

## Praise for Colin Campbell

“Very real. And Very good.” - *Lee Child*

### The Resurrection Man Series

“A cop with a sharp eye, keen mind, and a lion’s heart.” - *Reed Farrel Coleman*

“Campbell writes smart, rollercoaster tales with unstoppable forward momentum and thrilling authenticity. The Resurrection Man series is a blast.” - *Nick Petrie*

“Grim and gritty and packed with action and crackling dialogue.” – *Kirkus Review (Jamaica Plain)*

“Action packed. Tough-as-nails. The pages fly like the bullets, fistfights and one-liners that make this one of my favourite books of the year. Top stuff!" – *Matt Hilton (Jamaica Plain)*

“Campbell’s wry maverick Grant never fails to entertain.” – *Kirkus Review (Montecito Heights)*

“Harkens back to the gritty action series of the 70s and 80s, with a stylish noir voice.” – *Kirkus Reviews (Adobe Flats)*

“Crackerjack entertainment: taut, gritty and full of devilish twists.” – *Kirkus Reviews (Snake Pass)*

"Campbell's BEACON HILL is a great tale of violence and intrigue, stretching across the Atlantic and back again. In it, Jim Grant proves he is the real deal." – *Reed Farrel Coleman (about Beacon Hill)*

"The Resurrection Man series is a blast, and BEACON HILL tops the list -- until the next one." – *Nick Petrie (about Beacon Hill)*

### UK Crime Novels

"An excellent story well told. A mixture of The Choirboys meets Harry Bosch." – *Michael Jecks (about Through The Ruins Of Midnight)*

"Campbell's 30 years as a Yorkshire policeman infuse this unusual procedural with grim reality and the harsh humor that helps keep the coppers sane." – *Kirkus Review (Blue Knight White Cross)*

"Every detail feels authentic, and Campbell's dark, muscular prose suggests the best pulp writers of the '50s." – *Kirkus Review (Northern Ex)*

*Colin Campbell*

Also by Colin Campbell

*Resurrection Man*

Shelter Cove

Beacon Hill

Snake Pass

Adobe Flats

Montecito Heights

Jamaica Plain

*Vince McNulty*

Northern Ex

*UK Crime*

Blue Knight White Cross

Ballad Of The One Legged Man

Through The Ruins Of Midnight

*Children*

Gargoyles – Skylights And Roofscapes

*Horror*

Darkwater Towers

*Adobe Flats*

For my daughter, Ann.  
One thing I definitely got right.  
I love you.

*Colin Campbell*

# **THE PRESENT**

“That’s a neat trick. That balancing thing.  
You should be in the circus.”  
- Jim Grant

# ONE

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STEAM HISSED UP FROM Jim Grant's lap as scolding hot coffee shrivelled his nuts and turned the front of his jeans into molten lava. At least that's what it felt like when his efforts to peel back the lid of his latte tipped the king-size paper cup over his nether regions and threatened to melt his gonads. Hot coffee in his lap and a swirl of white foam down the front of his t-shirt like a question mark. Not the best start but par for the course considering his reception since arriving in Absolution, Texas. About as friendly as the one those Mexicans got that visited the Alamo.

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GRANT'S FROSTY RECEPTION BEGAN even before he arrived. On the train from Los Angeles. Not the main line express but the third change after leaving the city of angels. The parched scrubland passing outside the window reminded Grant of that other place. The one where devils ruled and angels feared to tread. When he asked the conductor how long before they

stopped at Absolution the conductor's reaction set the tone for all that was to follow.

"This train don't stop at Absolution."

"That's not what my ticket says."

The conductor examined Grant's ticket. The printout gave his journey as Los Angeles, California to Absolution, Texas. The railroad official frowned and scratched his head.

"We aint never stopped at Absolution. That's a request only stop."

"Well, I'm requesting it. How long?"

The conductor handed the ticket back.

"Next stop after Alpine."

He pulled a pocket watch out of his waistcoat pocket. More for effect than necessity. Grant reckoned this fella knew exactly how long before the place the train never stopped at.

"Half an hour. Bit more maybes."

"Thanks."

Grant settled back in his seat and watched Texas drift by through the window. Dry and brown and dusty. He couldn't remember the last patch of greenery he'd seen since changing trains. He didn't expect to see any more up ahead. Considering why he was here that seemed appropriate. He glanced at the leather holdall in the overhead rack and thought about what was inside. Then he turned his attention to the scenery again.

Absolution wasn't anything he was expecting either.

