

# Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

**PUBLISHER**  
LEE HARRIS

**MANAGING EDITOR**  
ALASDAIR STUART

**COMMISSIONING EDITOR**  
ELLEN J ALLEN

**REVIEWS EDITOR**  
PHIL LUNT

**ISSUE 119 · 26TH APR 2010**

## CONTENTS:

---

**FICTION:** *Power in the Blood* by Scott Roche

**REVIEW:** *God Emperor of Didcot*  
*The Digital Plague*  
*Doctor Who "The Time of Angels"*

**FEATURE:** *Roll the Bones* by J. R. Blackwell



## EDITORIAL:

---

by **alasdair stuart**

### Change!!s!Good!

It's an interesting experience living in England at the moment. The last few weeks have seen a general election called, the advent of televised political debate, an Icelandic volcano shutting down English airspace and the daleks being redesigned. I'm honestly surprised the civil defence sirens haven't gone off.

The thing is, a lot of the time, change is rubbish. It's difficult and painful and nasty and suddenly something that was familiar is either very different or not there at all. Our social and cultural map, the one we've spent our entire lives drawing is suddenly redrwn by someone else's hand, and if you're very lucky the only thing that will happen is that things look a little different. If you're not lucky, you find yourself adrift in a landscape that's shifted beneath you and you can't, as the song says, find your way home.

So how do we survive change? By accepting it and, in doing so, gaining perspective. The volcano will erupt again, the election, despite the crushing sensation of irrelevance and fear a lot of people have about English politics will happen (Hub, by the way, doesn't care how you vote. Just, please, vote.) and the Daleks are going to stay tall, brightly coloured and bustle-wearing for the foreseeable future. They'll still be archetypal villains, still be the Doctor's nemesis and, whatever happens, They'll still be the same shouty, death dealing mutants, just in slightly new casings.

Much like English politics.

# FICTION

---

## **Power in the Blood**

---

**by scott roche**

A grunt escaped Reggie's mouth as one last kick landed in his gut. He felt the cool pavement on his face and heard the cursing only as white noise. His body struggled to block out all sensation. Something lifted him up and the last thing he remembered was the world turning red and the taste of metal in his mouth.

He woke up in his bed at home, every part of him aching. Surrounded by the plain, but fastidiously clean wooden furniture and the trinkets of his quickly retreating boyhood, he was at peace.

Mom sat at the foot of his bed hands folded in her lap, saying the rosary over him beautiful, like Botticelli's virgin. "Who did this to you son?" She leaned forward.

His voice came out strong and clear. "I can't say." It hurt his jaw to talk, but years of getting his ass kicked by bullies and more than once by his father had given him intimate knowledge of pain's language. He didn't think he had any broken bones, just plenty of bruises. The mirror behind his mom revealed mussed brown curls, a few bruises on his face and a rainbow on his upper torso. "Can you leave so I can get dressed?"

Doris knew that further questioning would be pointless. Every time her son came home like this he demanded distance. "I'm sorry Reggie." The thin wooden door closed behind her.

He looked at the clean school uniform that Mom had draped over his chair. The coat of arms for St. Andrew's in stark contrast to the navy blazer. It was the best school in the city and he was one of its brightest students. He loved the knowledge that it gave him and he saw the brutality as a small price to pay. It made him angry, but he used the anger, the humiliation, the pain to help him focus and push through. Eighteen more months and he would be free of its bonds. College beckoned him, a cool and soothing mistress. The distance seemed insurmountable on days like this.

The ritual of showering and dressing gave him time to prepare mentally for what lay ahead. Whatever it was he felt sure it would be unpleasant. He started every day by giving himself over to visions of the violence he wanted to do to his enemies. He knew realistically he'd never have the guts to carry a knife and use it over and over again in the precise ways he imagined, but somehow it took some of the feeling of helplessness away. Maybe one day he would just snap and in a blink they would all be gone.

Toothpaste and dried blood mixed in his mouth as he finished the last steps. The taste had an electricity about it that he enjoyed. He remembered getting nosebleeds as a kid and relishing that coppery smell and the brilliant redness of it. If that made him some kind of freak, he lived with it.

Ten minutes later he was out the door, chain link fences topped by razor wire flanking him. Beat up, spray painted cars crowded him as though vying for their own slice of the sidewalk.

"Sum, sumus, es, estis, est, sunt." He muttered under his breath.

"Hey kid, want a little somethin' to get you thorough school?" A grating voice called to Reggie from a nearby alley.

Reggie kept on going, oblivious to the dealer, concentrating solely on the upcoming test.

The man caught up with him and tried to get his attention. Persistence almost always paid off. "Hey, you. Come on, the first one's free."

Reggie looked up. He felt the warmth of anger push up through him. "Leave me alone."

"Never mind kid."

A slight tremor in the dealer's voice and the whiff of fear pleased something in Reggie.

The school sat an island of carefully tended green surrounded by wrought iron fences. It was protected from the encroaching rot of the city by reputation more than anything else, but graffiti on one gate post showed how tenuous that was. Once inside, throngs of children chatting and laughing swallowed him and he lost himself in the anonymity of a crowd. No one stared at him, not that he noticed. There was no laughter, at least not to his face.

English, Math, Latin all came and went. The last brought sweet Margaret and her pink silk panties. Boys were almost always guaranteed that preview to Paradise that more than one had actually entered or so the bathroom stall said. That view was afforded by the seats in concentric circles radiating out from Father Tim. Lost in thought of what lay beneath the plaid kept the droning from driving him to sleep. So lost was he that it wasn't until the laughter was fairly loud that he looked up.

