



Alternate Routes

Tim Powers

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Something weird is happening to the Los Angeles freeways—phantom cars, lanes from nowhere, and sometimes unmarked offramps that give glimpses of a desolate desert highway—and Sebastian Vickery, disgraced ex-Secret Service agent, is a driver for a covert supernatural-evasion car service. But another government agency is using and perhaps causing the freeway anomalies, and their chief is determined to have Vickery killed because of something he learned years ago at a halted Presidential motorcade.

Reluctantly aided by Ingrid Castine, a member of that agency, and a homeless Mexican boy, and a woman who makes her living costumed as Supergirl on the sidewalk in front of the Chinese Theater, Vickery learns what legendary hell it is that the desert highway leads to—and when Castine deliberately drives into it to save him from capture, he must enter it himself to get her out.

Alternate Routes Details

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Author : Tim Powers

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From Reader Review Alternate Routes for online ebook

Marc Hutchison says

Tim Powers has to be the most creatively original fantasist alive. In this book he first grounds us in a starkly real Los Angeles, then takes us off a nonexistent off ramp of the Pasadena Freeway into a desert netherworld where nothing makes sense and anything is possible.

Powers is probably my favorite writer. I've read just about everything he's written and he's never disappointed me.

Andrew Shultz says

This book was Tim Powers fanfic written by Tim Powers. It was everything about him turned up past when it's interesting and on to being self-parody without knowing it. He's done great things, go reread them instead.

Ron says

Tim Powers mines L.A. typography once again to bring a spooky story to the readers of *Alternate Routes*. Sebastian Vickery used to be a Secret Service agent based in L.A., but disappeared after killing members of the TUA. So when a member of the TUA tracked him down, he was less than pleased, especially when he had to go on the run with her. Plenty of Powers' ghost strangeness from the Fault Line series, but with the addition of disappearing freeway exits, ghost cars, and the possible destruction of Los Angeles. If you are a fan of Tim Powers, you will enjoy Vickery and Castine reluctantly saving the day while finding a friendship along the way. And if new to Tim Powers, you can enjoy an interesting read.

Doug says

Once again, I find myself wishing for half stars or a sliding scale on Goodreads. This could be anywhere between a 3 and a 4 depending on how much you love the books of Tim Powers.

I am a big fan and did enjoy this novel, but it fell short in some key areas for me. The biggest was the characters - the two main characters never really come alive in the way that his leads usually do, and the villain of the book almost seemed like a quick sketch.

One *very-Powers-fanesque* complaint I have is that the connection between the supernatural elements and our world's history also feels a little underexplored or underdeveloped.

In all, I'd say that this is worth reading for all Powers fans, but new readers should look elsewhere in his back catalog.

Randi Kennedy says

First thoughts: more of a 3.5 than a 3. A solid sci-fi adventure that's part Night Vale, part crime noir, and part Greek myth. My only criticism is the two-dimensional, incomplete characterization of the villain. Either really commit to "hapless govt employees misusing something they don't understand with catastrophic results" or flesh out Terracotta into a villain with more depth and malice.

Autumn Is Azathoth The Haunted Reading Room says

Review: ALTERNATE ROUTES by Tim Powers

There is no author equivalent to Tim Powers. Mr. Powers and John Connolly are the two authors I consistently count on to "take me away," to transport me to a realm at first seemingly like ours, but a realm undergirded and overtone by a truly magical realism (surrealism) in which anything can happen and rules never apply.

In ALTERNATE ROUTES (the subtitle reads "The Ghosts of the Freeway are Rising"), L.A. exists side by side with a bizarre form of Afterlife, and both dimensions increasingly bleed through. Twisting the natural laws of physics, ghosts in the Afterlife can communicate, and a secret Federal agency, the Transportation Utility Agency, has charge of those communications. It's L.A. head has a specific agenda, and if he succeeds, the Other dimension will expand and consume L.A...and beyond.

Theo Logos says

The collected works of Tim Powers can be read as a haunted universe. From the haunted 19th century London of The Anubis Gate, to the haunted 18th century Caribbean of On Stranger Tides, to the haunted 20th century Las Vegas of Last Call (and all books in between), Powers' signature is his unique, creepy host of ghosts. They play greater or smaller parts from novel to novel, but as Keith Richards provides that special something that immediately identifies a Rolling Stones song, Powers' ghosts are what marks a book with his distinct style.

Alternate Routes is driven by its ghosts; they are what drive the plot from first chapter to last. Though the live characters in this novel don't seem to be as fully fleshed as in some of his other works, the concentration on this ghostly world with all of its uncanny quirks will be a pleasure for any Powers fan.

This shouldn't be your first Powers book. If you have yet to read him, read Last Call, and perhaps a couple of others first. To fully appreciate this offering, you should already be introduced to the mechanisms of the ghostly Powers' universe.

brian dean says

[that the heroes were intact. They had all their eyes, fingers, toes, arms, etc. They even were able to reenter the workforce after the chaos had settled. A typical Powers book ends with entire limbs missing. (hide s

Nick says

This was a strange modern fantasy, the only one I can remember where the world's oldest freeway plays a role.

