



## The Faceless

*Simon Bestwick*

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Chilling supernatural horror and the police procedural collide in this absorbing tale of contemporary characters sucked into a web of mystery and fear. As local townsfolk in a northern city disappear masked men with sinister links to the past haunt the streets. Unconnected events begin to align as Detective Chief Inspector Renwick realises these mysterious figures have chosen targets and an even bigger plan.

In the Lancashire town of Kempforth, people are vanishing. Mist hangs heavy in the streets, and in those mists move the *masked figures* the local kids call the Spindly Men. When two year old Roseanne Trevor disappears, Detective Chief Inspector Renwick vows to stop at nothing until she finds her. In Manchester, terrifying visions summon TV psychic Allen Cowell and his sister Vera back to the town they swore they'd left forever. And local historian Anna Mason pieces together a history of cruelty and exploitation almost beyond belief, born out of the horrors of war – while in the decaying corridors and lightless rooms of a long-abandoned hospital, something terrible is waiting for them all.

## The Faceless Details

Date : Published January 31st 2012 by Solaris (first published January 29th 2012)

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Author : Simon Bestwick

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Genre : Horror, Fiction, Thriller, Mystery Thriller

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## From Reader Review The Faceless for online ebook

### Rebecca McNutt says

I'm sad to say that the thing I liked most about *The Faceless* wasn't even the writing, but the front cover graphics. I found the writing to be predictable, repeatedly going in circles for no apparent reason.

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### Joseph D'Lacey says

Without wanting to give very much away, *The Faceless* is a supernatural story in which a group of deeply wounded characters fight to overcome their pasts and save themselves and their loved ones from a vastly more powerful evil.

As always, Bestwick's command of language allows him to create an incredibly vivid landscape. In this case, the grimmest possible picture of 'the bastard North', particularly Ash Fell and Kempforth. Madness, self-mutilation and the inspired Spindly Men make this a truly creepy horror novel but on deeper thematic levels, Bestwick tackles the sins of the fathers, the eternal horrors of war and the healing power of love.

A great read for any lover of the genre.

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### Huw Macdonald says

I spent the first chapter or two thinking I wasn't going to like this book. Simon Bestwick's writing style is a bit unusual and takes a bit of time getting used to. Slowly, however, you begin to see his unique voice coming into great effect, fashioning a vivid, believable Northern town setting and a persistent sense of lurking evil and unease. Some of my favourite parts of the book are in the fictional "testaments" of old soldiers that appear interspersed in the prose. Here, Bestwick captures a disturbing raw tone of voice which it's easy to imagine coming from the long-suffering veterans.

The plot of the book starts interesting with sudden disappearances of children from around the neighbourhood accompanied by disturbing sightings of faceless "Spindley Men" in the foggy landscape around town. I really enjoyed the World War I backstory that builds as the characters start to unravel the mystery and it was interesting to learn some bits of historical trivia along the way. Sadly, for me, the latter part of the book was a bit of a disappointment. The final uncovering seemed slightly silly, and out of place with the well-crafted realism of the rest of the book. I especially didn't like how the plot transformed from the scale of a local ghost story into a story of global consequences in the last few chapters. The two sections didn't seem to gel together very well.

The characterisation is good. All the main characters are well-developed with defining personalities, strengths and weaknesses. Simon Bestwick makes it easy to get to know a character quickly with well-timed exposure to each one's backstory and effective descriptions/dialogue. At the end of the book I did find myself thinking I really didn't care what happened to any of the characters but I think that was more a symptom of my dislike of the plot more than ineffective characters. I also thought that there were too many police

characters in the book. I don't think it was really necessary to refer to the whole beat by name and had the result of just adding to confusion about who was doing what.

Overall I recommend the book for the sense of atmosphere created and the creepy World War I theme, but also wishing the ending had been different so I could have finished it with a 'wow'.

