



American Neolithic

Terence Hawkins

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A Neanderthal's true nature threatens to tumble a pervasive and ignorant belief system and the powerful structure orchestrated to keep it together.

American Neolithic is a strange tale, one that places a mirror before humankind so it can witness its own lustful, shallow violence, ruled by racism and paranoia. That mirror is held up by Blingbling, the only literate Neanderthal in his Nest, who is framed for killing the rival of a hip-hop group. Crass, jaded attorney Raleigh is chosen to defend Blingbling, and he puts his own career and life on the line to protect the creature, who is at times more human than his human cousins. Terence Hawkins's moral message is subtle, woven into a story that alternates between Raleigh in the present day and his efforts to defend Blingbling in court, and Blingbling himself, two years into the future.

The contrast between the gentle intellectual Blingbling and his no-nonsense lawyer reveals that of the two, the Neanderthal is less of an animal than humans would believe. The alternating chapters are effective, offering reprieve from Raleigh's vulgar, fast-paced narratives with Blingbling's introspective ones.

But the fact that Blingbling's fate is already demonstrated and implied in his chapters undermines some of the tension that would be present if his ending point were unknown in Raleigh's chapters.

The world Raleigh and Blingbling find themselves in is familiar and frightening, overtaken by paranoia, racism, fear of terrorism, and a dictatorial government ruled by evangelical Christianity.

But while this frightening new world is expressed fully in a grand sense—in the uncontrollable machinations of the court system and government agencies that dictate the fate of the main characters—*American Neolithic* would benefit from a few more details that would bring the world to life. For example, Hawkins recounts that the First Amendment has been amended, but such a detail would be more vividly rendered if Hawkins showed government agents directly prohibiting the exercise of other religions. At other times, the descriptive writing overreaches: "his aircraft carrier sized desk looked as though it had been hand carved from a single chunk of fumed oak by Irish nuns who'd fled the famine."

American Neolithic's strength is in its quick-fire narrative, its sympathetic protagonist Blingbling, and Blingbling's fight against a powerful government ruled by hate. Hawkins's decision to make Blingbling a Neanderthal is unexpected and inventive.

SHELLEY MAE HAZEN (Summer 2014)

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