



Kingdom

Anderson O'Donnell

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In a secret laboratory hidden under the desert, a covert bioengineering project--codename "Exodus"--has discovered the gene responsible for the human soul.

Somewhere in the neon sprawl outside the nation's collapsing economic core, a group of renegade monks are on the verge of uncovering a secret that has eluded mankind for centuries.

In a glittering tower high above the urban decay, an ascendant U.S. Senator is found dead--an apparent, yet inexplicable, suicide.

And in the streets below, a young man races through an ultra modern metropolis on the verge of a violent revolution....closing in on the terrible truth behind Exodus--and one man's dark vision for the future of mankind.

Welcome to Tiber City.

Kingdom Details

Date : Published May 14th 2012 by Tiber City Press (first published May 1st 2012)

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Author : Anderson O'Donnell

Format : Kindle Edition 252 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Dystopia, Thriller

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From Reader Review Kingdom for online ebook

John says

KINGDOM is the debut novel from author Anderson O'Donnell, a paranoid and dystopic vision of a near future in which humanity has everything that it wants and nothing that it needs. It's an excellent debut from a disturbed and disturbing voice; a dark, fast-paced, engaging and thought-provoking read that I promise will stay with you for a while-- it certainly has for me. The book is as much milestone as manuscript; it is the culminating achievement of a labor of love years in the making, a novel not so much written and re-written as it was sculpted and crafted by author O'Donnell. If you're into William Gibson, Philip K. Dick, Bret Easton Ellis, or Jack O'Connell, or if you enjoy near-future biopunk tech-noir, or even if you just want a smart, engaging story, do yourself a favor and pick up a copy of KINGDOM. Paperback or ebook, it's dealer's choice. But remember to bring along some 5-HTP because this book WILL drain your serotonin and dopamine levels. It pulls no punches and refuses to let you brace before impact. It fucks you without lube. It twists and it roils and it seethes and breaks--and when it breaks, it breaks bad.

KINGDOM is the story of monks, monarchs and the men who would be king-- the only kind left to inherit the future urban landsprawl so rapidly approaching, the kind who gladly embrace the glitter of gold but shirk the weight of the crown. One such man, the central figure linking the story together (though far from its protagonist) is Michael Morrison, a billionaire designer genetics salesman who has all but stopped his own aging process and is busily assimilating bits and pieces of the shiny empty new world of the mid-21st century like the bright yellow video game dot-muncher from the 1980s who symbolized the mindless greed of that decade just as Morrison epitomizes the zeitgeist of his own, representing what all human history to this point has apparently been leading up to: an insatiable lust for Control. Control over not just human goods and services or even human beings, but the very process and fundamentals responsible for said beings--control over life and its creation. Morrison, who has assembled the best-funded and most secretive team of scientists and researchers ever gathered on this planet, has spent much of his artificially-extended drug-enhanced life lording over an underground bunker which houses the blackest of black clinics: Project Exodus, a secret project designed to save humanity from itself in the form of a eugenically bred Next Great Leader--a spray-tanned Senator, a blow-dried Moses, a hand-built marionette man made for the media with Morrison fingering the strings.

The Senator in question was not Morrison's first foray into politics. His predecessor, Senator Robert Fitzgerald, was pumped and primed to ascend to the highest seat of American Power-- just before pumping a .45-caliber bullet into his own brain, distinctly aware of a lack of something inside himself... something which we soon discover was, in a soul. The missing soul in question is, we are to learn, not just a religious device or a metaphysical construct but rather in fact a quantifiable, verifiable scientific reality that like everything else in Nature can be synthesized and reproduced artificially if only one has the correct genetic sequence. It is this genetic source code that Morrison is most eager to acquire--and he will stop at nothing to acquire it. Opposing him and his black-ops army is an unlikely hero: Dylan Fitzgerald, the son of the late soulless Senator, a Quixotic Hamlet-cum-JFK Jr. who's into sex, drugs, and-- well, that's about it. Dylan only has two things in common with his late father; 1. a nagging existential doubt of his own spiritual verifiability; and 2. The identity of the man responsible for such a desperately empty condition. It is this search for self that will bring Dylan into contact and conflict with Morrison's secret world-- and will also most probably violently remove him from it.

We meet many other flawed characters along the narrative's yellow brick road, which stretches from the deserts of what was once the Mexican border all the way to the skyscrapers of the elite in the Shimmer District, which is the bejeweled seat of power of the story's central locale: Tiber City (whether or not said bejeweled megalopolis was named for the river in Rome that world-conquerors Romulus and Remus were

thrown into as infants is an open question, and one that I'll have to remember to ask). There's Campbell, Morrison's Chief Science Officer, the genius mind behind Project Exodus who upon accidentally discovering the Project's biological scrap quickly fled to the sweet release of opiates and Irish Whiskey only to be nursed back to health by the monks of the mysterious Order of Ramoth (Hebrew for "breath"); Al-Salaam, Morrison's bespoke assassin, who has been tasked with apprehending Campbell and eliminating him; Jack Heffernan (no relation), Morrison's good-looking yet mindless and soulless Presidential hopeful; and of course Meghan, Morrison's beautiful daughter and the lifelong love of one Dylan Fitzgerald... the girl who could be the answer to Dylan's prayers or just as easily the living embodiment of his nightmares. All of these characters have an interesting role to play as the story unfolds, but it is Tiber City itself which remains the most intriguing and enigmatic character. Its different Districts each have their own unique look and flavor, and as Dylan meanders through each of them on his search for meaning and understanding, we are all too aware that Tiber City ain't that great a place to visit, let alone make one's residence in, and yet it is clear that the suggestion is that we'll all be living there permanently soon. It is a city of style over substance, of form over function, a hollow particle-board world with a shiny veneer that you could easily put your foot through if you didn't watch your step, as it is rotten throughout and no one quite knows where to step anymore.

