

# Hub

Issue 18  
3<sup>rd</sup> August 2007

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Published by *The Right Hand*.  
Sponsored by Orbit.

## Issue 18 Contents

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## Normal Service Has Resumed

Many apologies for the lateness of this issue, which was caused by a technical problem at Hub Mansion. Needless to say, this has been addressed. ☺

## British Fantasy Society Open Night in York – October 2007

On Saturday October 13th, Hub is playing host to an Open Night for the British Fantasy Society. Held at York Brewery, the Open Night welcomes both members and non-members alike – if you're interested in Fantasy or Horror, feel free to come along! We just need to know how many of you are coming so we can make appropriate arrangements with the brewery.

As well as socialising with like-minded people, there is also the option to be part of a private tour of the brewery (a small charge will apply for this).

Full details over at [www.hub-mag.co.uk/bfs](http://www.hub-mag.co.uk/bfs)  
York's a great place to visit. We hope to see you there!

## About Hub

Every week we will be publishing a piece of short fiction, along with at least one review (book, DVD, film, audio, or TV series) and we'll also have the occasional feature, too. We can afford to do this largely due to the generosity of the people over at Orbit, who have sponsored this electronic version of the magazine, and partly by the generosity displayed by your good selves. If you like what you read here, please consider making a donation over at [www.hub-mag.co.uk](http://www.hub-mag.co.uk).



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# The Library

by Christopher Brosnahan



The day my sister died, I was in the library. I was doing what I could loosely class as revision, but if I was pressed for more information, I could not honestly tell you what I was doing. I know I wasn't exactly working, and was instead reading an article on something, but I couldn't tell you what.

The library was a strange mixture of modern and antique. It was an old building that had been clumsily modernised some years previously, and then extended. What was originally a small library had become a multi-media centre of sorts. On the left of the building was the main research centre. Many rows of bookshelves, behind which were three rows of videos, with a row of combination video/televisions. Moving upstairs led you to the computer room, generally full of first year students discovering the online world, and final year students panic-stricken and trying to write dissertations.

Moving across to the right, you began to realise just how old the building was, as you were brought directly above the main lobby, and the glass façade of the left hand side was replaced with an older, brickier, dustier feel as you went through the doors to the right. There were research books here, but they were specific to the teaching students. This led you to a glass corridor, behind which were a series of painfully old computers in the next room

It wasn't until my third month in the university that I found the fiction section. Hidden at the back of the oldest part of the library, behind the rows of children's texts, was a small steel spiral staircase. When you climbed this, there was a small room, four small bookshelves which housed a strange, eclectic mixture of fiction books, which seemed to be ordered with no specific logic. There was also, next to the badly cleaned window, a row of small desks with reading lamps, and old, comfortable chairs. There was something strangely familiar about this room, and it quickly became my favourite area to study, or to relax away from everybody else with a good book.

My phone was on silent, in accordance with the library rules. Normally it was my habit to keep the phone on the table, next to whatever work I was doing. Although there would be no noise, the lighting up of the display would be enough for me to be able to leave the room, and take the call. But this day, I had neglected to take my phone out of my jacket pocket, and there it remained, hung over the back of the chair I was sat on. And so I missed the most important phone call of my life.

My sister was seven months pregnant at the time, and had been declared fit and healthy by the Doctor just the week previously during her third trimester scan. Although she had broken up with the father, she was upbeat, and looking forward to the birth,. She was as scared as she was exhilarated by the prospect. My parents had fallen out with her over the pregnancy and the break up, and as a result the bond between the two of us had strengthened. She had been at the university I was now at a few years previously, and still lived nearby. Perhaps our proximity to each other was what caused her to call me, rather than an ambulance.

That night, she had been walking home, and had been attacked. The person who attacked her had taken her purse, and had brutally beaten her when she tried to stop him. By the time she had picked herself up, and walked back to her flat, pain overcame her and she collapsed on her living

room floor. She dragged herself to the phone, and rang me, and as she miscarried and bled to death over the next hour, she called me repeatedly.

