



This Bleeding City

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Charlie Wales left Edinburgh University with dreams of the high-life. Six months later, he is marooned in London, unemployed and living a dreary existence in a house he shares with the girl he loves (but who no longer loves him). Finally securing a job at Silverbirch — a hedge-fund based in Mayfair, he begins to work in the brutal and remorseless world of high finance.

When the markets crash, Charlie sees the potential for an escape; but is he already too far immersed in the City to get out?

This Bleeding City Details

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From Reader Review This Bleeding City for online ebook

Tariq Mahmood says

This is a dark depressing novel about working in the City (or of a London) in the financial sector which I found pretty difficult to put down because the story intrigued me throughout. Maybe because I myself do not like working and felt a strong affection for the plot? The book left me with a pretty negative profile of city traders highlighting the huge sacrifices they have to make in order to follow their materialistic dreams. The protagonist is portrayed as a stereotype trader who is ambitious and self centred and is willing to pay a price for his success. As someone who has never worked in the city I found the story kindling sympathy for the traders but I am not sure whether this sympathy grew out of my envy for people with high profile jobs? It will be interesting to know the views of traders who read this book though.

Susannah says

Was not cheered by previous review, including those of friends but I found it quite gripping. Read it fast because I really wanted to discover the who why what from the first pages. Odd phrases seem forced, like à first time try hard novelist but all in all I really enjoyed it even though I do agree that the characters are just not authentic/likeable.

Ryan Williams says

'If you liked "Bright Lights, Big City", you'll love this' said the wrapper around this novel, which sat on top of a pile in an airport bookstore. That set off a round of predictions. The novel will be about bright young things snorting and pilling around the financial world, or the London branch of it; someone will have vaguely literary yearnings; endless complaints will follow about The Job, whose details will be traced rather than described; despair will follow by the bucket-load, and the pace will be heedless. On some level, furthermore, the lead character will embrace the burned-out degradation attendant on his ambition.

Wasn't wrong.

I wanted to like this novel far more than I did. Despite the initial topical appeal - which, perhaps, helped grease the novel's journey out of the slush pile - the whole scene seems more reminiscent of the 80's than the present. The yuppie optimism may be draining away, but the dream of the characters - to yield up their twenties to retire rich in their forties - is the same.

With the best will in the world, it's hard to turn the ins and outs of portfolio managers and investments into readable material. Impatience mars the novel's construction, too. Sometime the scenes, especially in the novel's middle section, are less drawn than hurriedly jotted and pushed at the reader. They're as wispy as plane trails.

Does everyone in the financial world blurt out their autobiography at the slightest provocation, and sound the same doing it? Take this piece from a lap dancer:

'Oh, that's so cool. I'd love to go to Vegas. I saw that film with Nicolas Cage. It's such a glamorous place. [Did she actually watch Leaving Las Vegas...?] I like places that have all the gliz and glamour and still have

a really seedy underbelly. An Arab guy flew a bunch of us out to a party in Dubai. It was like that out there. All polished glass and gold and yet, out of sight, hidden from that very harsh light, hookers and drugs and debauchery.'

Or this one:

'I'm so lonely, Charlie. [The main character.] Sometimes I wish that we were back together. Just so I had someone to be with. Look at your eyes tonight. They are so beautiful. So shy and beautiful. No wonder so many girls loved you at university. No wonder I did.' With Charlie's superiors at Silverbirch, it gets worse.

In summary: crudely executed, muddled and superficial; more This Side of Paradise than The Great Gatsby.

Nanikore says

<http://wp.me/pKv78-jh>

This is another debut novel - that's two in a row - "This Bleeding City" is the first published novel by Alex Preston, and as an English graduate who became a trader in London, and then went on to become a writer, has a certain parallel and insight to the novel's main protagonist.

However, given some of the events in the book, I hope much of the events are from observation rather than experience.

The prologue opens as Charlie Wales, the book's main character, forgets that his small child is still in his car in the car park as he gets absorbed with his work. He suddenly remembers hours later, and in a panic pitches through the crowds, returning to find his infant son unconscious - and we don't know whether he lives or dies. This effectively sets the tone for the whole novel.

Set against the recent economic meltdown in the financial markets around the world, it tells the story of Charlie, and his friends Henry and Vero and their journey from their time at university in Edinburgh through unemployed times in London, to Charlie's rise as an analyst and finally trader for the Silverbirch company, his dropping out for the woman he loves, and his going back again to achieve greater fortune, though that never seems to be enough.

