



## After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall

*Nancy Kress*

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## **After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall** Nancy Kress

The year is 2035. After ecological disasters nearly destroyed the Earth, 26 survivors—the last of humanity—are trapped by an alien race in a sterile enclosure known as the Shell.

Fifteen-year-old Pete is one of the Six—children who were born deformed or sterile and raised in the Shell. As, one by one, the survivors grow sick and die, Pete and the Six struggle to put aside their anger at the alien Tesslies in order to find the means to rebuild the earth together. Their only hope lies within brief time-portals into the recent past, where they bring back children to replenish their disappearing gene pool.

Meanwhile, in 2013, brilliant mathematician Julie Kahn works with the FBI to solve a series of inexplicable kidnappings. Suddenly her predictive algorithms begin to reveal more than just criminal activity. As she begins to realize her role in the impending catastrophe, simultaneously affecting the Earth and the Shell, Julie closes in on the truth. She and Pete are converging in time upon the future of humanity—a future which might never unfold.

Weaving three consecutive time lines to unravel both the mystery of the Earth's destruction and the key to its salvation, this taut post-apocalyptic thriller offers a topical plot with a satisfying twist.

## **After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall Details**

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## From Reader Review After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall for online ebook

### Jo (Mixed Book Bag) says

Nancy Kress has put together an interesting and frightening book about what we as humans are doing to the Earth. The theme is woven into the story but the words "we did it to ourselves" do not appear until the very end of the book.

I usually have problems with books that flash back and forth in time but in After, Before and During the Fall that format works exceedingly well. By flashing back and forth the entire story is told in just 189 pages. We get to see life in 2035 and the contract with life before 2014.

The characters are interesting. Those after the fall have a different behavior pattern and it makes the story more believable. After, Before and During the Fall is more novella length and is a very quick read. It kept me wondering what had happened until the end.

At the heart of the story is something I have always said when I hear people say that we are destroying the Earth. We are not destroying the Earth. We are only destroying our ability to survive on the Earth. The Earth will go on without us just as it went on after the dinosaurs. Nancy Kress uses this theme to tell a gripping story about what can happen if we are not careful.

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### TheBookSmugglers says

Originally reviewed on The Book Smugglers

#### *After the Fall*

It is the year 2035. Life on Earth has ceased to be, humanity reduced to a handful of survivors trapped together in "The Shell" (a hull built by an alien intelligence that survivors refer to as "Tesslies") that shields its human captors from the desolate wasteland outside. Of the 26 original adults taken into the Shell before the annihilation of life, just a scant few remain. But hope endures, because these original survivors copulated and gave birth to the Six - children born inside the Shell that have never known any other life or the world outside. These children, now teenagers, were born with defects from radiation exposure, stunted with spindly limbs, rendered sterile and unable to procreate. Shortly after the Six have reached puberty and their sterility discovered, a new technology appears in The Shell. A strange platform lights up at random intervals and allows only the Six to return to a point in Earth's past for a few precious minutes, giving the future survivors a chance to "grab" the things they will need most to survive. With each grab, the Six bring back food, water, supplies, and most importantly, virile, healthy children.

Pete, one of the Six, is just fifteen, but already has become a leader within the Shell and has made a number of successful Grabs. As the original survivors grow weaker and older, Pete's rage grows stronger and he vows to kill the Tesslies that have murdered his planet, destroyed his people, and so coolly ignore their human captors.

#### *Before the Fall*

It is the year 2013. Julie Kahn is a talented and intelligent mathematician that specializes in patterns, and she

is hired as a consultant for an FBI task force, charged with solving a rash of kidnappings in the northeastern United States. Julie's carefully calibrated equations determine that the kidnappings are all interlinked, but she can't figure out why or who might be behind them. As an expectant and then a new mother, Julie gradually understands that somehow, the kidnappings, the mysterious break-ins, and the food and supply thefts are all clues revealing a terrifying united truth about the future.