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STEAM DIDN'T RISE UP from the engine as the train pulled in at the one stop bug hutch of a town. It wasn't that kind of train. This wasn't the iconic steam engine of the old west with its cowcatcher grill and enormous chimney. It was the squat bulky diesel of the Southern Pacific that hadn't changed shape

since the 50s. Grant felt like Spencer Tracy stepping down from the streamliner at Black Rock. That was another place trains never stopped at.

Heat came at him like he'd stepped through an oven door. Dust kicked up from the boards of the platform. Calling it a platform was an exaggeration. A raised section of wood and nails with three steps at one end that led into the parking lot. Parking lot was an exaggeration too. The hard packed sand and gravel might have been a parking lot once upon a time but nobody parked there nowadays. The ticket office was boarded up and closed. No wonder the conductor had looked nonplussed as he pulled the portable stairs back into the carriage. The door slammed shut. The engine roared. There was a hiss from the brakes then the huge monster eased forward. It slowly built up speed as it nosed into the desert and a few minutes later Grant was alone in a landscape so bleak he wondered why anybody wanted to build a town there in the first place.

He took his orange windcheater off, slung it over one shoulder and walked to the ticket office. The boards creaked underfoot. He felt like he should be wearing spurs. Dust puffed up around his feet. The office was just that, a small square garden shed in the middle of nowhere. There was no waiting room or restroom or any other kind of room apart from enough space for one man to sit inside selling tickets. Back when anyone caught the train from here. Grant guessed that was a long time ago.

He glanced over his shoulder towards the town.

Absolution was just a row of uneven rooftops breaking the smooth lines of the horizon. Not as far away as they seemed. Not close enough to pick out any detail. Just flat featureless buildings among the scrub and rock. He squinted against the blazing sunlight. Even the blue sky looked bleached and unfriendly. When he looked closer Grant could see there were



more buildings than he first thought. Smaller and lower than what passed for the main street. A couple of water towers in the distance. A few weather vanes beyond them.

Nothing moved. There was no sound apart from the wind coming in off the flatlands. Then Grant heard pounding footsteps from the other side of the ticket office. He stepped to one side so he could see. A cloud of dust broke the stillness. A man was running towards him. He didn't look happy.

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“WHAT YOU THINK YOU'RE doin' here fella?”

The man was out of breath. His words came out in a rasping voice that sounded like a smoker's but was probably just desert dry from a hard life. He carried a key to the ticket office but didn't offer to open it. Grant was visiting not leaving. He didn't need a ticket. He held the leather holdall in one hand and nodded his head towards the departing train. Explaining the obvious seemed the way to go.

“Just got off the train.”

“I can see that. How come?”

Grant could see this was going to be hard.

“Well, it just kinda stopped. Then I got off.”

“No need to be flippant young man.”

The man spat on the boards to prove he could spit.

“This aint no place for getting shirty.”

The parchment face looked like it was shaped from stripped hide. It was lined and cracked and as dry as the voice. There was no twinkle in the eye to soften the harshness. It was impossible to guess his age but Grant figured somewhere between old and ancient. Running from town hadn't helped. When he got his breath back his voice levelled out.

“Sunset Limited hasn't stopped here in years.”

Grant tried a smile to lighten the atmosphere.

“That’s a step up from never.”

The man looked puzzled. “What?”

“Conductor said it never stopped here.”

“Weren’t far short. Seems like never.”

Grant let out a sigh. This conversation was going nowhere. He glanced along the rails at the disappearing train. The long silver streak was banking to the right as it took the long slow bend around the distant foothills. He turned back to the man with the ticket office key.

“Looks like never was wrong and the years have rolled by. Cos it sure as shit stopped today. And here I am.”

The eyes turned to flint in the parchment face.

“Yes you are. And that begs the question don’t it?”

Grant waited for the question it begged but it didn’t come. This fella was as inscrutable as Charlie Chan but not as friendly. The black trousers, white shirt and faded waistcoat suggested an official position but if his job was to sell tickets he must have been on short time. He was no great shakes as a meeter and greeter either.

“You’re not much of a welcoming committee.”

The parched skin tightened. “Who said you’re welcome?”

Grant nodded. “Nobody I guess.”

The town was only a short walk from the station but it felt like miles away. The buildings were grey and dull, without any hint of life or colour. No smoke from the chimneys. No glints of sunlight from moving vehicles. Place was as barren as a long shit turd. Dried up and dead and full of crap. The station attendant pressed home his point.

“Nobody asked you to come here.”

Grant kept calm but couldn’t leave that one unanswered. “How do you know?”

Then he set off walking towards town.