She first rang within five minutes of my having sat down in the library. I didn't check my phone until three hours later. The number of missed calls alone was enough to send terror shooting through me. Terror which gave way to grief as I stood outside the library in the rain, and listened to the messages that she had left on my voicemail. As I listened to my sister die.

The following month was spent with my family, as we grieved, fought, and generally attempted to repair the emotional wound that my sisters death had left us all with. The funeral came and went in a stunned silence. After a month, the emotional drain had become too much to keep my parents and I together, and I returned to university.

My friends had been as supportive as only true friends can be, and the faculty had been understanding. I was able to slot back into my classes, without missing too many beats, and had been assured by everybody that whatever I needed to get through the time, I would receive. But before too long, the comfort that so many people were giving me served only to make me feel more uncomfortable, and one night I decided that I had to be alone for a few hours.

My room in the halls of residence was no good. I couldn't isolate myself when I was surrounded by people that I knew on the other side of the floor, ceiling, and the walls. And the student bar was far too crowded for me to comfortably drink myself into an anti-social stupor. So instead, for the first time since my sisters death, I found myself drawn back to that small room above the spiral staircase.

I didn't associate it as closely with the emotions surrounding my sisters death as I had previously worried. After all, this was not where I had listened to those sickening messages - I had listened to those outside. If anything, I felt safer than I had previously felt anywhere since her death. Before I even realised what I was doing, I had picked a book from one of the shelves, switched on one of the reading lamps, and began to read.

It felt like just a few minutes later when I heard some movement nearby. I checked my watch, and realised that I had been there for a number of hours. I had only read a handful of pages of the volume in my hands. I did not remember falling asleep, but it was the only explanation that presented itself. I glanced round, confused at the sudden flow of time, just in time to see somebody moving out of sight around the bookshelves furthest from me. I returned the book, and left the library.

That night, I slept well for the first time in a month, and the next couple of days were easier. However, a few evenings later, I again craved isolation. And so I made my way through to the older part of the library, and up the steel spiral staircase. The fiction area seemed almost like a cocoon of comfort. I couldn't remember what book I had last started reading, so I picked up another volume at random.

I made myself comfortable, switched on the reading lamp, and opened the book. I was only a few pages in when I heard an announcement over the speakers, audible from the room below. The announcement was that the library was closing for the night. Puzzled, I looked down at my watch, and was shocked to see that it was already half past ten in the evening. The previous three hours had gone by in a flash.

As I made my way down the spiral staircase again, I glanced upwards. Why, I do not know. I saw a grey figure moving about at the chair where I had been. Had I been feeling more cautious, or perhaps more paranoid, I would have gone upstairs, and gone to find out more, but following my short stay in the library, I felt calm, serene. I went back to my room, and I slept as soundly as the dead.

This calm stayed with me for the better part of the next day, but by the late part of the afternoon I was again beginning to feel uncomfortable. As I made my way up to the student bar to try and drink my way to comfort, I passed the library and stopped. I looked at the spot where I had stood with my phone, and the feelings came flooding back, nauseating me with their intensity. Panic

and grief overcame me, and I felt like I couldn't breathe. A survival instinct of kinds directed me, as I staggered in through the main doors, and up the stairs into that strange research centre, and to those steel spiral stairs. Even as I climbed them, I could feel the anaesthetic calm sweeping over me, and my breathing began to calm. Within a few minutes, I had forgotten the anxiety attack that had overcome me, and I had - almost with a force of habit - picked up a book at random, settled down at a desk, and begun to read.

I had barely opened the book, when I suddenly became aware of how dark the day had gotten. I switched on the reading lamp, and cast my eyes back down to the book. I glanced upwards after I had finished the first page, and was met with the black of night. On a calm, logical level, I knew that I should be scared, and that I was obviously suffering some sort of blackouts, but the sleepy sense of calm that had overcome me convinced me that all was well. The announcement that the library was closing came again, and this time it did not startle me. I returned the book to the shelf, and looked around, half expecting to see some grey figure. However, all I could see were the four bookshelves. I did not remember going home, but I must have done, because I awoke in my own bed.

