If you like challenging science fiction, then Jeff Noon is the author for you. Pollen is the sequel to Vurt (winner of the 1994 Arthur C. Clarke award), and both are concerned with a world in which dreams, drug-induced hallucination, and reality become completely intermingled. In this volume, the dream world unleashes a pollen that threatens to cause people in the real world to sneeze to death. But no review can do Noons writing justice: its a phantasmagoric combination of the more imaginative science fiction masters, such as Phillip K. Dick, genres such as cyberpunk and pulp fiction, and drug culture. If you would like a more accessible approach to Jeff Noons richly imagined world, I recommend Automated Alice, a modern recasting of Lewis Carrolls Alice in Wonderland.

This is the first book by Jeff Noon I've read; I now consider myself a fan.

This is a book that I would classify as one of the truer cyberpunk books out there. What I mean by that is the setting in Noons book plays a central role in the story itself. Make no mistake this isn't some romance, western or sleuth story thrown in a cyberpunk setting. This story could not be told in
any other world but the one Noon created. What I like so much about this story is that Noon explores the implications of his hybrid technological/drugged-up setting through the viewpoints of not only his characters but the society in which they reside and through the story itself. Indeed all three of these elements are symbiotically linked to the weird and unique world Noon has created. Its great to read a cyberpunk book where the cyberpunk elements actually ENHANCE the story being told.

Another wonderful thing that Noon considers in his story is the concept of balance. In particular, characters with unhuman strengths also have great frailties. Genuine fragilities. Noon puts his characters into situations where their strengths become completely benign or detrimental, while their weaknesses become strengths. Noon understands when you merge a dream world with reality, rules and balance are needed to maintain the literary strength of your story. Without rules, powers go unchecked and the characters have no real conflicts. Noon does an excellent job of making his setting TRULY interesting because he respects the rules he lays out for his story and thus maintains an idea of consistency in his plot and characters.

Lastly, I love the prose and punctuation Noon uses in this book. It is rare that an author can pull off a first-person perspective that actually enhances the story. I believe Noon did this very well indeed. Even though the perspective bounces around a bit--and some of the transitions are a bit rough--Noon does a noteworthy job of handling his first-person perspectives. Noons artistically rhythmic use of punctuation fits in perfectly with the tone of the book; and his use of simple but VERY effective vocabulary make even the most stream-of-conscience sequences easily readable. Despite the extreme setting and ideas present in this book, Noons mastery of the English language makes this work much more timeless than less-risque works in science fiction.

Normally, I am a very harsh critic of science fiction; but Noons work I believe to be truly exceptional. Not only are his ideas really unique and interesting, he fully explores the implications of his ideas. Also, Noon is a wordsmith. No, he doesn't rip out the fifteen letter words for even the most benign conversations. Noon is a master of simple and effective language that is riddled with subtlety. I really enjoyed reading this book, and I cant wait to get my hands on Noons other works.

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