



Carmen, Mary
THE CLARKL SOUP KITCHENS
AuthorHouse (277 pp.)
\$18.75
November 2004
ISBN: 1-4184-8031-2

The cold planet of Clarkl, a place of “few comforts and extensive famine,” serves as the backdrop for this humorous, pseudo-allegorical tale.

Clarkl is the last-ditch option for the rag-tag recruits of two competing Christian missionary groups in the late-21st century—at least one of which consists of disgraced Catholic prelates—who run a food-for-uranium exchange between Earth and Clarkl. Carmen’s darkly comic saga of interspecies miscommunication is told through the diaries of four Clarkl enlistees who have little interest in Christianity and even less understanding of the hungry creatures for whom they must constantly cook. They are middle-aged, greedy, needy, and unnervingly self-

absorbed, showing very little interest in the fantastic landscape in which they live and work. Though they are on the strangest planet in the galaxy, they remain only mildly curious about Clarkl and the mysterious lives of its inhabitants. In short, they are the ugly, xenophobic Americans of the next century. For their part, however, the Clarklians—with their multitiered social structure of elitist Monarchs, intelligent Seekers, bully-like Batwigs, Carriers and Slinkers, and bottom-rung Drones—more than match the Earthlings’ religious and cultural disinterest. In fact, aside from their zeal for repopulation, they only seem to be wildly enthusiastic about the oddest trifles: pancakes with pineapple syrup, broccoli, pumpkins, Christmas music, and hot tubs.

Carmen may have set space travel back a millennia or two with this forbidding look at the future—and she certainly spins a wafer-thin allegorical yarn—but her bold, imaginative tales are enough for a memorable escape to a planet far, far away.

—*Kirkus Discoveries*

