

Interview



SFX Editor in Chief, David Bradley



Londoner **Dave Bradley** migrated west across the country in the 1990s to study medieval literature (don't ask, he says!) and then to pursue a career writing, later editing, computing magazines. A lifelong SF fan, he joined *SFX* in May 2005 when the mag needed a new captain in the big chair, rejoicing at his chance to combine those years of magazine know-how with his absurd love of '80s fantasy movies.

Complete SF, Fantasy and Horror nuts at the Cyprus Well office, it was great to get the chance to ask Dave some questions about *SFX*, writing for magazines and the world of genre fiction.

SFX is brilliant for genre fiction fans, a place where “our” books are reviewed seriously. Do Horror, Science Fiction and Fantasy get a bit of a raw deal in terms of mainstream book coverage? What are your thoughts on this?

Books can get a bit of a raw deal in the mainstream and even in the genre press - when you consider that authors like Dan Abnett and Graham McNeill are hitting the New York Times bestseller list with their *Warhammer* novels, and that every time the nation is quizzed about its favourite books you see that JRR Tolkien, JK Rowling, Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett score favourably, it's shocking how little acclaim the genre gets. I was pleased that Doris Lessing received the Nobel Prize For Literature in 2007 but so often the high profile book prizes overlook some of the remarkable workbeing done in science fiction, fantasy and horror. There are a number of publications, awards and events dedicated to SF, fantasy and horror (we support the David Gemmell Awards and Arthur C

Clarke Award every year) but very often they preach to the converted. What the genre needs is an outreach programme... I think that's where *SFX* comes in! We try to review at least 20 books per month in *SFX* (and a good five or six comics and graphic novels) but even that just scratches the surface of what is available. I hope the on-screen success of TV shows like Doctor Who, movies like Avatar and videogames like Halo and Mass Effect will introduce new people to the genre who'll discover in our pages that there are great experiences to be had in printed fiction too.

Can you recommend other places for readers to find good reviews of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror?

Great places to read book news and reviews include Locus (<http://www.locusmag.com/>) and of course Interzone in the UK (<http://ttapress.com/interzone/>), where you can also read new short fiction.

From your point of view as an editor, do you have any tips for our readers on writing a good review?

Good reviews need to be more than just a summary of the plot - time and again this is where I see new reviewers fall down; tempting though it is, especially if the story you're reviewing is fascinating or complicated, it just isn't enough to explain what happens and assume that speaks for itself. Keep the précis to a minimum and remember that the reader has come there for your opinion, so give plenty of it. Back up your comments with examples - your review should be fair and you should be able to defend your argument. Where a review differs from a piece of academic criticism is firstly that criticism assumes you've read the source material and so doesn't shy away from spoilers (whereas a review should never give away the ending!) but also a review will very often be read for pleasure in its own right, so remember to ensure your review is a good read! A sense of humour helps, or at least try to cultivate an accessible, distinctive style.

And ditto, about getting a career in writing for magazines?

I get asked a lot about how to start a career in magazines. Only recently I recruited a new member of editorial staff for *SFX*. Staff jobs come up infrequently so keep your eyes on places like *The Guardian* (the media jobs section) and also the websites of the companies you're interested in – all our jobs go up here first: www.futurenet.com/jobs. To be in with a good chance you need to be enthusiastic, knowledgeable and committed to your craft. Practice your writing every day! We'll always ask for samples of your reviewing as well as your CV so make sure that you can produce a portfolio of material, even if it's stuffed with reviews you've written for your own blog - writing may well require some natural flair, but it's also a skill that gets better the more you do. Local newspapers, fan sites, convention blogs and more all need writers so do get out there and try your reviewing out on the public wherever you can. If there is a shortage of staff jobs you might like to consider becoming a freelancer. In that case it's a question of approaching an editor and pitching to them why they might want to use you. My top tip would be cultivate an area of expertise that is in short supply. No magazine needs another Doctor Who reviewer. Everybody loves Doctor Who, people are falling over themselves to write about that, and anybody on the team can already do it in their sleep! But how many people have read every book by Robert Jordan right through to the latest *Wheel Of Time* instalments by Brandon Sanderson? Narrow the field by demonstrating to an editor that you can write about something that the existing team can't. Get some coveted contacts too. Then pitch your

specific skills with humour and professionalism to the relevant commissioning editor of the publication.