"Enjoying your reverie, Master Stevens?" Father Tim stood at his right shoulder. "Penance for lust can be quite severe. Perhaps you need to go straight to Chapel after this class and seek out Father Donovan?" The smugness on his face had once been love for these boys and girls.

Reggie felt the heat ooze up his neck and over his ears, the blush making it to the roots of his hair. Margaret and her friends were laughing. He wanted to stand up and call her every dirty name he could think of. The boys around him laughed, thankful it wasn't them. He wanted to lash out and remind them of their own sin. Instead he sat in humiliation, as the teacher regained control of his class.

The Chapel sat at the end of the marble floored hall, lurking in the shadows. Donovan always creeped him out and he had a feeling that the old man would be all too interested in the lurid details of Reggie's fantasy. Instead he headed outside. There he could find fifteen minutes of cool air and maybe a smoke. Strictly speaking it was against the rules, but it was one of the many unenforced ones here.

An oak supported him as he thought of smashing Father Tim's head again and again into the brick walk at his feet. That and the cheap tobacco smoke warmed his core. Once again though, his meditations were interrupted.

"Enjoy yourself you little fucker?" A gruff voice snapped at him.

Reggie looked into the face of one of his more frequent and violent tormentors, Don.Wilson. The act actually required him to look down as Reggie was close to six foot four inches and Don was a more average five ten. Both boys weighed in at one-eighty, though and Don's weight came from muscle. "Sorry?"

"Tryin' to get a look at my woman's cooze." He stepped up and poked a finger into Reggie's sternum. "Are we gonna have to have a repeat of yesterday's lesson?"

From a place that Reggie often wished he could plug up, he said "I wasn't aware that the pussy in question was owned by **one** man." He immediately regretted that as Don's beefy hand grabbed him by his hair.

"What was that?" His other hand punctuated the question with a slap. "I didn't hear you." A backhand to the face came out of nowhere.

Impotent rage bubbled up. Tears distilled Reggie's anger and shame. "No." He answered Don's first question.

Don released his hair. "Damn shame. I was lookin' forward to kickin' your skinny ass again." The permanent smirk on his face cranked up a notch.

Reggie straightened and ran the back of his arm over his nose. Mucus and tears stained the navy of his jacket. "I wasn't aware that you needed a reason." He felt like he was ten years old again. Don had that effect on him.

Don tensed to strike, but was stopped by an adult voice. "Problem boys?" Sister Fran asked already knowing the answer. She had only been teaching here for eighteen months though and still held hope for them.

The boys looked at her. She was the youngest nun there and one that most boys at Andrews spent a good deal of time fantasizing about. Not so much because she was sexy, more because she wasn't a dried apple in a wimple. Yet. "No ma'am." Came the answer in chorus.

"I'm afraid that I don't believe you." She pointed her slim, pale finger at Don. "I saw what you did, Donald. Perhaps you think you're immune because of your status on our football team. I can assure you that that's not the case. You will both report to Coach Feaney at day's end and he will extract an apology." Her look said that she would brook no disagreement.

Reggie screamed inside his head. *This will only make it worse! Don't do this to me!* But he only nodded, taking in the set of Don's jaw and anticipating a visit to the hospital.

She stepped up to Reggie. "And as for you Reginald, you are a fine boy. You don't have to take this from the likes of him." She produced a plain white cotton handkerchief from her skirt pocket and handed it over.

He inhaled before he blew and caught a whiff of something that wasn't quite perfume. He felt hungry, aroused, and confused all at once. Sufficiently cleaned he nodded thanks and tucked the cloth in his back pocket.

"Now, I'll be watching you both for the rest of break time. Don't make it worse on yourselves." She straightened her already immaculate smock and turned. Both boys watched her walk off.

Don turned first. "You're a fuckin' lucky twist. After we deal with the coach I'll deal with you. And come graduation I'm dealin' with her." A short punch to Reggie's stomach signaled the end of their conversation.

Reggie managed to keep his breakfast down and when he regained his breath he finished classes for the day. The whole day was filled with gut churning dread. The Sister's words echoed over and over in his head and she was right. He should have stood up to the bullies years ago, but entropy was a powerful force. He tried to placate himself with his fantasies, but neither that nor the weird fragrance from Fran's handkerchief helped.

Afternoon arrived and per his nature Reggie was there on the dot. Don had come early and the coach, a man in his fifties and not at all built like most aging jocks, stood in front of them. His "office" was the gym and at present it was dominated by the boxing ring.

Feaney ran his nicotine stained fingers through thick, white hair. "Boys, it has come to my intention that there's a problem between you two. We're gonna solve that problem right here and right now." He looked at Don. "Sister Fran wants you to leave this boy alone and wants you off the team if you don't. Neither of us want that." He slapped the athlete on his thick chest hard enough for both boys to wince.

His gaze shifted to Reggie. Water pale eyes bored into him. "She tells me that you won't stand up for yourself. Inexcusable. We'll settle this the old fashioned way. You're gonna beat the crap out of each other and then after that there'll be no more."

Back to Don. "You so much as lay a finger on him after today and I'll bury you under the field myself. Now dress out and glove up." He pointed to two pair of boxing gloves on his desk. The boys knew better than to argue.

