

Hub Magazine

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EDITORIAL:

by lee harris

This week we reach the final issue of HarperCollins' year-long sponsorship of Hub Magazine. Through their generous patronage we have been able to bring you more-or-less weekly short stories, reviews, interviews and features. Next week we will be announcing the name of the sponsor that will see us through the next 50 issues.

This week's edition is an Angry Robot special. Angry Robot is the latest SF, F and WTF imprint from HarperCollins. It began publishing in the UK and Australia in July of this year, and has so far published 9 titles. Those 9 titles are reviewed in this issue, and this week's story is by an Angry Robot author, Colin Harvey.

In May 2010 Angry Robot launches in the US and Canada.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I should point out that I work for Angry Robot, although each of the reviews published within this issue have been independently written by third party reviewers for various genre and review websites. No editorial changes have been made to any of these reviews, which can still be read on their original websites, and our thanks go to all the reviewers for their kind permissions to reprint.

So, before I hand over to Mr Harvey, a huge thanks to HarperCollins for making it possible for us to bring you a short story every week for the last year, and to pay our authors a little something, and I hope you enjoy this issue.

FICTION

A Little Respect

by colin harvey

Everyone reckons them kids ran off. I can't tell no-one the truth, 'cause they'd think I'm as barmy as Gramps.

We call him Gramps though he's really my Great-Grandpa. He's outlived his kids, so Ma took him in rather than put him in a home. Just as well Gramps already had kids when the war kicked off, 'cause he was naff-all use for fathering 'em afterwards.

His head's flatter on one side where a German shell or bomb took half his brain away, and if you can get two minutes conversation out of him before he forgets where he is, it's a good day. But he remembers Dunkirk like it was last week.

On the rare times we're on the same planet he says kids have no respect, but that's untrue. We admire them as earns it, but just 'cause someone's lived to eighty or ninety, doesn't make them special. Just that they're coffin-dodgers.

One day we was mucking about by the new bandstand and Gramps shot by in his mobility scooter, nearly breaking Sami's leg.

"Oi, Kyle!" Sami screamed at me. "You oughter take away them wheels of his! He's bleeding dangerous!" He ran after Gramps, who was bombing along like Jenson Button. I legged it after them, followed by Chris and George who we'd walked in with.

Gramps slowed as if to tease Sami, and pulled out his flute. It's a nasty-looking thing, like a leg bone that some sicko's drilled holes in. I tackled Sami just as he got within grabbing distance of Gramps. We rolled through the new-cut grass.

"Shouldn't you boys be in school?" We looked up to see Leo Bull watching us. "I assume that you *do* still attend school, rather than doing drugs and mugging classes?" Leo's got especially snotty since he's taken up with that foreign vicar, Arna.

I dusted meself down, staring at the ground so the old git couldn't see me grinning, and out the corner of me eye saw Sami doing the same. Gramps had driven off.

"Well?"

Sami muttered, "We was just going."

"Were just going, boy."

We scarpered before he could say any more.

That day passed slower than treacle. As soon as I got through the kitchen door, a crack to the back of my head made me see stars. "Ow!"

"What ya doing down the Mem?" Ma bellowed.

"Nothin'!"

"Gramps was upset. You chased him."

I was surprised he'd even noticed. "I was trying to help." I rubbed the back of my head. "Won't bother again -- ow! Wassat for?" I cupped my now sore ear.

"Being lippy. Go apologize to Gramps."

I stood in the doorway to his room; mumbled, "Sorry 'bout this morning."

He didn't look up, but carried on looking at his black-and-white photos. I peered over his shoulder at men in uniform. "Where's that?" I pointed at a young Gramps smiling into the camera, leaning against a road-sign that said *Sur-le-pont*. "France?"

Gramps didn't answer but hummed his usual tune, the same few notes that he always plays on that flute. He pointed to a picture of a black shark-shape dropping something. "Stuka."

Next morning Chris didn't walk to school with us like he usually did. Throughout that day rumours of paedos and weird stuff swirled round. We stuck to close to one another, like cavemen huddled round a fire when the wolves was circling it.

That night Gramps went out. When he wasn't home by midnight, I went looking for him.

I was going through the park gates when Sami and his girlfriend Shannon ran past, nearly knocking me over. I grabbed Sami and held on.

"I ain't staying in there," Sami gasped. "Me and Shannon was behind the bandstand while George kept watch. Some Broadlands kids turned up and started a ruck." He stared at me. "And then it went dead quiet." I heard him swallow. "They'd gone! All of 'em!"

I heard Gramps' flute, and my hair rose.

Before I could speak, Sami was running like the devil chasing after him. I ran too.

I told Ma I couldn't find Gramps. He came in five minutes later, humming that damn tune.

Next day, the day before Remembrance Sunday, was my birthday. Sami texted: *Meet?*

I went to the park. He held out a spray can as if to prove that what had happened hadn't scared him. "Tag the bandstand?" Most other kids had; it pissed off the crusties.

