



Plow the Bones

Douglas F. Warrick

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With an artist's eye for language and form, Douglas F. Warrick sculpts surreal topiary landscapes of dream worlds made coherent. Dip into a story that is self-aware and wishes it were different than what it must be recounting a secret held by a ventriloquist dummy. Wander a digital desert with an AI as sentience sparks revolution. Follow a golem band that dissolves over the love of a groupie.

In these pages, interdimensional lampreys feed on a dying man's most precious memories, and a manga artist's sketches remake Osaka into part fantasy, part nightmare. Combining elements of fantasy, magical realism and horror, the collection floats on a distinctly literary voice that is creepy, surreal and just plain weird.

Plow the Bones Details

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From Reader Review Plow the Bones for online ebook

Josh says

PLOW THE BONES is a collection of surrealist fiction in short form by Douglas F. Warrick. The limits of his imagery are boundless with many of these stories crossing into the deep confines of dreamscapes and nightmares.

Herein lies poetically depicted madness; a controlled chaos that's both eloquent and alarming. The pages of PLOW THE BONES are breathtaking at times by virtue of a perfect blend of otherworldly fiction and a balanced view of the realistic and macabre nature of humanity.

While I didn't connect with every story there were a number that held my attention: Come to my Arms, my Beamish Boy contains the rambling and disjointed thoughts of an Alzheimer's sufferer as his mind deteriorates. Drag is a form of urban legend horror story where a heinous and murderous creature known as Ember Eyes terrorises a group of teens. Her Fathers Collection is haunting, plausible, and entirely disturbing - one of the best.

In Stickhead a zombie-like creature is discovered by a couple of boys. It's as much about the surreal nature of the story as it is the relationship between the two boys. I liked this one, but it does require the reader to completely suspend their belief. Zen and the Art of Gordon Dratch's Damnation is a graphic depiction of eternal suffering in the bowels of hell. This is not for the weak of stomach.

The highlight of the collection is Across the Dead Station Desert, Television Girl. An erotic tale of an AI sex worker which blurs the lines between reality and the digitised realm. The setting itself echoes post-apocalyptic while the characters draw on desperation and need.

PLOW THE BONES is an acquired taste, yet there is something amongst the stories that will appeal to the majority of readers. The ghosts of this collection will haunt the reader long after the last page has been turned.

Vivid and beautifully written, PLOW THE BONES is a short story collection that captures the imagination and places it in a vice like grip, twisting, distorting, and molding the reader to its every will.

This review first appeared on my blog: <http://justaguythatlikes2read.blogspot...>

Wanda says

Plow the Bones is a book of short stories that can disturb its readers on many different levels - just harrowing. Many of the stories are surreal, creepy, disturbing, erotic, and filled with strangeness - stories that could invade your dreams at night. I must admit, I'm not a huge fan of horror, and some of these stories freaked me out - very spine tingling, and some rather gory. And, I have to say, some of the stories went right over my head, not able to understand or grab the context.

My personal favorite - Come to My Arms, My Beamish Boy - The story of an elderly man struggling with

Alzheimer's. Cotton has small fragments of his memory returning in short spurts, and then just as quickly, he's back to the dark shadow of the past. His world is collapsing. I loved how this one ended - just profound!

The stories are well written, grabbing your attention from the beginning. And what a powerful and vivid imagination! The author paints a picture with words - wonderful descriptive writing. Occasionally the author strayed into territories with disturbing content, not to be read by everyone - adult reading, for sure.

This is real horror fiction that is superbly written - solid storytelling in the world of the supernatural. A collection of short stories to be read, and then, read again - a book that challenges the imagination. This is definitely not my genre, but for those of you who like this type of reading, I'm sure you'll enjoy this book. My rating is 4 stars.

A complimentary copy of this book was provided to me from Apex Book Company to review and post on reviewfromhere.com. The opinions shared are my own.

Betsy Phillips says

It is really as good as the hype.