A few minutes later and they were squared off in the boxing ring. They had both been taught the basics, as had every male at Andrews. Reggie took a defensive posture, waiting for the blows.

"Come on, you big pussy. I'll give you one freebie. After that I'll give you a pounding like your daddy used to." Don stood with his red gloved hands at his sides.

Coach called from outside the ring, voice echoing in the expanse. "Go ahead boy. Take it."

Reggie brought his hand back for a big haymaker. He focused every ounce of his rage, hatred, and fear behind it. It split the air and missed Don by a quarter inch, spinning Reggie around and causing him to fall.

Don nearly doubled over from laughter. He toed Reggie. "Get up ya fag. My turn."

A second later and Reggie had latched on to Don's leg. Don thought he was going to beg until he felt a sharp pain in his calf.

Hot, blood squirted down Reggie's throat along with the chunk of meat. He had just intended to throw Don off his feet, but the bite came without a thought. Don fell all right and fell screaming. Reggie climbed on top of him and began to beat him. With every blow that fell Reggie felt stronger. "My. Father. Beat.

Me. Like. This. Asshole.” Every word was punctuated by the smack of leather on flesh.

It didn't go on for long before Coach pulled him off. He was certain that he was being shaken, but all he could feel was the satisfying joy of hitting and the warm stickiness on his face.

The week finished out and Reggie was surprised that he was still enrolled. Putting his books away after the end of a grueling day, he was lost in visions of the hell awaiting him when he felt the punch on his shoulder. He swung around and without thinking cocked his fist.

“Whoa bud, don't kill me.” Jack Wilkes held up his hands in mock defense.

Reggie relaxed. “Don't sneak up on me man. You know better.” His voice had a dangerous edge in spite of the fact that this was his best friend.

Jack shook his head making his hair, died robin egg blue, dance. “S'right. Don't fuck with 'Hannibal'. Isn't that what they're calling you?”

“I hadn't heard.” He had heard and it actually gave him a small rush. He shoved Jack's shoulder. “Sides better Hannibal and they give me some space than being tagged as the school fairy.”

“What the hell was that about anyway? Taking a hunk out of the man's leg? I hated on him more than anyone and I'm glad they kicked him out and not you, but wow.” Jack shook his head.

Reggie collapsed against the bank of orange metal. “I wish the hell I knew.” He looked up at his lithe friend. “We've known each other since third grade, right?”

“Yeah, old Sister Dragonface.” They laughed together, ringing a little hollow in the empty halls. “What's on your mind?”

“I liked it, the blood I mean.” The look on his face held a mixture of fear, revulsion, and excitement. The laughter in both boys died.

“That's more than a little sick and creepy.” Jack sat down hard, blowing out as he did. “But I'm no stranger to either. Look, we haven't hung out in a long time. You do your things I do mine.” He rested a delicate hand on Reggie's shoe.

“Yeah?” Reggie's brow tensed.

Jack shook his head again. “Relax, I ain't dumpin' you. All I'm saying is that I may not be much help. This isn't forth grade and we aren't as tight as we used to be. You need help man and I don't think I can give it.” He squeezed Reggie's shoulder.

Reggie stood quickly, shaking off the caring hand. “I'm not asking for help. I don't need help from you or anyone.”

Jack noticed that Reggie's voice had dropped an octave. He looked up. “Okay, okay. Relax. I'm not saying that you should go to therapy. God knows it hasn't helped me. My parents are trying to use it to scare me straight.”

The laughter came back to Reggie's face briefly, dispelling the presence that had just been there. “You? You've slept with half the cheerleading squad, the female half.”

Jack was relieved to see the humanity come back. “Keep your voice down. I have a rep to maintain. It's an easy in if they think they're 'converting' you. Anyway, you need to talk to someone about this thing. I've noticed things about you over the last few months. You're more morose than you've ever been and that's sayin' something. Promise me you will.”

Reggie sighed and helped Jack to his feet. “I promise.”

“I don't buy it, but I can't make you.” He squeezed his friend's hand. The bell rang, sending both boys to the next class.

Reggie really wanted to do just what Jack asked of him, at least part of him did. Finding excuses not to was far too easy and schoolwork consumed him. The year was coming to a close and everything began to pile up. That seemed to be therapy in itself though.

Under just such a burden in the library and steadily trying to dig his way out, he was interrupted by Lisa Taylor. A fellow bookworm, he had noticed her only peripherally. She was pretty enough with her milky skin and curly red hair, but in a way that was disguised by glasses, braces, and gawkiness all of which could pass to reveal a real beauty one day.

"Hey Reggie," she chirped. She sat her stack of books down near him.

"Oh, hey Lisa." He looked up from his work. "'Sup?"

She smiled warmly. "I just wanted to thank you for something. This is going to sound awful and if you tell anyone I'll deny it." She came around the desk and crouched by him, her hand on his knee. "I think what you did to Don was great. He's been making me miserable for years and I'm glad he's gone."

Her proximity brought with it a familiar odor that jolted and intoxicated him. "Thanks. It was... nothing." The last was almost interrogative.

She sat down beside him. "Anyway, this is going to sound weird and if you don't want to that's okay, but I wanted to ask you to the school dance." She held up a hand. "I know I'm nothing special to look at and maybe you already have a date, but how about it?"

Reggie put his hand over hers. "I think you're very pretty and you smell great and I'm.. it.. it's great that you asked. I'd have never gotten up the courage to do it."

"So that's a yes then?" She looked exhilarated.