### *During the Fall*

As Julie struggles to make sense of the data, and Pete and the Six travel back to the past on their grab missions, Earth herself is changing. Bacteria mutate, plates shift, volcanoes erupt. The end is coming, faster and more devastating than anyone could ever predict.

Aptly named and coolly effective in its scope and delivery, *After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall* is one hell of a book. At a slim 200 pages, Nancy Kress's new novel (more of a novella, really) is a harrowing look at a possible future iteration of our planet robbed of life by catastrophic climate, ecological, and biological change. It also happens to be a book with a wonderful science fiction bend, involving a technologically superior race of aliens and time travel, juxtaposed against a more procedural mystery and the slow death of a planet due to dramatic mutation and change. Phew. That's a lot of stuff to cover, but Kress does so with easy skill, alternating past, present, and future in a seamless and tension-building narrative. Following three characters - Pete, Julie, and the planet herself - *After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall* is an exercise in slow-simmering restraint, building both horror and hope as the chapters progress.

While I love the memorable and original conceit of the time traveling and perspective shifting with each different period of the apocalypse, the story contains more familiar SF tropes, too. The benevolent (or, perhaps, not so benevolent) Tesslies as they watch the violent, destructive Earthlings, are a familiar staple, and the concept underlying Earth's destruction is as well (don't worry, I won't spoil it). Just because the concepts are familiar does not mean they aren't well done, though, as these well worn tropes are handled evenly and well in this particular telling (albeit with a level of predictability in as far as the actual story concludes).

On the character front, we become mostly acquainted with two very different narrator protagonists, Julie and Pete. In the past, Julie is meticulous, intelligent and fiercely independent, remarkably competent and refreshingly so. In contrast to her even-headed logic, Pete from the bleak, stark future of the Shell is raw and violent, and this is where the real meat of the story lies. Pete's is a narrative hard to read at points because of his anger and his limited comprehension. Within the shell itself, Pete's relationships, his obsessions (sexual and emotional), and most of all his impotent rage are very real, tangible things. While it isn't a particularly pretty narrative, it is undoubtedly effective, painting a terrifying, claustrophobic future for humanity - but one tinged with the important light of hope at the end of the day.

Though brief, *After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall* is haunting, memorable, and a perfect example of how to write a future post-apocalyptic dystopia that is both effectively bleak, but with the all-important factor of human tenacity. Absolutely recommended.

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## Dontana says

The cover is striking. A tsunami wave and cracked, egg-shaped building, not to mention the tiny skull are great indicators for a science fiction story. I kept reading, despite my feelings about the characters and the story, because of the tiny chapters that making up "During the fall". I've never been so invested in the life cycle of bacteria.

One cataclysmic event changes the population and topography of Earth.

In 2035, four adults, six children, and a coterie of others are trapped in an egg-shaped containment called the Shell. They are ruled by an unseen force called the Tesslies, aliens. With machinery given to them by the Tesslies, the six children are able to go into the past, specifically 2013-2014, and kidnap children. These children are hoped to be fertile and, when the time comes, will help repopulate the Earth. But what happened?

The year is 2013. Julie is a mathematician tracking the disappearances of children and break-ins in an attempt to prevent another kidnapping. She has developed an algorithm that will help the government, but when the task force is disbanded she continues on her own. A series of events leads her to understand that the Earth is killing itself in order to self-regulate all of the changes and pollution caused by humans.

This was not my book. I like science fiction and everything that entails, but I did not connect with this one at all. First, the characters. I hated Pete, even remembering that he's only 15 years old. His choices always seemed to come from way left of center. I also understand that his brain may be messed up from radiation from his parents. None of these make me like Pete. They are the facts of his existence. I felt that Julie had no depth as a character. We know nothing about her past or, at least, what caused her to be such a loner. She seems to have retreated into her science, only has one friend, and has a strained relationship with her family. While not important to the story, I still feel like some history was missing. I could have done without Gordon anywhere in the book. His only purpose was to frame Julie's entrance into the plot.

