

From Dust to DNA

RJ Hogarth

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Theology, religion, philosophy, and science meet in this exciting tip of the hat to Dan Brown and Indiana Jones.

RJ Hogarth has developed a deep philosophical adventure in *From Dust to DNA*, weaving profound ideas, science, and exploits together to propel the plot.

John Rowntree loses his job teaching a class called “Religious Knowledge” after Sir Ernest Everleigh, England’s most outspoken atheist, leads a committee to completely ban religion within schools. John begins to attend Oxford and takes a lecture class from Sir Ernest, which in turn brings about theological debate. Sir Ernest is on the hunt to scientifically prove that God does not exist; to do this, he wants to obtain a relic from Afghanistan. Sir Ernest, along with students John and Jane and paleontologist Andrew Faulkner, travel to Afghanistan, where they search for the relic while encountering some unsavory characters.

The author attended the University of New South Wales where he majored in philosophy, math, and law. This background assisted him in the development of his novel, wherein philosophy and theology play a strong role.

A dry sense of humor shines through the work periodically, such as when agnostic John is on a plane trying to land dangerously in a dust storm: “John dropped his agnosticism for this landing.” Other times, Hogarth’s law background (lawyers often having to summarize previous court cases and such) shines through, such as when he concisely explains the history of Ur, which is biblical Abraham’s birthplace. He also nicely translates some difficult science into layman’s terms without being condescending.

From Dust to DNA is filled with strong ideas, strong characters, and strong writing. The pace varies, sometimes lagging during theological discussion, and then speeding through action scenes. It would have been preferable to move more quickly through the sometimes repetitive theology, and slow down to add more description to the action.

The characters all have depth, with just enough background to show their motivations—such as Sir Ernest’s ill son, and John’s family life with his church-leader father. There are times when it would have been better to show instead of tell, such as showing why and how the characters end up behind a car while they are under attack, instead of simply stating, “By this time they were all behind the car.” While there is plenty of wonderful dialogue between characters, there is a lack of history of the characters’ lives.

An exciting scientific novel combined with theology and adventure, *From Dust to DNA* tips its hat to Indiana Jones and Dan Brown. Strong and interesting writing contributes to this thought-provoking fictional chronicle of God and science.

BETH VANHOUTEN (November 14, 2014)

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