He nodded perhaps a little too enthusiastically. "Absolutely!"

"Good. I'll pick you up Friday night." She stood and gathered her books.

He raised an eyebrow. "You have a car?"

"I sure do and maybe after the dance we could hang out, ya know, just the two of us." She winked and swirled around, walking away.

Confused by the promise and his sudden turn of fortune, but willing to go with the flow, he tried in vain to return to his studies.

Reggie looked in the mirror and tried for the tenth time to get his tie straight. His mom had tried to teach him and he had even looked up online how to do it but it wasn't easy. For the hundredth time this month he wished that his dad was still around. A gentle knock interrupted his striving.

"Are you almost ready son?" Dorris asked. She had been walking on eggshells around her son for a while, but the last week he had been, different somehow, better.

"Yeah mom." The tie was about as good as it was going to get. "Come on in."

The door to the little bathroom opened. Dorris was in her waitress uniform, white synthetic fabric, draping over her bony frame. "You're so handsome son."

Reggie smiled. He was genuinely happy. He hugged his mom, practically swallowing her in his arms. "Thanks mom." She was so thin he felt like he could break her in half.

A high pitched honk came from outside. Dorris broke the hug and held her son at arm's length. "Have fun, my sweet boy. Don't rush home and be safe." Safe from what she couldn't say. He had grown up so fast.

"Bye mom, see you later tonight." Reggie ran out of the bathroom, grabbing the corsage and his jacket from the rickety dining room table.

Lisa sat outside in a little blue VW. As he got in he reeled from her perfume. "You have to tell me what you're wearing. It smells fantastic."

She looked at him a little oddly. "Well thanks, but I'm not wearing anything. I'm allergic to most scents."

"Oh... Well you smell great and look even better." His face warmed and he smiled. She did look great in her short, white silk dress. He had on a dark gray suit that was his general go to attire for weddings, funerals, and as it turned out school dances.

"Thank you again. You look pretty awesome too." They drove to the dance and entered a world of blurred color and sound.

Neither of them danced well. They managed to get through a few quick numbers without embarrassing themselves too much. Slow dances found them clinging to each other.

Lisa's eye sparkled. She laughed at his jokes and seemed to get all of the lame book and movie references he made. "I don't know why we never went out on a date before." She said as they sat drinking stop sign red punch.

"I do," He winked "because I'm blind or stupid or both. Thank you for opening my eyes." He almost winced, because even in his head it sounded cheesy, but the look on her face told him that she disagreed. She kissed him quickly, but equally softly eliciting a few whistles and laughs that neither of them heard.

They danced the last dance together and were the final couple to leave the floor. They walked slowly back to Lisa's Bug. "I've got a surprise for you."

"Li..."

She put her hand on his chest. "Shh. I want this to be a special night." She pulled a backpack out from the front hatch and motioned him to follow. They went back behind the school where the Cross Country team practiced. It had been roped off because parts of the track had been washed out during a rainstorm last month.

Woods, part what had once been a full blown park, crouched on the other side of the track field. After a few minutes of tramping through the underbrush thick from neglect, they arrived at a clearing. "I found this spot while taking some pictures for the yearbook." She pulled a blanket from the backpack and spread it out. "Sit down."

Reggie could hardly believe this was happening. He was about to make out with this cute girl. He did as he was told, head swimming.

She straddled him, causing her dress to ride up revealing lacy underwear and stockings. Moonlight made her clothes shimmer.

"You're an angel." He whispered. Unbidden and for the first time tonight, thoughts crawled from his subconscious. Ways that this angel could be sullied, humiliated. He pushed them down, or tried to.

She shook her head. "Not tonight. No good girls here." They began kissing with the passion and sloppiness of two amateurs. Hands, eager to explore places only dreamt about, went where they could. Reggie found himself growling softly and his fingers moved to the hem of her panties seeking what lay beneath.

She stopped him. "We can't go all the way. I'm sorry, I'm a little... messy." Her embarrassment was evident even in the moonlight.

Clouds began to mask the light. Reggie shook his head. "Messy? You're beautiful."

Frustration flitted across her face. "No, I'm on my period."

Reggie understood. "Okay, that's okay. We'll do whatever you want."

Relief brought her smile back. "Let's drink a toast and cool off a bit." She turned to her backpack and dug around. "I brought some special punch."

He rocked back and tried to bring his hormones under control. A thought bubbled up like sewer gas. *Little whore led me on. Brings us out here and then this?* His hands began to shake a bit. He held them up and saw something on the fingers of his right hand. It was hard to see in the pale white light, but he could smell. Under the odor of her arousal, was the scent of blood. His fingers found their way into his mouth and he tasted her. The blood's character was different, but he felt that same hunger ignite. He wanted more.

Lisa tried to scream as he grabbed her from behind, but the hands around her throat and the wailing and gnashing of teeth stopped her.

Don and his running buddies Joey and Neal heard the noises coming from the clearing. They had tried to follow the lovers, but got lost. He looked at the jocks and winked. "Guess our boy is gettin' lucky. That's okay, I don't mind sloppy seconds."

"I thought we was just gonna beat him up." Joey didn't feel good about this whole thing, but he'd been friends with Don since kindergarten. Backing out now wasn't an option. Those noises reminded him more of his dog eating a squirrel than anything else. He clutched the bat to his chest like a talisman and followed.

"You guys can't puss out on me now. This'll be fun." Don sounded like he wasn't sure who he was trying to convince.