Second, the highly inappropriate relationship between McAllister and Ravi. If McAllister is supposed to be the mother figure and teacher of the children in the Shell, why is she sleeping with Ravi? Fertility is not a good enough answer. A good mother knows not to openly choose favorites. It causes conflict in the house. Why, then, does McAllister choose to have sex with Ravi, when she knows that Pete has a huge crush on her, which is also inappropriate? They are already going back in time and kidnapping children from Before, why does she need to sleep with Ravi? It has already been proven that children born of the original survivors have physical and mental handicaps. Does she just want another child? Does she actually want a relationship with Ravi? Pure survival as motivation just doesn't cut it.

As a storyteller, Kress has done her job in making me feel a way about her book. My issues with the book are purely story driven. They grow from a place of engaging with the text, not from being pulled out of the story by technical errors.

Well written, classic science fiction is hard to find, and this is a great example of the genre.

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## Julie says

Novella split into three parts, as evidenced by its title, and centred on the fall of mankind -- after the destruction of the Earth's climate, a few survivors labour onwards to rebuild our species, courtesy some inscrutable aliens serving as custodians of the human race.

My rating's hovering between a 3 and a 4. (Seriously, Goodreads, why won't you do half-stars?) I was fascinated by the "After the Fall" + "During the Fall" segments, and was drawn to almost all of the characters. It's an interesting premise drummed up by Kress, this back-and-forth interplay between timestreams in which the survivors are doing *everything possible* in order to ensure their own survival. Times are hard, and desperate, and the story is well-told. And the destruction of the Earth got me a bit verklempt, as most apocalyptic stories tend to do to me nowadays.

But what knocks it down two stars: 1) I honestly started just skimming past the "Before the Fall" scenes -- I don't care a single whit about verbose descriptions of bacterial growth, sry. 2) The 'plot twist' actually seemed incredibly obvious to me from the start. 3) There was a lack of... any sort of explanation, really, and the ending didn't catch me much off-guard, and the whole thing is *heavily* reliant on deus ex machina.

I'd read other things by Kress, though, since it was a suitably unique setup & well-written, albeit flawed.

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## Daniel (Attack of the Books!) Burton says

It's easy to see why Nancy Kress's After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall has done well with science fiction's premier awards. Winning the Nebula and the Locus for best novella and garnering a nomination for the Hugo, the story is equally intriguing and gripping. It's too bad her story flops for failure to satisfy reader expectations.

Pete, one of the Six, lives in the completely enclosed and environmentally controlled "Shell" in the year 2035. They are descendents of the few remaining survivors on Earth of a catastrophic alien attack decades before. Kept alive by the grace of the aliens--the Tesslies--Pete and his fellow survivors jump back to the past to rescue individual children, hoping somehow to overcome their captors and restart life again on the planet.

Meanwhile, Julie Kahn is a mathematician and contractor for the FBI helping to hunt down a mysterious crime spree that follows the outcomes of her algorithm. Each event brings her closer to a conclusion she may not be ready to accept.

Skipping between three timelines, the story quickly builds to a crescendo. Kress uses the absence of information as a tool to build mystery and suspense, creating a palpable sense of the ominous. Given how short the book is--a novella, by definition--it was easy to blow through it in just one sitting.

At this point, the book blogger code of ethics demands that I warn you that spoilers follow...or at least, information that could lead you to spoilers.

Despite Kress' excellent writing, I struggled with her resolution. (view spoiler) If Kress had made angels appear and bring a message from God, it would have made more sense than the strange plot device she used.

Ultimately, for that reason, I finished After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall with a feeling of betrayal, disappointment, and like I had just had (view spoiler). It's good writing, but in the balance is a disappointing story.

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## Rachel says

Excellent writing, as usual, from Nancy Kress. The title misled me to think the book would have three sections, but it was three intertwined stories, with no problem seeing how they were related. The fall, of course, was a worldwide catastrophe. The small group of people in the future were plucked from the catastrophe by aliens and enclosed in a dome, since the Earth was unlivable. They blame the aliens for the fall, but the obvious question is, did the aliens cause it, or were they rescuers? This question is resolved neatly at the end.