Shannon watched us, chewing gum. When I hesitated she said, "Scared?"

"No!"

I'd only written 'K' when I heard the whine of Gramps' scooter. "Show a little respect, y'little bastids!" He wheezed.

"Sod off, Grandpa!" Sami picked up a brick.

"Throw it!" Shannon cried -- as I yelled, "No!"

Then things got really weird:

Flute to his lips, Gramps played his favourite tune; the world wobbled like it was made of cheap scenery behind a stage, and for several seconds I felt like I was being turned inside out. Suddenly we stood on a sun-lit road; all around us machine guns rattled, exploding shells threw up gobs of earth and stones, and diving planes almost drowned out men's screams. A young Gramps gawped at us. And all the while old Gramps played his flute; the world grew more and more solid. I could smell burning, and pork --though I knew it wasn't really pork-- and oil and metal, and blood and shit. I felt my cheek glowing from a nearby fire.

A sound I knew from films broke the spell and I looked up. "Stuka!" I threw myself over Gramps.

I must've knocked the flute loose, because the tune stopped. Suddenly Gramps and me was back in the park, alone. He insisted on looking for his flute, but couldn't find it. I hope the damned thing got left behind.

Last night I looked through his old photo-albums. I wasn't sure, but thought I saw in the corner of one photo a lad in modern clothes who looked like Sami, holding a clearly terrified Shannon. They've been reported missing but no one saw us meet, and I'm saying nothing.

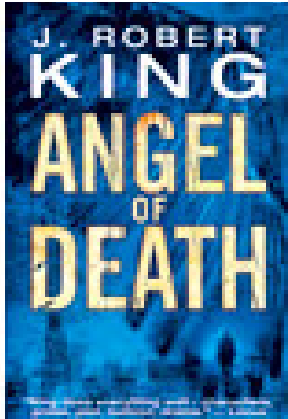
I'm taking Gramps to the Remembrance Service in the park. I think Ma was surprised I agreed. But I'm taking no chances.

He might yet find that flute.



Angel of Death

reviewed by gillian polack



by J Robert King
Angry Robot
£7.99

Angry Robot is rather evil. All they said was “What book would you like to review?” I said something – I forget what – then went about doing all the millions of things that need doing in the lead-up to Jewish New Year and to Conflux and to my own booklaunch. There was a ‘collect this parcel’ note in my letterbox yesterday. I couldn’t get there in time, so I left it till today. Unbeknownst to me, this meant I had a full day more to do my various deadline-y stuff.

You’ve already guessed there was a book in that package. I love new books. I looked at it and carried it round a bit and then thought it might make a nice break before my evening’s work. I had planned to read a chapter, wash my dishes, finish sorting my papers and then have an early night and then come back to it next week. That was two and a half hours ago.

The book is J Robert King’s *Angel of Death*. I can’t say a great deal about it, because the plot is so tight and twists in such interesting ways that almost any comment would include spoilers. I can say that really, you should not read it when you have deadlines. You will miss the deadlines. I was reading it with a migraine and the letters were dancing before my eyes and I still couldn’t stop.

Angel of Death and Kaaron Warren’s *Sights* are my best reads of the year. They’re so different, too. What they have in common are infinite shades of darkness. Also that craftsmanship.

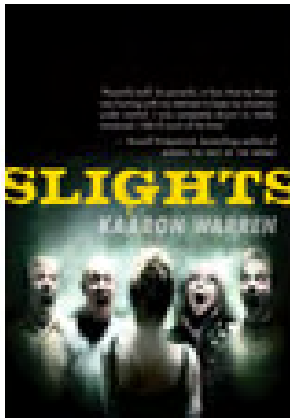
King has a very lean writing style. Deceptively clean. Every word counts. Even the beginning, which reads as fairly standard, has a bunch more in it than shows until things unravel. In fact, it was that opening that lured me in. I thought “This is the sort of novel that I can predict after 50 pages, so that’s how much I’ll read.”

King turns a lot of current popular themes on their head. Or he eviscerates them. He plays with the suspense of a murder-based thriller and with ideas that appear in Supernatural and even with paranormal romance. In the end, his world is none of these, although it is internally consistent, driven at precisely the right pace. The only thing I could have wished for was a little more depth to Donna’s character (the female protagonist) – occasionally she was simply following the plot around.

It begins with a thriller opening, except that somehow a minor Angel of Death (with carriage of deaths in the local region) is the point of view character. From him we learn who will die and the day on which they’ll die. Then everything shifts and tightens. Suddenly, I was not in the middle of anything I had expected and I kept turning the page to find out what was happening next. Suddenly, there is no predictable thriller. The tension remains. So do the deadlines.