O'Donnell's writing is darkly descriptive, and will put you in a foul mood if you let it. It's filled with original yet disturbing images like designer vagina infomercials, and peppered throughout with random spikes of genius like the mathematical art form of the future: a stream of numbers displayed against a blank wall that one can watch hypnotically for hours, an art form known as The Zero Movement. It is obvious that this is O'Donnell's best-guess prediction of what our future will look like, but whether it's a cautionary tale or an inescapable conclusion is difficult to determine. One thing, though, is very clear: Anderson O'Donnell has a powerful gift for observation, and in his writing he lends us his high-powered lenses on reality and forces us to gaze with microscopic vision upon a scene that most of us would just as soon look away from. He's not just slowing down to look at the car wreck in this book, he's taking your face and shoving it into the wreckage and he's not going let you up until some of the bent steel and gasoline fumes make an indelible image on your brain. This is a voice that most readers will want to hear more from, but one that a few perhaps might not want to ever hear again. O'Donnell's depiction of humanity and its culture reads at times like a condemnation, a soliloquy of suffering for everyday sins we don't even know we commit. But you can't fault a guy for calling it like he sees it, and damn if he's not dead on the money most of the time. My guess is that O'Donnell is going to win a legion of new fans with this, his first offering-- and probably also piss off a couple of dissenters who will criticize his work as "too dark and angry". But as Jack Black once remarked about his band's own mixed reviews at memorable Tenacious D show: "If everyone liked us, that'd probably mean we're pretty lame." KINGDOM might grab you and shake you and leave you feeling like it beat you up and stole your lunch money... but one thing it is definitely NOT is lame.

Autumn Is Azathoth says

Reviewed for FreeBookDude-will post review here on Oct. 12

Queenie Thayer-Tirone says

Let me start by saying this is not traditionally a horror novel, which is part of its charm. It's very dark though, a bleak look at a world ravaged by science gone amok. A dystopian future were man has meddled too much, and in the process, set up his own downfall. As you read, things become more and more apparent that even the people in slums don't dare to dream. As if some malevolent being will hear them and thus rip

what little they have left from their lives.

It's just that kind of story.

So there is horror, and some of it is very personal. Which I enjoyed. But it's more of a SF with philosophical leanings. The novel itself is written from three different perspectives, which at first can be a bit jarring, but the writer weaves them together well so in the end they are seamless.

First we have a man named Dylan Fitzgerald, whose fame and money come from his dead father. Then we have Dr. Campbell, a scientist whose research into genetics and other such things were meant to help make the world a better place. And lastly, Dr. Morrison, who used the knowledge Dr. Campbell taught him to create monsters, betray Campbell and build a mega corp that has tendrils in many pies. If you are a big roleplaying dork like me, this world is very reminiscent of Shadowrun, but yet somehow still close enough to be our own world. The tech level isn't completely over the top like in Shadowrun, but that's part of why I like it. Hell, I could even see hints of Resident Evil, with the whole creating monsters by messing with DNA thing. (Or for those of you not gamer geeks like moi, think Bladerunner but with less replicants and more human-gene-splicing) But it's very thematically bio-punk, edging on trans-humanism. There is no apocalypse in this, just a world crumbling around the characters involved in it. I could see it very easily becoming our world, as there is only a few years difference from ours, and men like Dr. Campbell and Dr. Morrison would be who we'd have to thank for that.

Normally having three perspectives would make things a bit too jumbled and confusing, but O'Donnell is a masterful storyteller. It's surprisingly an easy read, with only a few bumps at times in pacing and plot. But there are plenty of lush details about every dark corner of this world, and the characters are very engaging. They are all flawed, slightly broken people who despite knowing the world that surrounds them wants to swallow them whole, still strive to endure in this terrible place. And part of the beauty of O'Donnell's writing style is you can see the beauty in the decay, feel the touch of life even in death.

My favorite part by far is the characters, especially Dylan. It's probably because of how deeply personal I identified with him, despite his financial situation. His father was a politician who killed himself, leaving him a legacy both terrible and wonderful. Now he's a fallen star, a person with money and some fame that could do things mere mortals in the slums could only imagine. And he pines for a love he lost, Megan Morrison, daughter of Michael Morrison. But he spends most of his time in a drug fueled haze, trying to run from the demons his father's legacy has bestowed. Having lost my own mother to suicide, I identified with him right away. His emotions and turmoil felt very real. Little does Dylan know his role he will play in the bigger plot unfolding through the course of this novel. That his connection to it all isn't just through his father.

But I also enjoyed Jonathan Campbell's journey. His is less personal for me, but by far the more interesting of the three characters and his torture is very real. He created things that have destroyed, things that were meant to better humanity but instead, has created sickness, decay and death across the globe. Campbell is very engaging as a character. Very flawed and seeking redemption. And through that desire to find forgiveness for his mistakes, he stumbles upon a spiritual group helping people who've fallen between the cracks. And these people are searching for the gene responsible for the human soul.

And then there is Michael Morrison. I think his character is probably the weakest, because to me he came off as the typical "evil, backstabbing scientist". I couldn't really relate to him, but he was a great foil to Campbell. He meddles in not only bio engineering, but politics as well. I guess that's part of the beauty of the Morrison character. He reminds us how far detached the rich and powerful can be. How alien they are to us and how hard it is to relate to their goals and desires. There's probably a human being under all that genetic modification and finely pressed clothing, but it's so repressed it might as well be gone. He's perfect, white teethed, and clean, where Campbell could have been like that, but instead "fell from grace" when he

ran from Morrison and their work. I guess that's what makes Morrison so scary to me. He represents the 1%. He's gained so much power, so much wealth; he can do pretty much anything he wants. And the worst part is, he's a scientist with all this power. A mad scientist who thinks his plans and ideas are perfectly reasonable for progress.