The aliens gave them some very limited time travel capabilities to specific times and places not long before the fall, which they use to get supplies and steal babies so they have enough people to breed. (Adults can't do the time-traveling.) It's not so bad that they're stealing babies, as those babies would have died fairly soon anyway, in the fall.

So, plot is okay. The main characters are pretty good--a teenage boy, genetically damaged but functional, in the future, and a data-crunching woman scientist who has access to both the kidnapping data and the coming-catastrophe data. The writing is excellent. The behavior of the aliens is totally inexplicable. Which I'm sure Kress intended. But I had to do a bunch of suspension of disbelief about how people and aliens would act/react/think. And the hypothesis that is introduced in the denouement, while I am sure is exactly how Kress intended it, somehow irritated me at the same time it tied up all the loose ends.

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### **Wil Wheaton says**

A quick and effortless read that is profoundly rewarding, and satisfying. I've been reading a lot of post-apocalyptic fiction lately, and this is one of the few that was so plausible in places, it was truly frightening. I highly recommend it.

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### **Wealththeow says**

After a world-wide catastrophe (or series of catastrophes), only a few humans survive. They are trapped inside a bunker, with sufficient water, air and food (unvaried though it may be) but too much genetic damage to continue the human race. In hopes of keeping their species going, they start traveling into the past and kidnapping the healthy babies they find. This part of the story is told through the eyes of Pete, a rather stupid teenager who was born in the bunker and views the world of the past through an almost alien mindset.

In their past, and our future, a brilliant statistician named Julie Kahn is investigating the disappearances. This sets her on a collision course with Pete and the future he represents.

A well-written book, but upsetting as all apocalyptic novels are. I wish this had been a little longer and more fleshed-out.

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### **Bob Milne says**

A relatively short (under 200 pages) but interesting novel that puts a unique spin on the apocalypse. As the title suggests, each chapters carries us backwards or forwards in time, telling three intersecting stories:

**AFTER THE FALL:** A claustrophobic, emotionally charged, post-apocalyptic tale of dying adults, damaged adolescents, and stolen children.

**BEFORE THE FALL:** Cold and efficient, a contemporary drama surrounding one woman's struggle to decipher a mystery while preparing for single motherhood.

**DURING THE FALL:** Brief, tantalizing, and the heart of the story, these mini chapters offer a terrifying glimpse into just how simply catastrophic change can begin.

This is a book where execution is everything, where the telling of the story trumps the story itself. Personally, I saw the 'twist' revelation coming very early on, but that's OK. Instead of being something that hooks the reader or sets the stage for an earth-shattering climax, the twist is more a key to unlocking the melancholy truth behind the end of human civilization.

Fortunately, the telling is solid, populated by characters who may not be entirely likeable, but to whom we can either relate, or with whom we can sympathize. Pete (AFTER) is a spoiled teenager, a sad, angry, lonely young man who fills his time by having emotionless sex with teenagers as damaged as himself, and with secret, painful, unrequited longing for an older woman who serves as teacher, mother, doctor, aunt, and friend. His only escape from The Shell (a sterile bubble in which the human race has been preserved) is through brief jaunts into the past, where he steals supplies he doesn't understand . . . and young children to help repopulate the race.

Julie (BEFORE) is a lonely, independent, brilliant mathematician who has been helping the FBI to find a pattern in the bizarre string of child abductions and store thefts. Having become too close to her FBI partner, she chooses to embark on a path of single motherhood, even as she finds herself cast adrift by an agency that doesn't believe her theories. Driven as much by her need to find a purpose behind the pattern as she is by the need to protect her child, she sets herself on a course that will ultimately see her cross paths with Pete . . . before it's too late to satisfy either need.

A solid effort, with a well thought out, appreciably detailed, yet somehow understated catastrophic end to humanity's reign in the final chapters. I would have like a bit more insight into the aliens, but that's a minor quibble and doesn't detract from my appreciation for the story Nancy Kress has crafted here.

*Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins*

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## **Tomislav says**

I read this in the 2013 paperbackswap.com SF Challenge, for Category #9 "Time Travel" My copy was in kindle ebook format from Wisconsin Digital Library.

