



Reviews of *The Cottingley Cuckoo* by AJ Elwood, *Artifact Space* by Miles Cameron and *The Caduca* by Elaine Graham-Leigh

ROSE, mourning her mother, uncertain about her marriage and resentful that her plans to escape small-town life have been frustrated by events, is working at a retirement home in **The Cottingley Cuckoo** by AJ Elwood (Titan, £8.99).

One of its residents is different to the others. Mrs Favell is rather grand, has all her wits about her and takes a not very kindly interest in Rose.

She shows her a letter supposedly written in 1921 to Arthur Conan Doyle by a man in Cottingley whose granddaughter has had an extraordinary and well-evidenced encounter with fairies. Rose is fascinated by the tale, though repelled by the old woman.

But when, to her dismay, she falls pregnant, events take a much more sinister turn.

This is a beguiling psychological horror story, which might be about the supernatural or might just be about two women trapped in lives they didn't choose.

Artifact Space by Miles Cameron (Gollancz, £18.99) is the first volume of a two-part space opera that leaves me hungry for the final instalment.

Stripped of the sometimes pretentious metaphysics which has made so much recent writing in this subgenre hard going, it concentrates instead on making an adventure of interstellar travel as realistic as possible, both in its science and its culture.

It's set in a society which one character describes as being a mixture of democratic socialism and mercantile capitalism, where the economy depends on immense spaceships which travel the trade routes.

Marca Nbaro has always dreamt of fleeing her orphanage upbringing to serve on a "Greatship," though it's under dangerous false pretences that she eventually makes it aboard. The life of teamwork, belonging and purpose is as fulfilling as she hoped but she has joined the service at the time of its greatest crisis – something unknown, in deep space, is picking off the Greatships one by one.

All in all this is the most enjoyable and refreshing space story I've read for a while.

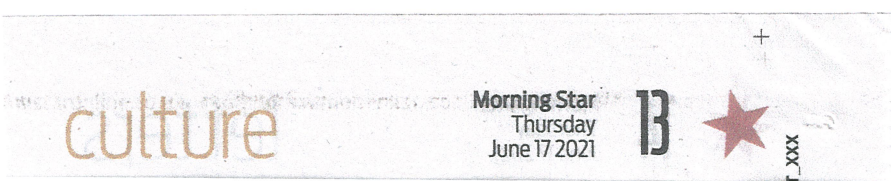
Another writer who knows how to make far-future, spacefaring stories leap

from the page is Elaine Graham-Leigh, whose glitteringly good debut novel **The Caduca** (Conrad Press, £9.99) is an action-packed story about neocolonialism, the blood-soaked cynicism of liberal intervention and a resistance movement divorced from the people and trapped in a cycle of pointless violence and self-indulgent martyrdom.

Intent on ending the guerilla war sparked by the overthrow of a leftist president on an underdeveloped planet is Quila, an idealistic diplomat who believes that democracy can be manufactured and exported like any other commodity of civilisation.

And if the people are too backward to understand the gifts being offered to them then sometimes, she accepts, it is regrettably necessary to impose freedom through armed might.

Quila will pay a terrible price for her naivety, but the author is too well-schooled in the workings of history to leave the reader despairing. She employs an indigenous character to explain that revolutions triumph when they unite all the victims of imperialism, native and settler, against their common foe.



WITH COMPLIMENTS

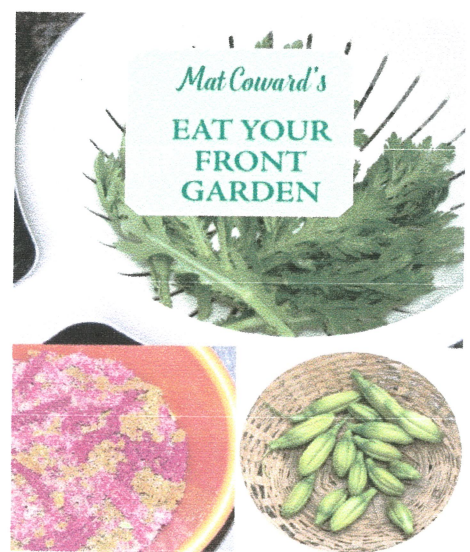
MAT COWARD

15 Rossiters Road, Frome, BA11 4AN

www.matcoward.com

matcoward@phonecoop.coop

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