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### **Luke Walker says**

The Faceless is a strange one (in a good way) in that it feels for a large part like a police/crime thriller before all the supernatural business kicks in. I know a lot of readers don't like their crime mixed with the paranormal but I'm all for it so that wasn't a problem. However, I did find it overlong in places and some elements of the ending felt rushed. Some great writing and a superb sense of creeping dread are big pluses, but a tighter focus on pace and perhaps reducing the number of characters would have helped make this a four star book.

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### **Canyonxplorer says**

Okay, here's my two pence worth...

A couple of years ago I read Simon Bestwick's Tide of Souls. The first two thirds of Tide of Souls was fantastic but I have to say that I really didn't like the last third. Then I read a short story called The Moraine which I loved and I recommend to anyone who visits the English Lake District.

The Faceless is set in the fictional town of Kempforth, we never quite learn where it sits in the geography of Lancashire but I'm guessing somewhere on the moors near Blackburn, Darwen or Haslingden. For me, this is home turf.

Kempforth has problems, more than just the Lancashire weather and social unrest on the housing estates - people are disappearing and there are mysterious figures lurking in the mist. The book investigates this from three angles each lead by a central character but accompanied by a sidekick - there is the police investigation led by a policewoman and her partner, there is the historical aspect led by a local historian and her brother and finally the more supernatural which leads to the psychic and his sister. Somewhere around halfway through the book these investigations come together and the last half deals with where that investigation leads and the outcome.

The positives of which there are many:

SB does a good job in making all his characters distinct, flawed where necessary and with very different motivations for driving them forward.

In my opinion, SB also did a great job of evoking the atmosphere of a small Lancashire town from his descriptions of the buildings, the people and the weather - yes, frequently the mist does shroud the streets in Autumn and early Winter. He also gets the Lanky Twang into the speech, although in my experience of being born and raised in the area you don't hear this much now in people under 50.

The plot and central ideas are also very good ones. At certain points I was thinking wouldn't it be good if... and sure enough those concepts were introduced. In fact I would go so far as to say that the central concept is very unusual to take forward as a theme for a horror novel. I congratulate and commend SB for his bravery in tackling it.

SB's handling of certain events early in the book is quite minimalist ie: when things happen they happen quickly and without fanfare. This does a good job of unsettling the reader. I thought this was very effective.

My only minor quibble is with SB's dialogue - not so much what is said but sometimes you go through long sections of dialogue which are just that, one spoken sentence after the next without any he/she said. This is bad enough with a couple of pages when there are 2 characters but when there are 3 or more it can be hard work to work out which dialogue came from which character.

In the last third of the book, the narrative moves away from the localized setting that SB so carefully constructed and, in my opinion, it suffers for it. I wondered if this might be because of my own geographical links to the region he describes but it seems some other reviewers have similar views.

I would recommend *The Faceless*, particularly to anyone looking for a horror story which isn't afraid to do something a bit different. In *Tide Of Souls* Mr Bestwick destroyed the place I used to work in, in *The Moraine* he produced a story that will have me looking over my shoulder next time I'm on a Lake District mountain and in *The Faceless* he destroyed the town I lived in for 5 years. I look forward to what he can come up with next!!!

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### **Janette Fleming says**

“In the Lancashire town of Kempforth, people are vanishing.

When two-year-old Roseanne Trevor disappears, the local kids blame ‘The Spindly Men’. But even as Detective Chief Inspector Renwick vows to stop at nothing until she finds her, terrifying visions summon TV psychic Allen Cowell and his sister Vera back to the town they swore they’d left forever and local historian Anna Mason pieces together a history of cruelty and exploitation almost beyond belief.

Meanwhile, in the decaying corridors and lightless rooms of a long abandoned hospital, something terrible is waiting for them all.

In a chilling tale of contemporary small-town horror, Bestwick has truly evoked the terror of films such as *The Orphanage* and the writing of James Herbert, Adam Nevill and M R James.”

“This grim, supernaturally-loaded tale of genuine melancholy, with a compelling and well evolved plot, is tinted with a sense of despair and anguish. It’s often bleak and ugly – as a tale laced with themes of war and suffering should be – but the story underpinning it is finely crafted.”

This ambitious, well-written, densely plotted novel, grips you with cold bony fingers from the outset mixing a police investigation about missing children, the horrors of World War I and a local legend/urban myth about ‘The Spindly Men’.