This received a nomination for 2012 Nebula novella award; the winners have not yet been determined.

While this very short novel has a good hook, and contains a lot of good writing, it felt incomplete to me. The narrative toggles between the very near future, and one generation down the timeline after a global catastrophe has left only a small habitat of humans alive. They have been provided with an unpredictable time machine that allows them to grab supplies and children from the present. Some really interesting character development and problem situations drew me in. But in the easily-predicted ending, Kress just pulled a few derivative concepts off the shelf to explain things. If the ending had been fleshed out more, expanding in some original way the conceptual questions raised, this probably would have been the size of standard novel, and been a very good one. As it is, this seems like a draft version.

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## **Stefan says**

In the year 2035, all that's remaining of humanity is a group of twenty-six people who live in the Shell, an enclosure built two decades ago by the alien race known as the Tesslies when an environmental cataclysm

made our world uninhabitable. The six genetically mutated children who were born inside the Shell are mankind's final hope of survival, also because they are the only ones who can use the Tesslie technology known as the "Grab": a brief ten minute trip back into the time before the Earth's environment was destroyed, during which they can gather precious supplies and capture other young children to augment the survivors' gene pool.

In 2013, Julie Kahn is a talented mathematician who is helping the FBI investigate a series of mysterious kidnappings. Thanks to her algorithms, it gradually starts to become clear that the strange break-ins and disappearances follow a pattern, allowing investigators to close in on the next crime.

And in 2014, a new bacterium appears deep underground, setting off a far-reaching chain of events....

Read the entire review on my site [Far Beyond Reality!](#)

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## **Ben Babcock says**

Nancy Kress has fast become one of my favourite science fiction authors. Like most authors I'm a fan of, her works don't always make it on my favourites list, but they *always* make me think. Kress often explores how technology affects humanity's relationship with nature and our own biology. She continues to play with these themes in *After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall* while adding in an ineffable alien menace and the paradoxes of time travel.

The title explains the structure: this story takes place across three times. In 2035, 26 humans survive in an artificial Shell, protected from the inhospitable Earth. They believe the Earth was ruined (and they were saved) by aliens they call Tesslies. With most of the children and adults too damaged by radiation to produce healthy offspring, the Tesslies have furnished them with machinery that allows them to travel back in time. Since adults can't go through the portals, however, teenagers like Peter have to go on these Grabs, which seem to occur at random intervals and send them to stores or houses. In the stores, they grab as many supplies as they can before their allotted ten minutes expire. In the houses, they look for the one thing the Shell desperately needs: fresh blood, in the form of babies they can raise as their own.

In 2013/2014, a mathematician has noticed a pattern to a string of FBI kidnappings. She constructs an algorithm for the agency, hoping she can predict when the next kidnapping might occur. Her algorithm is never quite accurate enough, and eventually she leaves the investigation. It's not until the very end, when Julie is most desperate, that she finally manages to perfect the program and ambush a time-traveller.

Meanwhile, Kress provides omniscient glimpses at mysterious mutations in bacteria and earthquakes beneath the sea floor. The implication is that these events are related, perhaps even artificial, and combine somehow to cause the eponymous Fall. McAllister and the other surviving adults in the Shell have taught Peter and the others that the Tesslies are responsible for both the Fall and the Shell. However, there's no clear evidence for this, and as Peter learns by the end, it's possible that humans themselves caused this to happen.

I'll return to that in a moment, but first I need to talk about the post-apocalyptic future Kress has created. I love the idea of the Shell and the way she has implemented it. Granted, it seems like even 26 *healthy* individuals would be hard-pressed to preserve humanity without some serious genetic issues developing. Nevertheless, they give it the old college try. Kress conveys the desperation and isolation that must develop in this community, when its children are damaged, some of them deformed and sick, and its adults are slowly dying off one-by-one.