This is neither a comfort read nor a slow read. It’s a fabulous book, but don’t pick it up when you’re supposed to be doing other things. It’s after midnight and those dishes are still unwashed and those papers are still unsorted. I don’t know whether to blame J Robert King for writing *Angel of Death* or *Angry Robot* for publishing the book.

This review first appeared at *Even A Little Thing*
(Link: <http://gillpolack.livejournal.com>)



by Kaaron Warren
Angry Robot
£7.99

*What should have happened was this:
We got a taxi home.*

These brief words mark the beginning of Stevie's story. After a celebratory lunch with her mother and a few glasses of wine, Stevie drives home. She swerves out of the way of what she thinks is a child in the road and slams into a wall, killing her mother in the passenger seat. Stevie nearly dies, remembering her mother's screams and awakens in a cold, dark room smelling of mothballs and shit and pain, surrounded by angry faces with unblinking eyes. She lives though, revived back to the world of the living, but Stevie remembers the cold room. The many faces that surrounded her are people from her past and her life; they are the faces of everyone she has ever slighted, and Stevie knows they are waiting to destroy her. It becomes Stevie's fascination, this cold room at the edge of death, and she tries to revisit it again and again.

I'm not sure how to write this review.

I don't think I have the words to describe how dark and depraved and strangely, perversely heartbreaking *Slights* is.

The official synopsis and my own above barely scratch the surface of what this novel is truly about. Yes, Stevie is addicted to her near death experiences, and yes, there is an unsettling mystery of old bones and trinkets and murder in this novel. And yet...this doesn't do *Slights* justice. This is a twisted memoir; a pastiche of Stevie's life; an unrelenting suicide note. Every chapter unfolds in yearly increments – each separated by Stevie's birthdays following the death of her mother – and gradually reveals Stevie's past, with her troubled childhood, overlaid with the present gradual deterioration of all her relationships, eventually culminating in her complete and total alienation. *Slights* is impossible to skim or rush through because of the nature of these chapters, flitting from memory to present, narrated in Stevie's minimalist, yet darkly chimerical voice. There is a tenuous thread of plot, but this is much more of an examination of character over time than it is a mystery or a linear story.

But as difficult as *Slights* is to classify, it is infinitely more difficult to put down. I could not stop reading this book, plain and simple. Even when the subject matter involved pedophilia, bitterly painful family scenes, brutality, murder, or – most disturbing of all – the echoing loneliness of despair, I could not tear myself away from this book. Stevie, in her first person narration, *is* the book, and for all her sociopathic flaws, I couldn't help but feel for her. Certainly, it's not Stevie's intent (nor Ms. Warren's) to win any sympathies from the reader – like everyone else in her life, Stevie is antagonism personified, pushing away anyone that tries to get close to her, mocking the amiability and affection of others as weakness. And yet, at the heart of Stevie's noxious thoughts, buried beneath her indifference and venom, she's just a very messed up person reaching for attention. And having insight to her thoughts, free of pretense, as well as her disturbing past and family heritage, well...it allows the reader to at least understand why Stevie is who she is.

It is testament to Ms. Warren's skill as a writer that she can inspire any feelings of sympathy at all in this book, especially considering the dark nature of the subject matter. The writing, in itself, is flawless. This is not hyperbole. Her bare-bones writing style, completely free of excessive adjectives or unnecessary descriptions (a style that [one reviewer](#) has aptly labeled as "minimalistic"), and the entirely convincing voice of her narrator is brilliant. The writing, effective characterization, and the sheer rawness of *Slights* makes this a visceral read, and one of the best horror novels I have read not only in 2009, but in years.

Ms. Warren's brand of terror isn't of the popular gore or the usual supernatural variety; instead, she drags us through the horror of apathy, the terror of what lurks beneath the veneer of the usual and commonplace.

And it is frankly terrifying how great a book this is.

Verdict: *Slights* is a forceful, harrowing read, and is not only the best horror novel but one of the best books I have read in 2009. Be warned, this is a dark read and certainly isn't for everyone...but I loved it. Absolutely recommended, for those with a strong constitution.

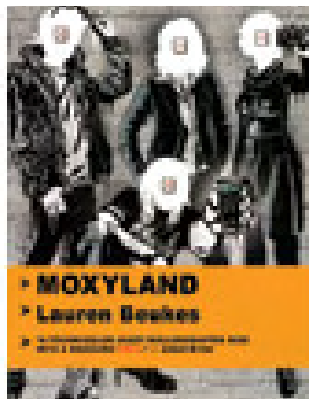
Rating: 9 Damn Near Perfection

This review first appeared at *The Book Smugglers*

(Link: <http://www.thebooksmugglers.com>)

Moxyland

reviewed by christopher jackson



by Lauren Beukes

Angry Robot

£7.99

We are offered a glimpse of this future Cape Town through the eyes of the four main characters, the narrative jumping between each of their viewpoints. The characters, each of them very different, are all awesome – inventive, unique and engaging. We start the story off with Kendra, an art-school dropout clinging desperately to the scraps of a long-forgotten analogue age with her insistence on using old-school film in her photography. However, Kendra has given in to the crazy levels of advertising and sponsorship of Cape Town 2018 (scary in that it doesn't seem too far removed from advertising today) and has become branded – injected with nanotechnology that turns her into a living advertisement, for the soft drink 'Ghost'.