Neal found a little more sense. "Fuck this man, it ain't worth losing my spot on the team." He turned and started loping back towards the school's lights.

Even Don paused as the noises got louder. But he fingered the pistol stuck in the front waistband of his

pants and focused on his anger. That pussy would pay for messing him up. The three moved through the trees like uncertain specters through a child's fever dream.

Reggie's sight cleared and even as it did he wished himself blind. Lisa lay in a twist of crimson cloth, her throat torn open and her face twisted in a look of horror. He couldn't deny the taste in his mouth or the joy it had brought him. He wanted to puke it all back up again. He wanted to be lying there in her place. But the power that hummed in his brain and filled his body couldn't be denied. "I'm sorry.... So sorry."

A branch broke off a few feet to his left and he heard voices. The moonlight had come back full strength and he felt naked and ashamed. He could do nothing about the body. The thought of being caught and denied access to this was too much. He leapt ten feet straight up to a nearby branch and crouched. The part of his brain that was still Reggie was amazed and the whisper that grew ever louder promised this and more.

The silver disk in the sky painted the death scene. Don pulled his gun free, taking an inch of skin from his stomach in the process.

Joey nearly fainted and merely vomited between his shoes instead.

"What the fuck!" Don said looking around for Reggie, thinking whatever had done this had also gotten him. It wasn't out of any sense of concern, but he figured that it would give him some lead time to run.

A sound like falling into dried underbrush came from behind him and he turned to see what he thought was Joey crouching over. His brain registered a second later, that it was Reggie standing on the crumpled body of his friend. He watched as the boy, who seemed no larger, pulled Joey's head from his shoulders and sucked at the strange fruit in his hands.

Don stepped back and pointed the gun. "Don't make me shoot you." He thought maybe if he could make it to the shadows at least he could run.

Reggie stepped forward and bathed in the light of the moon seemed to be carved from carnelian. His face, hair, and remaining clothes stained rust. "Oh, shoot me. You know you want to." Came the unnaturally thick, low voice.

"You killed her..." Don tried to focus the will to carry out his threat. "and Joey."

"I sure did. It was a shame about Lisa." His left hand moved faster than Don could see and pain shot up Don's right arm. Somehow he was holding the gun and something else. "You and your boys? Not so much."

Don realized that the other thing was his right hand. He saw blood fountaining from it. He watched, his body held prisoner by something, as what was Reggie came forward and drank deeply from it. Things quickly went black for him. The last word he heard was "Delicious."

It was easier to see now. His latest victim lay crumpled like an empty sack. The one called Neal had lost its important fluids into the dirt. He needed more food. The changes taking place in this new body were using up energy almost as fast as he could provide it.

His right hand dipped into a pocket and pulled out a once clean square of linen. Even through all of the contamination he could still smell the good sister.

*No!* Reason and conscience clawed at the back of his brain. He remembered stories of people buried alive and of the marks left on their casket lid as they struggled from freedom. His struggles were as useless and no less painful. For right now he wasn't in charge, the thirst was.

Running through the night air on feet that would have tripped over one another only days ago, part of Reggie exulted in the power and speed. He didn't make a sound, at least not one discernible to his ears. Thoughts about what he had done in only the last few minutes and the changes he had undergone over a week fought for his consciousness.

He didn't love the girl, *Lisa* he tried to remind himself, but she didn't deserve that end. He deserved this power though. After a life of abuse, defeat, self-loathing, this was his time.

*No.* He screamed at himself. *Not at that cost.*

He chuckled, not quite out loud. Human life was cheap. That's what everything around him said, no



screamed just as loudly as that voice inside his head. This new life was much dearer.

The clearing from wood's edge to stone buildings was free of witnesses. Fran lived at the school, as did most of the staff serving as dorm parents to the residential students. The building they were housed in was an old rambling thing built from native stone, the oldest on campus. His senses lead him to the right side of the building. His eyes crawled up to a window.

Pale light struggled to make its way out, blocked by grime and wire mesh. In spite of the greensward surrounding the school it was still in the middle of a dangerous city, now even more dangerous. He took off his blood soaked shoes and peeled away his socks. The grass was cool, almost cold under his bear feet. There was no one around to see him scramble up the rough wall. Fingers and toes found easy purchase and in seconds he could see her.

The rich smell came through her pores and found egress through a crack left open for night breezes. She kneeled at the foot of her bed, praying to the bloody man above.

He could easily smash the glass to get to her, but that would bring a great deal of undue attention to the scene. "Sister." He called weakly through the opening. When that wasn't sufficient to rouse her, he tried louder. "Sister Fran."

She turned to the window, a look of confusion running across her face. She was so beautiful. Her wimple had been removed, revealing flowing, dark auburn hair. "Reggie?" She cranked the window open further. "Come in. What on earth are you doing climbing up the building? You could get killed."

He crawled through, if he were any broader that would have been impossible. "Thanks Sister." He saw that the only light came from candles placed on nearly every flat surface.

She took in his appearance. "Dear Lord, what happened? You're covered in blood." She turned to a tiny sink in the corner and wet a towel.

He leered at her, while her back was turned. "I got in a little scrape with Don in the woods." Innocence painted his face under the bloody mask when she turned back to him. He wanted this feast to last a little while. "He had a knife. There was so much bl... bl... blood." He sobbed and crumpled to the floor, letting a little of his remaining humanity to the surface.