Sarah B. says

The "F" in Douglas F. Warrick tells you a lot about how this book is going to read. It was clearly written by someone who goes by Douglas, *not Doug*, and who would correct you if your forgot to include their middle initial in their name.

The prose is arch, affected, and in love with itself. It's impossible to separate reading these stories from feeling like Warwick is reading over one's shoulder with you, excited for you to get to his favourite turns of phrase. I knew I wasn't going to finish this book when I came across this particularly precious paragraph in "Funeral Song for a Ventriloquist":

A confession. This story began with a lie. This story wanted very much to end here. And so it spun a fabrication within its very second sentence. But this is not the end of this story, as ashamed as it may be to admit it. This is the rest of this story, told into the void as all stories are. Until their end. Whether they like it or not.

Godawful. I get that this is a young author, and I hope his style improves in his future work. I liked some of the ideas, especially in "Zen and the Art of Gordon Dratch's Damnation" (OMG that title though). I would bet that as he matures, Warrick will gain some confidence and step away from the wrought prose and let his stories stand on their ideas. I hope.

To quote from an Amazon reviewer named August, "The writing is very good. But I personally hated it." Not recommended.

Frank Errington says

Review copy

Plow the Bones is the inaugural release in a new series called Apex Voices from Apex Publications. Each book will feature a collection of shorts from authors you might not have heard of, but whose voices deserve to be heard.

Truth be told, up until now I had never heard of Douglas F. Warrick. Thankfully, that has been corrected by Leslie Conner, writer, and Apex editor, who asked me to read this collection and post my review which you are reading now. Thank you.

Not being familiar with Warrick's work, I had no idea what to expect. What I didn't expect was to be overwhelmingly impressed with these 13 stories, each one stranger and more imaginative than the last.

It's long been said that the opening line is key to grabbing the reader's interest and making said reader want or need to read more. Warrick certainly has a knack for opening lines. The first entry in Plow the Bones is "Behindeye: A History" and here is its opening line..."There is a man whose pupils are full of moths. Dry moths, dying moment by moment and collecting in drifts behind his eyes, deep down in that secret and endless world behind his face." Then there's, "When the ventriloquist died his will dictated that all of his puppets be burned." The opening line of "Funeral Song for a Ventriloquist." Both of those and others just made me want to keep turning pages.

I found each of the stories in this collection to be delightfully offbeat; fanciful and disturbing at the same time.

There is truly something for everyone. An intriguing ghost story in, "Her Father's Collection." I loved the story of the night clowns in, "The Itaewon Eschatology Show." "Come to My Arms, My Beamish Boy" is an insightful look into Alzheimer's, and there's even a story on the music scene featuring a golem band. You read that right, a golem band.

Plow the Bones concludes with my personal favorite, "Across the Dead Station Desert, Television Girl," the story of a new service which provides, well, here's the ad copy from the Television Girl website. "Television Girl! The newest innovation in erotic partnership! Television Girl! All of your fantasies fulfilled in a safe, solitary environment! Television Girl! Authentic sensual partnership, no strings attached!" Nothing could go wrong with that idea, right?

Need I tell you Plow the Bones is for adult readers? I didn't think so. Right now, it's available in paperback from Amazon .com and is one of the best books I've read in 2013.

Bob Milne says

Intellectually surreal and emotionally disturbing, Douglas F. Warrick's collection of tales marks a superb introduction for readers to the Apex Voices line of fiction. Not having had any prior experience to Warrick or his work, I wasn't sure what to expect when the review request first came in, but Plow the Bones sounded like an intriguing collection - and, let's be honest, an introduction from Gary A. Braunbeck certainly didn't

hurt.

What we have here is a collection that runs the literary gamut from snippets of narrative scenes to full-fledged story arcs, the diverse pieces held together by an imagination that refuses to accept any sort of mental, emotional, or physical boundaries. Comprised of equal parts WOW and WTF, Warrick's work is neither for the squeamish, nor for those readers secure within their four walls of the traditional narrative. While I wouldn't quite call the writing experimental, and am hesitant to use the tired old clichés of avant-garde, it is refreshingly original, challenging, engaging, and entertaining, all at the same time.

