



I Wish I'd Written... The Sterkarm Handshake

Article Author:

[Celia Rees](#) [1]

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I Wish I'd Written

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Celia Rees chooses Susan Price's **The Sterkarm Handshake**.

Celia Rees on a great fantasy that makes sudden and exact sense...<!--break-->

It's impossible to wish to have written a particular book, because they are as individual as fingerprints, but occasionally I encounter an idea that fills me with admiration. When I heard Susan Price talking about **The Sterkarm Handshake**, I thought, 'What a brilliant idea!?', closely followed by, 'I wish I'd thought of it!'

Like all great fantasies it is simple, every part clicking into place, making sudden and exact sense. A multinational corporation develops the technology to travel into the past to exploit untapped resources, but fails to take into account the people whom they will encounter. The time tunnel is situated in the Borders. 21st-century scientists meet 16th-century Sterkarms: a fierce, amoral clan of reivers who live by stealing and fighting. The Sterkarms think the scientists are elves, so that's all right then ...

The Sterkarm Handshake is realised through history, language and myth. Susan Price sets past and present at angles to act as mirrors, each illuminating the other world. The cultural differences can be very funny: the Geological Survey Team sent back stripped to their underpants made me laugh out loud. But the implications are ominous, the consequences potentially tragic, and beneath it all is the cynical and exploitative multinational corporation.

When I read **The Sterkarm Handshake**, I was awed by its wit and cleverness. I can't wait to find out what happens next.

The Sterkarm Handshake by Susan Price is published by Scholastic (0 439 01408 5, £5.99 pbk).

Celia Rees's latest book is **Sorceress**, published by Bloomsbury (0 7475 5036 0, £10.99 hbk and 0 7475 5568 0, £5.99 pbk).

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