat to their cities. The aliens and the natives must look past

their differences and their prejudices and help each other through the struggling season.

Overall I felt that the characters came to life a bit better in this story. The story felt more whole, and the prose slightly more mature. LeGuin spent more time with each of the cultures, unlike in *Rocannon's World* where she created several different intelligent species but didn't spend the time to examine in depth the way they all lived. The conflict between the tribes was compelling, albeit somewhat unrealistically friendly. There was only one scene near the end that I felt she really did not need to include, and one could also complain that there was very little real "science fiction" in this tale, that it felt more like an anthropological study of some primitive species in the universe, and a story about a long-lost group of explorers from *The League*. In this way, it barely seemed to fit in with the Hainish universe.

Despite those flaws, I really enjoyed the story for what it was, and I had a lot of fun reading the wonderful prose of UKL.

City of Illusions - 4/5

This is by far the most complex and sophisticated of the novellettes in this volume. The plot begins with a creature - an alien to this world - who stumbles out of the woods having lost his memory. He is brought up by a primitive tribe of natives with the name Falk, and for five years learns of the world, including "The Enemy," an oppressive race of beings known as The Shing who inhabit the planet. In time, Falk realizes he must leave and discover his origins, and he sets off on a journey to the city Es Toch where The Shing are said to inhabit. After facing several trials on his journey in this new world, he begins to learn some truths, and must unravel many lies.

This story follows after *Planet of Exile*, and while it can certainly be read as a stand-alone novel, may be slightly enhanced after reading the former one. It uncovers more of the history and lore of the Hainish Universe and the history of Earth, and it tells a compelling story while raising some interesting ideas. As it's told as a standalone story, the occasional passage starts to feel repetitive as LeGuin must re-explain some concept. While the story is more complex than the first too, it isn't overly so. My biggest issue is that I came away from it feeling like all the questions hadn't been answered clearly and wondering if they are plot holes or oversights. I attribute this to LeGuin's growing ambition and honing her storytelling, and recognize that they aren't all perfect masterpieces. That said, I enjoyed this very much, and give it a solid 4/5 stars.

Betty says

Three novels, *Rocannon's World*, *Planet of Exile*, and *City of Illusions*, make up this collection. These are Le Guin's first three novels, and the first three set in the Hainish universe (which also includes *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Dispossessed*, *The Word For World is Forest*, and many short stories). These lean a little heavier towards the fantasy side of the genre; science fiction elements are at play, but the central tension in all three stories is of technology being suppressed, destroyed, or otherwise made inaccessible to mankind. Le Guin is never anti-technology, she's more interested in seeing the balance between its benefits and abuses. For pure enjoyment, *PoE* was my favorite- developed characters, a driving plot, and a great balance between the science fiction and fantasy elements of the story. *CoI* was the weakest- such an interesting premise that got kind of bogged down in explanations towards the end. Overall, a decent collection and a great window into Le Guin's early career, but probably not the greatest introduction to Le Guin in general.

Ethan says

I'm reviewing *Rocannon's World*. I'll get to the others later. [EDIT: Three years later! D'oh!]

I wouldn't put this up there with the likes of *The Left Hand of Darkness* or *The Dispossessed* (two of my favorite books of all time), but it's not bad for LeGuin's first Hainish novel (and, I think, her first novel). This is an interesting mix of science fiction and mythic fantasy. Sometimes this kind of thing doesn't work for me, but here it does, maybe because of the interesting interactions between the off-world visitors and the inhabitants of what comes to be called Rocannon's World or maybe just because LeGuin is so good. As much as it pains me to criticize LeGuin, I did find the book slow going or hard to follow at times, but she makes it worthwhile and pulls off a satisfying - but not necessarily "happy" - ending.

Somehow it took me three years to get to *Planet of Exile*, but I'm glad I did! Le Guin's writing style seems to have evolved slightly for the better in this one. It still has a mythic feel to it, but it's also a bit more lyrical and engaging. We meet two groups of people: the farborns (who descend from Hainish colonists who arrived hundred of years earlier) and the people of Tevar who are native to the planet. A young woman of Tevar, Rolery, sneaks into the farborn area where she meets several farborn including a young man named Agat. Eventually they fall in love and there are numerous tumultuous cross-cultural incidents. It turns out a third group, the Gaal, have assembled an army to attack both the Tevarans and the farborn, which serves to drive the plot more effectively than in *Rocannon's World*. The most interesting part of the book for me is the idea that the farborn have been bound by the laws of their ancestors, one of which is somewhat like Star Trek's Prime Directive, although it also requires them to give up some of their own technology (like air cars). They retain a lot of basic scientific knowledge. A biochemical explanation for why they don't get local diseases is a big plot point, but could it be that they are finally adapting to their planet? Is their planet of exile becoming home? If Buddhists are right that everything is impermanent, is it folly to try to keep traditions unchanging or to wish that external influence won't change us? Do relationships inevitably change both partners in the relationship? These are just some of the deeper questions that the novel provokes, reminding me of why Le Guin is one of my all time favorites.

(See a version of this review on my blog: <http://examinedworlds.blogspot.com/20...>)

Onward to *City of Illusions*! It took me awhile to get into this one, which is also the longest of the three but still relatively short (it feels longer than its 170 pages, but in a good way). Once I plunged a bit into its depths, I came to see that it's my favorite of the three. This feels just a bit closer to the heights of genius Le Guin achieved in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which was published just two years later. A novel that focuses so heavily on personal identity, memory, illusion, deception, and directly quotes the *Dao De Ching*, all with the backdrop of the Hainish universe is pretty much guaranteed to be a favorite for me.