Next is Toby. Drug-taking, promiscuous, anarchic, slacker. Toby is a prick, and worse, but he is the kind of character you can't help but love. He does everything with such shameless joy and a reckless attitude, that you really get swept along with it. Beukes' invention of Toby's BabyStrange jacket is one of my favourite things in the book – a jacket with the capability to both display images and, more importantly, to RECORD what is going on around the wearer. This is ridiculously cool, and Toby uses his beloved jacket to record his "streamcast" (think podcast, only better), to share his antics with his fans on his wonderfully-titled website, "Diary of Cunt." Which Toby is, really.

Not just content with living in the system, Tendeka is the fighter. The dreadlocked, idealistic techno-hippy, who runs a grass-roots football academy (without the ever-offered corporate sponsorship), but his main interests lie in terrorist activities, rebelling against the system. But hacking corporate adboards isn't enough for him anymore, and how far is he prepared to go to get his message out? Ten is a whiner, sure... but he's arguably the moral centre of the story, even if he is not quite sure why he is fighting.

Finally, there is Lerato. She differs from the others in the book in that she is a privileged member of the society, a computer programmer working for the supremely powerful Communique organisation. Knowing Toby, however, can get you into some serious trouble, especially if you decide to hack the very system that you work to maintain on a daily basis. Through Lerato we get a view of the other side of Cape Town 2018, the corporate body that runs and controls the society, which make her sections of the story interesting and powerful, if perhaps not as fun as the other parts. But they are necessary counterpoint, and work well, as she too starts to find herself beginning to lose control.

One of the things I enjoyed most about 'Moxyland' was the dialogue of these characters, something that can often make or break a story. The characters all speak in a fascinating mix of slang and colloquialisms, drawn from the history and dialect of South Africa, as well as technological jargon and urban culture. Possibly my favourite piece of slang in the book is the fantastic derogatory term "bitchmonkey"!

Technology is becoming such an integral part of society today, down to the basic ways in which we live our lives day to day, and Beukes takes this to scary, but logical, levels in 'Moxyland'. In fact, the logic behind it is probably what makes it so scary. The powerful changes concern that part of our lives that we now take for granted, as an essential. Our mobile phones. But imagine living in a society where the police can ID you on the spot, and then electrocute you, through your mobile phone. Where access to certain areas of the city is granted via your particular SIM ID. And where you can be, literally, disconnected for breaking the law. This means no phone. No ID. No money. No access. You become cast adrift from your own society, and are forced to live on the streets. Terrifying stuff, all the more so because it isn't that hard to imagine becoming a reality.

The evolution of online gaming, and the blending of identity on the Internet versus your identity in the real world is excellently portrayed in 'Moxyland'. Tendeka spends much of his time in Pluslife, a Second Life-esque virtual world, where kids recreate their favourite celebrity's mansion down to the most minute detail, and where Tendeka (or '10' when he is online) receives his terrorist instructions from the mysterious *skyward and his/her frumpy female avatar, under a hacked virtual sky displaying a recreation of the northern lights. And Toby, looking for something to do with all his free time, works his way into a Realworld game, like a computer game but in real life, out amongst unsuspecting civilians, where players identify themselves through their SIM ID's.

As the lives of the four main characters become more entwined, I could see that the shit was going to hit the fan. Beukes hints brilliantly, but subtly, at the chaos to come at the end. But I had no idea HOW the chaos was to come, and when it did it was exciting, powerful and disturbing.

I LOVED 'Moxyland'. It is original, fast-paced, and bloody good fun, filled with awesome characters that I really wanted to spend more time reading about, and is full of brilliantly-observed details of a society in the not-too-distant future that is both fantastically different, but worryingly familiar. The political and social themes, that never override or confuse what is, plain and simple, a brilliant story, are both poignant and relevant, not just to the post-apartheid culture of South Africa, but to the world that we live in now, becoming more and more obsessed with advertising, surveillance and control.

I couldn't recommend 'Moxyland' highly enough. It was unlike anything I've ever read, and you won't be disappointed if you give it a go.

This review first appeared at *Never Too Serious*

(Link <http://nevertoserious.wordpress.com>)

Nekropolis

reviewed by liz de jager



by Tim Waggoner

Angry Robot

£7.99

Fans of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, fans of noir detective stories and fans of the just plain weird, rejoice! Tim Waggoner has offered up **Nekropolis** for your delectation.

