

Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

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EDITORIAL:

by lee harris

All your mail are belong to us.

Technology - it's a marvellous thing, but it makes us over-reliant and overconfident.

Over-reliance and over-confidence are bad playmates. I recently managed to lose 6 weeks worth of emails because I was overconfident in the technology, and didn't follow a sensible back-up routine.

My email backlog is considerable, but I expect to get through it by the end of next week (30th May), and this doesn't include some of the 6 weeks worth of backlog.

If you're currently waiting for a reply on a short story submission, however, this is dealt with through a different email address - we *are* horrendously behind on our slush pile, largely because we received so many subs even when the list was closed, and although we changed the subs guideline on the site we didn't change the autoresponder, so we felt it only fair to accept the submissions as valid. Again, if you're waiting on a response to your short story sub, you WILL have it by the end of next week.

Technology - it's what drives Hub, and what drives us mad.

DON'T FORGET

Our short story competition is still open (for new UK-based writers) - see **issue 85** for full details. Cash prize as well as publication, and entry is **FREE**.

Also, we have a rather special audio treat coming up every week over the next couple of months, so keep an eye (and an ear) out for that!

FICTION

Red Rover, Red Rover

by Janet Ioffis

Sandy crashed headfirst into the willow tree, then dropped to the ground, her face pressed against its exposed roots. Her hands and feet began to twitch.

The five boys watched her impassively for a moment, then turned away, reforming their line, relocking hands on wrists. They grinned at the six girls forming an identical line opposite.

"Red rover, red rover, send Angie on over," they chanted.

Angie stared at her friend, at the tiny red rivulets fanning out from Sandy's head, melting the surrounding snow, forming thin streams that flowed from her, like threads being unraveled from her red coat.

Angie clung to Barbara and Louise as they tried to pull their hands away.

A wispy cloud scuttled across the sun, dulling the redness of the lines surrounding Sandy, so that they appeared as innocuous as a shadow of the tree's bare branches splayed out against the dirty snow.

The girls finally managed to shake Angie free. Barbara shoved her forward, ahead of the line.

Angie dug her feet into the snow. "No!" The frightened nine-year-old tried to sound defiant. "I don't want to play any more."

All she and Sandy had wanted to do was spend the afternoon making snow angels. No one had been around when they started, none of the neighborhood bullies, none of the mean girls who humiliated them because they weren't pretty. As the snowfall ended, the others had appeared with the sun, with bright smiles on their faces and friendly invitations to play.

Barbara kicked Angie in the rear, sending her stumbling onto her hands and knees. Her blue mittens were already soaked, and her fingers burned from the new shock of cold.

"You said you wanted to play with us," Louise mocked in a bad imitation of Sandy's high-pitched voice.

Barbara kicked her again, pushing her face first into the trampled mush. Angie spat out snow and bits of dirt left behind by snow boots, and started to cry again.

"Cry baby!" Brian yelled.

"Come on," Jim teased. "Break our line." Break our line, the boys had said, and the two girls could ask any boy they wanted to take them to a movie. Angie hadn't wanted to play — they'd already been outside for two hours — but Sandy had such a crush on Jim that she couldn't resist the invitation. And Sandy insisted on going first.

"No!" Angie screamed. "I don't like you!"

"You want to be like us," Barbara teased. "You want to be one of us."

"No! You're mean. I don't like you and I don't want to play."

Louise pulled her to her feet and pushed her toward the line of boys. "You said you wanted to play. You can't go back on your word."

Angie screamed, hoping someone in the neighborhood would hear her. Hoping her parents were wondering why the girls hadn't come back inside for the promised hot chocolate.

"Red rover, red rover, send Angie on over," the boys chanted again.

Angie looked over at Sandy. Except for one twitching hand disturbing the red branches framing her, her best friend did not move.

"Go!" Louise screamed at her. "Or we'll tell everyone at school what a chicken you are."

"Come on, wussy girl," Jim mocked in an even worse imitation of Sandy.

Angie tried to wipe her tears away, but her mittens were too wet to have any effect except to make her face wetter and colder.

"No! You'll push me into the tree too."