If I had to point out a flaw within the novel it's this: At one point there is too much telling and not enough showing. As a writer, you are told to show the story, not tell the reader what's going on. And for most of the book O'Donnell does this, and beautifully. But there is a point in the novel where a bunch of jargon is tossed at us, and it really took me out of the story. Considering all the other things going on, the writer already explains to us the plot of the novel so well he didn't need to go over it again by adding the jargon notes that clearly lay everything out. I know it's hard to trust in a novel this dense that readers are going to follow your ideas, especially outlandish semi-science ones, but I could just fine without the extra jargon. I could piece it together from bits of what the characters were going through, from things the cultists said, from Morrison's scheming. I didn't need a whole section full of boring, cluttering jargon to explain the plot to me like an exposition fairy.

One of the greatest strengths of this book is the questions it brings forward. The prose is written so that every word means something, every syllable laced with purpose. All of the words are geared to bring you into this dreadful, damned landscape of too much science, too much modification, too much drugs and excess, too much suffering and greed. There's just way too much pain, and trying to find solace and spirituality through a world burned alive seems like a fleeting task, especially for science.

But oh...they sure try to find the human soul. And they claim it's a gene at that.

Whether they find it or not, I'll leave that for you to read for yourself. But it's definitely a book worth reading. It will leave you with some interesting ideas to ponder, and make you very uncomfortable at times.

William Dickerson says

The asterisk – three lines intersecting, its limbs equidistant, enclosed in a circle – is not only a recurring symbol in Anderson O'Donnell's novel, KINGDOM, but it is also the perfect visual metaphor for the overall theme Mr. O'Donnell is driving at in this impressive debut.

On the surface, KINGDOM is a dystopian tale that channels near-future Philip K. Dick grit while gracefully dipping its toes into the deep end of some far-out sci-fi ideas. It is a visual novel; it's – dare I say – cinematic. It's LOGAN'S RUN, but steeped in our world, depicting an expectant future that's right around the corner, and it is the novel's merger of high-concept sci-fi and prescient realism that makes this work smart and, quite frankly, relevant. O'Donnell expertly weaves his narrative between three main characters: Dylan Fitzgerald (the lost son of the late Senator Robert Fitzgerald and KINGDOM's ostensible hero), Jonathan Campbell (the venerable scientist and brain behind the genetic experimentation in Tiber City) and Michael Morrison (the hardnosed entrepreneur, unscrupulous scientist and central protagonist/villain, who usurps Campbell's work, and sets the narrative's plot precariously toward the point-of-no-return). While I'm sometimes skeptical of split narratives that will eventually tie themselves neatly together at the end – these narratives have been done to death, in both books and film – O'Donnell appropriately (and at times ingeniously) uses this storytelling device as a way to underscore his theme of disconnection. And it is through this theme of disconnection that O'Donnell illustrates the book's pursuit of finding the opposite – a connection – much in the way Dylan finally finds his connection, a connection his father was unable to find for himself.

O'Donnell's "connection" is manifested throughout the work by enigmatic – but by no means unfamiliar – phenomena like: love, hate, belief in a God, friendship, and the like. He employs a circular motif throughout the novel, which not only takes the form of the asterisk enclosed in a circle, but is also represented by the "Zero Movement" (a real time modern art movement, replete with requisite ones and zeroes) "coconut chairs," the "Omega Gene," and the physical eyes of characters, specifically the eyes a father passed down to his son (and, unwittingly, passed down to the next crop of Tiber City's political leaders). It's all about connection. One end of the loop connecting to the other, forming a reciprocal bond, in a manner that's both surprising and inevitable. That is faith, or what is expected of faith. Faith in something higher, something that is beyond our human comprehension; and while that "something" may be out of our reach in our common existence, it is that belief in its existence that imbues our lives with meaning. O'Donnell treads carefully along this theme, however; his work is not a polemic on the virtues of religion – in fact, it's quite the contrary. I might argue that KINGDOM is a completely secular work, a work in which belief – specifically peoples' religious beliefs – is misdirected. I might argue that the novel implies that belief is often misdirected: that belief is better focused on the people around us. However, I do not presume to think it is O'Donnell's intention to marginalize religion. I think it is his intention to suggest its cultural marginalization, and marginalization of community as a whole, in a dystopian society that values egoism over the connection to something outside of ourselves, whether that something is another human being or a divine entity belonging to any one of a variety of religions. It is the idea of disconnection that thrives in much of modern dystopian fiction and sci-fi futurism, and O'Donnell takes the idea and runs with it, elevating it to a point where he seamlessly merges ethereal mysticism with the very tangible world of biotechnology. It is our connection with something outside of the self – be it other people or simply a belief in something bigger than us – that drives our lives, that makes us human, that connects one end of the circle to the other. In KINGDOM that adhesive glue that facilitates the connection we crave is called the soul.

KINGDOM is genre fiction of the highest order. It's a book about characters, but it's so much more than that. It's a page-turner. But it also makes you think, and in plainest terms, that's the mark of good literature. While the characters in KINGDOM struggle to search for their respective souls, Anderson O'Donnell has clearly found it himself; his writing is brimming with soul. If O'Donnell's book is the "circle" of the asterisk, his characters and readers are the lines within, connecting to each other at the center.