The loss of knowledge and experiences is particularly striking. Peter has learned, thanks to his rudimentary education, about things like stars, atoms, and planets. But he has no conception of television or photography. On one Grab, he manages to steal a digital photo frame, and he sits for hours just watching the three pre-loaded promotional pictures, fascinated by this magic. It's a small thing, but it allows Kress to show us how quickly we can lose something when we don't have it in front of us: one generation can forget what moving pictures are like if we lose the ability to screen them. Life in the Shell is a bizarre mixture of roughing it, complete with farming, and scavenging, through the unpredictable and dangerous Grabs. There's very little in the way of culture, leisure, and therefore, I wonder, what of civilization?

It's not up to Kress to make a realistic attempt at preserving civilization though. That would be the Tesslies' responsibility; hence, perhaps Kress also means to show that their grand plan (experiment?) is doomed to failure. The ending is ambiguous. Although the Shell dissolves at the end, leaving the survivors on a rehabilitated planet with all they supposedly need to start over, Kress does not provide any closure. Perhaps they succeed; perhaps they die again. The "after the fall" portion of the book is a reminder that there aren't really endings (aside, maybe, from extinction), just new epochs.

I really like the premise of the story, and I think Kress handles time travel very well. Normally, it bothers me when authors take a "meanwhile, in the past" approach to time travel—that is, treating the past and present/future as if they are happening concurrently. There is usually little reason for this. In this case, however, Kress makes it clear that the time travellers have no control over the Grabs. Either the Tesslies or their machinery determine when the Grabs open for them and the time period to which the Grabs send them. These times/destinations are not random, because Julie recognizes a pattern and exploits her algorithm to eventually meet Pete. Kress never explains if the Tesslies have created this pattern deliberately for some reason, or if it is merely a byproduct of time travel. In general, there is a distinct lack of exposition. We never meet the Tesslies—not truly—and we never learn their motives, beyond what the survivors speculate. We never learn why, if they are interested in helping humans, they don't use time travel to fix the past (perhaps it's just not possible). Kress puts the reader in the position of the survivors: full of questions, short of answers. This could have been frustrating, so it's a testament to her skill that she manages to create a story engaging enough to make you forget your relative ignorance of what's going on.

The theory behind the Fall that the survivors eventually embrace does not sit well with me. Though they long assume the Tesslies were responsible for humanity's destruction, Peter's encounter with Julie suggests humanity is responsible. Eventually they raise the idea of the Gaia hypothesis, that the Earth is itself a living organism created by the interdependency of all the organisms inhabiting it. According to this hypothesis, the Earth is a deliberately self-regulating system. It's intriguing, but it also feels out of place. The "during the fall" chapters that explain what is happening beneath Julie's nose present the earthquakes and bacterial mutations as apparently random. And if they aren't, it seems like a stretch that the Earth can "choose" to wipe out humanity for the greater good. Maybe I'm just not thinking of the system in abstract enough terms—but if that's the case, I would have liked Kress to put more effort into persuading me.

If Kress has latched on to the Gaia hypothesis as a way to challenge how humanity is stewarding the Earth, then I can still agree with *After the Fall*'s themes, even if I'm not particularly fond of how Kress establishes it. Sustainability has put in an appearance in many of her other works. Here, Kress emphasizes how humans, despite all our advances in technology, are still at the mercy of nature and natural disasters. (She does cheat a little. Yellowstone and the tsunami from the Canary Islands earthquake do a number on the United States, but she has to cheat and use a resulting nuclear launch to trigger the global apocalypse.) If the Tesslies hadn't stepped in, humanity would likely have gone extinct. I like it when science fiction encourages us to consider the ecological implications of trends in society.

*After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall* has all the hallmarks I have come to expect from a Kress story. It's clean, compelling, and its characters have a good balance of vices and virtues. The amount of thought she has put into constructing her futures and the scenarios that have brought them about is obvious

from the detail and structure of the book. All this contributes to a fulfilling story, and even if I can't endorse every aspect, it still deserves that Hugo nomination. This is one for any fan of Kress to check out, and if you are new, this would be a fine place to start.

