

City of God



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著者:Tom Grimes

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CITY OF GOD

Kirkus Reviews-- ***starred review

A near-future novel that depicts with savage glee the economic-driven Armageddon awaiting us: a choreographed, televised race war brought to you by your local sponsors.

The author of two baseball-oriented novels (A Stone of the Heart, 1990; Season's End, 1992), Grimes here makes a quantum leap into DeLillo land, taking the usual Blade Runner vision of our world in a few years' time-income disparity a gulf, the streets a battlefield-and casting it in the poetry of direct marketing. For most white people in their armored sedans and feudal communities, overspending is the only heroism; for the black and brown ghetto, life revolves around crack and virtual-reality arcades. But then black crackhead Do-Ray, heeding the mysterious rapper Coda, blows away two cops, bringing on rioting and murders that are carried live on XXN- TV. Looking for Do-Ray are Nick, a disinherited louse of a public defender; Julia, a prosecutor with a skinhead 14-year-old son on the lam; and McKuen, a black Vietnam vet detective. As

the characters converge, Do-Ray understands that he's been manipulated into taking the fall as the nonexistent Coda-a ratings-boosting creation of XXN and its Bill Gates-like, seemingly omniscient chief-and reaches for a vision of love and redemption. Julia and McKuen never find their quarry, but they do find each other. And Nick, pathetic to the end, dies reaching for XXN's brass ring. Grimes hews to his vision and keeps the energy up almost to the last, beginning with opening setpieces that are brilliant, language-fueled riffs, bleakly funny and uncomfortably accurate ("Can't produce jobs, we'll mass-produce criminals," says Nick, upon hearing that the police are using the riots as an excuse for mass arrests). The characterizations are a bit thin, but then, this is television.

Pungent with the lunatic language of consumer-driven tabloid America, this horrifying prophecy of a book, coming on the heels of the Oklahoma City bombing, seems closer to social commentary than satire.

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