

## AUTHOR INTERVIEW



## SUZANNE McLEOD: CRACKING MAGIC ONE SPELL AT A TIME!

**I**n her younger years, if you lost Suzanne the odds are that if you searched behind the sofa you'd find her but not because she was hiding from the Daleks or the Cybermen but because she was engrossed in a book.

Five years ago when she was running out of reading material Suzanne thought about the books she enjoyed and decided to take the brave move to write her own. Arriving in September is her first offering in the Spellcracker.com series entitled *The Sweet Scent of Blood*. We talked to her to find out more...

**Falcata Times:** Writing is said to be something that people are afflicted with rather than gifted and that it's something you have to do rather than want. What is your opinion of this statement and how true is it to you?

**Suzanne McLeod:** I started writing five years ago - I used to have the occasional thought that one day I might write a book but until then never did anything about it - so I wouldn't say writing is an affliction or something I have to do, but more something that I now want to do instead of most other things. I usually end up getting lost in my writing to the extent I often realise I've been bash-

ing away at the keyboard, have forgotten to eat or take the washing out of the tumble dryer and I'm desperately crossing my legs which are numb from sitting in one position for so long - so maybe writing is an affliction after all ;)

**FT:** When did you realise that you wanted to be a writer?

**SM:** When I realised my five to eight book-a-week habit was getting more and more difficult to sustain - I just wasn't satisfied with what I could find in the bookstores anymore, and my favourite authors were taking too long to write their next books ;). So I thought I'd have a go at writing my own!

**FT:** It's often said that if you can write a short story you can write anything. How true do you think this is and what have you written that either proves or disproves your POV?

**SM:** Difficult one! From my own experience, I started out writing short stories, probably like most people do. I think they are an excellent way to learn the craft, and to play around with different structures and to find your own voice. And for a short story to be great, every word in it needs to do its job, so yes, I'd probably agree. As to my own writing proving this - I've written shorts and had them published (although not in the SFF genre) and my first book is due out in September - so I guess it does. But I think now I'd find a short story hard to write after being used to having more words to play with!

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**FT:** If someone were to enter a bookshop, how would you persuade them to try your novel over someone else's and how would you define it?

**SM:** Okay, always presuming the begging and pleading and bribery didn't work! Then maybe I'd say something like this - A sexy, fast-paced urban fantasy set in London with hot vampires, eccentric goblins, a cool faerie and plenty of magical plot twists!

## A FAST-PACED URBAN FANTASY SET IN LONDON WITH HOT VAMPIRES ECCENTRIC GOBLINS A COOL FAERIE AND PLENTY OF PLOT TWISTS!

**FT:** How would you "sell" your book in 20 words or less?

**SM:** I'm going for a twofer on this one ;) Take selling pitch above, remove two words and hey presto! A fast-paced urban fantasy set in London with hot vampires, eccentric goblins, a cool faerie and plenty of plot twists! (Or is that cheating?)

**FT:** Who is a must have on your bookshelf and who's latest release will find you on the bookshops doorstep waiting for it to open?

**SM:** Emma Bull, Kelley Armstrong, Charlaine Harris, Kim Harrison, Jim Butcher, Laurell K Hamilton, Carrie Vaughn, Mike Carey, Patricia Briggs, C.E. Murphy, Rachel Caine and Tanya Huff and many more

**FT:** When you sit down and write do you know how the story will end or do you just let the pen take you? ie do you develop character profiles and outlines for your novels before writing them or do you let your ideas develop as you write?

**SM:** I'm a plotter, an outliner. I need to know where the story is going, who the characters are, and what motivates them, otherwise I end up going off at a tangent and falling down some very deep rabbit holes! (There's a chapter in my book which took me almost 20,000 words before I got it right! I learnt a big lesson about outlining on that one!) And writing to an outline means that I can get the right elements happening together but it also leaves room for my imagination to fill in those cool little details that suddenly pop into my brain. So far, I've not needed to do character profiles as my cast seem to be living quite happily in my head, but I do write a lot of notes on post-its with snippets of dialogue or additional plot points that need to be woven in as I'm writing.

**FT:** What do you do to relax and what have you read

recently?

**SM:** Read! Read! And yet more Reading! (Ultimately with the addition of sun, sea and margaritas! although any comfy place will do.) The last three books were Jeri Smith-Ready's Wicked Game, C.E. Murphy's The Queen's Bastard and Rachel Caine's Thin Air. All of them great!

**FT:** What's your guiltiest pleasure that few know about?

**SM:** Milky Bar white chocolate buttons, Scottish Tablet (a type of fudge made with condensed milk for those that don't know) and Chocolate Cherry Liqueurs - not that I've got a sweet tooth or anything!

**FT:** Lots of writers tend to have pets (mainly cats.) What do you have and what are their key traits (and do they appear in your novel in certain character attributes?)

**SM:** We've got two rescue dogs - a hyperactive Jack Russell/Lab cross, (she's about the size of a whippet!) and a couch-potato German Shepherd/Lab, (who doubles as a tummy on legs). I wouldn't say that their character traits have made their way into my writing as yet, but anything is always possible for the future.

**FT:** Which character within the book is the most fun to write and why?

**SM:** I think some of the walk on characters are the most fun. They might not have much screen time, but it's great to give them their own foibles and motivations so they come over as much more interesting. But then I have to be careful, because my imagination starts giving them bigger parts ;)

## MILKY BAR WHITE CHOCOLATE BUTTONS

**FT:** How similar to your principal protagonist(s) are you?

**SM:** Probably not that much! If I met up with a celebrity vampire, I might just manage to ask for their autograph \*grin\*, where as Genny is much more likely to give as good as she gets! And she's witty (even if it does take a couple of weeks for me to think up her dialogue - sadly not an option in real life!) Plus some of the situations she gets into, I'd be huddling in the corner waiting for someone to come rescue me, while Genny is all about rescuing other people.

**FT:** What hobbies do you have and how do they influence your work?

**SM:** I read - although maybe I might have mentioned that! I dabble in the less strenuous bits of gardening and I am a DIY freak. Although I'm not sure the last two have much influence on my writing.

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**FT:** Where do you get your ideas from?

**SM:** Everywhere, anywhere. I love documentaries, and myths, and history and finding out how things work. My mind always seems to find an idea in almost anything I watch, or see, or hear, and I'm constantly 'trying ideas on for size' to see if they'll fit into my current plot, or another one. And once I've even dreamed a whole book, although I haven't written more than notes for that one yet.

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**FT:** Do you ever encounter writers block and if so how do you overcome it?

**SM:** Writer's block is something I've come across (all too frequently \*sigh\*) but I've discovered that there is usually a reason for it. When it hits - which is when the words feel like I'm trying to squeeze them out of a stone - I take a break and re-evaluate where I'm going with my scene. Most of the time I find I'm trying to push either my characters or plot somewhere they don't want to go. Once I've worked out what's wrong, then the words start flowing again, or at least trickling faster.

**FT:** Certain authors are renowned for writing at what many would call uncivilised times? When do you write and how do the others in your household feel about it?

**SM:** I write whenever. Ideally in the mornings, but as I usually end up on writing binges to get things done, I've been known to get up at 5 a.m. and at times to keep going to the witching hour before falling asleep over my laptop! I'm lucky though because there's only my husband to worry about, and he's very understanding.

**FT:** Sometimes pieces of music seem to madly influence certain scenes within novels, do you have a soundtrack for your tale or is it a case of writing in silence with perhaps the odd musical break in-between scenes?

**SM:** I love music, but sadly I can't write to it. I end up getting hijacked by the song if I like it, and if I don't it just becomes an annoying distraction. So I stick to writing in silence.

**FT:** What misconceptions, if any, did you have about the writing and publishing field when you were first getting started?

**SM:** Probably just the large amount of books that do get published every year - when you see the figures, it's an astonishing amount. Other than that I was a complete novice, but thanks to the internet and chatting to other authors and reading agents' and publishers' blogs, I picked up enough of the basics pretty quickly, and I'm still learning about the rest.

**FT:** If music be the food of love, what do you think writing is and explain your answer?

**SM:** Writing has to be food for the soul ;) For sheer entertainment and escapism with as much or as little to challenge your world view as you want, there is nothing like a good book.

**FT:** What can you tell us about the next novel?

**SM:** In book 2 - The Cold Kiss of Death - humans are being murdered by magic, and all the evidence points to Genny - a situation that isn't helped when the Detective Inspector investigating the case has her own reasons to judge her guilty.

In an effort to find the real murderer Genny goes deep into London's fae and vampire communities. But her search is hindered by her tangled personal life. Genny's sort-of Ex - and now her new boss - can't decide whether he wants their relationship to be business, or pleasure. A spell she's relied on to keep her safe for years could be slowly killing her! And then there's the queue of vampires all inviting her to paint the town red - how long will it be before they stop taking no for an answer and Genny's life becomes even more dangerous?

**WE HAD  
HOMEWORK EACH WEEK TO  
WRITE 250 WORDS**

**FT:** What are the last five internet sites that you've visited?

**SM:** Fangs, Fur & Fey LJ community, The London Dungeon, Amazon, British Fantasy Society, and a web design company as I'm trying to get my website together.

**FT:** Did you ever take any writing classes or specific instruction to learn the craft of writing a novel?

**SM:** When I started to write, I joined a local authority 'Writing for Beginners' class. It was the best thing I ever did. Not only did I learn all the basics, but I started getting immediate feedback on my work - we had homework each week to write 250 words - and reading that out loud for everyone to comment on was about as nerve-wracking as you can get! Through the course, I also joined up with five other like-minded writers and for



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the last four years we've met once a week to critique each others work - and these guys don't pull any punches! It's thanks to their help and encouragement that my writing has come this far.

**FT:** How did you get past the initial barriers of criticism and rejection?

**SM:** With the writing class and with the group, you learn to take constructive criticism and use it to improve. As for rejections, they are never fun! But I think it helps to shed the tears and do the shouting in private to get the pain out of your system. Then to remember it's the writing that's being rejected, not you personally. And of course, chocolate and a large glass of wine are always a big help too!

**FT:** What are the best and worst aspects of writing for a living, in your opinion?

**SM:** The best is the actual writing and creating ;) The worst is the deadlines and that I have to do the day job too!

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