

Parrish Lantern Review

We meet Neil Atherton, the hero of this book, in the toilet of a Karaoke bar in Hong Kong and it's Neil Diamond Nite. Egged on by people who appear to be friends of his wife, he performs a wonderful rendition of "Reason to Believe", a beautiful song written by Tim Hardin and covered by Neil Diamond; as he is performing this song he silences the room, everyone hangs on his every word, every line he releases into the room has the ability to create listeners, believers out of a disparate crowd of cynics, drunks and the generally apathetic – it turns out Neil can sing & beautifully. After his turn is over, he is accosted by Elbert Chan, a Chinese man of about forty wearing a wild Hawaiian Shirt and claiming to be a music agent, with big plans for a singer of Neil's quality.

Neil Atherton is a middle-aged British Folk Singer/Guitarist who has touched the hem of the Goddess of success, yet climbed no higher. At one time he was on speaking terms with those who had the hits during the Folk boom of the late 60s – early 70s. He even worked as a backing musician with the likes of Richard Thompson, Dave Swarbrick, Fairport Convention and their ilk. When they moved on, he toured those folk clubs that still survived in the back rooms of Pubs, clubs & church halls. Eventually garnering less & less work, he follows his wife when she's offered a new job in Hong Kong and what at first seems like a new start, leaves him completely lost, with nothing to do. Washed up in Hong Kong, he is no longer the free-spirited musician, just a kept man, accepting hand-outs from his wife who has made a success of this move. She has accepted and is thoroughly enjoying her new life, which is the antithesis of her past life and her husband and what he stands for. Neil still believes in the folk ideals of the sixties. She takes this opportunity to divest herself of all the old baggage . . . Neil is kicked out and quickly replaced.

This leaves him almost homeless, living in a school room at night & spending his days in places like McDonalds, becoming more and more reliant on Elbert Chan and his offers of work as a Neil Diamond impersonator . . .

We follow Neil through a series of increasingly bizarre scenarios, which includes a conflict with a leading stateside Diamond impersonator. I won't say anymore on this as it would ruin what is a really funny & fantastic part of this tale. This book shows the underbelly, that dark seam, that hides beneath the glitz and glamour in

every metropolis, and shows how an innocent, naive individual gets enmeshed in a world so different from his own that he doesn't realise how it slowly is corrupting him. This is the tale of the fool, the king for a day, marching blindly in borrowed glad rags to his own destruction.

This book is a dark comedy, even in the moments where there are signs that optimism may raise its head, a bloody great sword comes swooping down, just to let you know that such idealism is unwarranted here; and yet this book constantly made me smile, the characters here are fantastic, the strangely seedy, dishonest & yet otherworldly nature of Elbert Chan; the snooty humour of the office girls; the sheer desperation sweating from every pore (along with the booze) of Iannis and the self blinding naivety & pity of the hero (anti?) himself, just brought a smile to my face and a chortle from my lips.