I had lectures that day, but as soon as I left my room, that choking panic returned. It was eight thirty in the morning, and the library was not due to open until nine thirty. I forced myself to breathe more normally, and made my way to the cafeteria, where I nursed a bitter tasting coffee over the next fifty minutes. I saw one or two of my friends come into the cafeteria, but I just looked down at my coffee until they went away. I was counting down the minutes until the library opened.

I was stood outside ten minutes early, waiting for the doors to open. The staff member on duty saw me there, and smiled, opening the door. She called me an early bird, and laughed at my eagerness to study. I lied, and made up some excuse about having an essay due in by noon that I desperately needed to finish. She let me in, but told me not to expect this to be a regular thing. I thanked her, and made my way to the steel spiral staircase. As I did, I noticed a reflection of myself in the windows. I looked thin and gaunt, much more so than I had realised.

I could not remember which book I had last been reading, but I was accustomed to that now. I looked at the five...no, the six bookshelves which were there, and sleepily picked up a book, and sat at one of the desks. Within a few minutes, I became aware that it was already darkening outside. I struck a match, and fumblingly lit one of the gas reading lights by the side of me, unused to the mechanism, and glanced down at the book I was reading.

The sound of the librarian's bell alerted me that the library was once again closing, and I returned the forgotten book back to its place. As I descended the steel staircase, I glanced upwards, and saw that grey figure again. I was about to leave, when the cold panic again hit me. I hid at the back, behind the bookcases, and I waited for the library to close. Whether I waited there for seconds, or whether I waited there for hours, I do not know, but I finally had the library to myself.

I ascended the stairs again, fighting the impulse to take a book, and instead, I lit the gas lamp, and looked around. I walked down past the numerous ornate bookshelves, and around the magnificent fiction section (the envy of most universities). The room was entirely lit by gas lamps, and I walked back to the furthest set of shelves. There was nobody there, and nothing other than the leather bound volumes. I ascended one of the wooden ladders to reach the books highest on the shelves, and I returned to the floor, book in hand. As I walked down the lengthy room to the reading area, I could feel the part of my mind that was still awake screaming at me. I hesitated, and looked around again.

I was fooling myself. The library was safe, and as I made my way down to the large, comfy leather chairs, I sat down and opened the book. I lit the gas reading lamp, and I settled down to -

I slammed the book closed, and span around. The grey figure was there, watching me. It was thin, and angular, with long white hair, and ill looking, translucent skin. It smiled at me, lovingly, and I could feel what it was trying to say to me, its thoughts projected into my head. It was protecting me from the grief and the anxiety, and it wanted me to stay. If I kept feeding it, as I had

been so painlessly, it would protect me, just as it had protected me from hearing the desperate calls from my sister.

It was the memory of my sister that made me break the gaze between us and look at my reflection in the window again. I looked ill, thin and gaunt. I looked back at the smiling, loving figure in grey, as it implored me to sit down and read.... Sit down and forget.

I tried to fight against it, but I could feel myself turning round, and opening the book. My shaking hand went to turn the page, when my conscious mind asserted itself. It didn't take much. It just took me pushing the book closer to the flame of the lamp. The flame licked the edges of the paper, and took hold, dancing across the writing on the paper. The sudden pain as the fire reached my hands brought me a sudden clarity, and I once again had control over my own movements.

Fear pushed me, as I rose from the comfortable seat, and ran past the screaming grey figure. He was no longer concerned with me, desperately trying to stop the fire which had, by now, taken hold of the desk. I ran down the steel spiral staircase, leaving the fire to consume what was behind.

I ran down to the main entrance, to be confronted with the glass doors. I looked around desperately, trying to find a way outside, away from the spreading fire behind me. I saw one of the chairs in the reception area, and I grabbed it and hurled at the glass. It cracked the glass, and rebounded. My mind was sharp for the first time in a long time, and I grabbed the chair again, swinging it at the glass door, time and again until the cracking turned into breaking.