Sheila says

A post-apocalyptic novel with no apocalypse, Anderson O'Donnell's Kingdom is set in the near future of a world not so different from ours, where America's Cold War has spawned an evil that's just now coming of age. The world definitely ends with a whimper rather than a bang in this tale where drink, drugs and prostitution ruin lives in a land ruined by man.

Dark evocative descriptions are filled with premonition. "[T]he moon hugged the horizon, too tired to finish its ascent..." And the whimper of the world's long ending resounds over the city. "[H]uman flesh and blood were the gasoline" of the social machine and "Benzedrine-fueled Bedouins" roam border deserts where secret laboratories hide the madness of science.

A powerfully plausible future history postulates "the new iron curtain of Sharia law" and the decadence of Tiber City, while memory and self fall victim to a blurred and unreal reality. This place and this people are "the kingdom," while the man who would stand behind the throne manipulates his subjects, science and hope.

The world is haunting, horrible and hurt. The writing is evocative and blunt with all the melodramatic confusion of drug-addiction blending into genuine curiosity with just a few tinges of hope as that moon skips the horizon. I want to watch the movie. I want to know if I can read the sequel. And the story, like 1984, leaves me wondering... Future, future history, possible future? This soulless world of fiction leaves me looking at the newspaper and hoping the real world still has a soul to save.

My Disclosure: I received a free copy of this novel from the publicist and promised an honest review.

John Heffernan says

KINGDOM is the debut novel from author Anderson O'Donnell, a paranoid and dystopic vision of a near future in which humanity has everything that it wants and nothing that it needs. It's an excellent debut from a disturbed and disturbing voice; a dark, fast-paced, engaging and thought-provoking read that I promise will stay with you for a while-- it certainly has for me. The book is as much milestone as manuscript; it is the culminating achievement of a labor of love years in the making, a novel not so much written and re-written as it was sculpted and crafted by author O'Donnell. If you're into William Gibson, Philip K. Dick, Bret Easton Ellis, or Jack O'Connell, or if you enjoy near-future biopunk tech-noir, or even if you just want a smart, engaging story, do yourself a favor and pick up a copy of KINGDOM. Paperback or ebook, it's dealer's choice. But remember to bring along some 5-HTP because this book WILL drain your serotonin and dopamine levels. It pulls no punches and refuses to let you brace before impact. It fucks you without lube. It twists and it roils and it seethes and breaks--and when it breaks, it breaks bad.

KINGDOM is the story of monks, monarchs and the men who would be king-- the only kind left to inherit the future urban sprawl so rapidly approaching, the kind who gladly embrace the glitter of gold but shirk the weight of the crown. One such man, the central figure linking the story together (though far from its protagonist) is Michael Morrison, a billionaire designer genetics salesman who has all but stopped his own aging process and is busily assimilating bits and pieces of the shiny empty new world of the mid-21st century like the bright yellow video game dot-muncher from the 1980s who symbolized the mindless greed of that decade just as Morrison epitomizes the zeitgeist of his own, representing what all human history to this point has apparently been leading up to: an insatiable lust for Control. Control over not just human goods and services or even human beings, but the very process and fundamentals responsible for said beings--control over life and its creation. Morrison, who has assembled the best-funded and most secretive team of scientists and researchers ever gathered on this planet, has spent much of his artificially-extended drug-enhanced life lording over an underground bunker which houses the blackest of black clinics: Project Exodus, a secret project designed to save humanity from itself in the form of a eugenically bred Next Great Leader--a spray-tanned Senator, a blow-dried Moses, a hand-built marionette man made for the media with Morrison fingering the strings.

The Senator in question was not Morrison's first foray into politics. His predecessor, Senator Robert Fitzgerald, was pumped and primed to ascend to the highest seat of American Power-- just before pumping a .45-caliber bullet into his own brain, distinctly aware of a lack of something inside himself... something which we soon discover was, in a soul. The missing soul in question is, we are to learn, not just a religious device or a metaphysical construct but rather in fact a quantifiable, verifiable scientific reality that like everything else in Nature can be synthesized and reproduced artificially if only one has the correct genetic sequence. It is this genetic source code that Morrison is most eager to acquire--and he will stop at nothing to acquire it. Opposing him and his black-ops army is an unlikely hero: Dylan Fitzgerald, the son of the late soulless Senator, a Quixotic Hamlet-cum-JFK Jr. who's into sex, drugs, and-- well, that's about it. Dylan only has two things in common with his late father; 1. a nagging existential doubt of his own spiritual verifiability; and 2. The identity of the man responsible for such a desperately empty condition. It is this search for self that will bring Dylan into contact and conflict with Morrison's secret world-- and will also most probably violently remove him from it.

We meet many other flawed characters along the narrative's yellow brick road, which stretches from the deserts of what was once the Mexican border all the way to the skyscrapers of the elite in the Shimmer

District, which is the bejeweled seat of power of the story's central locale: Tiber City (whether or not said bejeweled megalopolis was named for the river in Rome that world-conquerors Romulus and Remus were thrown into as infants is an open question, and one that I'll have to remember to ask). There's Campbell, Morrison's Chief Science Officer, the genius mind behind Project Exodus who upon accidentally discovering the Project's biological scrap quickly fled to the sweet release of opiates and Irish Whiskey only to be nursed back to health by the monks of the mysterious Order of Ramoth (Hebrew for "breath"); Al-Salaam, Morrison's bespoke assassin, who has been tasked with apprehending Campbell and eliminating him; Jack Heffernan (no relation), Morrison's good-looking yet mindless and soulless Presidential hopeful; and of course Meghan, Morrison's beautiful daughter and the lifelong love of one Dylan Fitzgerald... the girl who could be the answer to Dylan's prayers or just as easily the living embodiment of his nightmares. All of these characters have an interesting role to play as the story unfolds, but it is Tiber City itself which remains the most intriguing and enigmatic character. Its different Districts each have their own unique look and flavor, and as Dylan meanders through each of them on his search for meaning and understanding, we are all too aware that Tiber City ain't that great a place to visit, let alone make one's residence in, and yet it is clear that the suggestion is that we'll all be living there permanently soon. It is a city of style over substance, of form over function, a hollow particle-board world with a shiny veneer that you could easily put your foot through if you didn't watch your step, as it is rotten throughout and no one quite knows where to step anymore.

