

## ***Dronikus* – Author Marko Newman**

### **Short review by Dr. Kathryn Brimblecombe-Fox**

*Dronikus*, by Marko Newman, is a compelling speculative near-future novel that takes the reader on a journey from a dystopic world to one that ultimately seems more promising. The story takes place in an ambiguous country on an Earth where ecological disaster and techno-hubristic megalomania are clear extensions of our contemporary world. Thus, the story is believable.

After escaping his putrid place of exile, the main character, Zola, embarks on multiple journeys. His first journey through fetid waters and streams, culminates in a death-defying expulsion through a dangerous tunnel. Here, Newman conjures a picture of tumultuous birth or re-birth, signaling Zola's pivotal post-exile role. Zola's ensuing journeys through cities, enclaves, landscapes, and compounds, mirror the turbulence of his initial watery escape. The reader is certainly taken on a ride, one that provokes a plethora of questions about the future of life on Earth.

In this near future, drones and robots are called *dronikus* and *rators*. These original names cleverly signify that drones and robots have been normalised into categories, embedded into the fabric of this future world. While Newman could have nominated the names, *dronikus* and *rator*, as new techno-species, he does not animalise or anthropomorphise them, or any other autonomous devices. Human reliance on technology and human fears of its punitive use by powerful entities creates an underlying tension which drives the fast-paced narrative. This, in turn, helps to propel the human-to-human relationships that infuse the story with urgency, pathos, and emotion.

While *dronikus* and *rators* roam as persistent surveillers with killing capabilities, Newman also introduces other technologies. These include de-extinction experiments, electromagnetic glo-slime, and bio-engineered human enhancements. That none of these are unbelievable, catapults this near future world into our present – where these kinds of techno-possibilities are nascent.

In an age where accelerating technological developments require critical and imaginative scrutiny, *Dronikus* is an example of speculative fiction's catalytic agency to provoke wonder and questions. Here, Newman's background in filmmaking imbues his storytelling with an active evocation that draws the reader into the narrative. Enjoy the journey!

**Kathryn Brimblecombe-Fox**, PhD, M. Phil, B.A., is a visual artist and researcher. Her creative practice and research are focused on issues associated with militarised technology and militarise-able civilian technology. These include, drones, robots, persistent surveillance, electromagnetic connectivity, and increasingly autonomous systems