

Kingdom: Tiber City Blues

Anderson O' Donnell

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Kingdom is an entertaining science fiction story set in creepy locales.

Anderson O'Donnell's *Kingdom* is an exhilarating science fiction thriller with a noir sensibility about the morality of manipulating human genes.

In an unspecified time in the future, at a research facility hidden in the desert of the dying American Southwest, two scientists, Morrison and Campbell, have decoded the human genome. When Campbell's genes are affected, he is exiled to the slums of Tiber City, an enormous dystopian metropolis nearby.

The novel skips forward a decade as Morrison's daughter, Meghan, searches for Campbell, hoping to take the genetic research facility down with his help. Dylan, her drug-addicted ex, has a father who was also a victim of genetic alteration. In the meantime, Campbell has stumbled upon a new gene that may code the human soul.

Imaginative turns of phrase capture the intricacies of the environment, which teems with decrepit neighborhoods, unusual cultish groups, and sick, desperate, and forgotten people. The decomposing landscape of Tiber City is more than just a backdrop, it's a pivotal part of the plot. An apocalyptic feeling permeates the text, humming in the background from its beginning to its end.

The book's characters are shaped by this environment. Their thoughts and actions suggest complex histories, tense relationships with each other, and disturbing trysts with Tiber City's hostile underground. Their sometimes questionable choices make sense in this context. Hard-boiled, penetrating dialogue moves the story forward and hints at characters' hidden motives and secrets. Their relationships are complicated and realistic, especially between parents and their adult children.

Large swaths of characters' backstories are relayed through exposition and slow the tale. Journal entries and letters inserted between chapters expand on these backstories. They break up the intense plot and add variety to the storytelling methods, though they are sometimes redundant.

Precise, haunting language propels the story and its observations regarding the direction that humanity is headed in. Tiber City's "neon corporate logos" are "the new constellations by which men [seek] direction," and liquor stores, strip clubs, and twenty-four-hour 7-Elevens sustain its "meth boomtowns."

Suspense is constant, even in the book's slower sections, though the pace is uneven. The ending is abrupt and hints at a sequel; some plot strands remain open. While the book's themes, revolving around the human soul and the implications of messing with peoples' genes, are unclear until the end, its moral pulse remains consistent throughout.

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AIMEE JODOIN (June 19, 2019)

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