

Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

PUBLISHER
LEE HARRIS

MANAGING EDITOR
ALASDAIR STUART

COMMISSIONING EDITOR
ELLEN J ALLEN

REVIEWS EDITOR
PHIL LUNT

ISSUE 124 · 12TH JUL 2010

CONTENTS:

- FICTION:** *The City* by Keith Harvey
- REVIEW:** *Turn Coat*
 Retribution Falls
 Dead Streets
- FEATURE:** *Cogs and Biros, Arts and Science* by Alasdair Stuart



Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Abaddon Books

EDITORIAL:

by alasdair stuart

A Very Geeky Valhalla

Matt Smith, the current Doctor, performing the *Doctor Who* theme with Orbital as they play the final song of the 40th Glastonbury Music Festival. That's about as English as it's possible to get and it's a glorious, pivotal moment in modern pop culture. Everyone there, everyone, didn't just know what the song was, they loved it, they embraced it as part of their world when traditionally we've viewed it as part of ours.

In other words, Doctor Who's crossed over. It's become mainstream, universal, loved by people who never saw the first series but are coming to it now. It's become central in English pop culture and, like the country so often does, we've overlooked that. So here it is, on the front of our latest issue. Enjoy:)

Alasdair,
Editor,
Hub Magazine

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrNGxDxgwLY&feature=related>



Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Abaddon Books

FICTION

The City

by keith harvey

Virtual fall arrived through alchemical transformation prescribed and calculated by the Mandarins' machines.

The temperature of the central dome of La Ciudad dropped to a seasonal sixty degrees and the cybernetic trees lining the *16 de Septiembre* transformed their synthetic leaves into gold, orange, and red patches of undulating light that illuminated the wet cobblestone streets and shadowed the green Gothic arches and covered alleyways of the *Zócalo*.

Oblivious to the chemical changes around him or the machines that induced them, Father Alejandro Cardenas jumped off the last step of electric streetcar *quattro* that transported him from his office at the Central Cathedral of level one to the *Zócalo* and slipped on an archaic worn stone. As his right knee scraped the rough surface of the rounded rock, he dropped his leather briefcase onto the ancient pavement and swore, as only a Jesuit can. As he straightened, he swatted at a cloud of nanobots attracted by the smell of his blood with his left hand; they swirled in a golden haze of electricity around his skinned knee, cleansing the scrape and digesting his blood.

Hearing him curse, a young Azteca girl, wearing traditional garb of stitched parrot feathers, a black leather kilt, and lizard-skin sandals, ran to his side to help; his first thoughts, however, when he saw her brown skin and hawk-like nose, were not to thank her nor bless her for her kindness but to demand, in a hysterical tone, what an *india* was doing in the governing sector. *Didn't she know, he thought, that only Mandarins or their bureaucratic servants were allowed inside the dome?*

The girl must have interpreted the look of shock on his face or read his mind because she immediately produced her digital visitor's pass that granted her twenty-four hour access to ground level, sector one, denominated administration and education center of the central dome of La Ciudad, and pressed it toward his face. "See, see Father," she stammered, "I am here by permission of the Department of Culture for the traditional dances this evening in the *Zócalo*."

Cardenas pretended to read her pass but he was too agitated to concentrate on the digital card flashing in front of his eyes; instead he brushed away her hand, checked his chronograph to determine the time, and realized he was late for his meeting with the *Americano* representative of the multi-national corporation known as Argent Noir or AN International. He turned away from her, bent down and brushed his pants with his right hand, then unconsciously straightened his long black hair with his soiled and muddy fingers. "Bless you my child," he mumbled, as he set off in a loping run toward the restaurant Rio Rojo, a decades-old establishment located in a shaded cul-de-sac near the Inns of Courts and the law school.

Legend was, he remembered as he ran, that Pancho Villa met his murderous associates at the Rio Rojo during his occupation of La Ciudad in the early part of the twentieth century; that Trotsky and Diego Rivera dined there before Trotsky's assassination; that Paulette Goddard, the American actress, supped there regularly with three of her lovers and two husbands: Charlie Chaplin and Burgess Meredith; that the great poet Roberto Bolaño once celebrated his birthday there, and that currently Julio Calypso, *El Presidente de la República*, and his three brothers ate tamales and frijoles there every Friday night with their blessed mother, known to all inhabitants of the arcology as *La Señora*, before retiring to the back room to play cards with the leading Mandarins of the city.

María García, the restaurant's hostess, her green eyes sparkling at him in some sort of ironic glee, greeted the priest. "*Buenas tardes, Father,*" she said, reaching for his briefcase. Cardenas, however, still a bit shaky from his fall and the unexpected encounter with the Azteca, pushed her hand away, and

mumbled: "No, no thank you. I will hold onto it, Maria. Is there someone waiting for me?" He coughed and cleared his throat, as he scanned the restaurant quickly. "I was to meet a very important person here tonight," he repeated vaguely.

