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The year is 1907, and Britain has entered into a terrifying war with Ruritania, whose strange metal planes darken the skies, and whose monstrous war engines cast looming shadows from across the channel. Doctor Robert Watcham, lately returned to London from the front, makes his homecoming to Dilke Street. There lives his old friend and England's greatest amateur detective, Sax Raker. Even as his beloved city prepares for war, Raker is himself about to embark on the strangest (and, perhaps, the most important) investigation of his career: the case of the man who wasn't there. Is the mysterious, vanishing killer, at last, evidence for Raker's long-held belief in a secret criminal mastermind? Is it some apparition uniquely belonging to this city, a place that seems to have lost all semblance of sense two years ago? Or do all the signs point to something much, much worse?

Aetheric Mechanics Details

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Author : Warren Ellis , Gianluca Pagliarani (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review Aetheric Mechanics for online ebook

Brendan says

I picked this up because I'm a Warren Ellis junkie, and will read anything with his name on it. I'm particularly fond of his APPARAT publishing project, in which he writes comics that might have been if not for the comics code and the superhero takeover. Sort of.

Anyhow, Aetheric Mechanics is a steampunk alternate history London in which quantum mechanics are available to turn-of-the-century technologists, such that Britain has ships in space. It follows the story of a doctor returning home from the front to reunite with his friend the eccentric police consultant.... The mystery they investigate is one of a partly-invisible man who seems to be orchestrating some mass kidnapping of aetheric specialists. The solution to the mystery borders on the Alan-Mooresian, feeling a bit like an issue of Promethia or something equally self-referential. A few other thoughts:

* The art in the comic is good, of course, with the Holmes doppelganger looking a lot like Jeremy Brett. At the same time, I prefer less dense images when the artist doing the inking doesn't use much shading and the images are in black and white. Like Juan Jose Ryp's stuff, I'm not as keen on the very dense images the larger panels in this comic use. That said, the cool Victorian space-age dreadnoughts and towering robots are awesome.

* Ellis does a nice job of revealing the Holmes aspect of the story. It occurred to me — oh man, doctor coming back from the war, returning to his “eccentric” roommate — just about the time that it's actually confirmed for us.

* The resolution is satisfying, but not as amazing as some of Ellis' other work has been. I guess it's pretty hard to do that with a novella.

Josh says

This felt more like a long teaser than a finished product. The art is really nice, and the ending is interesting but comes about way too suddenly.

Adam says

This was an incredible take on steampunk Sherlock Holmes. My one complaint is that I hate reading a story that is so deft and detailed in its worldbuilding (even if that world is effectively a fanfiction rendition of another world) but in the end is more of a prologue than a complete tale.

mark says

The choice of ending was... interesting.

Joanna says

So. The story is chugging along, doing nothing special, but the art is great right? So I keep on reading. How does it end? It ends like this: *magic happens* and that is unacceptable. Too clumsy. Too assured that its cleverness will save it.

Lauri says

Ülilühike (40+ lk.) must-valge aurupunk, on ka elemente "Ruritaania romansist" ning peategelane "eradetektiiv Sax Raker", ja tema ustav arstist abiline "doktor Watcham" meenutavad muidugi teadagi keda, Baker Streedilt.

Ainult et ilmelikult lühike oli, ja mõnevõrra segase lõpplahendusega. Mulle jäi rohkem mulje miskist keelpõses naljast kui korralikust aurupungist.

Ja no must-valge mulle eriti ei istu ka, pole kunagi istunud. Keskmise "kolm".

Brian Rogers says

The artwork is lovely, the story is solid - with the idea of a world of mashed together fictional concepts from the Victorian period explained in a new and different way - and worth the read. It's not Ellis' deepest work, but it is a fun book.

Aron says

Very good. If not my favorite, Ellis is on my top 3 list of favorite comic book writers. Great little story & artwork, my only complaint is that's it's really short. Although the page count is pretty low almost every panel has a lot of good dialog, so in truth, it's probably got as much content as comic that's at least 50% bigger, so it was definitely worth the \$6.99 I paid for it.

Ben says

An above-average Warren Ellis story with great black and white art. I was drawn in by the steampunk Sherlock Holmesy-ness, but was impressed and surprised by a way-out there conclusion that explains a lot more than you think it will but still leaves you dying to know what will happen to these characters next. Very short too.