In Matt Richter we have a very likeable, reasonable and amusing protagonist. With only a limited time to live as his zombie body is no longer reacting very well to magics to keep it "alive", Matt decides to take on one more case which may very well be the end of him before, well, the end of him.

Matt teams up with Devona, a half-breed human/vampire to find an ancient artefact known as the Dawnstone before it can be used to destroy all of Nekropolis. So far, so simple, you may be inclined to think,

only to realise that Nekropolis is unlike any other place you have ever dreamed of. A nightmarish place inhabited by creatures so odd and bizarre, you may think you've walked into The Calmun's Cantina on Tatooine--only, not as nice.

Nekropolis by Tim Waggoner is a feverdream and it is testament to the author's writing skills that you never toss the book aside in disbelief. The world creation is of a very high calibre, bearing in mind that it is not a thick volume allowing for a lot of exposition. Everything has its place and to be fair, the archetypes he brings out to play in the novel are very well portrayed. The story spins along at a rapid pace--it is not for the fainthearted and you have to make sure you keep up.

The main character of Matt Richter carries the story to the very end--you are reminded of his undead zombie status often; he points out that he doesn't feel physical pain but he never uses that in a way to gross out the reader or to stupidly enter into fights he knows he can't win. He is an intelligent ex-cop who happened into the Nekropolis through a portal with his partner a few years ago--something went awry and instead of Matt dying at the same time, he became a self-willed zombie. The search for the Dawnstone is the main plot in the novel but as the story progresses you find yourself relishing in the small sub-plots and the asides as Matt's character and status in the city is revealed through various encounters along the way.

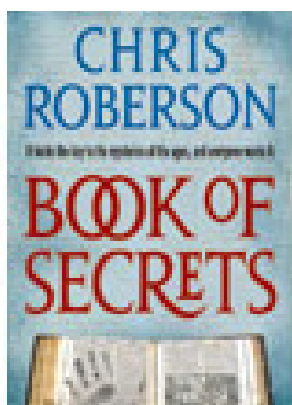
Nekropolis is a surprisingly quick read and something to pick up if you are in the mood for something different and fun. The weirdness does not leave you alienated (sic) and the world building is of a very high quality. It is Sam Spade done for a new future generation interested in something the same, but with a very different slant, making effective use of supernaturals in a dark city inhabited by beings and creatures that are as likely to eat you as to help you. This is the first novel of a three book series and if this lays the ground-work, we can be assured of a wild ride through the next two!

This review first appeared at *SF Revu* (Link; <http://www.sfrevu.com>)

Liz de Jager also runs the book blog *My Favourite Books* (link: <http://myfavouritebooks.blogspot.com>)

Book of Secrets

reviewed by keith harvey



by Tim Waggoner
Angry Robot
£7.99

"Book of Secrets" is (1) a crime novel, reminiscent of the noir fiction of the thirties; (2) a meta-fiction celebrating American genre fiction of the thirties, forties and fifties; (3) a bildungsroman about the spiritual journey of a young man; (4) a portal fantasy.

As you might glean from the previous paragraph, Mr. Roberson tells several stories in several forms. If we look for "the figure in the carpet" imagine an "x." One bar of the "x" progresses chronologically; that is the first person narrative of an investigative reporter by the name of Spencer Finch. Spencer Finch is on an assignment for the magazine "Logion" to reveal the nefarious dealings of a Houston bigwig by the name of J. Nathan Pierce, known as "Nez."

From this initial information, however, we are alerted that this is not your usual hard-boiled fiction based in the hard-scrabble world of reality. First, "Logion" is an online magazine and its name alerts us (perhaps warns us) that we are in "metaphysical" country. "Logion" refers to the traditional maxims and proverbs told by a sage or prophet. In most instances it is used to describe the maxims of Jesus. So, our protagonist is writing for a metaphysical or a religiously oriented virtual magazine, although that is never stated.

Next, Mr. Pierce, our unseen or barely seen subject, is called "Nez." This is obviously a reference to the Indian tribe--Nez Perce--who not only had their own unique language but a highly developed mythology. Languages and mythologies become a theme and Mr Roberson introduces us to various mysteries

revolving around a mysterious book written in many hands and many languages.

Situated in the metaphysical world, we are now alert to possible puzzles of meaning. After all, it is a mystery or is it?

Not to put too fine a point on it and not to scare off any reader, the novel is also a bildungsroman. A bildungsroman is a novel that has as its main theme the formative years or spiritual education of one person. The one person in this case is Spencer Finch and the purpose of the first leg of the "x" is to take the reader on a chronological journey through his spiritual development.

The second leg of the "x," however, is the fantastical element of the novel. Its narrative moves in reverse toward the past. Just as a good metaphysical investigation, the reader must follow the past through a series of short stories about a family of do-goers named the Black Hand to the "happy" origins of humanity.