Bleak, cruel and full of dark melancholy this tale is unsettling especially the excerpts from the diaries....

I love this from Graeme's Fantasy Book Review

"A good horror novel will leave you shocked or scared at what you find on each page and secretly glad that you can put the book down, at its end, and return to your normal everyday life. An excellent horror novel though, well... An excellent horror novel will leave you feeling strangely hollow to begin with as what you read demands all your mental space and will swiftly vacate any pretence you had of getting back to normality. That done, the excellent horror novel will move in; making you feel horribly uncomfortable while it settles in. It might be days, or even weeks, before it moves on and you won't be able to get those deeply unsettling images out of your mind in the meantime. 'The Faceless' is an excellent horror novel and this is exactly what it has been doing to me since I read it. It will happen to you as well and that's why you should give it a go."

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### **Andrew says**

The Faceless is very interesting novel. On one level it's a straightforward horror story with legions of the dead, but on the other it's a tale of interpersonal relationships and fractures which can occur even with the ones we love. It's a tale of magic, both misused and misunderstood. It's a book of redemption, hope, and the ramifications of governmental decisions. It's a slow burner yet also fast paced. It's a book whose themes don't leave you once you put it down.

Traditional horror isn't always my thing, and in some respects this follows a well-trodden path, yet its core idea manages to be both believable and audacious; and confronts us with a history of World War One which we all know about but rarely think about. SPOILER: the bitter disenfranchisement of wounded soldiers is quite a shock and puts the convenient throwaway term of cannon fodder into perspective, viewing them as individuals with their own purpose rather than those who happily laid down their lives for the 'cause'. This unflinching honesty greatly enhances the book, there are literally no heroes or villains here, just people who had tried or are trying to get on with their lives. It is an epic work in terms of its themes, in the true meaning of the word.

The book manages to work on many levels due to Bestwick's skill in knowing when to say/show something and when to pull away. If a few of his characters are caricatures, this is something of an inevitability, yet their detailed backgrounds and their interweaving perspectives add depth. And Bestwick's refusal to flinch from reality, to not shy away from making many of his major characters casualties, is a great strength.

The ending is both upbeat and downbeat, again illustrating that choices are rarely black and white. Those interested in intelligent modern horror who want something that will last should start here.

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### **Rhi says**

American Horror Story meets the Mist with a slight touch of Girl Interrupted and Saving Private Ryan. This didn't get scary... Until nightfall.

Kempforth is a tiny town in Northern England, home to Anna, Eva, Martyn, Mary, Alan, Vera, Renwick, and

others. Also, its home to the Spindly Men, mask-wearers who terrorize the town. Kempforth holds Ashfell, as well, an abandoned hospital for veterans of WWI, which Anna happens to be studying. She lives with her brother Martyn, his wife Eva, and their daughter Mary. Alan and Vera are siblings once from Kempforth, haunted by what they've seen and done. And Renwick is the cop driven by a missing child case. All parties wind up interwoven and struggling to make sense of the Spindly Men and Ashfell.

All the pieces fit together nicely, and the story was well-written, moved at a nice pace, and had okay characters. At one point, I did feel as if there were too many characters, but the story was well-done. A decent little horror story. 3.5/5 stars.

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### **Gavin Gates says**

After reading this it came as no surprise at all to find out that Simon Bestwick has been nominated for awards for his writing, this is without a doubt a perfect example of British horror at its best, stark, harsh, vicious and creepy as hell. I started to read this in the morning of a day off which turned out to be a wise move as I just could not tear myself away until I'd finished it. Can not recommend highly enough. Bestwick is a real force to be reckoned with in horror writing.

