

Ian Weir's *Daniel O'Thunder* brawls with evil

By [Alexander Varty](#)



In *Daniel O'Thunder*, veteran screenwriter Ian Weir crafts a vision of Dickensian London filled with shadowy characters and the unmistakable scent of Beelzebub.

Daniel O'Thunder

By Ian Weir. Douglas & McIntyre, 392 pp, \$29.95, hardcover

If one unreliable narrator is enough to skew a book toward the fantastical, imagine the twists generated by four! In his first novel, veteran screenwriter Ian Weir calls on a quartet of witnesses to deliver the story of godly pug Daniel O'Thunder, proud son of Cork turned evangelical sermonizer, and it's a sign of his sure command that all are engaging, even when spinning bald-faced lies or subtle prevarications.

Weir's prismatic approach encompasses Jack Hartright, a failed cleric with an appalling secret; Nell Rooney, a fallen woman who can't entirely conceal her heart of gold; Jaunty Rennert, a small-time tout with a talent for disaster; and William Piper, a scuttling, ink-stained wretch. Better still, the Vancouver-based author has added a holy hero whose appetite for buxom bedmates is matched only by his charisma, spiced his tale with the shady, sulphuric presence of Beelzebub himself, and set it in the stinking streets of Charles Dickens's London, circa 1850.

These are the ingredients of a romp, and a romp *Daniel O'Thunder* most certainly is. Which is not to say that this novel is lacking in thematic meat or moral weight. Weir poses provocative questions about faith, friendship, and the nature of evil, and does not spare us the stench of the slums. But the chief attractions here are that braided plot, and the giddy pleasure its author takes in the ornate linguistic tropes of the Victorian era.

O'Thunder, who has traded the king's shilling for a seedy gym-turned-chapel in deepest Holborn, has "the face of a warrior archangel, and a voice like a flight of eagles". His

unofficial aide de camp, formerly a brothel bouncer, once “drank and fornikyted and laid wiolent hands upon uvvers”. A ham actor with a fondness for Scottish vampire fantasies is a “purveyor of tartan ghouls to the illiterate”; the fetching Rooney plies her trade under the thumb of a certain Mother Clatterballock.

This is wonderful stuff, not far removed from a landlocked version of Patrick O’Brian’s Aubrey-Maturin series, save that its unambiguous finale precludes a sequel—possibly the only miscalculation Weir makes in an otherwise excellent and rambunctious debut.