



84K

Claire North

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From one of the most powerful writers in modern fiction comes a dystopian vision of a world where money reigns supreme, and nothing is so precious that it can't be bought....

The penalty for Dani Cumali's murder: £84,000.

Theo works in the Criminal Audit Office. He assesses each crime that crosses his desk and makes sure the correct debt to society is paid in full.

These days, there's no need to go to prison - provided that you can afford to pay the penalty for the crime you've committed. If you're rich enough, you can get away with murder.

But Dani's murder is different. When Theo finds her lifeless body, and a hired killer standing over her and calmly calling the police to confess, he can't let her death become just an entry on a balance sheet.

Someone is responsible. And Theo is going to find them and make them pay.

Perfect for fans of speculative fiction such as *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Never Let Me Go*, Claire North's moving and unnerving new novel will resonate with readers around the world.

Previous books by Claire North:*The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August**Touch**The Sudden Appearance of Hope**The End of the Day*

By the same author, writing as Kate Griffin:

A Madness of Angels

The Midnight Mayor

The Neon Court

The Minority Council

The Glass God

Stray Souls

84K Details

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Author : Claire North

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Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Dystopia



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From Reader Review 84K for online ebook

Bradley says

I really had to debate between giving this a full five stars or the four, but ultimately it all boils down to whether or not the heavily ambitious tale was pulled off in spectacular flavor or whether it must remain a disquieting tale with an end that will either leave a bittersweet taste in your mouth or leave you anxious.

I personally think it'll be a bit of both.

I'm reminded of a bit of *Les Misérables* and a bit of Charles Dickens in this one, which is either odd or awesome when you consider that this is a high-concept SF dystopia where everything boils down to a price tag.

Lives, crimes... ANYTHING can be paid for. If you're unproductive, it's much easier just to liquidate the asset. Namely, you. Pay the blood price. And if you're rich enough, then anything can be had. It's the ultimate capitalist nightmare.

Fine. We've had stories like this before. Even recently. But here's where Claire North really shines. She never rests on any kind of concept. She dives deep, retaining a lyrical air with complex and satisfying novel structures that focus more on telling highly personal and emotional thematic threads for her characters. Linear storytelling is not a high priority.

And in that respect, she has a lot of giant storytellers' shoulders to stand on. She's carrying on a very creative and complex tradition and owning it for the SF community. For that, I must applaud. :)

For this tale, however, we go from apathy and invisibility to the realization that the MC has had it all wrong the entire time, that missed opportunities and reveals such as his high-school flame having his child and he never even knew... and especially in this world... would have truly nasty consequences. Especially when that old flame is murdered. She was worth only a measly 84k.

After that, it's a tale worthy of a mighty revenge couched in the simple statement that he will find his daughter.

Usher in some truly horrific worldbuilding, degradation, gruesome deaths, and revolution, all the while seeing how the other side lives... and dies... and we've got something quite epic. Without quite feeling epic.

The MC's quest is monomythical. Nothing else matters. The pendulum has swung.

The resolution is fascinating and complex and not easily digestible. Everyone seems to have a hard time living in this world. There are no easy fixes. This is not a place for heroes.

I would not expect any readers to come away feeling happy... but that's not the purpose of this tale. It's meant to make you think. And it does that in spades.

Not a traditional blockbuster, right? Right. And that may be its ultimate strength.

Lashaan Balasingam (Bookidote) says

You can find my review on my blog by clicking [here](#).

Claire North, also known under the names of Catherine Webb and Kate Griffin, brings us a brand-new dystopian sci-fi story with 84K. Although I've only known her for her huge success upon releasing The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August—which I have yet to read myself—this introduction to her mind has been truly eye-opening. The world she creates in this story comes to life thanks to some of the most meticulous world-building and attention to detail. It easily sucks away any sign of happiness fancied in the near future, and I simply love it for being able to achieve such a result. In 84K, readers are bound to be shaken up by the ideas explored with razor-sharp rigor, but also by the hauntingly mesmerizing writing style that Claire North utilizes to mold her story.

What is 84K about? This is the story of Theo Miller, an employee of the Criminal Audit Office. His job is to assess every offense that is put onto his desk and make sure that every criminal in question pays his debt to society. Debt as in time in community service? Time in prison? Capital punishment? No. In this world, each crime has a value and once those indemnities are dealt with, as in payed in full, the criminal is free of any charge against him. While Theo Miller lives his life trying to stay as irrelevant as possible to society, a figure from his past suddenly emerges from the dirty corners of his memory and flips his life upside down by dragging a past he has always tried to detach himself from back into his reality.

In this world, human rights are abolished and the rich reign with countless privileges under their belts thanks to their very deep pockets. Imagine a place where those who have the money can get away with anything, including murder. Anyone who is unable to pay their debt are however sent down to the “patty line” which essentially comes down human slavery. This whole premise alone strips this world down to an extreme form of capitalism and hammers in a whole new array of values and priorities in individuals. The story in essence explores humankind’s one true treasure in the most cautious and subliminal way possible: choice.

