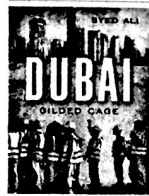


Non-fiction

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**Dubai: Gilded Cage**, by Syed Ali (Yale, £14.99)

Within 40 years Dubai has been transformed from an obscure regional port into a global city glittering with iconic architecture, such as the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building. But, Syed Ali argues, it is a unique kind of global city: "a city of transients". Astonishingly, 90% of Dubai's population are expatriate workers. From builders to bankers, all are on short-term, renewable visas. They live in a state of "permanent impermanence". For Dubai's rulers, the lack of permanence is a form of social control. Anyone they don't like is simply deported, a fate suffered by Ali himself. "You are asking too many questions about locals and non-locals," the police officer said. Ali argues that Dubai is a social experiment. In Dubai's market society, money is all that matters and culture is generic and global. "Dubai Inc" has become the ultimate non-place, where no one feels at home. Laissez faire urban utopia or exploitative, artificial dystopia? As Ali shows in this fascinating study, in the future there may well be many more cities like Dubai.

PD Smith



**Thousand Mile Song: Whale Music in a Sea of Sound**, by David Rothenberg (Basic, £10.99)

Jazz musician and philosopher David Rothenberg is an explorer in the little-known field of "interspecies music". His goal is to cross the sound barrier and to make music with whales. He meets musicians, such as Pete Seeger, who have been influenced by whale song, and scientists studying what Rothenberg describes as "one of the greatest sounds in the animal world". Not all scientists share Rothenberg's enthusiasm: "I don't see the point of fucking with animals just for the hell of it," says one. Indeed, in America, unless you're a scientist, playing music at whales is illegal, regarded as harassment. But Rothenberg's enthusiasm is persuasive. "His attempts to accompany whales with his "squeaking clarinet" is "the ultimate interspecies experiment", one he hopes will show a common instinct for music among humans and some animals. Unsurprisingly, the results - which you can hear on the accompanying CD - are inconclusive, but although this sounds like a piece of New Age shtick, the book is both thought-provoking and entertaining. PDS



**Strange Days Indeed: The Golden Age of Paranoia**, by Francis Wheen (Fourth Estate, £8.99)

In 1973, Francis Wheen left a note informing his parents that he had "gone to join the alternative society and wouldn't be back". Arriving at a London hippie hangout, he announced he'd dropped out. "Drop back in, man," came the answer, "you're too late." *Strange Days Indeed* explores why the *Private Eye* writer was disappointed in his youthful dreams, and offers a telling record of how 1960s psychedelia curdled into 70s psychosis. Richard Nixon is the defining presence - tangled up in tape, his mind spooling away on the White House lawns - but Wheen's account also touches on European terrorists and African coups, Idi Amin and Harold Wilson, Erich von Däniken and Uri Geller - all representations of the era's sense of impending apocalypse. The personal anecdotes are funny - Wheen's resentment at spending his pocket money on the "ghastly doggerel" of Paul McCartney's "Give Ireland Back to the Irish" lingers - but he's best when teasing out the web of conspiracy theories, revealing a glinting thread that still runs through public life today. Victoria Segal



**Operation Kronstadt**, by Harry Ferguson (Arrow, £8.99)

It is 1919; the Bolsheviks are still fighting for power against Tsarists and moderate reformers. The only British agent in the country is in mortal danger. Mansfield Cumming, the eccentric first "C", or chief, of MI6, sends a group of sailors and naval engineers with specially designed fast motor boats to rescue him. The mission involves attacking a heavily fortified naval fortress. This yarn moves at a hectic pace; its heroes are Paul Dukes, an MI6 officer later knighted for his derring-do, and Gus Agar, awarded the VC for his bravery. The author, a former MI6 officer, says that if their actions had been supported "there is a good chance that the Bolsheviks would have lost the civil war and the Soviet Union might never have existed". A strong claim. He also says he was concerned that his tale, based to a large extent on personal diaries and papers, presented a "rather too negative, if accurate, picture of MI6". He consulted MI6 officers who replied that they were content with the publication. It is not really surprising. Richard Norton-Taylor



**Frankly, My Dear: Gone with the Wind Revisited**, by Molly Haskell (Yale, £10.99)

Molly Haskell was born southern, if not a belle, and therefore is qualified to contribute this *Gone with the Wind* primer to Yale's "Icons of America" series. She covers everything, from her own teen swoon at the novel to the unique eye of William Cameron Menzies, the film's production designer - a job description invented to cover the many contributions he made to Tara on screen. Whatever aspect of *GWTV* you could want know about, Haskell covers it: the damaged author Margaret Mitchell, hugging her slow-written book to herself and wanting never, never to publish; the unstable Vivien Leigh using her fierce flakiness as a basis for character creation; the interventionist David O Selznick, pushing the toughest of MGM hands into breakdowns. Nobody and nothing is forgotten: there's a deserved paean to Hattie McDaniel's *Mammy* - being black, she wasn't invited to the Atlanta premiere, and her face didn't appear on the souvenir programme, but she and Clark Gable remain the strongest and truest memories from the film. Vera Rule