O'Donnell's writing is darkly descriptive, and will put you in a foul mood if you let it. It's filled with original yet disturbing images like designer vagina infomercials, and peppered throughout with random spikes of genius like the mathematical art form of the future: a stream of numbers displayed against a blank wall that one can watch hypnotically for hours, an art form known as The Zero Movement. It is obvious that this is O'Donnell's best-guess prediction of what our future will look like, but whether it's a cautionary tale or an inescapable conclusion is difficult to determine. One thing, though, is very clear: Anderson O'Donnell has a powerful gift for observation, and in his writing he lends us his high-powered lenses on reality and forces us to gaze with microscopic vision upon a scene that most of us would just as soon look away from. He's not just slowing down to look at the car wreck in this book, he's taking your face and shoving it into the wreckage and he's not going let you up until some of the bent steel and gasoline fumes make an indelible image on your brain. This is a voice that most readers will want to hear more from, but one that a few perhaps might not want to ever hear again. O'Donnell's depiction of humanity and its culture reads at times like a condemnation, a soliloquy of suffering for everyday sins we don't even know we commit. But you can't fault a guy for calling it like he sees it, and damn if he's not dead on the money most of the time. My guess is that O'Donnell is going to win a legion of new fans with this, his first offering-- and probably also piss off a couple of dissenters who will criticize his work as "too dark and angry". But as Jack Black once remarked about his band's own mixed reviews at memorable Tenacious D show: "If everyone liked us, that'd probably mean we're pretty lame." KINGDOM might grab you and shake you and leave you feeling like it beat you up and stole your lunch money... but one thing it is definitely NOT is lame.

Bob Milne says

Part near-future dystopian science fiction thriller, and part cult horror novel, Kingdom is a chilling journey through the underworld of Tiber City. It's a story about greed, debauchery, idealism, and the shaky foundations of even our best intentions. Politics, science, and humanity - none of it is safe from the dirty, distorted lens that Anderson O'Donnell allows to peek into every darkened alleyway, and behind every closed door.

Told through three perspectives, the story takes us into the minds of a rich playboy, a fallen geneticist, and corporate guru, and forces us to witness the world through their eyes. Having multiple perspectives that are

so very different from one another is a challenge, but Anderson handles it well. His characters aren't particularly deep, and it's hard to form any sort of emotional attachment to them, but they're distinct, powerful, and effective. They're neither likeable nor admirable, but they do demand a certain degree of sympathy, if not compassion.

Where the story really shines is in its world-building and atmosphere. Portraying such a dark and gritty dystopia only a few years into the future is another risk, but it lends the story a sense of immediate consequence that really grabs hold of the reader. The designer drugs, the genetic engineering, and the body modifications are just a part of the package. Ironically, since I'm far more interested in the science and the technology, I would have like more detail about the order of monks and what led them to their soul experiments, but maybe that will come out more in subsequent books.

The writing itself isn't just solid, it's superb in its use of language. The dialogue is stronger than I've encountered in quite some while, with several quotes and conversations that would definitely become part of pop culture had this been a movie. O'Donnell's voice is dark, and highly opinionated, but that's one of the charms of the book. If he has one flaw, it's that he tends to ramble on a bit a times. The story could have been a bit leaner in places, but I'm not sure it'd be as easy to maintain the overall tone without his commentary, so it's a hard choice to make.

Unique, original, and exciting, Kingdom proves that O'Donnell is an author to watch.

Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins

Rich D. says

"Kingdom" is the first book in a series about fictional city Tiber City by author Anderson O'Donnell. I found this book on Amazon and was intrigued by the synopsis and decided to take a chance on it since it was being offered for free. I am glad I did.

"Kingdom" is a dystopian Sci-fi thriller that is set in the near future (2015) and focuses on a genetic experiment to create the perfect leader through genetic alterations. The story is primarily told through the view points of three characters, two of which are scientists for The Exodus Project and the other is a young man who becomes involved in the project.

The thing that makes this such an intriguing read is that it deals with a plausible scenerio that could very likely occur. Scientists are working on mapping the human genome and figuring out how everything works and this novel shows the potential bad that could come out of this work. Also, O'Donnell does an excellent job of building an identity for Tiber City and its residents. I also like the decision he made to have the story take place only a few years from the present. While some parts of Tiber City and its technology seems like it wouldn't be plausible in 2015, alot of the factors that led to this dystopian environment are not that far fetched. O'Donnell does a great job building his characters and I like the fact that none of the characters were the stereotypical flawless hero. Even the characters that are deemed the hereos of the story have their own flaws and are far from perfect, which is refreshing.

This was a book that was hard to put down and I cannot wait for the second installment that is due out sometime in 2013!