If there are supernatural powers in the world, would a government agency wanting to utilize them really surprise you? The only real shock is just how crazy one of the government bureaucrats has become, possibly from his brushes with what's on the other side of death. Ghosts that seem to be semi-sentient echoes of what the person had been, along with ways to and from the other side of the life-death barrier, combine with freeways, taco trucks, weird ways to deflect ghosts, and a bunch of other things. The main story is about people who have suffered real losses, but some of those losses are made worse by continued contact with the things that claim to be your lost loved ones...or loved ones who never existed in the first place.

Shifting realities, shifting roadways, shifting alliances...this is a cool adventure story with ghosts who can talk on the telephone or the radio, or show up cosplaying their favorite stories, or a host of other odd things.

Andrew says

Tim Powers delivers a very urban urban fantasy in this novel of ghosts interacting with the freeway system of Los Angeles. Sebastian Vickery, a former Secret Service agent, and Ingrid Castine, an agent with a covert agency using the ghosts of LA in some sinister ways, get caught up in a potential supernatural disaster. The actions of that covert agency is weakening the barriers between our world and the world of the ghosts (connected to the Labyrinth of Greek mythology) and the end result could cause thousands of deaths. On the run from law enforcement, from the covert agency, and from the ghosts, Castine and Vickery have to find a way to avert this catastrophe.

Tim Powers' novels are never simple and straightforward. While he is perhaps best known for weaving supernatural conspiracies and mysteries into the history of the real world, here, he takes full advantage of his contemporary setting. His explanation of how the freeways of Los Angeles become a concentrated network of supernatural occurrence makes perfect sense within the context of the story. The city is as much a character as the people in the story, and it's hard to imagine this book being set anywhere else.

While a compelling, fast-moving story with a lot of action, the story succeeds primarily because the two main characters are engaging and likable. I found myself genuinely concerned about them, beyond whether or not they were going to successfully stop a supernatural apocalypse. I was excited to hear in a recent interview with Tim Powers that a sequel is in the works, because I would like to spend some more time with Castine and Vickery.

Graham Bradley says

In true Powers fashion, this was an absolutely demented mashup of ideas and symbols and characters that congealed into a plot by the end. I spent a lot of time soaring up to high peaks only to plummet into uncanny valleys, at times wondering what in the heck was going on. By the end, most of it came together, but the underpinnings were not as stable as they ought to have been, so at times I got turned around and had to catch up to how it all worked. Otherwise it might have gotten 4 stars.

John says

This here's some hard-core Tim Powers. It's deep in (what I call) his "ghost mechanics" genre, where we learn along with the characters all the rules for how ghosts work -- lots of ghostly nuts and bolts. (Oh, why isn't there a Tim Powers RPG?) His short story "Down and Out in Purgatory" gave us a glimpse of the Other Side; Alternate Routes expands on that with several crazy Labyrinthine chapters. I felt that this book might be a turnoff for someone new to Power's work, but those familiar with his ghost mechanics will love it. Someone should start a Tim Powers tour of L.A.!

Jeff Miller says

Yes another quirky Tim Powers novel with odd systems regarding the supernatural. Quite enjoyable. While having his framework this novel stands on it own story wise. There are also Catholic elements to the story I also enjoyed.

Mark says

I'm a massive Powers fan, albeit perhaps more for his historically set novels than his weird modern Americana, so if you've tried Powers and found him not to your liking then this is unlikely to change your mind. That said, this seems to be a bit more entry-level Powers than some other works of his, with action from the off and more-and-earlier explanations of the Weird Stuff, so it might be worth trying if you're new to Powers.

In this case the Weird Stuff revolves around ghosts, freeways, and some greek mythology. The main character Vickery is Tortured By His Past in a slightly cliched fashion but Powers is a good enough writer to make him a fully-featured character anyway. He was a Secret Service agent (of the more boring fraud investigation type) until he heard something Weird on the radio in a motorcade vehicle and his colleagues promptly tried to murder him. Now he's hiding out under an assumed name and driving vehicles for a private agency that specialises in getting you past supernatural obstacles. The plot quickly kicks into high gear as former colleague Ingrid Castine pops up to warn him that he's been spotted but she's for some reason not prepared to let them get to him -- it turns out she's not happy with what's she's been learning on the inside -- and the pair are quickly on the run from gunmen who can track them with intel extracted from ghosts. Without running into spoilers, the weirdness ramps up from there. It's a quick and pacy story with Power's trademark of Secret History interacting with Americana.

Debrac2014 says

I was lured into this story by it's synopsis! Ghosts showing up around the Los Angeles freeways because the of the currents produced by traffic! it's a good story, very offbeat, but the odd twists and turns were confusing at times! The two main characters, Vickery an ex-Secret Service agent and Castine, a TUA agent, are being chased by this oddball government agency, the TUA, who want them dead for hearing ghosts!