Behindeye: A History is one of those strange little snippets, a tale that can be read on many levels, which sets the stage for everything that follows. It's almost as if Warrick is confronting the reader with a bold demand to get inside his head, with the unspoken agreement being that he gets to climb inside ours as well.

As for what follows that invitation, highlights for me included:

Funeral Song for a Ventriloquist - a sad and melancholy story of a dead ventriloquist's sole surviving doll and the cautionary tale he weaves for a young girl. It seems so simple and direct, but has the kinds of layers to it that you might expect from a classic Twilight Zone episode.

Her Father's Collection - by far, my favourite of the collection. Here, Warrick tells us a tale of obsessive love, in which a father commits the ultimate atrocity, simply so that he never has to let go. Not content to stop there, he wraps that tale in a ghost story so cruel, and so chilling, that you almost want to applaud his audacity by the end.

Zen and the Art of Gordon Dratch's Damnation - is probably the most intellectual of all the tales in the collection, a philosophical musing in which a dead young man is forced to suffer the Judeo-Christian idea of eternal damnation . . . and who comes out the other side, having denied the pleasures of heaven along the way, due to a rather Buddhist philosophy.

Ballad of a Hot Air Balloon-Headed Girl - a weirdly touching tale of innocent lost, the mindless suffering of war, and the magic inherent in freedom of it all. The battlefield story could have been a story in and of itself, but contrasting that grisly reality with the fantasy of a girl with a head that becomes its own hot air balloon really pulls it all together.

Stickhead - almost demands comparisons to Stephen King's The Body, with two kids discovering a decomposing corpse in a ditch, but goes in a very different direction. Rather than exploring how such a find might force onto to confront their own mortality, Warrick invites us to poke the body with a stick and see what happens.

I Inhale the City, the City Exhales Me - is a surreal story of life imitating art. It all begins with the concept of anime drawings comprising their own reality, which is exciting on its own, but when it begins exploring the idea that even those we trust to report on events around us are actually creating it as they go . . . well, it all gets rather disturbing.

Across the Dead Station Desert, Television Girl - a serious contender for my favourite entry, a darkly erotic tale of the ultimate in masturbatory innovation, and an invention that goes so very, very wrong. Beneath the surface, however, it's also a story of objectification, obsession, and possession, a condemnation of our need to compel our pleasures.

Plow the Bones is a relatively short collection, but by no means a quick read. These are stories to be savoured, considered, and sometimes even reread to uncover all of the layers. The language of the writing is well-suited to the surreal creepiness of the stories, drawing us in with the promise of poetry, but then ensnaring us in subtle arguments and criticisms. It's a weird, wild ride, and a welcome dose of originality.

Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins

David Ledeboer says

Sometimes before, after, or during reviews of books I scribble my thoughts down on pieces of paper or make a tweet about a book. Usually this notation is just some random interesting fact that I wanted to specifically point out at the time and catalogue, whether or not I come back to this in the review isn't always the case. However, for the review of Plow the Bones, I want to come back to a tweet I posted: "I was amazed at the continuous style and flow of the shorts within this novelized collection. While each piece is a wholly individual short story, it felt on some mysterious level as if they had always been intended to be published as one unique and brilliant collection."

From the very first short, "Behindeye: A History", to the sensory conclusion of artificial sentience, "Across the Dead Station Desert, Television Girl", there lies a fine invisible filament, an inconspicuous strand, a fishing line woven through the very skin of Plow the Bones, that while it might not have been intentional at the time, this inconspicuous thread connects each and every short. By voice, style, pace, insanity, creativity, and brilliance, Plow the Bones was meant to be a collection of shorts. They all fit so seamlessly together it is astonishing, and yet somehow each one of them is so uniquely different.