Mr. Roberson uses these stories, short stories, to educate the reader, solve the mystery, and display the various genres--short story, pulp fiction, tragedy, etc--that were used in pulp fiction. Additionally, and this is very important because it elevates the novel, Roberson, by actually including the stories rather than describing them, inducts and educates the reader into the pleasure of pulp. This not only shows his versatility and enriches the text of the book but also reveals his inherent connection to the pulp tradition.

Before I move on I think we should illustrate our point and reveal Roberson's genius in actually writing the stories and including them in the narrative. Upon the death of his grandfather, Finch inherits a box of pulp magazines. The first story he reads is "The Talon's Curse" by Walter Reece. This story is the closest in time to the action of the novel and begins the count-down to the journey backwards toward the beginning of man. "The Talon's Curse" is a noir/mystery situated in San Francisco in the thirties. The next story is a Western written in 1918. Each story elicits the qualities and the identity of the members of the Black Hand.

The backward progression through the use of genre ushers the reader ultimately into the "original" world of myth and religion. This point is the intersection of the "x," and to punctuate the point, Roberson takes us through the looking glass to another world, to a world of crystal populated by angels and demi-urges.

Herein lies the fantasy and the speculation that earns the book its classification as "slipstream". If we sub-categorize it, this portion of the novel is a "portal" novel, in the vein of David Lindsay (*Voyage to Arcturus*) and C. S. Lewis (*Perelandra*).

So once we parse the pieces and put them back together, we discover that "Book of Secrets" is a book of genres. In other words, it is a celebration of the age of pulp with a meta-fictional slant. It moves in two directions--a very readable first person narrative in the form of a crime novel that progresses to the conclusion of the mystery and a fantasy novel that moves in reverse to disclose the nature of the universe. The two stories collide at the portal and the protagonist falls through it into a world of angels and gnostic demi-urges. This is the denouement and the moment of fantasy.

In conclusion I will summarize some other things I liked about the novel.

Roberson situates the action in my place--my physical space. I went to school in Houston, practiced law in Austin, and now live in Dallas. I know El Paso like the back of my hand. These western spaces plus New Orleans is Spencer's place and that in itself endeared the novel to me. Roberson described them clearly and truthfully and I felt and saw each city in the telling.

Second, Roberson is just a damn fine writer. He writes a good sentence; the novel is structured like a Swiss watch and paced like a Tennessee walker.

Third, in the time of the post-Tolkienians and the novel as brick, "Book of Secrets" is unique, refreshing, breezy, and fun.

This review first appeared at *Red Rook Review* (link: <http://redrookreview.blogspot.com>)

Kell's Legend

reviewed by antony jones



by Andy Remic
Angry Robot
£7.99

Kell's Legend is the first volume in the Clockwork Vampires Chronicles and has been written by Andy Remic.

Without warning came the vast albino army, the army of iron, invading Falanor from the north. To have any hope of survival a small band set off to warn the King. The band leaves quickly and with it a living legend, the mighty warrior Kell. Joining Kell is his granddaughter, Nienna and her friend, Katrina along with Saark, the ex-Sword Champion of King Leanoric who is in disgrace after an affair with the queen. The group fight their way south and are attacked from all sides by deadly Albino soldiers, clockwork vampires who drain the blood of their victims. As the land of Falanor comes under brutal attack by the unstoppable invaders Nienna learns the truth about grandfather Kell – that he is anything but a noble hero, anything but a Legend.

The clockwork vampires have bled their own country dry and must seek new blood to sustain their empire. Their society has evolved from the technological advances they have made in clockwork, managing to merge human and machine to create a lethal combination. To sustain this cyborg symbiosis of machine with flesh they must consume refined blood or "bloodoil" and this has become a kind of addiction for them, creating a need to hunt and consume to get their fix.

Kell's Legend is loosely based on the traditional fantasy story, brave but world weary warrior type who just wants to retire from any bloodshed and finds himself forced to use his talents of destruction. This standard fantasy fare is written with great style and really pays homage to the late great fantasy author David Gemmell. In particular I am reminded of my favorite of Gemmell's characters "Druss the Legend". This tradition though is then bashed on the head and buried 6 feet deep with inclusion of the clockwork vampires creating a blend of fantasy horror and fantastic fight scenes. I mean really top quality fight scenes. One of Gemmell's most redeeming qualities as an author was his ability to write about fighting and war to such a degree that you almost felt like rushing through his novels to get to those bits.

Kell's Legend fight scenes live up to this quality and elevate the novel way above the standard fare. Kell's Legend is a novel of power and scope, able to stand as a worthy successor to the Gemmell crown.