Emily says

Kingdom takes you into a very, very dark world. As a dystopian biopunk thriller, it's: graphic, dark, suspenseful, gritty, and philosophical. This is, at its core, the story of three men. Two men, Michael Morrison and Jonathan Campbell, set about changing the world with their top secret genetic research on Project Exodus. The third, Dylan Fitzgerald, could hold the key to everything. There is no shortage of fascinating, lush landscapes throughout this novel. The story easily hops between the barren desert, glitzy glamorous world of the rich and famous, and the dilapidated slums of Tiber City.

What initially drew me to this book is the biopunk. I'm a huge fan of the genre and stories that feature genetic manipulation as a backdrop to tell a fascinating story. And this story did not disappoint. Not only is the science fascinating, it doesn't shy away from the hard, philosophical questions. What is a human soul? Does humanity have a right to manipulate it's genetic code to make man in its own image? What kind of consequences might there be? It's fascinating stuff and there's no shortage of it in this novel.

On top of that, there are two things that really excite me about this story: the world building and the characters. Kingdom is set in the near-future. Some of the tech you will recognize, and many of the historical events are the same. But it's pretty incredible to think that a few key twists in the timeline -- a few technological advances here, a new genetic advancement there -- could change our world into the one we find in Kingdom. My favorite character of them all is Jonathan Campbell. He carries an enormous amount of guilt; he's lost and searching for redemption.

I would recommend this book to fans of dystopias, science fiction, and biopunk and/or cyberpunk. But be warned, Kingdom is not for the faint of heart. It contains graphic sex, drug use, and violence.

Suzy Ayers says

Review from: PS Naughty Reviewer- Suzy (Rating 3.5)

This book is one that requires a reader to force themselves to soak it in and really think about the words displayed before them. If you've read the book, this contrasts to the dystopian world that the characters live in. (ie. Images that are moving so fast that only your brain processes them; your eyes barely receive the messages.)

It is honestly not an easy read. This is due to many things, the graphic words initially are concise to the point where you can almost feel, see, and hear the bones cracking, contorting beneath the skin. Yes, this is at the opening and throughout the book. (I was eating—I do not recommend this. lol) Then you move into a young man's life filled with depression and drugs. Then the third POV is this young man's father being told through a journal that you later find out about.

I was confused mostly. The story line is outshined by the vivid imagery. I have never in my life read such beautiful descriptions of landscapes. They describe this broken world in extreme depth, where I feel it should be more interspersed, but they continue throughout the book.

The other thing that was terribly distracting was that the writer never gave me a break, a breath or a pause. Their writing style is, how do I put it? Wow! There are lots of: EM dashes, colons (at the end of a sentence instead of a period), multiple uses of "ands" in a sentence and lastly, sentences that are between 30 to probably close to 60 words long. This made for some hard reading for someone like me who normally breezes through books.

Overall, the story is a harrowing read. I began to get engrossed around 20% into the book. If you enjoy dystopian worlds, this is a fantastically horrific and yet a beautifully described one.

The end seemed like it was only the beginning. :) So get reading if you love: descriptions you can see/feel, a very dark storyline and a religious undertone. Trust me religion isn't the forefront. The main theme is biology vs spirituality or something greater.

Pavarti Tyler says

Disclaimer: Although I know Anderson O'Donnell through the Indie Community I bought my own copy of this book and made no promises to him regarding a review.

Fast-paced, visceral and closer to probable than possible, O'Donnell has created the best near-future dystopian Lit Fic I have read since *The Windup Girl* by Paolo Bacigalupi. Bio-Punk isn't a new term, but it's gaining ground and KINGDOM deserves to be at the top of the list of books to read in said genre. There simply aren't enough stars to communicate the impressiveness of O'Donnell's work here. He has taken religion, science, politics, theory and philosophy and blended them all together to create what is easily one of the most important books to come out this year. And I say that with all the humility of a fellow author who has written a Lit Fic that I wrote to try and do my part to change the world.

O'Donnell's writing is impressive in craft as well as scope. His prose weaves through the stories of three men, Dylan Fitzgerald, whose father was a US Senator who committed suicide, Michael Morrison and Jonathan Campbell - co-creators of the Exodus program. Each man's experience of the narrative is unique, but beyond Anderson's ability to capture characterization is the remarkable work he's done to write in completely different styles for each voice. Dylan's sections are particularly notable because of his use of narcotics, despite being written in third person the stylistic writing creates a world the reader experiences through the lens of the character in question.

Literary Fiction is often looked on as snobby. Those of us who write it take a small amount of pride in a certain academic or intellectual value to our work. Lit Fic isn't "just for fun." That's fine and dandy as long as you can still enjoy the story. Well, I can assure you not only is O'Donnell smarter than I am, he's a whole lot Lit Ficier. KINGDOM can be enjoyed as a sci-fi romp through near future dystopia without worrying about the deeper levels of religious lore or political and artistic trends but here are a few things worth noting when you read KINGDOM:

* Tiber City pulls its name from the Tiber River. I don't know O'Donnell's reason for this but I immediately think of Romulus and Remus and the founding of Rome. I'd love to know if that played into the narrative at all.

* Obscure but prophetic reference to the punishment of Korah: "During their journey through the desert Korah, Dathan and Abiram revolt against Moses's leadership. God punishes the lot - the ringleaders plus 250 followers - by having the earth swallow them whole."

* Assassin named "Al-Salaam" which translated from Arabic to "of peace"

* Repeated and non-traditional use of the trinity motif, including a miraculous conception and 3 Kings wandering the desert in search of a savior.