Maria pointed at a tall, heavysset man with a ruddy complexion and thick blond hair pulled straight back from his broad forehead, leaning against the marble bar and drinking a shot of tequila. "The *gringo* there," she said, "asked for you about fifteen minutes ago."

"Ah," said the priest, as he pushed past her and approached the man, who straightened to his full height--well over six feet, five inches--and extended his hand. "Are you Señor van Kahnweiler?" asked the priest.

Van Kahnweiler smiled, grabbed the priest's right hand, and squeezed it between ham-like fists, causing the priest to let out a mouse-like squeak; his bones cracking and popping under the pressure.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Father," the giant said in a heavily-accented voice reminiscent of the film-actor, Max von Sydow. His pale blue eyes twinkled as he asked: "Would you like a drink?"

Cardenas wiggled his fingers to make sure nothing was broken before responding. "A shot of *La Familia* would be nice," he whispered into his chest, as he leaned against the bar next to the giant, who turned and waved two fingers at the bartender.

As they waited for their drinks, Cardenas asked nervously: "So is this your first trip to La Ciudad?"

Van Kahnweiler leaned over him conspiratorially and said with a wink, "No, Father, I have spent quite a bit of time in your city over the years. You might say I built it, or, at least, a major part of it."

The priest, uncomfortable with the man's proximity and size, stepped back and asked: "What do you mean? You built what?"

Before the *gringo* could respond, the bartender placed two shot glasses on the bar and van Kahnweiler paused, sipped his tequila, and said: "Good, very good; an excellent choice, Father." He placed his drink down, wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and whispered into the priest's ear: "You obviously enjoy the finer things of life." He paused and then continued with "That tells me we can do business."

"I enjoy the simple things, as a man of God should," answered Cardenas in an attempt to deflect the implied criticism of either elitism or hedonism—he wasn't sure--of either the priesthood or the ruling class of the Hive, the Mandarins.

"Nothing wrong with that," said van Kahnweiler, extracting two Cuban cigars from an expensive leather case. "Is this *robusto* simple enough for your taste?" he asked sardonically.

As van Kahnweiler lit the priest's cigar with a solid-silver lighter, Maria interrupted them. "Your table is ready, Father."

She led them through the crowded restaurant to a banquette in the corner beneath a Diego Rivera painting of Mexican peasants storming a wooden barricade, manned by French Legionnaires, firing a savage volley into their ranks. As Cardenas squirmed across the banquette's red leather seat, a thirty-piece mariachi band ensconced in an alcove off to their left began its next set, drowning out any other sound. Nonplussed van Kahnweiler simply talked louder.

A few minutes later a rat-faced waiter, wearing a red jacket, appeared with transparent *plastique* slates that projected a multi-paged menu. As the music blared, van Kahnweiler shouted: "I heard the tamales are good." The priest tapped his slate with his index finger, clearing it, and said: "Since before Pancho Villa, the Rio Rojo has been famous for its tamales."

"Then we must order the tamales. Besides, the president likes them doesn't he?" Somewhat startled by the reference to the president, the priest nodded and said: "He and his family have been coming to this restaurant for many years. In fact, this is a favorite meeting place of the *neos*."

"Neos?" asked van Kahnweiler.

The priest leaned toward him and said: "The neo-liberals."

"Ah, them," he muttered with a sneer. The priest smiled and then called the waiter over and ordered tamales and beers.

The band's next song was the story of a lonely cowboy who loses both his lover and his horse. Van Kahnweiler closed his eyes and listened to the music as if for the first time. "Beautiful," he murmured, "simply beautiful." When the song ended, he opened his eyes, turned to the priest, and said: "Listen, Father, I have

something very important to talk to you about. You were recommended to me by Bishop Britton of Toronto, who received your name from Cardinal di Muralto of Rome. Are you familiar with those names?"

Cardenas nodded; his eyes widening in excitement at the name of two of the most powerful men of the church outside the great impenetrable wall that divided the northern hemisphere from the south.

"Good, Father; very good," said van Kahnweiler. "They have sent me to tell you that we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to do something worthwhile for the world and for Mexico. We can both do God's work and man's work to make Mexico a better place."

Cardenas suddenly wondered if this giant *gringo* was insane.

Van Kahnweiler placed his huge hand on the priest's shoulder, squeezed firmly, and whispered: "Are you ready to do God's work?"

Cardenas gulped and nodded.

At that moment the waiter arrived and placed two frosty glasses and two bottled *cervezas* on the table. Van Kahnweiler smacked his lips; and, before continuing his presentation and explaining how he and the priest were going to do God's work, he swallowed a substantial portion of the dark beer. Finally, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he said: "Now, Father, our project is secret, strictly *entre nous*, but we must start amassing support here in La Ciudad as soon as possible. But, before I brief you, I have to ask you to swear to keep our conversation private."