This review first appeared at www.ScienceFictionandFantasy.co.uk

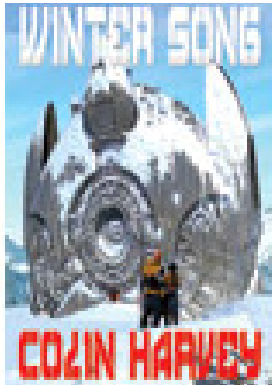
(Link: <http://sciencefictionandfantasy.co.uk>)

Winter Song

reviewed by gregor lincoln

by Colin Harvey
Angry Robot
£7.99

The new publisher Angry Robot ranges a multitude of sub-genres and with Winter Song adds something very hard in the Science Fiction category; according to one of the back cover blurbs "Rock -hard science Fiction adventure...No one gets out alive." Well I agree, the body count is fairly high, but I would add or unchanged to the statement."



Winter Song relies on very few science fiction tropes, they are present in the novel, but the story is about much more than hyperspace, implanted personalities, terraforming and transhumanism. The conflicts that are present in the tale could have taken place in a secluded community now or in the last century, or millennia struggling with limited resources and questions of personal responsibility to community and society. Karl Allman, the protagonist and catalyst for change, crashes pretty spectacularly on a barely habitable planet (its a description worthy of Ian Banks here). He is helped by Bera a woman shunned by her social group/fostered family for an illegitimate and

failed child.

Together these two break from the trial group causing a hunt across the icy and mostly barren and strangely, starkly beautiful landscape encountering the sometimes hostile and more often poisonous local fauna Karl looking for a possibly mythical ship/beacon through which he can send a signal for aid and Bera looking for freedom from the oppressive system that has kept the failing colony going for generations.

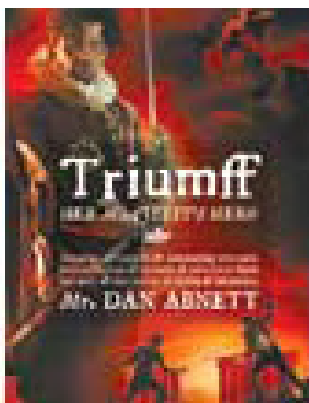
The above description does no real justice to the well crafted society that recalls the "Formers" that abandoned the unprofitable colony to fend for itself. In looking back on the story there is a great deal of heroism in the struggle of Ragnar's (the family "chieftain") and his small town you might call it. They may be harsh and repressive to us and the hero's of the story but in fact there is a nobility in their struggle. There are other elements that invade the story - but I think that those elements are best left to be discovered as the tale unfolds. Know that there is lots more at heart in this tale than the tropes that some authors use as central elements, this is a tale about personal struggle and will leave you thinking about it weeks later.

The tale that Colin Harvey is a worthy addition to the science fiction invasion that has come from England in the last decade. He deserves a place on your shelf along with Asher, Reynolds, Hamilton and Stross. He is not them, don't expect him to be but check him out.

This review first appeared at *Deadwood Reviews* (Link: <http://www.deadwoodreviews.co.uk>)

Triumff: Her Majesty's Hero

reviewed by graeme flory



by Dan Abnett
Angry Robot
£7.99

Whether it's in a book or on TV, there's nothing I like more than a good old fashioned swashbuckle. Dazzling sword fights, witty repartee, a chandelier to swing from and lots of confrontations with either pirates or the City Guard. It doesn't get much better than that! Recently, I've been getting my 'swashbuckling fix' from Jonathan Green and his dashing character Ulysses Quicksilver; a set of books that you really

should check out if you like the aforementioned dazzling sword fights etc. I'm always on the look out for more of these kind of books though so when Dan Abnett asked me if I'd like to try out 'Triumff' I jumped at the chance. I've read a couple of Dan's books before and they've never failed to hit the spot. As it turned out, 'Triumff' was completely the swashbuckler that I thought it would be and I couldn't help but enjoy this one immensely. Any sequels will be more than welcome in my house!

It's the year 2010 and her Divine Majesty Queen Elizabeth XXX rules over the Anglo-Hispanic Unity; an empire that is technologically stagnant but rules over the globe through its utilisation of the 'arte' ('magic' to the likes of you and I). While the general populace is content with this state of affairs, elements of the ruling class are anything but content and plot to relieve the Queen of her throne. Sir Rupert Triumff (renowned explorer and dashing swordsman) is more than happy for the Queen to stay right where she

is but is in the middle of a plot of his own. Both Triumff's plans and those of a shadowy cabal are about to collide in a series of events that are set to have the streets of London ringing with the sounds of combat and magic...

Once I got into it, 'Triumff' was an absolute pleasure to read. There is that 'once I got into it...' to bear in mind though... The interview, at the back of the book, tells the reader that the character of Sir Rupert Triumff is a favourite of Dan Abnett's going back almost twenty years and this affection on the author's part is clear in both positive and negative ways. Abnett comes across as being extremely happy to finally get the adventures of Triumff down on paper as is shown in his waxing at length about the background setting (and its history) that this drama plays against. This background information paints a bright and vivid picture, as well providing the reader with a constant flow of humorous asides (that were more 'hit' than 'miss' as far as I was concerned); the only problem I found was that there was a little too much of it...