O'Donnell's take on religion, the soul, the value of church vs. the value of community are all very complex. He touches on the corruption of the church system and magnifies it, introducing the reader to the CitiMart Church of Christ with a video greeting from a polished "Pastor Rick." While religious imagery and themes

run deep in KINGDOM, I personally didn't see a criticism of faith or any particular belief system. Quite the opposite. O'Donnel has imbued his book with the necessity of a spiritual community, an internal faith that burns true without definition. Even the most hardened scientists of The Exodus Project ultimately have to reconcile their calculations with the existence of something outside of definition.

In addition of the beauty of the following passage, I hope you can see the truth. I do, I think part of my own emotional issues come from the same place as described here. Plus, who can resist a grover reference?

In Dylan's opinion, this trend - the embrace of the euphemism - only made the inevitable breakdowns in civilized behavior all the more atrocious. It was as though when the stark realities of life finally slithered their way under, over, around , and through all the artificial constructs man threw up, the strain was too great and people just snapped.

Inside the bleak depictions of an America gone mad, magnified and personified by Tiber City (which even has it's own little Coney Island!), there is a message of hope. The possibility of redemption remains and the existence of, if not God, a little something extra beyond our humanity that connects us and binds us to the divine, confirmed. KINGDOM is a heady book, a dense book, a book for thinking and mulling. It is also a good book.

Anderson O'Donnel has created in KINGDOM everything the Indie Revolution is supposed to stand for. A voice that otherwise wouldn't have been heard, a message which couldn't stay silent and an art that breathes new life into the stagnant waters of commercial publishing. The Hugo and Nebulous Award Winners have nothing on O'Donnel. Perhaps, he might just have something on them.

Mihir says

Full Review Originally at Fantasy Book Critic

OVERVIEW/ANALYSIS: Kingdom is a bit of an oddity to describe; its blurb proclaims it as being a bio-punk thriller however that still doesn't give us any clue into its specifics. I was attracted to it because of the difference of its genre setting and the bio-punk label. Kingdom opens up with in a couple of different time periods; one is in the year 1986 whereas the other one is in 2015. The first thread is about the scientist Jonathan Campbell who is overcome with remorse and guilt because of his dealings with Morrison Biotech, the second thread opens up with Dylan Fitzgerald who is the son of the famous presidential candidate who blew out his brains.

These two are the book's dual point of view characters, Campbell and Fitzgerald, two men separated by the chasm of time, personal priorities and social stations. Campbell since his meltdown that lead to him escaping from his job at Morrison Biotech has been keeping busy with an order of monks called the Order of Neshamah. It is an order of holy men dealing with science in a quest to know more of about the human soul and its connection with God. Jonathan Campbell is not sure what to make of them however owes them big for dragging him back from his personal abyss and thereby does odd things for them based on his skills. Dylan on the other hand is going through life like a pebble being rattled from nook to crevice by the river flow. He doesn't know what he is looking for amidst the endless stream of coke, parties and girls. Things soon take a turn differently why he starts looking into why his father committed suicide.

The story isn't set in some dystopian future, its set just three years from now, the scary part being no apocalypse occurred, there was no great shift per say. The future that is shown in the book is just simply a

fact. It occurs due to reasons that we humans have decided it so and this is one of the parts of the story that the author drives home. That most events in history occur due to human apathy or due to specific human interests, the decline of civilization in America is played out quite nicely through out the story and the author does paint a bleak picture.

The best part about Kingdom is its characterization especially that of Dylan as at first when we meet him, it's really hard to relate to him. More often than not I felt contempt for him, however to the author's credit, his character turnaround was brilliantly managed and that really set the tone for the book. Jonathan on the other hand seemed to have gotten the short straw, even though he gets a similar amount of page time, we never quite get into his head or learn what makes him tick exactly. Another plus point is the plot, which is a hodge-podge of SF, thriller and ethical dilemmas. The story takes some weird turns and with all the metaphysical stuff juxtaposed within the context of genetic science, it ventures into territory that is hitherto new. However it is still a thriller book which camouflages itself nicely with the bio-punk label.

The biggest discrepancy however about the book's plot is in its origins, its never quite thoroughly explained as to why and how the exodus project got off the ground. Yes there are reasons given about creating better, perfect leaders and humans but what was the original spark for it? Who gave it its first push? Such questions and similar ilk are never quite clearly explained. The book however does end on a strong note and lays the foundation for book II in the Tiber City trilogy. I'm hoping that the background and role of the Order of Neshamah is further explored in the sequel as for me their role and intentions were the most interesting part of the story besides the plot tracts of both the POV characters. Also the epilogue plays out to a very strong mythological note and in particular gives a crucial pointer towards book II.

CONCLUSION: Kingdom is a different sort of book and Anderson O'Donnell has to be given his due for giving us a story that is different than most SF thrillers, given a few flaws, this debut is still something to be taken notice of. I'm curious to learn more about the author's future plans for the books and what the next chapter will hold for the denizens of Tiber city. Kingdom is a solid three star debut effort and worth your time if you want to read something different in the SF-Thriller genre.

E. Bard says

Kingdom (Tiber City #1) is a very dark thriller. It is a dystopian near future science fiction filled with desperate characters who, for the most part, face a grim existence.

The novel Kingdom pulls together from two separate storylines. One of those storylines follows Campbell, a self destructive and formerly brilliant scientist who feels betrayed by his former partner for the cruel and inhumane science that was truly behind their scientific work (project Exodus). At the start of his story, Campbell has left his old life behind. He is waiting to die in the urban decay at the edge of the desert when he is rescued by a mysterious organization of monks. Campbell is confused. The organization is involved in its own scientific research: finding a biological link to the soul. Their research is almost the exact opposite - yet strangely linked - to Campbell's past research, which was more or less finding a gene for eternal youth (it turns out to be more later in the book). As Campbell realizes the monks (or the 'gurney men' as he thinks of them) are rescuing and treating victims of Campbell and his former partner's own research, Campbell begins to work with the monks in an attempt at redemption. However, redemption might not be possible for him. Campbell was involved with a very powerful biotech industry and he may still be hunted by his former partner Morrison.(He is).