The air felt like it was rushing in, clearing not only the smoke from the fire, but also my own head. I broke the glass further, making enough space to climb out through. The climb through the broken glass was painful, but I relished the sharp, shooting sensation. It was so different to that dull, throbbing calm I had been prisoner to for so long. As I breathlessly reached the cold air of the outside, my head filled with memories and emotions. They forced my entire body to rack with grief, and I curled up, desperately crying as the library burnt behind me.

I do not know if the creature in the library deserved my hatred. It was trying to help me on some level, regardless of its feeding on me. But my sister was precious to me. Life was precious to me, and the memories were precious to me. Without them, I could exist, but I could never truly live.

### **About the Author**

Christopher Brosnahan lives in London, though he was one of the founding members of a York-based writers' group, specialising in SF. He was a runner-up in last year's SFX *Pulp Idol* competition for short fiction writers.

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# Reviews

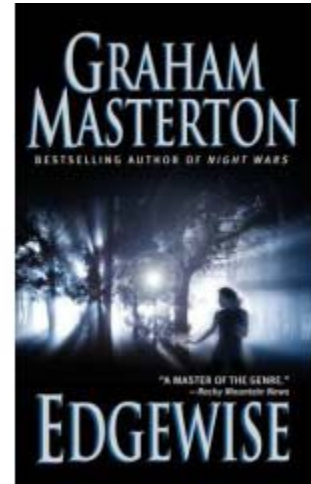
*Edgewise* and *London under Midnight* reviewed by Marie O'Regan  
*Sanctuary* reviewed by Lee Harris

## Edgewise

Written by Graham Masterton

Published by Severn House Paperbacks

RRP: £9.99



Lily Blake wakes up to find two men in her house. Two men who want her dead. Tied to a chair and placed atop a bonfire, she can only struggle to break free while listening to the men abduct her children – apparently on the say so of her ex-husband. Miraculously, Lily escapes, and the scene is set for a furious chase. Frustrated by the FBI's lack of progress, Lily engages a Native American private eye called John Shooks, who in turn introduces her to a Sioux shaman, George Iron Walker. George summons the Wendigo spirit, and sets it on the children's trail, his price a spit of land Lily's real estate firm are dealing with – a price that Lily, it turns out, is not free –or even able - to pay.

As Lily is drawn into the Native American spirit world, specifically that of the Wendigo, she is caught up in an escalating circle of death and destruction involving all those close to her. The Wendigo's anger is directed towards her when she cannot pay the piper and her only chance is to turn the tables, taking the battle to the spirit itself, and those who unleashed it...

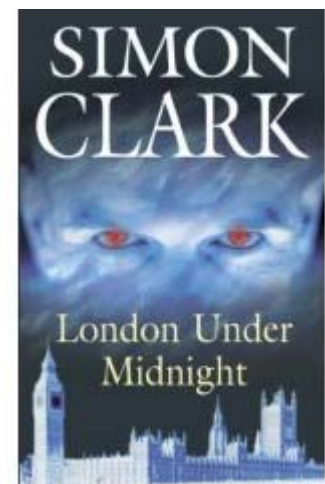
*Edgewise* shows us that Graham Masterton is still writing at the top of his game. The character of Lily and her determination to find her children is totally believable, as is the deviousness of human nature, shown to great effect by the character of George Iron Walker - a man with a hidden agenda. We are also introduced to FLAME (Fathers' League Against Mothers' Evil), a worrying extrapolation of how far some father's rights movements might go. The descriptions of the Wendigo and its actions evoke a genuine sense of fear and unease, reminiscent of Masterton's (arguably) most famous creation, the Manitou – and Lily's moral dilemma over the force she has unwittingly let loose makes for uncomfortable reading. It's easy to take the moral high ground when the peril is far removed, less so when it's your neck that's on the block. *Edgewise* shows all too well the price of unleashing retribution, both in human and emotional terms, whilst delivering the scares and violence you'd expect from a Masterton novel. When you look in the mirror, *who knows what you'll see...*

## London Under Midnight

Written by Simon Clark

Published by Severn House Paperbacks

RRP: £9.99



Recently returned from a job in New York, freelance journalist Ben Ashton is eager to get back in the swing of things. He's less than happy, though, with his new commission – to find out who's daubing graffiti ('VAMPIRE SHARKS they're coming to get you') all over London, and why.