In some ways it's a character study, amplified through the greed and constant envy amongst the climbing financial markets. Charlie sees himself as being the poor relation both financially and culturally to his friends, he being from a lower middle class family in Worthington, and they from wealthier parts of England, and in Vero's case, France, and spends much of the novel attempting to climb to the next rung, and as soon as he makes it up one he almost instantly sees the next and moves off to that.

Having worked on the fringe of the finance sector I can find it fairly believable, and Preston writes the characters well, tracking the innate raw intelligence of most of the characters, which is then undermined by their pathological flaws for either wealth or status or sheer indulgence.

Preston inserts some great characters into the plot - the tragic teeth stained Madison, who completely sees the insanity of her life, but who is unable to pull out of her job, so wed to it is she, and so determined to prove herself with her insight that the markets will soon fail. She is one of the the most fascinating people in the book, and perhaps represents rationality in that those around her aren't at all interested in reality. She in turn links to the mentored Ray, who is completely outside the financial world as a low income adolescent, and

sees Madison's and Charlie's choice of job and life often to be somewhat deranged.

Henry and Vero both weave in and out of the world of greed which is constantly associated with the markets, and seemingly are always better off when they're away from it, though not directly, but mainly via Charlie, they all become entwined in the downward spiral and at the end I only really had sympathy for Henry, but it's a sort of flawed sympathy somehow.

Charlie himself is carefully portrayed to try to let you maintain some sympathy for him throughout most of the novel, and only really towards the end (not wanting to put in any spoilers here) do we really see how he truly is - or at least what he has become - and eventually, I would argue, he gets what he deserves in many ways. Even then, even through the ups in his social status he maintains a small flat in London with poor heating, no television and an old car, as he reads compulsively and trawls real-estate website looking at possible future homes.

Overall I'd say this is a book well worth reading, even if you have no interest in the market - and no knowledge of them is needed to follow the story - just to see how someone with a bit of a chip on their shoulder and a fair amount of intelligence can not only wreak havoc in their own life and that of their family, but to almost everyone else they have a relationship with. The writing style is also very smooth, and very fluid given the topic of the storyline which makes some of the more unexpected and shocking events seem a bit removed or glossy which is perhaps the intent as the characters are often on drugs or just have a certain detachment from people and events, which is sometimes the crux of Charlie's life.

Monica Co says

This book belongs to the tradition of fiction that came out after the big 2008 financial crisis.

Set in the London City, it is the story of a young graduate who climbs the ranks of a big investment firm, but at the same time loses touch with the real life values. Driven by greed and ambition, he realises his mistake when it is too late; then he simply becomes what he was meant to be from the beginning.

Despite finding the novel a bit immature and somehow clichéd, I liked how Preston ends the story; instead of finding a happy or a tragic ending he opts for a solution which is 100% realistic, and, precisely for that, scaring.

Stijn says

I was lucky to get my copy of 'This Bleeding City' from the author himself. Mr Preston was giving an early morning kind of a lecture in a forest at the end of the road festival in Wiltshire. It was raining, I didn't know him, but liked the way he talked about his book and how he read a few fragments for us, early reading birds in the woods. Afterwards Mr Preston simply asked if anyone was interested in a copy. I rose my hand, and walked back to the festival site carrying a new book (with a little personal note written on the first page). Back home, the book sat several years on my bookshelf. Until a couple of weeks ago. Picked it up, immediately having difficulties to put it down again. What a wonderful, wonderful book. Heartbreaking.

Ineke van Mackelenbergh says

Fast-paced well-written insight into City hi-money - but sad to realize what materialism can do and how it

can pervert good sense.

Polly Courtney says

As a fellow ex-City banker, I was really keen to get my hands on this. It didn't disappoint. Beautifully written and with a carefully crafted storyline, I related to the characters instantly.

Whether non-City evacuees would enjoy this I'm not sure (which goes for most City books, including my own); I think anyone who has worked in a high-pressure environment would relate, and there's plenty to like outside 'the office' in here.

Dennis Thompson says

Felt almost a bit like an autobiography in that it really wasn't that great a story. I suppose you could argue that it is a good thing that the story seemed real but for me fiction should have some element of escapism and an interesting story. Set during the period 2005-2009 or so mainly in London during the financial crisis.

Cameron McNiff says

I ended up giving up on this read, it was too difficult to get into, I just couldn't engage with the story or characters enough to make me keep on reading.

Jon White says

Very depressing book. I didn't care about the characters at all.
I met the author and questioned him about the reality of the book and how he based his characters. To be fair, he took the criticism well. No-one in my library book club liked the book.

