Robert Yeates's study of the image of the American city is an ambitious book. It endeavors to analyze how American urban spaces are portrayed in science fiction, and not just in prose fiction but in various media: radio drama, film, comics, games, and the “transmedia franchise” (works that began in one medium and then have been adapted for others), as well as magazine fiction. Each chapter traces the depiction of the city in one or a few texts that Yeates treats as representative of the genre and the medium.

The book's ambition is both its strength and its weakness, however. After an introduction laying out his theoretical foundations, and explaining why he moves beyond consideration of fiction alone, Yeates devotes about 150 pages to the texts themselves. There is good reason to look at how the various media treat the theme, especially given how much post-apocalyptic science fiction in the twenty-first century is in the form of movies and games, but it is quite a challenge to deal adequately with all this material in such a short study. The effort is certainly admirable, but practical considerations mean that in some cases only one or two texts must stand for many more that may or may not fit Yeates's claims for the genre or medium as a whole.

Furthermore, some of Yeates's textual choices are debatable, to say the least. Until film, games, and television came to greater prominence in post-apocalyptic SF, prose fiction offered numerous and varied visions of life after the near-end of humanity in both short stories and novels over a long period. Yeates shows some familiarity with early texts in the field, but provides a somewhat brief and derivative history of apocalyptic science fiction. He relies heavily on some sources, particularly W. Warren Wagar's *Terminal Visions*, while not mentioning Martha Bartter's important article “Nuclear Holocaust as Urban Renewal” at all in his literature review and only incorporating her insights in Chapter 3, where he discusses film. Giving prose fiction just one chapter gives short shrift to all that material from Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) to current cli-fi. He focuses only on magazine fiction—that is, short stories—and of all the choices available he chose to look at Jack London's hardly representative “The Scarlet Plague” (1912). The story undeniably deserves more attention than it has received, but what about Stephen Vincent Benêt's
“By the Waters of Babylon” (1937) or Harlan Ellison’s “A Boy and His Dog” (1969), to name only two? Yeates discusses London’s story in the context of the pulps, but while it was published during the days of general-interest pulp magazines, it predates the science fiction pulp era and it first appeared in a British large-circulation magazine.

Other textual choices are equally questionable. In looking at radio drama he analyzes, in addition to original scripts, adaptations of stories like Ray Bradbury’s “There Will Come Soft Rains” (1950) and “Dwellers in Silence” (1949), both of which were later published in *The Martian Chronicles* (1950); one cannot help wondering why he did not study the original stories instead. More curiously, when he turns to film he devotes most of his chapter to two adaptations of novels by H. G. Wells on which George Pal worked, *The War of the Worlds* (1953) and *The Time Machine* (1960). While the first moves the action to Los Angeles, the second remains set in London, putting it well outside Yeates’s scope. He also discusses *Things to Come* (1933) more briefly—another film based on Wells and, as he acknowledges, set in London. Many more films could have been analyzed instead, including ones he names, like *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1959) and *Panic in the Year Zero!* (1962) among the earlier nuclear-holocaust films by and about American cities, and innumerable later ones dealing with both nuclear and non-nuclear apocalyptic events. On the other hand, he does an excellent job of laying the theoretical groundwork for the study of visual representations of disaster and the post-apocalyptic city. He analyzes the way Los Angeles appears in *Blade Runner* (1982), although less in the original film than in the transmedia adaptations of it.

There are some other gaps that he might have been filled in. For instance, the chapters seem somewhat disconnected; while some common motifs, like ruins and their effects on the audience, are traced through the various media, each chapter seems to offer a distinct argument, and less attention is paid to how the aural and visual media perpetuated tropes that had been established elsewhere. Also, a more comprehensive account of the city in fiction, as constituting the site of both corruption in tales going back centuries, and utopia in Plato and then the Renaissance and later, might have contextualized the science fiction better.

Yeates tries to do a great deal in a small space and should be commended for offering a wide-ranging analysis. There are numerous missed opportunities as a result, however, and so the book does not quite live up to the promise of its title.

**Works Cited**


Ellison, Harlan “A Boy and His Dog.” Miller and Greenberg, pp. 335-73.


**Allan Weiss** is Professor of English at York University in Toronto. His monographs *The Routledge Introduction to Canadian Fantastic Literature* and *The Mini-Cycle* appeared in 2021, and he is the author of articles and has given conference papers on Canadian and fantastic literature. He has been Chair of the biennial Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy since 1996, and has edited three volumes of proceedings from the conference. He has also published three short story collections, *Living Room* (2001), *Making the Rounds* (2016) and *Telescope* (2019), and stories in various journals and anthologies.