

The cover of IN GREEN'S JUNGLES

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 Dec 2000

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The Reverend Jacob Corbin — 08 Dec 2000, 03:33

I thought the covers for LAKE OF THE LONG SUN and EXODUS FROM THE LONG SUN were both attractive and skillfully executed -- they had an air of old-fashioned futurity, like the kind of paintings people living in the Whorl might have actually made, as opposed to the stiffly-posed, airbrushed techno-fetishism of, say, a David Weber cover. NIGHTSIDE and CALDE were ehhhh, but not embarrassing. The new TPBs of FREE LIVE FREE and DOCTOR DEATH are both attractive and classily understated.

The Short Sun jackets have good layouts and nice printing quality -- it's the pictures themselves, or more accurately what they depict, that bug me. Call me crazy, but I don't like walking around with naked women or badly-rendered aliens on my book covers...they drag the books back into the mire of generic adolescent sf/fantasy.

Literal representation is the telltale mark of genre muck -- how many abstract fantasy novel covers have you seen lately, for instance? (The only ones I can think of belong to Terry Pratchett books.) There are plenty of approaches that would have worked equally well or better. For instance, since both OBW and IGJ could be considered planetary romances, a well-done landscape painting or a Photoshopped photograph would have been classy while still communicating some of the exotic appeal of the novels. Another alternative would have been to depict the events of the books in metaphorical fashion, like on the British paperbacks of Iain M. Banks (USE OF WEAPONS, for instance, has a great cover illo of an empty chair lit by a solitary floodlight with a gun sitting on the floor and a battleship silhouette in the background...you'll not find those props in the novel, but they perfectly convey the tone of the book). Or the publishers could have forgone an illustration entirely and grabbed the reader's attention by sheer dint of design work, like on William Gibson and Neal Stephenson's recent novels, or the gorgeous Alfred Bester and PK Dick paperbacks they've been rereleasing.

Forgive the rant, but I remain convinced that half of sf's problem in connecting with the public at large can be laid at the feet of just plain bad book design -- printing processes and paper stock may have improved since the pulp era, but the underlying aesthetic is the same: "naked women and/or monsters sell books", and incidentally keep away people who might otherwise be tempted to try them.

Reverend Jacob

<http://www.fortunecity.com/tattooine/shirley/272/>

"People who like this sort of thing will find this the sort of thing they like."

Richard M. Nixon

*This is WHORL, for discussion of Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun.