

Mayhem by Sarah Pinborough

When a rotten torso is discovered in the vault below New Scotland Yard, it doesn't take Dr. Thomas Bond – Police surgeon – long to realise there is a second killer at large in the city, where days earlier, Jack The Ripper brutally murdered two women in one night. Though this new murder is just as gruesome, it is at the hand of a cold killer, one who lacks Jack's emotion.

As more headless and limbless torsos find their way into the Thames, Dr. Bond becomes obsessed with finding the killer. His investigations lead him into an unholy alliance with a vagabond psychic and religious zealot. And as the terror grows Dr. Bond begins to wonder if it is a man who has brought mayhem to the streets of London, or a monster.

Sarah Pinborough has a deft hand at taking a known story and turning it on its head. She did it with creation itself in *The Dog Faced Gods Trilogy*, and is doing it now with *Poison* (Snow White), *Charm* (Cinderella) and *Beauty* (Sleeping Beauty). With *Mayhem* she turns her eye on the legend of Jack the Ripper, except this isn't totally a story about him. In fact Jack is a bit part player, a side effect to other events. This is a story about an age old horror that comes to the streets of London with a taste for blood, and about the men who must face it.

There is an interesting mix of characters, fictional and real. The main character – Thomas Bond – is real and was a Police surgeon who worked in and around Whitechapel during the time of the Ripper murders, he even wrote a paper on the psychology of the killer. Here he is a driven man, obsessed with tracking down the so called Thames Torso murderer and proving the two sets of killings are not by the same hand, he is also battling near crippling insomnia and drug addiction that see's him walking the streets at all hours. Alongside him is Polish refugee Aaron Kominski – another real life character, and a onetime suspect in the Ripper killings – and a Jesuit priest tasked with tracking and despatching something that is not human. Other characters include Inspector Moore and his assistant Andrews, like Bond they were both real life Policemen (though in real life Andrews was an Inspector as well) in and around Whitechapel and worked on the Ripper case.

Sarah has worked her story within known events and managed to make the two seamlessly gel. London is suitably dark and dismal; the wretched streets of Whitechapel are vivid to the point that you can smell the waste that fills the gutters. Likewise the people are equally wretched, their desperation palpable. Along with Dr. Bond the reader is taken through the dark underbelly of London, the Opium dens and gore drenched murder scenes. And all along the reader sits inside Dr. Bond's head, knowing his inner thoughts, inner conflicts, slowly throughout the course of the book piecing together the clues that will lead to the killer.

Surprisingly, for a murder mystery, the killer is revealed halfway in, it came across all very *Columbo* and I did have to go back and re-read that part again thinking I'd suddenly skipped a wad of pages. But outing the killer so early in the book made the rest more interesting, now you

get chapters that show you where he came from, what he was about. I do like stories that get you inside the mind of the villain, one of the reasons I like Dexter Morgan I suppose. The second half of the book now became a race against time, with the killer known and his reasons suspected Bond and his cohorts had to prove their suspicions, not only to themselves but to others when they had the proof they needed, and stop the killer before he struck again.

The whole process of telling this story is helped by the different styles Sarah uses to get her characters experiences across. Dr. Bond is told in the first person, the rest is in the third. An interesting mix that frees up the flow giving insights not only into the main character but also helps fill in the blanks about anything else that's going on. I personally like first person storytelling, it is one of the easiest to read and to write – for me, but there are limits, there are always blanks where the reader is left wondering what is happening elsewhere and only get the briefest of insights when other characters relate events. Here you get the best of both, making a stronger story and an easier understood one.

You are left – after all this – with an exciting murder mystery with strong supernatural elements. Alongside the main story the Ripper investigation quietly bubbles along, there are hints, snippets that lead the reader in the direction of one character. Sarah doesn't set out to name Jack, but the implications are obvious as to whom she identifies, and you are left wondering what happened next.

You think you know about the Ripper? Well you don't know jack.