The other storyline follows Dylan, a wealthy young man also bent on self destruction. He's the son of a famous Senator who in spite of a promising destiny, committed suicide. Seeking solace for his loss in a

dissolute life, Dylan is surrounded by shallow people - all who on some level are using him. While the young man is constantly indulging in oblivion he is also seeking something more. Dylan is haunted by nightmares and memories of his father. There is a mystery surrounding his father's death. There was more to the man's life and death than Dylan can put together. With the reappearance of the Dylan's girlfriend Megan (Morrison) in his life, the young man begins to pull out of his fog.

Somehow, the Senator was tied to Morrison, Campbell and their project Exodus. Dylan and his father become the links that pull the two storylines together.

The author was very descriptive throughout the novel and spared no detail when it came to setting the urban landscapes and the background to the scientific/spiritual research concepts he wrote about. I think that may be the author's strongest point in this installment of the Tiber City series. Some of the descriptive passages were very well done.

But again, it was a very dark novel. It included graphic sex, numerous forms of substance abuse and profanity. I think it could appeal to readers who are looking for that kind of urban noir thriller. However, it really wasn't the kind of book I enjoy, so I'm not comfortable giving it a rating. It just really wasn't my thing.

Paul Montgomery says

Brief synopsis - Kingdom follows three key characters: Dylan, the fairly debauched and despondent son of a former politician; Campbell, the disgraced and redemption-seeking one-time genetecist; and Morrison, the head of a corporate genetics corporation. Set in the near future, Kingdom follows the three leads in the separate quests for answers, redemption and domination, and finding that their paths and fates are inextricably linked.

It took me a surprising amount of time to read this, and I think I finally figured out why. The journey through a book is much like a physical journey - whether it be a brief stroll through something light and airy, or an arduous trek through a barren desert.

Kingdom is like a walk through a rainforest. The scenery is breathtaking (by which I mean the quality of the writing), but there's so much that it bogs you down and slows your journey.

O'Donnell is a fantastically talented writer, with some beautiful turns of phrase, great dialogue, and wonderfully evocative descriptions. He crafts his characters well, turning reprehensible ones into people who can be identified and empathised with.

O'Donnell has his own voice, dark and angry, used to condemn a bitter and bleak future with aspects of our own which have attracted his wrath. However, he's also intelligent and creative, bringing in genetic manipulation, political wrangling, addiction, and studies of the soul, to create a fascinating piece. Reminiscent, at times, of Philip K Dick.

Interestingly, although I started off curiously detached from the lead characters, they do grow rapidly and subtly into investable people. Very well handled.

However, O'Donnell's biggest strength is also his biggest weakness. The writing is gorgeous, no doubt.

However, there's just so damn much of it. In brutal honesty, the text could have done with a harsher edit, and losing 25-33%. I can understand why not, as what's written is so well delivered, but it does affect the pacing, and impact on what's being told at times. Tough choice to make.

The other problem is the old "information dump" issue. Whilst O'Donnell has crafted this wonderful world, has a real knack for dialogue and whatnot, on the occasions where information needs to be dumped it is literally dumped. In a huge chunk of text.

Honestly, I would love to see more from O'Donnell, but in a leaner, tigher-paced book, with less description. For what is, essentially, a slim novel there is too much descriptive padding. More story (and please note, I am in no way suggesting there isn't enough story here, because there is, and it's well written), and an expansion of his world would be great.

For a debut novel, this is outstanding, and I'm positive O'Donnell will be one to watch in the future. Recommended.

Ken says

Kingdom is the debut novel from author Anderson O'Donnell. A fantastic dystopian science fiction thriller with some concepts that reminds me of the film Gattaca as well as the 2012 Arthur C. Clarke shortlisted novel *The End Specialist/The Postmortal* by Drew Magary.

In Kingdom, Morrison Biotech has spent the last few decades perfecting the recipe to create the ultimate human being, one with the charisma and leadership skills to run a country and yet someone the corporation can control. The one thing they can't decipher is the "Omega gene", a gene that appears to have no functions but when omitted, the subjects all breakdown within a couple of years.

One man seems to know the answers though. Jonathan Campbell, once co-founder and mentor of Morrison, thinks that the "Omega gene" is the key to human soul, the antenna that receives instructions from above. Without it the drones will always remain soulless. Campbell has had enough but Morrison needs him to finish what they started.

Meanwhile a young man is discovering a secret that would rock the foundations of his world...

O'Donnell vision of the future, especially where our science would take us isn't rosy at all. What if we progressed from using our knowledge to treat genetic defects to using it to fulfil our narcissistic needs? What would happen to our world then? Can the world really be sustainable with all these perfect and healthy beings running around? This leads to the interesting Tiber City itself, a sort of heaven and hell rolled into one place. The rich has their glamorous and glitzy district while the poor lived in the city's slums.

Another interesting part of the book is the flawed characters. Jonathan Campbell is drowning himself in an alcohol induced stupor over the events he has set in motion and Dylan Fitzgerald is going through a self destructive phase trying to come to terms with his own identity. O'Donnell does a good job in exploring the turmoil and emotions going through these characters.

This novel is a good and fast read with an ending that alludes to the birth of a new age and I can't wait to see how things will turn out in the other stories. Recommended to anyone who is looking for a bit of grimness in their science fiction.

(Originally posted at <http://www.paperlessreading.com/2012/...>)