Dany says

I found this book sooo depressing, but at the same time very realistic and well written.
Maybe the story is a bit discounted, and you already sort of guess since the beginning that is not going to end well; even though you hope a bit that it will turn unexpectedly positive before the end.
I think it is easy though to identify yourself with Charlie, who represents all the fears and insecurities that we all have at the beginning of the adulthood, but also the hope that we are going to make it and becoming successful in our lives.. Perhaps that is the wish that in the end everything would sort itself out...
Also I live in London, and I guarantee that more than once I thought of it as a bleeding city...

Malashree says

It's very well written, but being Preston's debut, it does get a bit clumsy at times. Also, the protagonist is not very amicable. In fact, most of the characters aren't, and those who are somehow screwed over by either the protagonist or terrible circumstances. I do understand that the protagonist is an anti-hero. He's not supposed to be liked, but still...

Preston obviously draws inspiration from F. Scott Fitzgerald, and particularly 'The Great Gatsby'.

I felt sorry for the characters, particularly the protagonist, I felt sympathy but the novel lost some of its charm as it went on. It became overtly gloomy and archetypal. I initially rated it a 4 because I greatly enjoyed the writing in the beginning, but I know that over-all, it deserves a 3. That's not to say I don't want to read more from him though.

David Hebblethwaite says

This Bleeding City is one of those novels with which you can tell roughly where it's heading more or less from the outset – not because of any clumsiness on the author's part, but because the story is so archetypal: young man goes off to seek his fortune, and discovers that what he thought he wanted wasn't necessarily so great after all. The context for this particular telling of that story is the City of London (where Alex Preston himself works) in the run-up to the recent financial crisis.

To fill in more specifics: whilst at university, Charlie Wales's ambition is to work in the City; to truly become part of the smart set in whose circles he moves; to meet the expectations of Vero, the beautiful French girl whom he loves. On graduating, Charlie moves to London with Vero and another university friend, Henry; and eventually finds work at a hedge fund. But Charlie struggles with the demands of the job... and you may be able to guess much of the rest (though probably not all of it; the story isn't quite as straight forward as you might anticipate).

When you know the broad trajectory of a novel – and the prologue of *This Bleeding City* shows explicitly that tragedy is on the horizon, so there's no getting away from that knowledge – the telling has to carry even more of the weight; Preston does a pretty good job here, on the whole. Having said that, some aspects of his style can be difficult to warm to; for example, his dialogue can sound too much like speechifying:

‘[...]I’m sorry that I’m not planning a play for the Festival or writing reviews for a highbrow theatrical website, but we all made those choices, and it’s trite but true that it was a long chain of little decisions, a series of mistakes and ill-chosen priorities and... and we ended up here. We had so many ideals, so many dreams, and we ended up settling for money.’ (32)

I’m not generally keen on dialogue that draws attention to itself, as this does. But there is a way in which it works quite well, because it foregrounds the fictionality, emphasising that there’s a greater story behind the specific one being told here. And there’s narrative power in Preston’s writing nonetheless; it’s not so much that particular images or sentences stand out (though there is a description of a sunset which is striking, albeit less because of the words on the page than the way Preston depicts it as a rare moment in which the workers of the City can unite in taking their minds off their jobs), but that the text as a whole has the pull of good storytelling.

The main weakness of *This Bleeding City*, I'd say, is that the characterisation of Charlie doesn't quite come together. He seems to me a very self-aware sort, who sees shortcomings in his chosen career path even early on (as an example, consider the passage of dialogue I quoted earlier, which is spoken by Charlie to Vero); he doesn't strike me as the type who would carry on doing something for so long when he knew in his heart that it wasn't right for him (or, if he is that type, it doesn't come across strongly enough in the novel). And, since Charlie's character is the fulcrum of the book, this can't help but dent its success to an extent

So, *This Bleeding City* has its flaws – but it's still a good read for all that, and one I'd recommend. I'll be interested to see where Alex Preston goes next with his writing.

NoBeatenPath says

While this book has a few nice features - a clever title, a prologue that draws you in (though it pretty much telegraphs the whole plot of the book) it is really rather dire and a chore to read. The author seems to have taken every metaphor he could find, gilded with some extra adjectives and whacked them into his story. The plot - boy from average background sells his soul to get the finer things in life (including a girl who is 'too good for him') but discovers in the end that of course that is not really what happiness is about, after losing his way - is trite and has been done much better elsewhere. The characters feel like badly drawn stereotypes, and frankly I never really cared about any of them.

In short - this reads like a bad creative writing program output. There are some fascinating novels being published at the moment - save your precious reading time for them, don't bother with this one.
