

The best recent science fiction, fantasy and horror

Cosmogramma by Courttia Newland; The Love Makers by Aifric Campbell; The Second Shooter by Nick Mamatas; Dead Relatives by Lucie McKnight Hardy; and Under the Whispering Door by TJ Klune

[Lisa Tuttle](#)

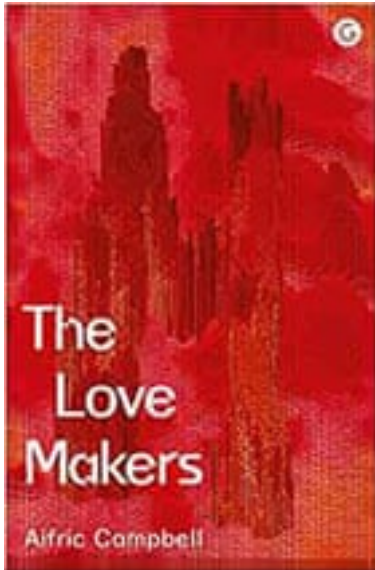


[Cosmogramma](#) by Courttia Newland (Canongate, £12.99)

[Newland's second venture](#) into science fictional territories is a rich, diverse collection of short stories. The first, Percipi, an account of war between humans and their robot servants, may appear a poor choice of opener, written in expository, admonitory style. But the stories that follow range in style, tone and subject matter, from horror stories of alien invasion, social breakdowns and the fine line between madness and reality, to more upbeat fantasies of a secret race of people living beneath the sea and a connection between space travel and time travel that might allow someone to redeem crimes of the past. The final story, set on a rewilded, post-human Earth, sends the reader back to the first, casting it in a different light. For all

their individual differences, these fine stories are in conversation with each other, as well as the reader.

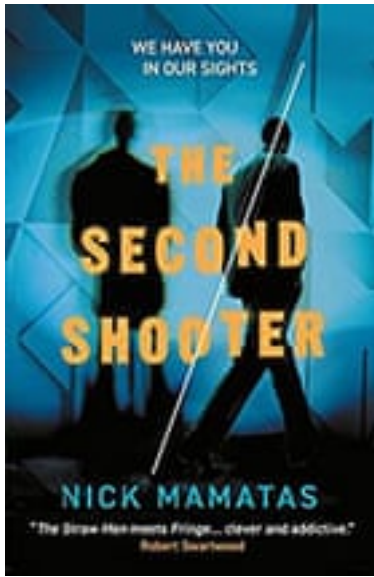
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[The Love Makers](#) by Aifric Campbell (Goldsmiths, £19.99)

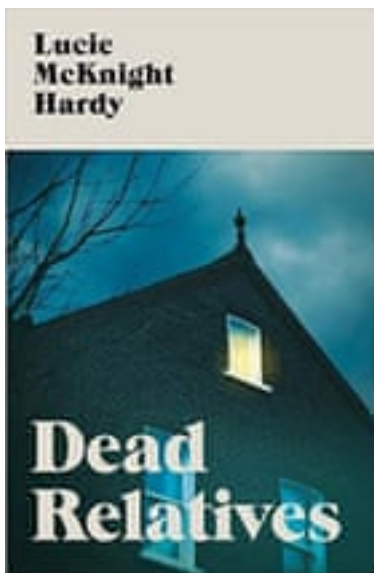
[Campbell's](#) fourth novel is a suspenseful, plausible near-future road trip that is published alongside 14 essays by experts in fields ranging from robotics and artificial intelligence to law and ethics. In the fiction Scarlett and Gurl, the titular characters are a wealthy tech entrepreneur on her way home for Christmas and the stranded dancer to whom she gives a lift. Scarlett, involved in the development of new uses for AI, resists its inclusion in her own life, insisting on hiring a succession of human nannies instead of the iMom her peers rely on. Gurl shares her boyfriend with a sex robot she looks upon as her best friend. These types of future tech may not be so far away; AI and robotics are already part of our lives. The essay by Kate Devlin begins "The first thing to know about sex robots is that there are no sex robots," but it goes on to consider the role of the virtual assistant, and reveals that a Japanese company which makes "a voice-driven AI with an associated projected holographic anime character" has thousands of male customers who would like to marry their virtual assistants. This book, created with the aim of raising

awareness of potential social impacts of developing trends in technology, provides much to think about. It deserves attention.



**[The Second Shooter](#) by Nick Mamatas
(Solaris, £8.99)**

Freelance writer Mike Karras specialises in conspiracy theories and he's driving across America to interview surviving witnesses of mass murders. Plagued by a talk-radio host who believes Karras is part of a larger conspiracy to make private gun ownership illegal, the hapless reporter finds himself running for his life. At first an entertaining thriller, amusing and disturbing by turns in its depiction of contemporary American obsessions and populated with interestingly exotic eccentrics, the book takes a turn for the worse when a mishmash of quasi-magical mysticism is revealed as "the truth" behind it all.



Dead Relatives by Lucie McKnight Hardy (Dead Ink, £9.99)

Following on from her impressive debut novel [Water Shall Refuse Them](#) (2019), this short-story collection confirms the author's reputation in the field of literary horror. The title story is a miniature gothic novel with a sensibility reminiscent of Carson McCullers or Flannery O'Connor, yet set in rural Wales in the early 1960s. Iris, the young

narrator, has never gone beyond the grounds of her home, existing half in a realm of fantasy and ritual featuring her dead relatives, and half in the house run by her monstrous mother and Cook as a home for unwed mothers. Most of the shorter stories might be described as domestic horror, often featuring women driven to an act of madness by grief, bullying or male indifference. Painful, sometimes searingly memorable, they make for uncomfortable reading.



**[Under the Whispering Door](#) by TJ Klune
(Tor, £16.99)**

No one mourned when successful, hard-nosed lawyer Wallace Price unexpectedly died. He was dedicated to his work, with no room left for friends or family. Due to a glitch in the usually smooth passage of spirits into the afterlife, Wallace attends his own funeral, and learns that nobody liked him. This is almost as hard to accept as the fact that death is final, and all his skill in argument won't get his life back. He's told he will be allowed some adjustment time before passing through the titular door: he can stay as a ghost in Charon's Crossing, the teashop run by Hugo, the Ferryman, and his assistant Mei, a recently qualified Reaper. Only they, and the other resident ghosts, can see Wallace, whose hardened heart softens in their company. This is a whimsical, warm-hearted fantasy that suggests it is never too late to make a positive change in life – or afterwards.

... as you're joining us today from France, we have a small

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