Normally Cardenas would have walked away at this point but the name Cardinal di Muralto flattered him and scared him. The *gringo* was dropping names from both the Vatican and the North American church; Cardenas intended to hear what he had to say.

"You can rely on my discretion, *señor*."

Van Kahnweiler slapped his hands together and rubbed them vigorously. "Father, I am here as a representative of a consulting firm, retained by the Vatican, to prepare the way for the eventual relocation of the Holy City from Rome to La Ciudad." He then leaned back to allow his pronouncement to sink in.

Cardenas fell back against the leather banquette in shock and stared at the *gringo*. He was so startled that he did not even notice the smug look on the *gringo's* face. *Could it be possible that the Holy Father would relocate to Mexico, he thought, or was this man mad?*

As if in answer to the priest's query, van Kahnweiler touched a finger to his left nostril in a gesture that seemed to convey all the tawdry mystery surrounding his role in Mexico and to explain his purpose in being in La Ciudad: "My assignment is to enlist a group of highly placed individuals within the church and the administration to help me persuade the Mexican government to enter into an agreement to cooperate with my company to relocate the Vatican City and his Holy Father to La Ciudad."

Cardenas' head swirled and sweat beaded across his brow as the man's words took hold. *Could this really be true? Could the Holy Father consider moving to the New World, to La Ciudad? What had the man said about his company? He was not sure.*

Finally, he calmed down enough to ask: "What do you want me to do?"

Van Kahnweiler whispered into his ear. "I want you to identify ten men within the Mandarin clique, the government, and the church that you think will support our cause. Just ten but they must be highly placed, influential, and sympathetic. You will have nothing else to do in this affair after you identify them but arrange for me to meet with each one separately. I will handle all the discussions and the negotiations."

"Negotiations?" he asked timidly.

"There are always negotiations of one sort and another in times like these."

"I am wondering why the Holy Father would leave Rome. I mean it is the Roman Catholic Church?"

"Difficult times my friend. This is not the first time the Pope has fled Rome for a safer location. Read the history of the Avignon papacy."

Cardenas nodded knowingly and then asked: "Where would it be? I mean where would they build the city?"

Van Kahnweiler cleared his throat and said: "There will be no 'they;' it is us. I must make that abundantly clear to you and the men you introduce me to. You belong to us and your task is to make sure we get all the requisite permissions necessary to realign the perimeters of the dome; otherwise there will be no us; no holy city within the hive. You got it." When Cardenas nodded, he continued: "We will build it here

within the walls of the arcology; probably near the Zócalo."

"But how will you do it? I mean there is no space for the holy city within the hive."

"All we need is .44 square kilometers. It's nothing really." He raised his monstrous hand as emphasis of the miniscule request for the land.

Cardenas caught his breath, as he calculated. *One hundred and eight acres carved out of the dome's floor. It is impossible; he thought. The dislocation alone, plus the destruction of ancient buildings, was unthinkable. The people would never put up with the disruption and the seizure.*

"You will have trouble with the Mandarins, the government, and the Communists; not to mention the archaeologists, the historians, and the Indians."

"Progress, my dear fellow, will rule the day. Think of the jobs and the money that will flow into the coffers, not to mention the esteem the city will gain from the Pope's arrival. And then there is the political clout to consider and the power that will flow from it. La Ciudad will be the new City of God and the Mexicans the next Romans."

The waiter arrived with their food and van Kahnweiler ordered two more beers and two tequila shots.

An hour later Cardenas, puffing on his second cigar, left van Kahnweiler at the bar, waiting for his next meeting.

Since the priest's arrival at the Rio Rojo, the machines had further dimmed the lights of the dome and lowered the temperature to fifty-five degrees. Cardenas shivered in the fall air as he walked toward the Zócalo.

In the distance, he heard the rhythmic beat of native drums. At first he thought he was imagining the sound but then he remembered the girl, who had tried to help him when he fell. She had said she was here for the dancing. He took a deep draw on his cigar and strolled toward the sound of the drums.

In the center of the Zócalo, approximately three hundred young Aztecas gathered, dressed in ceremonial garb, in feathers and robes, waiting for the signal to begin the *mitote*. Somehow it came and a group of twenty or thirty young people held hands and formed a circle. The first circle moved with the beat of the drums, undulating inward like a flower opening and closing with the sun, as a second group, larger than the first, encircled them and synchronized their steps. Then a third and a fourth group circled and enclosed the first two. They were calling for the winged serpent to rise from the stones of the ancient center of the city and to cleanse the city and re-establish its ancient rule.

