Clarion Review

Science Fiction

Tego Arcana Dei: Forces of Retribution
Andrew Man
AuthorHouse UK
978-1-4772-4612-2
Two Stars (out of Five)

"It's difficult for my small brain to understand all of this," the main character, James Pollack, complains to one of his numerous sexual partners in Andrew Man's second book in the Tego Arcana Dei series. Many readers will surely feel the same way as they struggle to comprehend this novel about people who can move through time, space, and parallel universes. At times, even the characters themselves appear confused about their own whereabouts.

As with his first installment in the series, Man borrows from many other works both within and outside of the science fiction genre. There are two particularly graphic sex scenes—one reminiscent of *Shades of Grey*, the other similar to an after-hours offering on a premium cable channel—as well as some scenes that recall a number of recent time-travel / dimension-jumping movies. Man also tosses in about two pages on the 2008 financial crisis and a thread about the Great Pyramid at Giza and how it could be a "Sonic Bell," a radio transmitter to the stars, or a source of limitless energy. These may have been meant to give the book some contemporary edginess or controversy, but they aren't well integrated into the story.

Man writes quite nicely, and his characters (especially the women) are interesting and attractive. There are, however, no identifiable villains or malevolent forces for his characters to confront or avoid, and there is no quest, goal, or mission to pursue. Much of what they do while jumping back and forth and through a "4D system called spacetime" is a dance more akin to the hokey pokey than to the waltz.

There are references to "Quantum weirdness," "amazing scientific mysteries," and of teams of holographic workers building a machine that somehow is "very important to our planet in the future," but just how or why any of it is important is unclear. A guardian-angel type, Deepak, who ushered Man's other characters through the first book, makes only a few appearances in the sequel. His explanations do help to convey how the main character and his

girlfriends use the “astral ways that connect the world” to “move around in time,” but they do not answer the “why” of it all.

Put simply, the book does not seem to have a point. And if it does, it is such an obscure point that even the cast has little notion of what they are doing. Many readers may come to the same conclusion as Alexei, a lovely Italian woman who, like every other female character in the book, has sex with Pollack: “Dio mio, I’m not sure I’m ready for this.”

Mark McLaughlin