Here I would normally go into dishing out fragment descriptions, teasers, and review thoughts on each and every short within this collection, but I'm not going to do that. WHY NOT? Well, because in all honesty, Apex Publication should make each of these shorts available online in eFormat for \$1.99, and after you buy one or two of them, you are going to smack yourself in the head for not purchasing the whole book in the first place.

So, let's hit on a few of the absolutely fantastic shorts in Plow the Bones:

"Come to My Arms, My Beamish Boy" is one of the best fucking shorts I've ever read! Sorry for the expletive but in certain instances, like in this case, it is deemed necessary. No ifs, ands, or buts, this short will tear you apart. Cotton, is an old man with Alzheimer's, and is slowly having his life and memory ripped from his outstretched fingertips. In the end, there is but a single exclamation point he hopes to recall before his light is extinguished. Simply put, this is a million dollars short and I can't urge you enough to just read this one if anything else. I've shoved the book under my wife's nose and yelled at her, "Read this, just this one, pleaseeeee. YOU WILL LOVE IT." Yes, it works.

"Old Roses" – I'm not sure why I liked this one so much, but I did, something in the undertone-currents of the story, about whether to believe the main

character's father's autobiography or not. Old Roses is captivating and has intrigued me, I just wish we knew just a little bit more about some of the other characters in this, but the lack of certain details is most probably intentional to allow the reader their own interpretations.

I'm also adding, "I Inhale the City, the City Exhales Me", to this group. I liked it before and I still enjoyed it the second time around, it is a very refreshing read, I also find it a little less dark and slightly more entertaining than some of the other pieces in this collection. Also, I would be interested in knowing the timeframe in which some of these were written, because I feel the location/setting and design of this short had a correlating connection directly with "The Itaewon Eschatology Show", more strongly felt than with any of the others.

Now for my least favorite, which was "Funeral Song for a Ventriloquist", expectations play a huge role for me when grading books and stories. The potential in this one, simply by title alone, with this story is gigantic and I wish the premise would have went in a few other directions than the path it inevitably angled down. "Funeral Song for a Ventriloquist" isn't the first I've encountered that raises my hopes to unattainable peaks and it won't be the last.

Another note worth mentioning is I think Mr. Warrick might have missed his calling as a professional torturer, the first paragraph of Zen and the Art of Gordan Dracht's Damnation is something else entirely. I really hope when we all die, that if we are to be judged for our sins, whoever is delving out the punishment hasn't read Plow the Bones or we are in for some serious trouble.

My quest to familiarization with Plow the Bones by Douglas F. Warrick started with, "I Inhale the City, and the City Exhales Me" in the Dark Faith: Invocations anthology, then turned into an author interview, and finally a read/review of the aforementioned book. The path this has led me on was something of a dark and emotion-filled trail of self-enlightenment. During points in certain stories I found myself questioning abstract ideas, viewing engagements and life choices differently, bathing with turmoil in emotions of horror, curiosity, and sorrow. Books leave bits and pieces of themselves inside you, like black grit beneath your fingernails you can't scrub away. Plow the Bones was more akin to a thin sliver of glass than dirt beneath the nails, it was a shard that sliced and embedded a piece of itself in my head where it will forever rest. Plow the Bones is one I will proudly rest ownership on, in my bookshelf and memory.

J.D. says

I was given an electronic version of this book in exchange for an honest review. And now I feel guilty and would've wanted to pay for this outstanding short story collection, give the author his due—and perhaps a tip. This is an exceptional, unforgettable set of stories, worth having for all fans of horror, the weird, or of just about anything fantastic, the whole realm of what manages to twist reality into the surreal.

For some reason, the Introduction sections of many books by original writers are full of comparisons and connections with other writers—as if they’re too original for their own good, and credit must be given to others. Mr. Warrick deserves to be read on his own, and for instance, I don’t find his stories Borges-like at all—why every good short story writer has to be compared to Borges? I could imagine Salvador Dali writing stories like these—if he’d been inclined to write—as he would enjoy building unsettling horrors that are more stylish than the infernal towns of The Bosco’s. These tales feel (to me) close to the purest SF/horror Ray Bradbury wrote—here, I’m doing the same thing I’d criticized—especially when poetry erupts into the story to make it alive, to transform it into blinding light.