Father Cardenas, standing on some worn stone steps, frowned as he watched the ritual dance and the sexual throbbing of the *huehuetls*. He spat on the ground as he watched and whispered a prayer. This practice of the *concheros* was spreading, growing into a movement throughout Mexico, and the Church opposed it because the *concheros'* god was not the Christian God. Yes, he thought, *we need the Holy Father here to battle the rise of the winged serpent, the god of the Aztecas.* He shivered as the vibrations of the drum began to move him; he felt his hips sway involuntarily and he shook himself. He felt the sensual power of the alien god rising up through the stones and tickling the soles of his feet. He called out to God to forgive him and protect him, as he pulled himself away from the sounds that stirred his blood.

Cardenas staggered away from the dancers and stumbled on the rough stones of the steps of the Zócalo. It was the second time in one night he had fallen and he wondered if something was wrong with him.

As he fell a hand grabbed his left arm and held him. He straightened himself with the help of the other and this time he turned to thank the stranger.

He gasped involuntarily when he saw his rescuer. Once again his help came from a woman. He was sure of that. But this woman's face was covered with a black balaclava and he recognized her as *Policía Federal*, a PF, dressed in black fatigues and carrying a submachine. Her eyes were green and her skin around them the milk-chocolate of a *mestizo*. Her sheer physical presence disturbed him with some hint of sensuality and, as he stepped away, he recognized the faint aroma of her perfume, a rare and expensive French brand preferred by Mandarin women.

"Watch your step, Father; these stones are treacherous." He thought her eyes were laughing at him.

"*Gracias, Capitán,*" he paused, holding his breath, waiting for her to give her name. Rather than answer, she snapped her fingers imperiously and two men, dressed in the same black uniforms, body armor

and balaclavas emerged from the shadows of a stone wall.

"Escort the Father to streetcar *quatro*," she barked.

"How did you know I was taking that streetcar?" he asked. Instead of answering, she simply said: "*Bueñas noches*, Father Cardenas." She turned and walked back toward the dancers; her right hand holding the barrel of the machine gun that dangled from the black nylon strap that crossed her body.

As he watched her lithe figure disappear into the gloom, he imagined she, too, was moving with the rhythm of the drums. *How did she know his name? Are they watching me?* He suspected she was one of them; one of the *concheros* who were slowly changing the sights and sounds of the city, rebuilding the temples and bridges of the Aztecs, infiltrating the government, and undermining the regime of the *indio* president of the Republic, Julio Calypso.

By the time he reached the streetcar stop, he had decided to help van Kahnweiler. *Here surely was a man of God, sent by the Vatican to provide hope for the Mexican people*, he reasoned. *What were a few acres in the center of La Ciudad, when Mexico's soul was in jeopardy? So they would have to demolish ancient buildings; the anthropologists could make sure no treasures were lost. And the people could be re-located. Only the Aztecs and the atheistic government cabal currently running the country would be a problem. They would have to be eliminated.*

As he waited, a young man, wearing a leather jacket over a faded black T-shirt and blue jeans, queued up next to him. The Priest examined his lean frame and unshaven face and determined he must be a student. The student took his place in the line and extracted a dog-eared copy of Plato's *Republic* from his book bag and began to read. *A student at UNAM, thought the Priest, and probably a communist philosophe.*

Just as the street car arrived, he heard a loud shout from the Zócalo and he turned back like Lot's wife to the see the crowd, moving like some dark splotch away from the city's ancient navel. But he could see nothing in particular in the twilight; the machines were dropping the lights and night was falling. As they climbed the steps, the student slipped close to the priest and whispered into his ear: "The winged serpent is returning and with him comes the blood of sacrifice. Are you ready to die?"

"Are you talking to me?" asked the priest, stopping on the step. The streetcar's AI urged him forward, as he turned to confront the student.

The young man grinned and recited: "'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.' Marx wrote that but he stole it from the de Sade. Did you know that?"

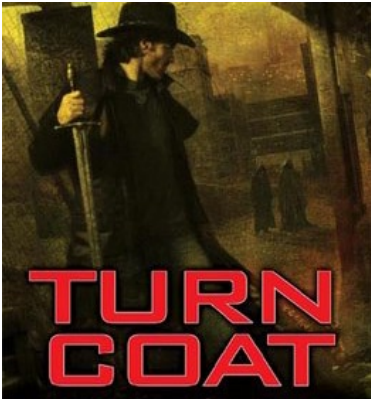
The priest shivered and stared into the black eyes of the student. "Heretic," he muttered. "You are all heretics."

As he took his seat at the back of the car, far away from the young man with the wild black eyes, he quickly decided he would work tirelessly for the *gringo* and the arrival of the Pope. The soul of the city was in jeopardy; the old gods were rising from the cobblestones of the Zócalo and the *philosophes* were corrupting the youth. He must help stop the madness of all of the disparate groups that were eating away at the foundation of the hive.