Travis says

I have no idea how I found this book. I was looking through lists of books I had saved in my library catalog and found it there, but I don't recall when I found it, or what attracted me to it at the time. I almost didn't want to read it because I've found Warren Ellis's works to be a bit irritating, but this wasn't a bad read. My initial impression was that it was a good Sherlock Holmes sort of story (I've read a few in the past), hitting the right notes of camaraderie between main characters and the absurd levels of observation and deduction displayed by the detective. Of course, it isn't Sherlock Holmes and so part of my initial reaction was wondering why if they were going to copy so many of the details they felt the need to change the names anyway. Of course the solution of the case provides the explanation, in a way. I found it a bit annoying. The science of course is bad, since yet again we see quantum mechanics being used to justify fantasy, but it also stupidly assumes that thoughts and ideas and concepts are equal to "information" as used in quantum theory. But even setting that aside, the resulting world lacks internal coherence, which is rather annoying. How can Britain have space ships (in the steampunky literal ship that flies into space variety) and concerns about holding territory around Mars, and yet be in imminent danger of being invaded? If the threat of loss is that great, either their fleet should have been destroyed, or entirely recalled to provide defense. Of course the true culprit is plot, which wants to introduce us to ideas slowly to start, but then ratchets up the tension for ultimate drama in the end in under 50 pages.

Ultimately, the story is fun if you ignore all of the justification, and it has nice, clean art, so I liked it. And it is quite short, so it is hard to really hate it for its pretentiousness.

Matthew says

Trust Warren Ellis to combine a murder mystery, steampunk, war stories, Sherlock Holmes, giant robots, quantum mechanics, and flying cars in just 40 pages. And make it good.

Derek says

An impressive tale! Combining time travel, a complex whodunit and Sherlock Holmes (so named Sad Rakker) is one helluva amazing story. Started off slow, but builds quickly and the ending will mindfuck you for sure. It's the last thing I expected Sax Rakker to have done. But I guess that's what anyone else would've done once confronted with the ugly truth of the unreality of your existence. No one likes to be fodder for an experiment gone wrong.

Shaun Duke says

It's not very often that I get to review a graphic novel, so when a friend let me borrow this, I was really excited to tell you all about it.

Aetheric Mechanics takes place in an alternate Earth in which Britain is at war with a place called Ruritania, whose powerful technology is quickly turning the tide of the war in their favor. Doctor Richard Watcham returns from the war front and, upon reuniting with Sax Raker, an old friend and renowned amateur detective, he embarks on an investigation of bizarre origins.

I'm not familiar with Warren Ellis' work, but if Aetheric Mechanics is any indication of his talent in coming

up with weird stories, then I suspect I'll enjoy just about anything he writes. There's a lot going on here, and the brief instances that explain the current situation (the war with Ruritania, etc.) add some depth to the world Mr. Ellis is working with. Aetheric Mechanics is also generally visually gorgeous, with an exceptional amount of detail throughout the piece. Add to that a strange, steampunk-ish murder mystery and there's plenty here to keep you entertained.

The dialogue is particularly strong here, unlike a lot of comics/graphic novels that try to write in a pseudo-Victorian/WW2-analogous era (assuming, of course, that I got the representative periods correct). Raker, for instance, has a distinct voice that will remind some, for reasons that become obvious when you read the story, of other detective types we've come to know. The other characters, while not as distinct as far as attention grabbing is concerned, hold their own in a world that will immediately spark some of the "gosh wow" desperately needed in quasi-SF tales.

The only problems I had with Aetheric Mechanics are probably normal things found within the comic/graphic novel industry. The story was, in my opinion, rushed, and I would have liked to see the story expanded over two or three volumes to give the twist ending greater impact. The result was that the relationships between characters were either left to reader assumption or not developed at all. Also, the lack of color and the pencil/ink combination removed some of the depth that needed to be there in certain panels (particularly the action-packed ones). Neither of these complaints ruined the experience for me, though.

Overall, I liked Aetheric Mechanics, despite its flaws. It's not perfect, and I hope that Mr. Ellis and his artists continue writing in this world (the ending leaves a lot to be told). I think this is one of those graphic novels that can't be left without sequels; it's too big to be alone. If you're a steampunk/detective mystery fan, then you should definitely check this one out.

John Shaw says

A very unique book.

Blending a Sherlock Holmes-esque
tale with steampunk and a very shocking reveal
at the end.

A different London than history remembers.

A London with aetheric machines brought
to life with beautiful detail by illustrator
Pagliarani.

Venus Maneater says

This was surprisingly fun! Truly amazing art by Pagliarani.

Holmes with a twist. A futuristic, beautiful, steampunk ish twist.