The language here is always vivid, dizzying, and vertiginous—if you aren’t stunned for some of this writing, you may as well start reading procedural Swedish crime novels. Another aspect that’s unusual about these stories is the broad, magical Asian influence, both in settings and in philosophy. The story “Zen and the art of Gordon Dratch’s damnation” is worth the price of the book for the philosophically-minded and, if you were worrying about the afterlife, it’d make you worry even more.

“Across the Dead Station desert, Television Girl” is another brilliant construct, modern and daringly exploring our new obsession with AI, but also ambitious and somewhat akin to uncover a lost—and R-rated—episode of “The Twilight Zone.”

Not all the stories keep the same level of astounding verbal pyrotechnics, and a few (“Drag” for me) succumb at the end to be a little too omniscient. This might have to do with characters that are being considerably screwed by life, the afterlife, or even the gatekeepers of the afterlife; their complaints seem to eventually reach the higher spheres. And to make it more fun, some of these castaways are weird ghosts, clowns, or other evil spirits.

Without giving any more away, this is a must-have collection, and my only letdown has been that I can’t find much more published by this author. Please, Mr. Warrick, dream some more, eat poorly and drink a lot, have nightmares, do whatever’s that you do to create your art. There are dark souls out there—like yours, in a good way—who want to be entertained.

A very Goodread, and a keeper for all horror/dark fantasy aficionados.

Steven says

There is a connection between the television comedy Louie, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and Douglas Warrick's collection Plow the Bones.

All three are literary in the best possible way. Not the pretentious "look at how clever I am at writing this" head-up-your-ass kind of literary that is too often force-fed by bad English teachers who are still writing their own "literary" works focusing on the introspective musings of a beleaguered-but-sympathetic writer-turned-adjunct-professor whose name is strikingly similar to the author's. Not that.

The kind of literary where the words are beautiful, the sentences are keenly and insightfully crafted with care - and they exist entirely to serve the story. To draw you in and drive it home, to haunt you days and weeks and months and years later because the story shows you, perhaps unwillingly, something about yourself.

In Ecclesiastes, the prophet says "Vanity of vanities - all things are vanity." Everything will crumble to dust. All human endeavor is meaningless and without purpose. While the prophet does an end-run by appealing to service to the Lord, it is a last-second panacea, as much as Descartes' half-hearted reassurance that reality is not an illusion because (my paraphrase) God is good and wouldn't do that to us.

I'm writing this the day after a building fell on a Salvation Army thrift store, killing six. That kind of faith too closely resembles willful ignorance. But without that sense of external validation, without that sense of meaning... things get soul-blastingly cold.

For me, the most striking bit in Louie is when the title character tells us all relationships are doomed. They will always - always end in sadness. The relationship will end, or, best case scenario, one of you will die before the other. The end result of all relationships is sadness. He strives for one anyway, though you as the viewer know he's doomed to both short (and long) term failure.

It's a horrible, terrifying thought. I dare you to contemplate it. Dare you. It is emotional torture.

As a teenager, I told my mother (to her horror) that I'd realized the positive emotions - happiness, joy, and so on - could simply be explained as the absence of the negative emotions of fear, sadness, and depression. As if the removal of those awful things is relief enough. Carry a weight for too long, and simply removing gives you a feeling of lightness.

And that is the far side that Douglas Warrick takes us to.

Make no mistake. He shoves us screaming into the fire, eyelids pinned open while we viddy the chaos and meaningless madness that exists all around us. It's emotionally trying reading. This book hit me as hard as Blindsight and House of Leaves; it took me nearly a month to be emotionally equipped to finish the book.

But.

But.