"That was an accident," Brian insisted.

"If you just try," Barbara said in her most wheedling tone, full of false promises, "we'll let you go crying home to mommy and daddy."

Angie didn't believe them. But she turned and faced the boys anyway, and ran straight at them as fast as she could.

The boys braced for her, waiting to send her flying into the tree just like Sandy. There was no way to break the strength of the boys' grips. But Angie was much smaller than her classmates. She dropped and

went sliding under Jim's and Brian's outstretched arms.

More than one of them cried, "Cheater!"

"I broke your line!" Angie yelled at them as she clambered back to her feet. "I broke it. You didn't say how I had to do it."

She backed away from them, away from the tree, away from Sandy and the bloody shadow tree on the ground, away from their forgotten angel impressions in the snow.

"Get her!" Jim shouted.

They chased her into the street just as a car rounded the curve. Angie skidded to a stop inches from the front fender, falling down hard, tearing the knees of her snowpants.

It was the blue Volvo driven by Mr. Giotti, who lived down on the far corner. For a moment, everything was as still as Sandy. Then the driver's door creaked open and Mr. Giotti stepped out, his feet crunching on the road salt.

"What's going on here?"

"We're just playing," Barbara said in her sweetest tone.

"You look like you've been crying," Mr. Giotti said to Angie. "Do you need a ride home sweetheart?"

The boys snickered. Mr. Giotti threw them a withering glare.

Sniffing, Angie nodded. Mr. Giotti seemed much nicer than her parents had said. She couldn't figure out why she'd been told not to talk to him.

"My friend," she pointed toward the willow. "She's hurt."

"Angie pushed her out of the tree," Louise lied.

"I did not!"

"Enough," Mr. Giotti said. "Get in the car sweetie. I'll get your friend."

Mr. Giotti disappeared for a few moments, then returned to the car, gently laying Sandy in the back seat. He smoothed Sandy's hair, the strands that weren't bloody, and even straightened her clothing. He really was nice, not that strange man on the corner she'd heard her parents whispering about.

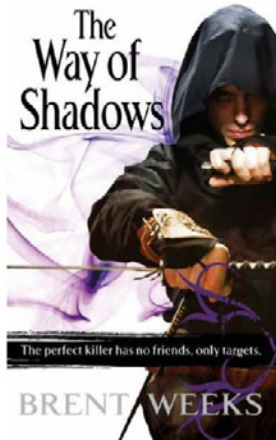
As Angie settled in the passenger side, the other kids just laughed.



REVIEWS

The Way of Shadows

reviewed by cathy hill



By Brent Weeks
Orbit
£7.99

Azoth is a child living on the streets of the Warrens, the filthy, crime-riddled slums of Cenaria City. His life is a desperate struggle, divided between stealing to survive, paying dues to his sadistic guild superior, and trying to protect a helpless little girl. Azoth longs to become something greater than his enemies, so he will never feel fear again; he wants to become a wetboy. Wetboys are more than mere assassins, they are the cream of killers, feared across Cenaria by nobles and crime lords alike. Azoth's dream comes true when -after a gruelling test- he becomes apprenticed to the legendary and feared Durzo Blint, the best wetboy in Cenaria. However Azoth's dream comes at a price, he must forswear emotional attachments and commit to a path that might well lead to his death. Azoth has to turn his back on his early life and become Kylar Stern; in public a minor noble of limited means, in private a skilled and deadly killer. The training is harsh, the work is dangerous, and his master has many enemies. However Kylar's main stumbling block is his Talent -the magic that separates wetboys from lowly killers and assassins- which has failed to bloom, meaning he is at a severe disadvantage when facing his enemies. As war threatens Cenaria, and Kylar's public and private lives become more complicated, he must make a choice about who and what he truly wants to be.