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### **Jenny (Reading Envy) says**

Pretty well-paced and thought out for a novella, a bit simplistic in the end, but who can hate an apocalypse that you can time travel to before and after?

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### **Sarah says**

This novel is pretty much summed up by the title. As always with apocalyptic books, and especially near-future ones, I was terrifically disturbed by the premise. Kress did a great job of weaving timelines and characters. I loved the structure; she managed to create suspense despite telling us the (almost) end right in the title. She is a master of structure and pacing, and she literally wrote the book on beginnings and endings. A moving cautionary tale.

As an aside, the descriptions of Pete reminded me of one of my high school English teachers. I always thought her head was really a helium balloon.

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### **Robert says**

Reading this shortly after the Hunger Games trilogy may not have cast it in a favourable light: it has some of the technical problems of Collins and none of the passion. This comes over as a polite request not to trash the planet which is weak compared with the raw outrage expressed by Collins. There's no suggestion as to how to avoid trashing the planet. And there's the problem that the science is implausible, the ideas unoriginal, and the situation, "after the fall" exceedingly improbable. It's a terrible title, too. (A bit like her *The Beggars in Spain*...that's a really bad title, too. Much better story though.)

The fact that the characters are well drawn and convincing and the prose is competent doesn't really make sufficient compensation. It's disappointing as I thought the novella version of *The Beggars in Spain* was good and it had me hunting for her works in every bookshop I've visited since. Having finally got hold of something else, it turns out to be not nearly as interesting or sophisticated in terms of the SF elements or the subtext, even though *Beggars in Spain* ended up a rush job towards the end. (It got expanded into *three* full-length novels that I would still like to read.)

Disappointing.

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### **David says**

Being a novella instead of a full novel, Kress didn't have the space to fully address a lot of issues brought up

in the book. Here's a list of some of the issues I have with the storyline.

- 1) Why the pet shop? Is this a Noah's Arc story? The lone dog isn't going to be able to multiply. Why gerbils?
  - 2) What are the Tesslies? Aliens or machines? If the conclusion is a Gaian allegory, why and how are the Tesslies there?
  - 3) If the Tesslies/Gaia are trying to save the Earth, why are they saving the humans?
  - 4) I don't believe the humans have any chance of surviving at the end of the book. How will they develop tools? How will they build shelter? How will they develop energy to cook food, smelt metal, or to do anything necessary to develop a civilization. The entire history of human civilization can be plotted along our development of energy resources.
  - 5) Along those lines of energy sources, what possible energy source could they implement without technology other than rudimentary combustion? Wouldn't this add to the green house gasses instead of allowing the atmosphere to recover?
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## James Reid says

Hugo Nominee Review 2013 - Novella 3 (17500-40000 words)

Can an ending to a book retroactively make you dislike what came before? The fall has a standard sf trope, time travel to bring people forward to repopulate after a disaster, and plays with the structure by having incidents After, Before and During the disaster. I found the story generally interesting, though the writing of the characters felt a little flat. The wrapping up of the before was really good, the whole during was underwhelming, and the after felt somewhat inevitable. However the core mystery (which to be fair was a McGuffin to a certain extent), really really irked me,\* and dragged down an otherwise interesting short work.

A good but not great reread of some familiar tropes, in a relatively short package. For time travel and apocalypse completists only. Well enough constructed to make me want to read her most famous work, beggars in Spain.

Hugo thoughts

I suspect if you didn't have the probably irrational reaction to parts of the book that I did,\* you might rank this much higher. Even then, the flatness to a lot of the writing (which could have been written off for the before narrator, but not the rest), drags it down a little below the others so far.

\* Spoilers

Seriously, Gaia? Aliens interfering after an apocalypse I get, but geological and evolutionary changes to reshape the earth as part of self guiding system? That crosses the line from McGuffin or technobabble onto "core" level not thought through. Either more attention needed to be devoted to justifying it, or less (present stuff as a mysterious given, entirely OK in a shorter work).