On a far future Earth, our protagonist (later called Falk) is found naked in the woods with no memory of his identity. He is physiologically different from the native Earthlings (with yellow cat eyes), but this sort of human variation is not unheard of in the Hainish universe since humans were seeded on numerous worlds in the deep past. Falk eventually becomes more-or-less integrated into the native Earth village, but eventually goes on a quest to understand his identity in the city of Es Toch. Eventually (skipping a lot here) he gets to the city and meets the Shing, the alien overlords of Earth (or so everyone believes). They offer to restore his original memory, which it seems they may be doing for less than entirely benevolent reasons. Their ability to "mind lie" and the story they tell to ensure their domination of Earth are just some of the many eponymous illusions. Also, restoring Falk's old memories might kill off his identity as Falk, thus presenting us with something like the personal identity issue of fusion/fission and the moral issue of whether it would be murder

to kill off one identity to resume the other. And who is Falk anyway? The person he is now? The person he used to be? Both? Neither? Does it matter? This issue is also found in *Total Recall/We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*, although Le Guin's treatment of the issue is a bit more subtle than Dick's - this is Ursula Le Guin after all!

The plot is complicated for such a short novel and as usual with the Hainish novels, the reader gets the feeling that there's a lot more going on in the vast historical background than meets the eye, which is a necessary ingredient for any sufficiently believable universe. Le Guin's world building is right up there with Herbert's *Dune* or Tolkien's *Middle Earth*, although Le Guin does more with less than Herbert or Tolkien, relying mostly on hints and half-remembered legends than historical appendices or epigraphs.

The Daoist distrust of language comes through, too. The famous first lines of the *Dao De Ching* are quoted directly. Not only can the true Dao not be named, the ability of mind lying shows that it can't even be telepathically transmitted! Nor is the Falk who can be named the true Falk! But then, who is he? While Le Guin is generally more drawn to the mystical/naturalist elements of Daoism (see especially *The Lathe of Heaven*), the last page of the novel leaves us on a note more in line with Zhuangzi's playful skepticism than Laozi's inscrutable mystery.

Thus ends my three-year journey through these three books. Perhaps someday I'll finish all the Hainish novels, but then I have to ask in appropriately Le Guinian terms: can one ever finish reading Le Guin, or does one merely start again making a new beginning of an old ending?

Terence says

Three Hainish Novels is an omnibus collection of UKL's early novels *Rocannon's World*, *Planet of Exile* and *City of Illusions*.

Rocannon's World: This is the earliest and the least satisfying of the three. Rocannon is an ethnologist of the League of All Worlds (what would become the precursor of the Ekumen of later novels when Le Guin's Hainish Cycle actually took shape) who's intrigued by the natives of Fomalhaut II when one of its representatives visits the nearest League outpost. Coupled with his interest is the League's in recruiting allies in a coming war with a vaguely defined enemy so an expedition is eventually dispatched. Said expedition is destroyed by the enemy and the only survivor is Rocannon. He enlists the aid of one of the native species (the Angyar) to reach the enemy's base and use their ansible (view spoiler) to contact the League.

It's an old-fashioned quest story and, while Rocannon is a sympathetic character, it would be an otherwise forgettable novel except that it lays the foundation for how the worlds of the League develop *mindspeech*, telepathy. (view spoiler)

Planet of Exile: The second novel takes place at a later time on the world of Werel, γ Draconis (about 150 LYs from Earth). The planetary year lasts for about 60 Earth years with correspondingly longer seasons. When the story opens, Autumn is ending, and the natives are preparing for the coming Winter. The southern cultures have traditionally holed up in largely subterranean fortresses. In part, this is to survive the Winter; in part, this is to survive the depredations of their northern cousins, who are fleeing the cold. In this cycle, however, the northerners have been united under a Genghis Khan-like figure who is destroying the Winter refuges, slaughtering the men and enslaving the women and children.

Added to the complications is the presence of a colony of exiles. Humans who were stranded on the planet several seasons ago when the long-anticipated war with the “enemy” came and Werel was cut off from the League.

Relations between these humans and the natives are strained but largely peaceful. The entente is threatened by the northerners and – on a more personal level – the relationship between the leader of the humans, Jakob Agat, and Rolery, a little-regarded granddaughter of the natives’ leader.

In terms of the overall cycle, this story lays the groundwork for the Werelians development of mental disciplines that will be instrumental in finally defeating the “enemy.”

City of Illusions: The most polished of the three novels, *City* takes place over a thousand years later. The League has been destroyed by the “enemy,” who finally receive a name – the Shing. Their ability to lie (view spoiler) with mindspeech has allowed them to shatter the League and isolate its worlds, which they rule over, strictly controlling technology and not allowing the emergence of any large center of power. The book opens on Earth, where a nameless amnesiac is discovered by a human settlement. Eventually, this man – named Falk by his discoverers – decides to set out for the Shing city of Es Toch and tries to recover his identity.

(view spoiler)

As standalones, all three novels are decent reads and would earn my recommendation to Le Guin fans and, I think, SF enthusiasts in general.