My first impression as I began reading this book was one of a world very thoroughly created. The map at the beginning is covered with names and labels, and I'll admit I was slightly daunted by this, as it seemed to contain a lot of information that I was sure I'd quickly forget. Then I started reading the text and I forgot the map completely. Most of the continent isn't featured in the story; the main action takes place in a single city. A few other places are featured or visited briefly, and only a few more of the various places mentioned in text are important for plot reasons. The reader can get an idea of a place from little more than a description of a building or a conversational reference. It may never be mentioned again (in this volume at least) but you know it exists and -if you are the kind of person that likes to do so- you can look it up on the map. This attention to small, casual details runs throughout the book, without infodumps or masses of unnecessary exposition the reader soon gets a strong feel for the world. I don't know if Brent Weeks carefully thought everything through while he was worldbuilding, or whether he did it on the fly and tidied everything up later; it doesn't matter. What matters is that after reading for a short while you are transported into this world. It is a world of intrigue and factions, crime and suffering, magic and danger. Every time you pick the book up that's where you're sent again.

The characters are well written and believable people. We follow Azoth as he becomes Kylar, the same person but in a very different situation, and then we follow Kylar as he develops. Kylar is no saint but for all that he's training to become a killer he's not a bad person and it is easy for the reader to empathise with him. Durzo Blint is an interesting but dangerous character with a cynical outlook and a dark sense of humour, he can be unpredictable and his motives are intriguingly mysterious for much of the book. By contrast there are characters like Logan, Elene and Count Drake, people who are basically decent and good-natured, ready to see the best in others and willing to be selfless and charitable. These characters shine a light into what is otherwise a gritty and tarnished world, and in shining that light they create the shadows of the title. It is not just Kylar and Durzo that come under those shadows, but most of the characters and supporting cast. However even the amoral and desperate characters look better when compared to the chief antagonist, a cruel, ambitious sadist who is easy to hate.

The story itself -when summarised- contains many familiar elements. There are assassins (or wetboys) and their apprentices, entangled personal lives, magic, danger, and the threat of invasion, but if you're the kind of person who would pick this book up you probably love that stuff. While the story is not as unique and detailed as the world in which it's set, it is a gripping and enjoyable read. The main story is about Azoth/Kylar and seen mostly from his point of view, although the narrative is regularly told from the viewpoints of other main characters. The story unfolds starting with a fairly narrow sphere of experience -the life of a child on the streets- and expanding to encompass events of city-wide, national and possibly even global

importance, although the latter is mostly hinted at and likely to become more significant later in the series. There are twists and turns in the plot, however the clues are usually there in the story, even though they aren't clear to the characters or reader until they are revealed. The story speeds up towards the end, when a lot of things are happening fairly quickly. While it's clear that the story will continue past this book, it is not clear where or when the second volume will pick up.

FEATURES

Bleeding Words

Bleeding Words #3: Growing Ideas

by gary mcMahon

An idea, an idea... ah, what price an idea?

Ideas are often hard to come by, but sometimes they jump on you like Kato, Inspector Clouseau's frenzied manservant. And it's strange how an idea can slowly grow and mutate and eventually take on a life of its own, leading to all sorts of interesting problems.

A few months ago I woke up in the middle of the night and went to stare out of the bedroom window. It's what I do: I'm a hopeless paranoid insomniac. Along the street, outside one of my neighbour's houses, there was a battered old 1970s style dining chair set out at the kerb. I haven't a clue what it was doing there – the next day wasn't bin day – and the following morning when I checked again the chair was gone.

Obviously this meaningless little event gave me an idea for a story, and over the next week I wrote a tale called "The Chair" which I then managed to sell to Black Static. A nice result all round.

Then, recently, belatedly, the idea began to grow...

I had a stray thought about a linked story, called "The Table." Getting out a notebook, I scribbled down a few images and sensations; then I developed a rough outline involving a man seeing silent, possibly mouthless people sitting and staring at his dining room table. At some point during those few minutes of frantic scribbling, I got an idea for – yes, you've guessed it – another story, this one called "The Drawer".

Finally I wrote the outline for the final story in the sequence, "The Room", where all these threads come together and form a statement about the way modern living has turned us into willing prisoners in the comfortable little cells of our own homes.

So, from a single late-night glimpse of a battered old dining chair in the street, I now have a proposed four-story series of linked tales that I'm calling "The Domestic Sequence".