Fran looked at the window and then back at the boy sobbing near the foot of her bed. What felt like a cold breeze blew through her soul. She fingered her rosary and stepped up with the cloth. "Well I had hoped you two would be done after he was... after he left." She held out the wet towel as one would meat to a rabid dog.

He took it in his right hand. "Thanks sister. I think we're done now, he and I."

Her eyes tracked his hands as he wiped the blood away. "Why come to me?"

A smile threatened the corners of his mouth. He fought it down, his soul screaming for her to run away. "You always seemed to care so much for us. I thought you could help me. I'm afraid that I've done something bad."

"I love you children." She squatted so she could look into his eyes. "I'll be glad to help you. You just tell me what you need."

His eyes flashed. The nearness of her and that scent buried any idea of waiting. "I need you."

The hunger there scared her. She knew what the boys whispered about her. It flattered her and even excited her in a way she tried to deny. But she didn't think this was that sort of hunger. "Just wait now." She stood and backed away as far as the room would let her. "I don't know what's wrong with you Reginald, but whatever you've done can be fixed."

"Fixed." Anger crept into his voice. "I don't need anything to be fixed." He stood in a fluid motion. "I'm just fine." He pulled her into a lover's embrace. "More than fine." He looked into her eyes wanting to see her fear more clearly. Her body seemed cold in comparison the furnace his own had become.

Mentally she chanted the twenty-third psalm and felt His presence. "You're not fine, not at all." Stress brought out her brogue. "You need help. He can help you." Her eyes went to the crucifix.

"Him?" Hatred suffused him, more powerful for the moment than the hunger. He spun the petite woman onto her bed. "He can't do a thing for me, or for you." He reached down to rip the front of her smock away and touched the gold there. Skin sizzled and he hissed in pain. Swear words, more ancient than the Latin heard in these halls filled the room.

"Perhaps I was wrong." She sat up, tears filling the corners of her eyes. "Maybe it is too late." She began to sing the *Kyrie* and genuflecting.

As she sang Reggie felt a wave of cold air wash out from her and watched as light began to fill the room, eclipsing the candles' weak illumination. A new level of agony coursed through his body. His consciousness swam back to the surface and gained control. Where Sister Fran and the bed had once been stood a creature both beautiful and terrible in a way that no words he had could describe. The light consumed everything and the pain and the music swelled to a peak and just when he thought he could take no more everything went black.

Father Tim ran down the stairs in his robe and slippers. The Mother Superior had called him unable to say anything other than, "Come to Fran's room quickly," she said. A group of nuns stood outside her door praying fervently but apparently none had dared enter.

"Sister Mary Louise, what's going on here?" Tim put on his sternest face. Being awoken at two in the morning did not put him in his best mood.

The house mother genuflected. "Father, we heard the most... unholy noises coming from Fran's room. I called Herself and she called you."

Tim looked around for the Mother Superior and didn't see her. Sister Katherine was many things but brave wasn't one. "So no one has called the police yet?" He was satisfied by the shake of her head. He wanted to make sure of what had gone on before involving the authorities. There had been no whiff of scandal in St. Andrews for over a century and he'd see that it would stay that way.

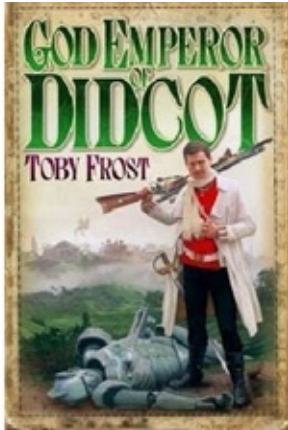
As noisy as the sisters said it had been there was no sound coming from behind the dark wooden door now. He tried it but it wouldn't budge. He put his shoulder to it and practically fell in. Candlelight made seeing any details difficult, but he was fairly sure they were both dead and that it had been peaceful. Fran was cradling the boy, more beautiful in repose than any of the great masters could have accomplished.

He closed the door, sighing under his breath. Well at least this one would be easy enough to sweep under the rug.



## God Emperor of Didcot

*reviewed by martin willoughby*



**By Toby Frost**  
**Myrmidon Books**  
**rrp £7.99**

Space Captain Smith is back...accept it.

Toby Frost's second book, *God Emperor of Didcot*, re-introduces us to Isambard Smith and the less-than-intrepid crew of the *John Pym*. Isambard is just as brave, dashing and stupid as before, Suruk still enjoys decapitating his enemies and taking their skulls as trophies and Polly is still a frustrated ex-sex toy with the courage of... well, she has no courage. On top of all this, Gerald the hamster has survived and is still merrily running around in his cage despite Suruk's attempts to eat him.

There are also some new characters in this insane universe. First up are the Deepspace Operations Group. A unit so elite and gung-ho that there are only five of them and are led by a total nutcase. They are brave, not very good-looking and relatively stupid: ideal characteristics for people whose job is to risk death in impossible military actions. The big surprise is that they have stayed alive so long.

We also get to meet Suruk's family, not that Suruk is pleased with the idea. His once proud warrior race have, it seems, settled down as doctors, lawyers and architects amongst other professions. Added to his sense of embarrassment is that the holy table where war councils used to meet and plan their carnage has been turned into a National Trust site run by a jobsworth.

The story itself concerns tea, the drink of the British Space Empire and provider of sustenance to the soul of Britain. It turns out that the scientists of this future age proved that the decline of the British Empire in the 20th century was down to a change in British drinking habits. It was fewer cups of tea and the growth of coffee drinking that killed the Empire, not, as we tend to think now, the growth of national movements, a declining British economy and two world wars.