The robotic car jolted forward and the priest gazed out onto the multi-colored leaves of the synthetic trees under the dome of the hive city and for a moment he imagined an etheric serpent rising from the entwined bodies of the dancers on the Zócalo, flying languidly beneath the arches and struts of the silver dome, and spewing fire onto the adamantine girders that supported the upper levels of the hive. He quickly crossed himself and muttered a prayer, while the young man shook his head and laughed at him. The priest turned away and stared upwards through the reinforced glass of the trolley into the electronic beauty of the reflected artificial night and glimpsed a giant dirigible rising from level-two station and heading south through great bay doors that were slowly opening. It was not the imagined dragon of the *concheros*; but its running lights flickered red and green like the reflection off parrot wings in the mottled light of the rain forests of Brazil and its great clarions sounded through the silence of the night announcing its departure.

Turn Coat

reviewed by martin willoughby



by Jim Butcher
Orbit
rrp £7.99

Take a chunk of Humphrey Bogart, add in slices of Indiana Jones and Han Solo, spice it up with Jim Rockford (feeling old yet?) and a sprinkling of Jack Dee and voilà: you have Harry Dresden.

Dresden is a wizard, a warden and a man whose common sense is on a permanent vacation in a dusty corner of his mind. Alongside him are Molly, an apprentice who he refers to as grasshopper (if that stirs memories of David Carradine, you are officially old), and a dog with more sense than the humans around him.

The novel gets into the action half way down the first page, and barely lets up before it finishes 500 pages later. If it's not action, it's humour; if it's not humour, it's intrigue; if it's not intrigue it's Molly cooling her nipples with cold beer bottles. Best of all, the story is told by Harry Dresden himself.

The story starts when Morgan, who hates Dresden, turns up at Harry's apartment and falls into the hall with some horrendous wounds. He is being chased by his own people for a crime he didn't commit. So begins a murder mystery and the hunt for the turn coat within the wizard's community. Along the way, Harry has to deal with some seriously sexy vampires and a hideous shape shifter he calls Shagnasty.

On his side he has a dog called Mouse, four werewolves and several hundred fairies that take orders from him as they are addicted to the Pizza he pays them with.

If all that makes the book seem like a light-hearted romp...well it is. Partly. It's also very bloody. The descriptions of death in some parts leave nothing to the imagination, especially when one vampire rips another apart. Butcher's imagination has also brought forth a dark world of supernatural conflict between the various sides and even within the same groups and he manages to weave the light and the dark into an enthralling tale.

On one side you have the white council of wizards and it is one of their number, LaFortier, who has been murdered. Morgan was found over the body holding the knife that killed him with no memory of having done so. Due to the internal politics of the white council, someone needs to be executed, whether they are guilty or not, and Morgan fits the bill.

Harry is convinced that Morgan is innocent and uses all his resources to find out who really killed LaFortier. He discovers who the killer is, but doesn't like what he finds. On top of that, the person behind the murder is trying to start a war between the wizards and the vampires.

Harry has to make alliances with the vampire White Court, deal with those on his own side who want him dead and try to avoid Shagnasty, whilst also keeping control of his errant student.

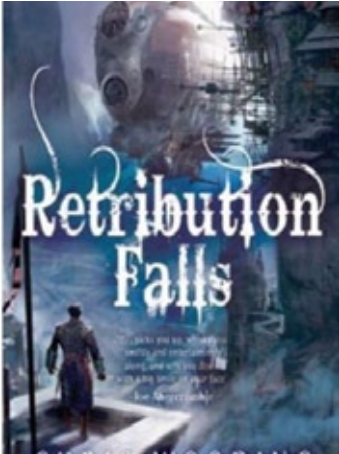
All the time his dog sits in the background tutting at all the fuss, disarming Morgan, Molly and anyone else who wants to start a fight near him.

On the other side you have the turn coat who, by the end, has been uncovered. Unfortunately, the discovery sets in motion another set of events that could end up with the world being destroyed anyway. That will be for a later story.

This is a superb book and made better by being written from Dresden's point of view. We get to know him very well, warts and all, and get to appreciate his attitude of laughing in the face of death. Next up in the series is 'Changes', and I can't wait to see what the dog gets up to next.

Retribution Falls

reviewed by amanda rutter



by Chris Wooding
Gollancz
rrp £7.99

Retribution Falls by **Chris Wooding** is a tale about Darian Frey, captain of the *Ketty Jay* and leader of a motley band of misfits and rogues. They survive - barely - on the proceeds from petty piracy and small-time crook jobs. But now Frey has been offered a plush job, an easy killing, and he can't resist taking the bait - even though it all seems too good to be true. Almost inevitably - given Frey's usual run of luck - the heist goes horribly wrong and Frey realises that he has been framed. On the run from contractors, pirates and the Coalition

Navy, Frey has to try and discover who tried to put the crime on him and clear his name before he is taken down...