It's strange how an idea can slowly grow and mutate and eventually take on a life of its own: a chair, a table, a drawer, a room...a short sequence of stories hopefully amounting to about 16,000 words.

It's almost as if an image can act like a trigger, setting off a series of detonations in your subconscious, releasing things that have been buried for a long time. These things snuffle around for a while, looking for a direction, and when they finally find one, they begin to mass and gather together to form the germ of an idea. Then that germ grows and bloats and takes on a form of its own – if you're lucky, you can catch it and pin it down and write it. If not, it escapes to fight another day.

I think it was Stephen King who once said there are two kinds of writers, those who add and those who take away. Some people are like artists sculpting granite: they take a hammer and a chisel and delicately tap, tap away at the thing, gradually revealing the shape of the story beneath.

Others, like me, do it the opposite way around. If the first lot are like sculptors, then we are like potters: we grab a small lump of clay, throw it down, and then add the layers, all the time throwing more and more lies at it in the hope of creating a representation of the truth.

This is how ideas come together for me: in small stages, with each new day bringing along another layer to add to the core, and at the end of an unspecified length of time I hope to have a finished story. Like the potter at his wheel, I press and I mould and I add more clay, looking for that which I must find, I need to find, within.

In this way, my first draft is usually not much more than an outline and I add the bulk of the piece in phases. I usually have to write a first draft in a single sitting – or at least in a single day – because I'm scared that I'll lose the original fire that inspired it. Then, after that initial white-heat frenzy, I can settle down and start repairing whatever damage I made to the original idea, adding those layers, and shaping the tale. The hard work, though, is always done in that first draft. The central idea rarely changes, and the theme usually presents itself to me during the opening salvo of writing. Everything afterwards is refinement.

All of this means, of course, that I always have a lot of first drafts on my computer hard drive; stories

that never got to have their layers added and their wounds dressed. Like immobile rows of the undead, they rot away quietly, never complaining, but hoping to be noticed again. Perhaps I should open the door and take a peek, see if any of them twitches in the darkness and catches my eye. I'm sure some of them are worth saving from the Hell of Unrealised Ideas.

16 March 2009

SFFE Press Release - 22nd May 2009

The *Science Fiction and Fantasy Ethics* group has been set up by a consortium of authors, co-ordinated by Andy Remic, who wish to celebrate the good side of the fantasy, science fiction and horror genres. By that, we don't just mean media with a positive theme – no, we're into violence, sex, drugs and rock 'n roll like every other monkey – but that our *outlook* and *content* will be geared towards the positive.

The site will include reviews, articles and interviews, which is pretty standard across the industry, but also several exciting new angles – such as collaborative stories written by the professional authors therein, and "Viewpoint" articles where writers can collectively wax lyrical on a certain topic.

Andy Remic enthuses, "If we can get all the associated writers together at a convention and suitably drunk on a cocktail of cheap Scandinavian meths, Stella and absinthe, we can also expect a movie! Watch this space!". The horror.

The official line runs thus:

"Our mission is to celebrate everything positive, funky and exciting in the Fantasy, Science Fiction and Horror Universe! The SFFE is a core platform, a hub of authors who have banded together with the aim of celebrating all that is positive in genre fiction. We aim to leave cynicism and negativity at the door, and concentrate on what makes us smile, what entertains us, and what brings light and joy to our SF, fantasy and horror universe. That's not to say there is no place for criticism--- there's plenty bad in the world. However, this little digital corner is a place for positive progression, somewhere you will (hopefully) come if you want to smile."

So far, a considerable number of industry figures have signed up to take part, and many more are currently in negotiation! The SFFE currently enjoys: **Tony Ballantyne, Eric Brown, Mark Chadbourn, David Devereux, Ian Graham, Paul Kearney, Tim Lebbon, James Lovegrove, Gail Z. Martin, James Maxey, Juliet E. Mckenna, Mark Morris, Sarah Pinborough, Andy Remic, James Swallow, Jeffrey Thomas, Jetse de Vries, Danie Ware and Conrad Williams.** A healthy dollop of literary roughage, we're sure you'll agree!

Check out:

www.sffeth.blogspot.com

Love, kisses and chainsaws—

Andy Remic.



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