As we travel through the fire, the beautiful words searing the false illusions, the manufactured meanings, the idle banal distractions of the world away, Mr. Warrick's work brings us through to the far side. To the place where, for a little while, cities can be redrawn, we love the women whose heads blaze, we tell our secrets to the creatures behind the walls, we dance on stilts and behind masks as the world burns. There is no meaning save the meaning of now, and released of the weight of all the illusions and delusions, free of the everyday blinding burden of society, we feel, for a little while, free.

It is a kind of hope.

We tell him that we love him.

And we mean it.

Anton Cancre says

A common complaint in the genre is that Weird Fiction is no longer weird. That Speculative Fiction no

longer speculates. Instead of the bright, dimensional boundary shattering work that started the genres, we're getting stale, staid and bland rehashes that stick to the established formulas. Nearly every fantasy is a copy of either Tolkien or Howard. Far too much Sci-fi is trying to be Herbert, Asimov or Heinlein. And if I get one more fucking lazy goddamn Lovecraft pastiche, I swear that I may stab someone. But then comes Dougie Fresh here with some of the weirdest speculative fiction I've read in years.

Now, if you like your fiction easy, simple and fun, then I will just tell you to stop now. You won't like this stuff. His stories are dense and, at times, intensely painful. This is not good time reading. At the same time, it is damn good.

If you've read either of Apex's Dark Faith anthologies (shame on you if you haven't), then You'll recognize his name among the standouts there. "Zen and the Art of Gordon Dratch's Damnation" (from the first one) presents a Buddhist lesson to a Christian god that manages to avoid didacticism and leaves pretty much everyone feeling cold. "I Inhale the City, the City Exhales Me" (courtesy of Invocations) follows an artist become a god or sorts, who is left weeping over the creations she has poured from her pen and her own petty, empty desires. Both stories are dense, intricate mazes of human misery and hope laid out in bizarre, but not incomprehensible, landscapes that positively wrecked me.

Two of the stories hit a bit too close to home for me. The first was "Come to My Arms, My Beamish Boy", a tale of an old man, losing everything he was and the few tenuous connections to his own life that remain his to interdimensional lampreys. The portrayal of Alzheimer's from the inside is touching and was possible a bad choice for me to read so shortly after losing a family member to dementia. All the same, the touch of potential hope at the end was needed, and I thank him for that.

The other was "Rattenkonig" about the hidden room in the house with a wall of interwoven rat-type things and the strange guy that shows up asking about them. Or, it's about the slow, steady, unnoticed dissolution of a relationship until those left feel no connection but can see no way out. He perfectly captured the feelings of alienation and confusion as well as the fear that nothing will get any better for either of you, no matter what you do.

Overall, there seems to be a general theme of disappointment running through these stories. An exploration of a life and a world that does not meet the hopes we were given for it. Don't look for answers, though. None are given and we (both readers and characters) are left fumbling and tumbling through things we have no hope of comprehending. I told you it wasn't going to be fun.

As I said, if you are looking for breezy entertainment, you won't find it here. But fans of Thomas Liggett and Gary Braunbeck as well as people that want a bit more honest weirdness in their Weird, without the nonsense of Bizarro, may not be happy, but they will consider the experience a worthy one.

Dwight Hurst says

First of all IMHO Warrick is a fresh and amazing talent in short stories. His ideas are novel and somewhat crazy, in a very cool way.

That being said I had a few issues with this collection. The ideas are super original, and I loved the ones I enjoyed. For example there is a brilliant story about an American ex-pat living in Korea and dressing up as a

clown on stilts to entertain strangers, looking for something unique. Also a story about a ghost searching for the ghost of her father (no spoilers-read it). A band made of Golems, a man dealing with Hell with Zen like focus...These, and a few others, made the collection worth the time for me.

Now the issues: There were several that seemed to be trying to be edgy for the sake of being edgy. Some of these had a feel of being written in a less clever descriptive style than I came to expect from the author. I actually stopped reading a few because sexualized material was being used (in my opinion) for shock value. This bumped it down a star

I still love this author and am looking forward to seeing what comes forth from them in the future. It would be interesting to see a Douglas Warrick novel.

To showcase his talent for a weird premise executed in a super impressive way, read his kindle short story "Sic Semper Sic Semper Sic Semper."