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### **Bob Williams says**

Karma comes home to roost in the most frightening way imaginable in this ghost story. THE FACELESS starts out small in scale with isolated disappearances of children and the seemingly unrelated stories of a small group of people: Anna, an art historian looking for her missing niece; Allen Cowell, a psychic, and his sister Vera who, sharing both business and incestuous bonds, have spent their lives fleeing a dark past but now find themselves being called back to a creepy, ghost-infested sanitarium to set things right; Detective Chief inspector Joan Resnick and Detective Sergeant Mike Stakowski (an older man who harbors both a crush and a paternal instinct for the younger Joan) who head the missing-child investigation; and ensconced within the English fog a group of impossibly thin and facially distorted supernatural beings along with some ghosts with a grudge who have a score to settle. On the edge of the action, there is a small circle of pedophiles from the past, one of whom was never apprehended.

These people's lives--and ghosts' non-lives--all intersect, and as the story progresses the scope of the story gets larger, larger still, and then MUCH LARGER. This shift in scale is immense, and when it comes it's handled well. The reader will be interested in the characters and how they will fare in the seemingly impossible-to-win battle in the final eighty pages or so. These pages will read like as much of an action-adventure story as a ghost tale.

In addition to all the excitement, the reader will learn about some WWI-related facts, Britain's part in the war, WWI's part in the evolution of plastic surgery and facial reconstruction, and a truckload full of war-related trivia. This book is rewarding on so many different levels: as a ghost story, as an action-adventure story, and as a (pseudo-)historical novel. Readers will see that a lot of care and as much love went into the writing of this story. I can't see anyone finishing this novel without being moved.

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## **Nick Sayce says**

Unfortunately I just couldn't finish this book. Don't get me wrong the setting was great and the way that the author defines the remote northern village makes the whole place very vivid and real.

The characters were very real and at times interesting, though they did take a long time to finish a sentence. However my main gripe with this book is that it just isn't scary. At no point was I scared to turn the next page, or wanted to turn the lights on while reading it. It's more like a soap opera with a supernatural twist. Like I said the writing was good but if like me you were looking for a good horror book then this won't be for you.

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## **Raven Dane says**

Genuinely creepy from page one, Simon Bestwick racks up the tension as the narrative grabs hold and won't let go. What distinguishes *The Faceless* from many horror books is the creation of fully rounded, three dimensional characters. This is the heart of *The Faceless*, telling the stories of real people trapped in a nightmare that the reader can care about. I loved the strong setting too, vividly yet subtly painted with a filmic quality. This book has all the hallmarks of a writer confident in his genre, knowing exactly what the reader wants in a well-written and exciting horror novel. I look forward to more work by Mr Bestwick

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## **Catherine Cavendish says**

In the town of Kempforth, Lancashire, the boundary between the dead and the living has become blurred. The derelict former War Veterans' Hospital and Sanitarium of Ash Fell is about to give up its supernatural and ghostly secrets. Terrible secrets - of men hideously injured and disfigured in war, only to be tortured still further. On top of it all, the local legends of the tall thin creatures called the Spindly Men are becoming all too real. adults and children are disappearing and the echoes of two world wars are becoming tangible.

*The Faceless* is one of those books that creeps up on you. It permeates your mind and draws you in. Simon Bestwick writes in a unique and highly readable style, making the incredible all too credible. Loved it.

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## **Carlos Lavín says**

I'm not sure about this one. Parts are 3s, parts are 5s.

The book starts out great, there's some very interesting characters and the writer really gets you into the northern England town setting. I was even thinking this could easily be made into a movie because of how clearly I was imagining everything. Was getting pretty excited about the whole thing.

I still try hard to not hate the change of scope from just a town to what came after, but can't seem to. The setting and characters were all coming along so well (view spoiler) Still had some parts worth reading, but overall I think the book should have ended in (view spoiler) Couldn't really care all that much about what happened after. There's nothing wrong with ending a book on a bleak note of "Oh yeah, and the whole world most likely went to shit after that".

Still, great writing (loved the interaction between the two cops) and overall a pretty good story, even if I didn't love the way he decided to end it.

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### **Carrie says**

#### **Pretty Good, Shades of King's the Mist and WWI**

The bitter ghosts of abused and forgotten WWI vets want revenge. The history of the Faceless Men of WWI and their sad tin masks has always fascinated me, so this book drew me in. Gets a bit weird, even for horror, but still good.

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