In order to keep the British upper lip, among other things, stiff, the planet of Didcot has been turned over entirely to tea production. This is something the Ghast Empire wants to destroy and, thereby, win the war against the British Space Empire by depriving them of their sustenance. Naturally they fail, despite an impressive, multi-legged, metallic war machine that appears near the end. Now where have I read about that before... hmm... can't remember.

Needless to say, Suruk's family return to the old ways, even if his brother wears a woollen jumper into battle. There is also a skirmish with some odd looking children with strange eyes that remind of something by John Wyndham... can't think what though.

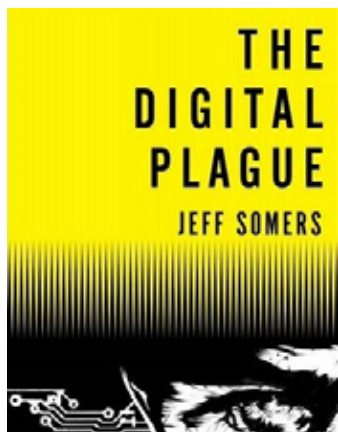
The Ghast commander, 462, continues his sadistic treatment of his minions by eating the pulped remains of those who have failed him. He also raises to power the God-Emperor to rule Didcot at his behest... then kills him.

By the end of the book Polly has been laid by Rick Dreokit (the human-hunting android), Captain Smith has, finally, been laid by Rhianna, Suruk's family have almost returned to their warrior ways and Suruk has added to his impressive skull collection.

Most of all, you'll be pleased to hear, Gerald the hamster is still there at the end.

# The Digital Plague

reviewed by david gullen



by Jeff Somers  
Orbit  
rrp £7.00

Having one of your protagonists inoculated with unknown nano-technology seems like becoming a trope of near-future noir, though volunteer or no you could argue it's either a revision of the were-myth, bringing personal transformation, or the personal extinction by internal consumption from monsters like those in *Alien*, *Shivers* and *Slither*. Avery Cates is a bad man, he's killed lots of people, dozens of them, and now somebody wants to pay him back. He's kidnapped, forcibly injected with nanotech and released. It seems to be the least of his problems but it's not, it soon becomes a problem of deadly interest to the entire world.

Somers takes Cates on a high-stakes, high-octane non-stop roller-coaster ride through a grimy and deeply dystopian future where the disparate arms of a failed world government battle for control with each other and the mad remnants of a cyborg revolution. Meanwhile the surgically modified beautiful people blithely continue their hermetic lives sealed inside the restaurant complexes and tower block condos among the urban wastelands of future war. Somers sets about killing them all.

Cates is not just a bad man, he's a nasty man. He kills (and he keeps count), he beats people up and hi sidekick is a fifteen-year old girl soldier who likes to stab people for laughs. Sometimes at night Cates thinks about all the people he's killed. He's not tortured by them, they don't file past in the grey twilight with accusing stares, but he does think about them. For a point of view character he's deeply dislikeable, Somers makes empathy a hard job with any of his characters, including Cates. Of them all only the cop Happling shows the faintest signs of morality – he only kills Shitheads.

In this sense it's a juvenile action thriller in an action thriller world where hover transport disconcertingly tends to flip upside down and crash without a pilot, Cates is not slowed down by a broken leg, and what is happening is far more important than why. Cates move through a relentless sequence of climaxes, cliff-hangers and revelations. One of the rules of writing is that each solution causes a worse problem and Somers has learned this lesson well. If you like nuanced, character-driven story telling you may prefer to read elsewhere. If you like your action fast, dirty, profane and apocalyptic this tightly plotted thriller is for you, and there are plenty of open endings for a similarly styled sequel.

# Doctor Who: "The Time of Angels"

reviewed by scott harrison



Written by Steven Moffat  
Starring Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, Alex Kingston  
Directed by Adam Smith  
Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> April, BBC1

We all love a good scare, there's no denying it. *Doctor Who* fans more than most. Back in the mid-1970s when *Doctor Who* was on at 5.45, sandwiched between the football results and *Larry Grayson's Generation Game*, it almost toppled beneath the overwhelming scrutiny and damning criticism of Mary Whitehouse and her National Viewers' and Listeners' Association finger-wagging

brigade. Whitehouse objected to the steadily increasing violence and horrific content that, under the creative partnership of producer Philip Hinchcliffe and script editor Robert Holmes, had the children of Britain diving for safety behind their collective sofas. One complaint from Whitehouse even elicited a written apology from the then Director General of the BBC and the episode in question was quickly re-edited for all future transmissions

Whether it did the little blighters any harm or not has been a matter for much debate between psychologists, teachers, parents and media watchdogs for the past three decades, even causing Melvin Bragg's *The Lively Arts* programme to devote a whole hour-long documentary in 1977 examining this very issue.

But here we are, nearly forty years later, with *Doctor Who* once more being transmitted in the traditional Saturday teatime slot and it still retains the power to unnerve, shock and – on occasion - terrify.