Retribution Falls is not without its issues, but the main emotion you have while reading it is pure, fist punching the air fun. Frey is a rogue in the classic sense of the word - a character you just can't help but root for, even though he is attempting to cheat and steal his way to a fortune. It is almost old-fashioned in the style of which it is written - motley band of adventurers trading insults and banter while trying to clear their names of murder. Barring the slightly sci-fi setting, this novel could fit neatly into the quest/adventure fantasy section alongside the likes of David Eddings.

Wooding writes at a breathless pace - in the most part. I have two issues with this. The first is that it leaves the world being barely fleshed out. We experience a whistle stop tour of various ports and areas within the land, but not a single one of them really stands out. I don't know if this was deliberate on Wooding's part, since I'm guessing to travellers constantly on the move most ports would blend together into one. The writing of these different locations definitely reflects the wandering life of the crew, but it does make for a breathless ride. A map might have helped, but I guess sci fi novels don't often call for maps!

The second issue with the breathless pace is that it is all the more noticeable when Wooding slows events down. In the latter part of the novel there are two occasions where I felt the pace was snail-like and it jarred me considering how events had transpired previously: these two situations were the conversation between Trinica and Frey, and the delving into the back story of Jez. In both cases, Wooding is writing about something that happened in the past, and it is done in a fairly clumsy manner.

Having said that, I really enjoyed this book. I know it has attracted comparisons to Joss Whedon's *Firefly*, and I can completely see why. The ensemble characters and the episodic adventures could be transferred with ease to a television show format.

I liked all of the characters, and enjoyed the ease with which they could be differentiated thanks to dialogue and mannerisms. I particularly appreciated the strong development of relationships across the course of the novel - by the end of the novel, the disparate group are very much a crew, and Wooding carefully and cleverly puts all the pieces into place to allow this to happen.

The writing is very effective, and could stand comparisons to such writers as Wilbur Smith in terms of the fact that this is very much an adventure story rather than a straight-up science fiction novel.

There are great flashes of humour, such as:

" 'You get the impression that this has all got a little out of control?' Jez screamed in Frey's ear.

Frey didn't hear what she said, so he nodded as if he agreed, and then replied, 'I think whoever's running this show, they've let things get a bit out of control!'

Jez, who also hadn't heard him, said, 'Definitely!' "

I also appreciated the warm heart to this novel and the honest writing of some very emotional scenes. In fact, I would be curious to see just how much of Frey's reaction to Trinica and how their story unfolded was semi-autobiographical - the feelings evoked were strong, and the words seemed almost personal, written with a true sense of knowing how it might feel to be so trapped by someone you loved so much.

All in all, I would definitely recommend *Retribution Falls* to anyone who wants a light-hearted read (with a couple of darker moments!) in the company of some truly memorable and vibrantly-written characters.

This review was originally published at www.FloorToCeilingBooks.com and www.FantasyLiterature.com

Dead Streets

reviewed by matthew fryer



by Tim Waggoner
Angry Robot books
rrp £7.99

I opened this book, the second in Tim Waggoner's *Nekropolis* series, with a sense of both excitement and hesitation. As its predecessor set the bar so high, I was concerned that *Dead Streets* might not be able to maintain the momentum. I needn't have worried.

Our narrator is Matt Richter, a zombie private eye, who lives with his half-blood girlfriend, Devona, in a dimension not too far from our own. Their home is *Nekropolis*. A sprawling, pentagram shaped city threaded with a river of green fire, its population are demons, werewolves and monsters of all persuasions.

Dead Streets puts Matt through quite an ordeal. Within the first few chapters, he's been harassed by a gorgon reporter, stabbed by a warlock and then decapitated in the street. After being rebuilt by Victor Baron, the city's foremost undead reanimator, Matt discovers he's been neatly framed for a crime against one of the ruling darklords. He must find the real culprit, not only to clear his name, but to save the city itself from another gleefully evil threat.

Nekropolis is a wonderful place to visit, and the opening sequence in a seedy nightclub gives us a taste of the lurid fun to come. Touring the city's five dominions is like riding some kind of vast, lethal ghost-train. In book 1 - the eponymous *Nekropolis* - we visited the Tim Burton-esque Gothtown, with its vampire punks, and the shapeshifter hunting grounds of the Wyldwood. In this instalment, the action focuses around *Tenebrus*, the city's subterranean prison, and the *Boneyard*: dominion of the dead. This is where Victor Baron's foundry churns out his wares, from the hovering, flesh-tech skulls that guard the jail to the grisly meatrunners: vehicles of sinew and muscle that lurch the streets.

This book is a melting pot of genres, and should please fans of them all. It has the trappings of SF, horror and fantasy, but the swagger and attitude of a pulp detective thriller. This prevents the tale from straying into whimsy. And let's not forget the gallows humour. It won't make you bellow with laughter and embarrass yourself in public, but get used to having a wry smile on your face. Reference spotters should enjoy themselves enormously. *Nekropolitans* have contact with earth (where Matt Richter was once a

regular cop) and import technology to merge with their magic, as well as sharing elements of dark culture. There are subtle cameos from Rocky Horror and The Grudge, to name but a couple, and the appearance of real life criminals including infamous 19th century bodysnatchers Burke and Hare.