At times I felt that I was reading more about the background setting than I was the story itself and that wasn't what I came to the book to do. The same kind of thing happened with the jokes although this didn't feel as bad somehow; the jokes come thick and fast but at least they are keeping things moving forwards at a fast rate of knots. I wasn't expecting 'Triumff' to be as funny as it was and it was a more than pleasant surprise to find myself laughing as much as I was.

When the story does get going it does so in great style and once again you get the feeling that Dan Abnett had a great time writing this book. The descriptive padding serves to hide a plot that is tightly drawn and has plenty of twists and turns to keep the reader guessing the outcome and turning the pages to get there as soon as possible. Running gags, such as the 'Swiss Army sword', maintain the humorous tone whilst also adding a delicious hint of uncertainty to the proceedings. How can Triumff possibly hope to win through if he doesn't know whether he'll be fighting with a cutlass or a tin opener...? The real fun lies in the moments where everything kicks off with lashings of hot pursuit and swordplay. This is where Abnett really lets loose and has a great time; throwing friend and foe together with great gusto and shaking the mixture up to see what happens. As far as I was concerned Abnett carried it off almost perfectly. My eyes were pretty much glued to these pages the whole way through and Abnett still manages to find the time and space to throw more jokes in as well.

I got the feeling that Dan Abnett indulged himself a little too much in the scene setting but this was more than balanced out by the rest of 'Triumff'; a book that never did anything less than be gripping and a thoroughly entertaining read. As I said earlier, any sequels will be very welcome!

Nine out of Ten

This review first appeared at *Graeme's Fantasy Book Review*

(link: <http://www.graemesfantasybookreview.com>)

Sixty-One Nails

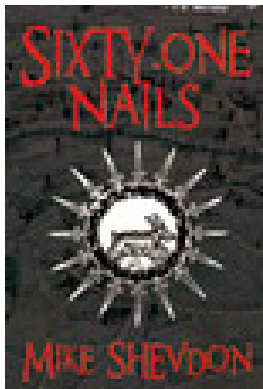
reviewed by david jooste

by Mike Shevdon

Angry Robot

£7.99

Images chaotic, a vision of a black cat, a building, a room, an underground chamber, and island of stone, a dark alter and an ominous iron door. These are the images the creature called Kareesh gave Naill. There meaning remains unsure but it is the only way for him to survive in this dark world he suddenly became a part of.



Now with his savior, the mysterious Blackbird, Naill must find his place in the world of the Feyre, forgetting his old life and learn to use his new found gifts, a gift that to the fey means nothing but death.

Will he succeed or will his failure result in the ancient seventh court returning from exile and bringing with them a new age of suffering for all human kind and half breeds.

Well there's your little teaser, and I hope it will make you as eager to read this book as I was.

Now I have to say in my opinion there is very little wrong with this piece of mastery. The characters are well shaped and developed. The storyline keeps a constant pace, which in turn keeps you locked in, and the research done for the book is superb.

Something that I loved about the book is the amount of detail Mike placed in it. Through your journey you encounter all the myths and superstitions that make tales of the fey so memorable. None of this new age stuff. It all falls back to things such as their weakness to cold iron, the power of a simple horse shoe, even the attitudes and types of behaviours that were originally associated with these beings. Even old lore about the power held within your name is included.

As for other aspects in the book. Mike even includes an explanation of where the Quit Rent ceremony comes from, which in turn forms an integral part of the storyline and is in fact an actual event. I believe it took place in London this week or last week.

The characters in the book are completely lovable. Right from the start you grow close to Naill, aka Rabbit, and Blackbird.

As you venture through the story you go through Rabbit's joy and pain, frustration and confusion as he must come to terms with the fact that he is now one of the Fey and must discover and learn to use his new gifts in order to survive. You work with him to find a lost secret that will give him access to the Six Courts of the Feyre, and possible safety not only for himself but for his daughter as well.

Blackbird is also an amazing character, if not the better. Saving Rabbit and then leading him on the path to self discovery. A creature of the Fey herself, fire and air, also known as a fey'ree, she has been around for hundreds of years having both the knowledge on how to survive and the strength of character to do what must be done.

But there is a deeper story to her past as well, the reason why she has been hiding for so long and cannot even remember what she really looks like, shocking but yes. A story that is much closer to Naill than even he could have guessed.

Though I do feel sorry for Naill as she changes her glamour from an old lady to a voluptuous beauty every so often.

Well that's about that, I will leave the rest for you to discover. This is definitely a must read for me and one of my top books of the year. The streets of London will never be the same with these two walking them.

Well done Mike, I can't wait for the next one, Road to Bedlam. Warden Alshirian, that should be interesting.

This review first appeared at *Realms and Galaxies* (Link: <http://www.davebrendon.blogspot.com>)



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