The Weeping Angels are back, fresh from their double whammy of topping both *Doctor Who Magazine's* Mighty 200 poll for *Blink* (2<sup>nd</sup> place) and *Doctor Who Adventures'* Scariest Monsters poll (1<sup>st</sup> place) , in episode one of series five's first two-part adventure. Reunited with the mysterious River Song, the Doctor soon finds himself materialising on the alien world of Alfava Metraxis, where he leads the hunt for the last of the Weeping Angels somewhere in the catacombs below the flaming ruins of the starship *Byzantium*...or so he thinks. Beneath the surface of the planet, in the Maze of the Dead, hundreds of decaying stone statues lay in wait for the first of the humans to arrive, ready to feed, before finally emerging from their centuries-long hibernation.

Only four episodes in and we are back on familiar ground, once more the show is back to its atmospheric, heart-pounding best. Although easily still the best show on British television by far, series five has suffered somewhat with a constant stream of badly misjudged aesthetic decisions and a slight dip in special effects quality. In *The Eleventh Hour* it was the unconvincing eye-spaceships and the bizarre 'inside the Doctor's head' sequence, *The Beast Below* had the rather poorly realised Space Whale, the totally unspaceship-like spaceship interior and the out of place funfair men, while *Victory of the Daleks* had its not-quite-as-good-as-*Empty-Child* London matt painting and those awful new Dalek designs. Minor niggles, yes, but every episode has had them. Up till now.

Packed with all the pace, excitement and directorial verve that has been strangely lacking in the previous three episodes *The Time of Angels* actually feels like an episode of *Doctor Who* from series four - a story that could easily have been written for the Tenth Doctor and Donna – coming across as some marvellous combination of *Blink* and *Silence in the Library*.

It is still a matter of great debate in this reviewer's house as to the success of Amy Pond as a companion. Jump online and you will no doubt find dozens of reviews, forums and fan sites falling over themselves to describe how great she looks in a short-skirted police uniform, and proclaim her as 'eye candy', but whether they think she's actually any good or not is seldom written about. At the moment she's failed to impress this reviewer, with her performance in these four episodes coming over very much like a bargain basement Donna Noble, however I shall hold my comments until I've seen all thirteen episodes.

For now though, the Doctor and co are trapped beneath the surface of Alfava Metraxis, the lights are failing and the Weeping Angels are closing in...

Just what is the Doctor's plan?

# FEATURES

## roll the bones

by *j.r.blackwell*

### YOU WILL NEVER PLAY LIKE COMMON PEOPLE

The common sense adage that I hear about this all too often is that you should never, ever, base a novel off of a game. Because no one wants to hear about your stupid character. No one cares about what spells your Lord of the Rings Wizard knockoff can cast. Nobody wants to hear about the back story of your rouge, and how she learned her stealthy skills. No one cares about why your elf left the lands of the freakin' Sparkle Queen and came to prance around humans. No one, not one person outside of you and your roleplaying troupe wants to know about how you and your friends saved a Princess from a Fire Red Mintbreath Dragon. Your game, they argue, is cliché, and no one enjoys it but you.

Guess what? Those people, the people that think that you shouldn't base a novel off of a game? Those people are playing in bad games. Their games have stupid plots with terrible characters and I don't want to hear about them either. But you know what? YOU, my friend, you do not play in a stupid game, with cardboard cutout characters and a flimsy plot. You play in a game that freakin' rocks. Your game has characters with depth, an innovative plot, and twists and turns that surprise and delight. Your friends come up with dialogue that punches in the throat. You are a storyteller that doesn't rely on convention, and Your players take things in directions that surprise and delight you. Your antagonists are multifaceted, your non-player characters have motives and desires of their own. Your story is rich with details. When you describe a room, that room lights up in the minds of your players. When you write your character background, it's got tragedy, drama, and hope in that mix. Your characters are ocean deep, and mile wide.

Your game is about soldiers during the Vietnam war, and how one man tries to hide his homosexuality under a mask of hyper masculinity. In your game, the village wise woman, young for her position, has to fend off the sexual advances of her best friend's husband in order to keep a place of respect in the tribe. In your game, it's a theatre troupe who have to save the princess from a tyrant, using only a bag of costumes and their wit. Your game has a dragon, but he only wants to have tea. Your game is about the servants of a monster and how they cope with his madness. In your space opera, your crew has just saved a group of colonists from going nova with their sun, only to bring them on to a ship filled with hungry vampires. Your game is about innovative characters in interesting situations. You want to write a novel about that? Please, be my guest.

The usual caveats apply. You can't steal the game setting – that belongs to the creators of the game - but your plot and your characters are yours, and there is no reason that you can't use them. Yes, when you write your game, you will have to edit out the bits that may be boring to readers - the long lists of inventory, the side quests that didn't advance the plot. But I don't need to tell you that. What I need to tell you is that your game is awesome, and yes, you should write about those characters, that plot. I will read that novel.

If I believe anything, I believe this: gamers are creative, interesting people with stories to tell. I'm not like the fools that think that you are uncreative and bland idiots who can't tell the difference between an entertaining story and a pile of shit. I believe in you. I think you can tell me a story I want to hear. You aren't the common, vulgar stereotype that these people think you are. You aren't the person who believes a knockoff story is creative.

You don't need the common advice of "don't" and "hold back" and "no" because drivel that is

meant to hold you back, to keep you from writing your story. A game is a mutual dream and I'm not going to tell you to be afraid or ashamed of sharing that dream. Bring me your characters, your plots, your fiction. Bring me those dreams, those shared worlds, those stories. I can't wait to read them.



// SPONSORED BY  **SOLARIS** // SCIENCE FICTION  
// FANTASY  
// DARK FANTASY

*Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Solaris Books*