



The Lost Art

Books Reviewed:

[The Lost Art](#) [1]

Issue:

[165](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

The world ? what's left of it ? is literally upside down, destroyed by the folly of ?the Users? (that?s Us or our immediate descendants ? as aficionados of dystopias for young readers know, the perpetrators of global catastrophes are invariably Us). Although the Users? dangerous technology prompts all the action on the massive stage of **The Lost Art** , this text has as much affinity with epic-fantasy as future-fiction. You cannot fault Morden for ambition; his narrative whirls from the sands of North Africa to fishing villages on the Celtic coast, or to the wastes around Moskva, even though East is West and North is South in this inverted world. We switch between the adventures of Va, an obsessive Russian Orthodox monk consumed with guilt for his violent past; the exploits of Solomon Akisi, a devious emissary of the Emperor of Kenya; and the heroics of the most engaging of the three, Benzamir Michael Mahmood, an interplanetary traveller whose people fled beyond the stars to escape Earth?s cataclysm. All, with different motives, search for the indestructible lost ?books? which contain the knowledge of the Users ? knowledge which, in the wrong hands, could bring renewed disaster to the world.

It is individuals, eventually bound into a nicely contrasting group, who must save the world; Benzamir and Va and those who love them ? two women, an inquisitive boy and a courageous servant.

That brief indication of content does little justice to the grand design of these 500-plus pages. This is Dr Morden?s first novel (the web describes him as an unemployed rocket scientist) and it is some achievement that so vast a narrative is mostly under control. He is good at fighting, spectacle and technology such as advanced magic carpets or spaceships which can think and talk; better at blurring the boundaries between moral right and wrong; and even better when he tempers heroic action with the illogicalities of human relationships. So Benzamir, for all the glittering powers he brings from outer space, is attractively humorous and vulnerable, especially when he is surprised by his own need for affection and love. In this almost primitive world, it must be said, women (however strong) find themselves in roles supportive to men, who are drawn to them by their beauty, compassion and devotion.

Much more than a large-scale ripping yarn, then, charged with contemporary ideas, yet shifting between a Middle Eastern folk tale and science fiction. Above all, it is the raw energy of the storytelling rather than its elegance or subtlety which drives the reader on; an energy which, in these surprising crossover times, might well absorb adult as well as adolescent readers.

Source URL (retrieved on Feb '21): <http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/165/childrens-books/reviews/the-lost-art>

Links:

[1] <http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-lost-art>

[2] <http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/165>

[3] <http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/geoff-fox>