While Claire North blankets her world in an eerie and depressive coat, she repeatedly assaults the readers attention by playing around with the writing and the timeline. This is not a linear story whatsoever. It is fragmented into multiple timelines and sometimes a same chapter can contain two different events and invite readers on a transcendent experience through the mind of Theo Miller. The writing style also contributes highly to the experience by playing around with the formatting and the sentence structure. Certain sections are pervaded with page breaks that messes around with the formatting, while sentences are sometimes cut short and free of punctuation or capitalization. These moments are often dealt in rapid-fire and quickly grows on you. In fact, you’ll find yourself accustomed to it and identify it as part of this story’s signature; it easily compels you to enjoy this story not only as a simple reader of words, but as an analyst trying to piece the events together.

Claire North’s latest novel is a truly original and cleverly-crafted piece of literature. Its take on capitalism is astounding and effortlessly stimulates the reader’s critical thinking. There are moments in this story where it pauses to reflect upon society in such a convincing tone that you can’t help but reflect for a second on the role of money, the value we attach to it and the structure of the society we live in. Just look at how much importance we accord to money and how society is built upon one business’ success after another. 84K is not an easy story to read, but it a sublimely scary dystopia that should be sought by readers.

Thank you to Hachette Book Group Canada and Orbit Books for sending me a copy for review!

Yours truly,

Lashaan | Blogger and Book Reviewer
Official blog: <https://bookidote.com/>

Vanessa says

1.5 stars. I'm so bummed. I love North's book "The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August" and had high expectations for this one. But once again, I find myself very disappointed - this is another perfect example of a book that has a unique and interesting premise but falls completely flat on execution. First, the writing style leaves much to be desired. Incomplete, repetitive sentences that just trail off. Over and over and over again. It wasn't dreamy or poetic; it was frustrating and clumsy. Second, alternating timelines and POVs are fine and work as a great literary device when done properly. Here it was a mess. I'm a very intelligent person but I was fucking lost at times. I almost gave up, but I persisted, because surely North was going to tie it all together somehow at the end. Which brings me to the third point, what the actual fuck was happening in the last third of the book? I was yawning through chapter after chapter of "Theo on the run." Ugh. I'm sorry Ms. North because you are clearly talented but this was a big fat NO and I question the sanity of your editors and publishing house on this one.

Marianne says

84K is the fifth novel by British author, Claire North. Theo Miller (not his real name) works at the Criminal Audit Office. When a crime has been committed, his job is to calculate what the cost to the guilty will be. It can be a little complicated, but he has formulae and algorithms to guide him. It's a job. He hasn't given much thought to what happens to those too poor to pay.

But then, from his deep past, when he wasn't yet Thomas Miller, comes Dani Cumali, wanting him to help her find her daughter. His daughter. Could it be? When he finally overcomes his reticence, it's too late: Dani has been murdered. Her case crosses his desk at work, and after the legal wrangles are done and her assassin pays a paltry 84,000 pounds (84K) to avoid jail and publicity, perhaps that's when it finally sinks in for Theo: it gets personal.

What The Company, the one that effectively runs the country, doesn't realise is that Dani has dirt on them, important dirt. And her last words to Theo were "She's your daughter. Don't f##k it up." Theo's had a pretty mediocre go at life; could he do one good thing? Could he save Lucy? And ensure that she has a better life?

Perhaps the best dystopian stories are those that vary from the way of life with which we are all familiar by a matter of mere degrees. The suspension of disbelief required is then minor and that makes it all the more alarming. North achieves this with consummate ease. Most of us have by now experienced victim blaming and lesser rights for aliens (Trump era): North takes it just a bit further, so that Thomas's Criminal Auditing job, the epitome of dehumanising crime, is not such a far stretch.

We're already seeing gated communities, relocation of the aesthetically distasteful poor, corporate sponsorship/ownership of sports teams and venues, privatised public services (police, hospitals, prisons) with the attendant increase in prices and decrease in service. The world North presents is not so far from that; in

fact, it rings so frighteningly true that we have to hope she's not too prescient.

While most of the story is told in two time periods, there is, throughout both, constant recall of past events, as well as multiple echoes of recent incidents, repeated almost like reminders. While times are not clearly marked, the context precludes ambiguity. And despite the nature of the tale, there is humour, some of it quite dark: Theo is unable, as he commits all manner of crimes, to stop himself from auditing his own misdeeds in a running mental commentary. Topical and salutary, this is another brilliant read.

Andrea says

I've just read the first five chapters of this new book by Claire North - a pre-publication teaser - and now can barely wait to get hold of the full book. I haven't learned a great deal about the story beyond what's in the blurb, but I want more!