You're obviously a huge fan – and that aspect of SFX and its writers is very, very clear – if you had to name some of your all time favourite novels, graphic novels or collections, what would they be, and why, and what should we be watching out for in 2011?

It's so hard to name a favourite. I've often said that Douglas Adams, David Gemmell and more recently Iain M Banks are the writers whose books I've loved the most over the years. If you haven't yet read Banks' latest, *Surface Detail*, then you should get that quick! But I'm also a fan of Stephen Donaldson's *Chronicles Of Thomas Covenant* and Dan Simmons' *Hyperion*, Alan Moore's *From Hell* (which I think is better than *Watchmen*) and so many other titles. Each one of these books has delighted me through the richness of its language – although at the heart is always a great yarn. Coming up in early 2011, I think fantasy fans should be looking out for *The Heroes*, the new book by Joe Abercrombie.

You interviewed Iain M Banks recently – and interview lots of the biggest names in the genres – have any authors just stood out as great interviewees?

Authors make excellent interviewees because they're usually very thoughtful. Unlike actors who play a role and then move on, an author is emotionally invested in their characters and usually has meticulous rationales for the worlds he or she has created. Iain M Banks and Joe Abercrombie are wonderful people, both so friendly, funny and intelligent. I've had the pleasure of speaking to many writers - earlier this year I spent an afternoon with Terry Pratchett and I have to say he was great fun, passionate about things you wouldn't expect, like videogames, and full of anecdotes about conventions he's attended in years gone by.

If you could create an action figure of any character or set of group of characters from any novel – which novel? (I'm going with *Salem's Lot*!!)

This is a great question! I want an action figure of Waylander from David Gemmell's *Drenai* books! I love Gemmell's stories, it's a source of great sadness that I never got to interview him.

How do you see the future for the Horror, SciFi and Fantasy genres – onward and upward?

SF, fantasy and horror continue to get bigger. These are genres that people are flocking to in all media - look what a success shows like Doctor Who and True Blood have been on TV, and most big screen blockbusters these days are in the sci-fi or superhero genres. But for the written word too, there are so many opportunities now - digital publishing has opened up the field hugely and we see publishers like Osprey taking a punt on things like Angry Robot Nano Editions. Could digital downloads kick-start a renewed interest in short fiction as people grab science fiction stories to read on their iPhones on the train? Maybe. Bookstores too have seen new genre imprints like Solaris, Angry Robot, Abaddon, and now Jo Fletcher Books from Quercus, so there's a lot going on in the genre. The creators are realizing how important it is to meet the readers too, so it's never been easier to approach authors, agents and publishers in person at events – everything from San Diego Comic-Con to smaller events like Bristolcon or SFX's own Weekender event, coming up in February. You can usually get good advice and feedback at conventions like that.

And finally, ditto for SFX – what new features can we expect in 2011?

2011 is going to be a really fun time for *SFX*. We've got the second of our live Weekender events in February (there are loads of guests booked to attend but to pull out a few names there are people like Terry Pratchett, George Takei, China Miéville, Keeley Hawes, Stephen Baxter, Anthony Head, Pat Mills...). Then we're planning a little polish for the magazine - we're going to be redesigning some of the sections to keep the magazine looking contemporary and to make sure the regulars stay fresh. Expect to see that in the spring. And then in the summer we're heading back to Comic-Con in the US - it's always such a blast; we had a panel in 2010 where I introduced some top guys like China Miéville, Paul Cornell and Toby Whithouse to the Californian crowd and it went down really well. Hoping to have a similar experience in July 2011!

Thanks Dave!

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