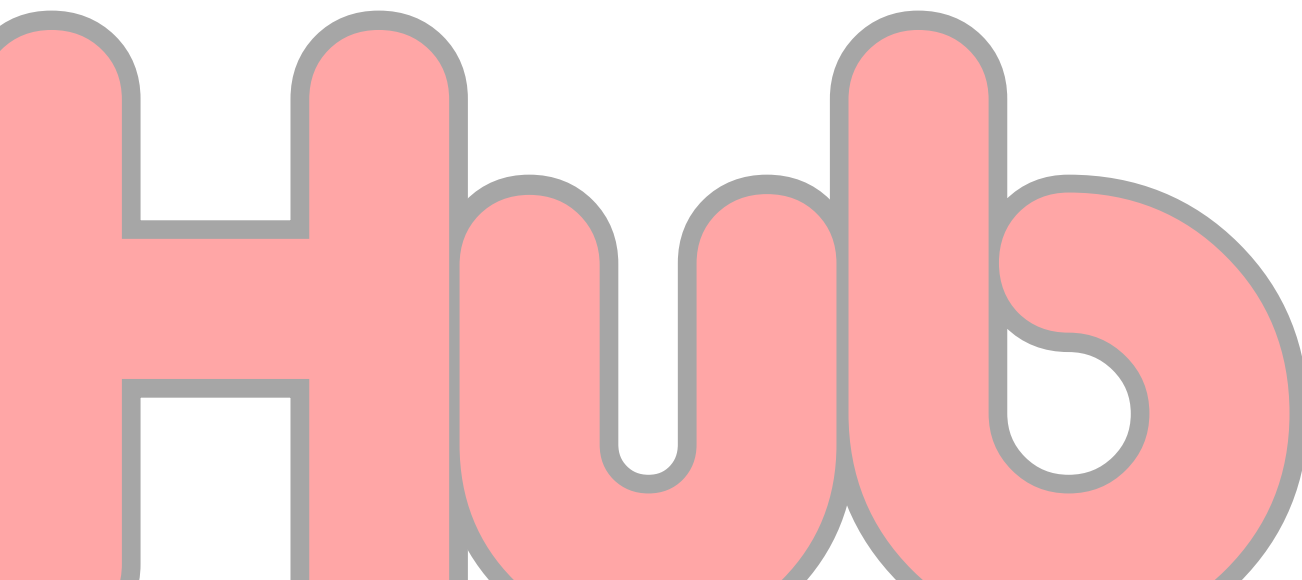
Despite a cinematic atmosphere, this is no style over substance; *Dead Streets* has the characters too. Even the minor players are strong, and my favourites include Shrike, a mouthy vampire who transports himself as cigarette smoke and bursts into flames every time he blasphemes. But Matt is the star of the show. He's sharp, understandably jaded, yet maintains a bone-dry wit. Devona shines as his better half, and they can be quite touching together, even when he manages to annoy her by being unable to talk about his feelings or understand why she's upset. He might be a zombie, but he's still a bloke. Their relationship is expanded gently, and brings a warm domesticity to the adventure. But best of all, the author also doesn't waste the comedy potential of having an undead protagonist. In a constant battle against his decaying body, Matt stoically accepts most of his misfortunes, but the weary indignation of his decapitated head is a hoot.

Dead Streets isn't perfect. Although the prose is smooth, it sometimes slows with extra lines of description that don't add anything to the vision.

There are a few text errors, which are always irritating, and a sharper editing process would also have caught the occasional jarring repetition. And while the climb to the conclusion is a gruesome blast, the finale didn't deliver the sheer spectacle I'd expected.

Nevertheless, the action is tense and bloody, the wisecracks fast, and the whodunit handled with aplomb. Some thrillers can be too easily second-guessed, others firesomely complex, but this has the right measure. Rather pleasingly, it manages to let you solve a mystery *just* before it's revealed, while saving the odd twist to catch you unawares.

For the full-blooded experience, read *Nekropolis* first, but *Dead Streets* is a standalone novel that sprinkles in the essential back story as required. It's an effortless and engaging read, and fans of tongue-in-cheek macabre will devour it. I'm very much looking forward to book 3. Hell knows where Tim Waggoner's noisy, noir ghost train is heading next time around, but I'll definitely be reserving a seat at the front.



FEATURES

Cogs and Biro, Arts and Science

by *alasdair stuart*

Last week, I spent some time at the Final Year Show for Bradford College's art students. The sheer concentration of talent and different perspectives crammed into the Victorian grandeur of the Lister building was staggering, as I saw everything from delicate woodcut manga art to the history of one student's home town represented by a circle of ceramic standing stones. Then there was Ross Reynolds.