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## aPriL does feral sometimes says

[Before the destruction of most of Mankind, floating robotic things, which they

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## **Rachel (Kalanadi) says**

Very strange, lots of stuff thrown together - ecological disaster, humans destroying the Earth, single mothers, mathematical algorithms, FBI investigations, alien intervention, time travel, baby snatching, sex- and testosterone-fueled teen boys - and it was just... kinda weird. I feel like this was all written to not-so-subtly say how terrible humans are for the planet.

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## **Terry Weyna says**

In recent years, I've hesitated to pick up a hard science fiction novel. The quantum physics one must be familiar with to enjoy the novel is so far beyond me that I feel I need a physics course or two as a prerequisite. It's hard to appreciate a novel when you haven't the faintest idea what's going on.

Trust Nancy Kress to write a hard science fiction novella that is so clear, so precise and so well-written that the reader is never left behind. It is no surprise that *After the Fall, Before the Fall, During the Fall* has been nominated for a Nebula Award this year. It has finely drawn characters (especially Pete, from the future, and Julie, from the present), and is based (at least in the sections set "during the fall") on solid scientific principals with a touch of imagination — just enough to power the plot.

The novella opens with Pete just beginning what we learn is a Grab: he is transported to the past for only ten minutes, during which he must grab whatever he can and bring it into the future with him. The top priority is young children, unaffected by the radiation that has poisoned his generation and rendered it mostly infertile. Pete, a young teenager, arrives near the ocean, but his delight in the scene is erased when he realizes all that has been destroyed by the Tesslies. The Tesslies, we learn, are entities about which nothing is known except that they reduced humankind to a mere handful of people eking out an existence in the Shell, a habitat the Tesslies provided for them. Pete is able to grab a toddler and a baby and bring them back with him.

In the next few pages, we switch to an omniscient point of view, narrowing in on a plateau in Brazil where bacteria is mutating at the base of the roots of coffee plants. We learn in subsequent chapters that this mutation essentially converts the bacteria to alcohol, destroying the roots, destroying plant life — and the same mutation is inexplicably happening at the same time in disparate corners of the globe.

Then we're in the present, where Julie is working with the FBI on the kidnapping of the toddler and baby. The mother's husband was killed in the kidnapping — not by Pete, but by the machinery that allows him to travel in time and space, through which adults may not pass. She is, understandably, hysterical, though her hysteria takes a form that makes it impossible to communicate with her. Julie has been working on a series of kidnappings, mathematically predicting where and when the next one will take place, and this brings her work closer to solving the puzzle.

As the book proceeds, we learn much more about Pete and the small community in which he lives, and the manner in which the adults are trying to preserve the good and obliterate the bad in their young charges. More than that, they are trying to rebuild the human race from a very small population. The group is scientifically oriented; the children do not even understand the religious references and hymns that the oldest member of the group often uses. They keep watch for changes in the world outside their Shell, waiting for the day when it is safe to venture out again. The one factor no one quite understands is the Tesslies. Are they

aliens who invaded our world? Are they human creations? It isn't even known if they are machines or biological organisms. We never do learn quite what their nature is, which is the only fault I find with the novella.

We also learn more about Julie, who, it turns out, is pregnant from an affair she had with the FBI agent with whom she was working. She leaves her full-time project with the FBI and prepares herself for the child she always wanted, but she continues to do independent consulting. More, she continues to work on the algorithms that she was preparing to predict the kidnappings. One of her projects, for a professor seeking to make a name for himself, reveals that big changes are coming to the world — and not for the good.

We learn more about those changes, too. They are not limited to bacterial mutation, but include enormous changes in the behavior of the Earth's tectonic plates, increased volcanic activity, and other signs that the Earth is becoming hostile to its human infection.

Kress effectively guides the flow of all three of these narrative streams, ultimately bringing them to a confluence that is both frightening and uplifting. Kress's skill shows in the intricacy of the plotting, the scientific knowledge, and the strong characterization. Although I've read only three of the Nebula-nominated novellas so far, I have to think that *After the Fall* has an excellent chance of claiming the rocket ship.

Originally published at <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/revi...> 4.5 stars rounded up to 5.

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