April Connor is a part of Ben's past – the girl he left behind when he moved to New York, although he never told her how he felt. A chance encounter on the banks of the Thames one evening raises his hopes – only to dash them when she introduces him to her fiancé, Trajan.

Deflated, Ben continues his research as the graffiti spreads throughout the town, but finds that within a day of their meeting, he's searching for April too, as she's gone missing after a violent attack on the riverbank that night. But Trajan can remember very little, the direct result of a blow to the head.

Simon Clark maintains a relentless pace in this novel, building incident upon incident seamlessly until the reader is caught up in the momentum, waiting for the denouement to be revealed. Along the way we are introduced to characters such as ageing wise man Elmo Kigoma, convinced that Edshu, the trickster god of his people, is at large – and is sending his minions, the Dead Bone people, to cause strife in the city. As Ben, Trajan and Elmo’s search for April, and the cause of the disappearances and graffiti merge, we see characters struggle against both the imminent threat of the Dead Bone people - or Vampire Sharkz - and their own frailties: unrequited love, selfishness and unwillingness to see what’s really in front of them. We also discover which of them is willing to pay the ultimate price – sacrificing themselves for the sake of their friends, and humanity.

Vampire Sharkz are coming – would you dare to go in the water?

## Sanctuary

Starring Amanda Tapping, Robin Dunne, Emilie Ullerup

\$1.99 per “webisode”

*Sanctuary* was created by *Stargate* writer/producer Damian Kindler. Kindler created *Sanctuary* as an internet-only sci-fi series with high production values. The story follows Dr Helen McManus (Tapping) and her daughter (Ullerup) as they attempt to gather and contain all manner of fantastic creatures currently roaming the Earth.

The story begins in Victorian London during Jack the Ripper’s reign of terror. Our first encounter is with a prostitute whose accent seems to have been carefully crafted after literally hours poring over Mr Van Dyke’s less-than-convincing Cock-a-nay chimney sweep in *Mary Poppins*.. Things don’t get any better.

The production values are, undoubtedly high – the majority of the first eight episodes (I’m not going to use “webisodes” – that’s plain daft) were shot on green-screen sets, with the backgrounds added in by computer during post production. The *Sanctuary* website proudly exclaims that they were recently awarded a Guinness World Record for “Highest Budget Television Production Direct to the Web”. There is no mention of any award for the quality of the writing or acting.

The storyline and script appear to have been written by someone who really wanted to write for *Charmed*, but never made the grade. The producers are to be applauded for trying something different, however, and for using the Internet as a true broadcast system; hopefully their next venture will be of superior quality.

Each episode lasts for between 15 and 18 minutes (the lengths vary tremendously, but with no broadcast schedule to adhere to, this is not a problem).

The site advertises the episodes as being available for US\$1.99 each (or US\$2.49 for the High Definition versions). Four-episode bundles can be downloaded for US\$6.99 (or US\$8.75 for HD).

However, until the end of July the advertised prices were only applicable if you download within the US (The UK price was £1.89 (or US\$3.81) and you didn’t discover this until you reached the checkout). This was a disgraceful state of affairs, as the production company had no additional costs for users downloading outside of the US. Fans of the series were vocal in their condemnation of the pricing structure, and on July 25th the producers announced that they had listened to the feedback and that the pricing structure would be flat across all global markets – US\$1.99 wherever you lived. Again, the producers are to be applauded for listening to their market and responding accordingly.

Unfortunately, better prices do not make for better episodes, and the series cannot be recommended.

**Coming Next Week:** Fiction: *Ten Thousand Spaceships* by Paul Martens

If you have enjoyed this week’s issue, please consider throwing some of your hard-earned shekles at us. We pay our writers, and your support is appreciated.