Erica Satifka says

I discovered Douglas F. Warrick's writing through his recent (2016) story on Tor.com, "Sic Semper, Sic Semper, Sic Semper." It was one of the best, if not THE best, short stories I've read so far this year, and I immediately downloaded this collection. Where has this guy been all my life?! These stories are weird, fierce, bleak, and totally original.

Some standouts: "Behindeye: A History" is a brutal bit of opening flash that takes "searing an image in your brain" to a whole new level. "Inhuman Zones: An Oral History of Jan Landau's Golem Band" is a longish piece about exactly what it says it's about, but rock and roll golems can't always be trusted to obey their master. "Across the Dead Station Desert, Television Girl" (amazing title there) is a brutal piece of dark feminist SF that has left me thinking. But they're all great stories, with enough variation in subject matter and tone to keep things varied.

This is not a collection to read all in one sitting, but if you like weird fiction or horror I would absolutely recommend *Plow the Bones*. It's one of the best single-author collections I've ever read.

David Marshall says

Very impressive!

<http://opionator.wordpress.com/2013/0...>

Jorge Villarruel says

Plow the Bones is not for everyone. This means, everyone interested in reading something different should have a look at it.

It's not for everyone. These stories are not easy. And by that, I don't mean it's hard to read or full of strange

and unusual words, tangled syntaxes or anachronistic grammar. It's not. *Plow the Bones* is crystal clear and you always know exactly what is happening. But it's not an easy book in what these stories are doing to you when you are reading.

Plow the Bones (the title comes from a quote by Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson Camille Paglia—"Each generation drives its plow over the bones of the dead"—who seems to be a big influence on the author as she is mentioned several times in the book) is an uncomfortable reading. Douglas F. Warrick doesn't fret when he needs to describe his harsh and grim world to the reader, but it's never gratuitous, either. It's shocking but not for shock's sake. No. It's shocking because the real world is shocking and we readers are not expected to escape from the real world when we read, but to understand a little more about it and its people.

These stories are a collection of sad, lonely and damaged characters who thrive and fail in a sad, lonely and damaged world. Brutal realism, one could say, because more than fantasy, this book seems to be written as a symbol or sigil to represent the material reality. It's not realistic in the way Dostoevsky is, to be sure, but it's not fantastic in the way Ray Bradbury or Neil Gaiman are, either. The stories from *Plow the Bones* have more in common with what we call the Kafkaesque: it's real and fantastic at the same time, the way dreams are. Even in the stories where there is no clear sign of the supernatural or the imaginary ("Come to my arms, my beamish boy" is a perfect example), Douglas F. Warrick succeeds in creating a poetic, oneiric and poignant depiction of life and its possibilities.

Plow the Bones is not for everyone, but it should be. These dreamlike and nightmarish tales tell deeply about ourselves, the world and the people who inhabit it, as all great books are supposed to do.

Brian says

Plow the Bones illuminates the dark corners of the imagination with Douglas Warrick's lucent, driving prose. What we see is thoughtful, but never pensive, and often fascinatingly disturbing. Each story haunts the reader long after finishing them. Indeed, the impression is that these stories belong to a surreal world, one that, despite its fantastical and horrific occurrences, is as visceral as our own.

There is no doubt that Mr. Warrick is well-read and well-studied in his craft. He updates, adapts, deconstructs, and rebuilds Lovecraft, King, Gaiman, Gibson, and many others, bringing a character-focused literary perspective that is delightfully contemporary and socially aware. These are not horror stories, or science fiction stories, or surrealist stories, but rather artful stories, styled with all of those genres and painstakingly rebirthed from the cadavers of their conventions.

Their quality is doubly impressive when considering this is a debut work. Reading *Plow the Bones* is to participate in the introduction of a bold new voice in fiction, one that is sure to thrill and intrigue for years to come. Recommended for all willing to flick the switch of readership for Mr. Warrick's writing, and peer unflinchingly at what may.