Or, to be more precise, first there was Ross Reynolds. Ross' art is the first thing you see, largely because his largest piece, *Ex Machine*, is huge. Standing seven and a half feet tall, it's an angel made of wire and motherboards and discarded electronics, all of which have been dissected and rebuilt as components of something larger, both literally and metaphorically. For a start, the *Ex Machine* angel towers over every passer by and there's a real sense of power and solidity to it. It's body spirals up out of a pile of discarded components, giving solidity to individual objects and a new structure and function to objects that have lost both. It's face is armour made of motherboards, there's a camera lens sticking out of the back of its head and its single wing, splayed back and up at an angle that mirrors the staircase bannister, is somewhere between the fragile structure of a fly's and the powerful, muscular limb of a bird of prey, its feathers keyboard inlays.

Physically then, *Ex Machine* is impressive but what it represents is genuinely extraordinary. As well as the liberation and repurposing of consumer electronics it manages to combine a very traditional form, the angel, with the all pervasive components of technology and in doing makes several points. The first is that science is our new religion, technology our new communion and by using it to create a traditional religious image, Ross is satirising our blind devotion to technology. After all, it should be pointed out, I'm writing this on a laptop, next to my mobile phone, ipod and digital camera whilst watching digital TV with my twitter account open in the background. Technology is everywhere, information is everywhere and unlimited information, unlimited access to technology? Is power and power, in enough volume, becomes divinity.

The second point the piece makes builds on this; that technology is not only the modern religion but the modern God. What the angel means seems to change based on what angle you view it from. From the front, it's poised for flight, gathering itself together to take off for a heaven that looks, I suspect, like a large, ordered junkyard. From the side, it seems at home, part of the building itself, the wing perfectly in line with the sweep of the stairs and leading the eye up and around to the Lister Building's skylight. From the top though, you can see the lens in the back of its head and suddenly it takes on a slightly more sinister tone. Ross has taped the angel off to avoid people walking through its base and, from above, that and the lens combine to create the impression of watchfulness, of containment. This is an angel that is *Ex Machine* but is not free, contained in a ward of hazard tape and looking, constantly, for an escape.

The last point though is the most interesting one and one that I can't help but find hopeful. There are video records, a laserdisc player, a couple of playstation controllers, CD Rom drives, a camera lens, six keyboards and countless other bits of technology in *Ex Machine*. All of them are obsolete and all of them are vital parts of something bigger than themselves, rescued from the scrapheap and ready to fly. Hope doesn't spring here, but, judging by *Ex Machine*, it's ready to soar.

Clearly, *Ex Machine* is a hugely evocative piece and, if it was the only piece Ross had produced it would have been impressive enough. However, the real meat of his exhibition lies in the hands of Roger, Monkey and Mr Go, who are, to all intents and purposes, his co-artists. However, these are co-artists Ross has built and designed for himself.

Roger, Monkey and Mr Go are devastatingly simple pieces of technology; little more than a power supply, a cog or component from another machine, a motor and some biro. They're noisy too, rattling and thudding around as they work but that's not the point. What's important is what they produce and how they produce it, beautiful, swirling, looping, delicate pieces that are evocative, intricate and never the same twice. This is the genius of Ross' work, the realisation that art is something that is just as valid when generated at one remove and that process itself can be art. The robots are very simple, deceptively so in fact, but being able to produce something so simple and so effective takes a surprising amount of work and a remarkable amount of trust on the part of the artist in both his ability and his tools. The robots aren't just simple, they're part of the art itself, extensions of Ross designed by him that create art that is begun by him but finished by them and their environment. I spent several hours around the exhibition, saw the pieces he, and they, produced and none of them were ever the same, each evolving as it was produced. Ross has a measure of control them, most notably in his early experiments with charcoal and felt pens instead of biro ink as well as the speed of the motor but, fundamentally, the robots are an extra stage in the process. Ross creates the robots, the robots create the art and the art is both Ross' and not Ross', created at a distance from him but through a process he's designed.

That's what continues to fascinate me about Ross' work, his ability to make the process of creation a work of art by itself. That process can be seen in the way that the *Ex Machine* angel is caught in the middle of forming, in the way the robots create pictures from the most commonplace items and in Ross' ability to see something beautiful in outdated electronics. Through him, they become something unique and beautiful, literally more than the sum of their parts and still part of a greater whole. It's fascinating to see and, if you get the chance, do so. You won't regret it.

More details of Ross' work can be found at: <http://www.bradfordcollege.ac.uk/culture-and-arts/arts-media-summer-show-2010/ba-hons-art-design/ross-reynolds>

Ross Reynolds' Etsy store can be found at: <http://www.etsy.com/shop/mechanamist>



Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Abaddon Books