So far I've liked everything by this author that I've read, and 84K looks to be no exception. The author quickly establishes the setting as London; a London that is kind of familiar, but somewhat disturbing in certain aspects. It's a place where public services have been corporatised. Call an ambulance and the operator tries to upsell - and if, in the end, you don't have insurance, then bad luck. It's not so bad if you need the police. The Corporate Police have their shareholders to consider when charging for an investigation, but at least they are reliable. Not like the Civic Police for the uninsured...

This is an alternate reality where human rights have been abolished, and if you commit a crime your only real concern will be whether you can afford the fine determined by the Criminal Audit Office, where Theo Miller works.

The author's style is familiar. Razor-sharp, fast-paced, and at times almost a stream-of-consciousness delivery, with sentences left unfinished, forcing my brain to keep up and fill in the gaps.

Looking forward to publication.

LATER

Even though I started reading the full novel only a short time later, I decided to re-read those first 5 chapters because there was something I knew I hadn't fully grasped. The patty line. The first couple of times it was mentioned I happily read on, assuming that if it was important, enlightenment would occur at some point. Well, in fact it is very important to the story - it's what the story hangs off!

So here's how it works - 1. human rights have been abolished, 2. crime is punished by indemnity, calculated by the Criminal Audit Office, 3. if the guilty party can't pay the indemnity, they are sent to the patty line.

Prison was a deeply inefficient way of rehabilitating criminals, especially given how many were clearly irredeemable, and despite privatisation efficiencies overcrowding and reoffending were a perennial problem. Rehabilitation through work was an excellent and scientifically provable way of instilling good societal values. The first Commercial Reform Institute was opened when Theo was seven years old, and made meat patties for hamburgers.

These days, of course, the 'patties' do a lot more than just make hamburgers.

Dani Cumali has been on the patty line since Theo last knew her as his childhood friend. When she re-enters his life and seeks his help with something that seems to be the uncovering of some kind of conspiracy, Theo is reluctant to get involved. To force his hand, Dani reveals that she has a daughter and that Theo is the father. It could be true. Her tearaway daughter Lucy is in care, and Dani wants to get her back. But then Dani is murdered - £84,000, thank you very much. Theo becomes increasingly convinced that Lucy is his responsibility, so he begins looking into Dani's conspiracy.

Meanwhile, there's another, later, storyline going on. Theo has been badly injured and rescued by Neila, who lives alone on a longboat, navigating the English canals. They head north together, hopeful of finding the possibly-mythical Queen of the Patties, and enlisting her help in the search for Lucy.

Now I generally love a story built around dual-timelines, but something went wrong for me with this one. I was watching and waiting for the two to converge, as they logically would, but I got a bit lost and thought the earlier timeline had caught up before it actually had. I suspect I know why this happened - I'd lost interest in Theo and his quest, and probably wasn't paying attention. Anyway, for this reason the final quarter of the book was confusing for me, limping along to an anticlimactic conclusion, but welcome ending.

Claire North's writing excites me as much as ever, but this story ultimately wasn't my cup of tea.

With thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for an ARC to read and review.

Kate says

A clever and challenging read with a great premise - every crime has a price. This is a world in which only the poor are guilty. While this is probably my least favourite of North's novels, largely due to its fragmented and jumpy style which meant I couldn't engage with characters or story as much as I would have liked, this author continues to astound with her imagination and ambition. Full review to follow closer to publication on For Winter Nights. 3.5 stars.

Justine says

Very, very, dark. This isn't unexpected from Claire North, as her view of the future in previous books has always been slanted in that direction. But 84K is definitely her darkest vision of our near future world yet, written in a form that edges on experimental fiction.

North's work has always been infused with politics, and 84K is no different. What makes this book so chilling to read is that, particularly with the state of the world now, with the apparent strengthening of the right wing agenda, and the further entrenchment of big corporate interests, 84K doesn't seem all that far fetched. The protagonist, Theo, at one point muses on his role in creating the horror of a world he now inhabits:

I am, fundamentally, a failure. I've known this for most of my life. Since I was a child, it was always clear to me that the world I inhabited was not one I had contributed to. Everything that was good, other people made

and paid for with their own sacrifice. Everything that was bad, I couldn't control. All the ideas and dreams I thought were mine were in fact someone else's, and the more I talked about taking control, being my own man, all the things you're meant to say, the more I was talking to cover the very simple truth, that I wasn't. I am not. I made some choices, of course, but they weren't defiant acts of judgement. They were made because the alternatives were significantly worse. I coasted down the path I had with the feeling that it was the only path that was really before me, and when I chose to choose to do nothing, it felt like a kind of release, an admission that this was my life and I may as well live it. Nothing changed. Murderers walked free, people died and begged and grovelled and lives were destroyed for so little, for fear and anger and...but it didn't matter. None of it mattered. Because it was just the way the world worked.

And there it is. The world North envisions became that way through the small, collective inactions of a populace that feels their efforts don't matter in the scheme of things. That isn't too hard to imagine, is it?

The Nerd Daily says

Originally posted on The Nerd Daily | Review by Jess Magee

What if every crime had a value? And as long as you could pay up, you were a free man? In a world abolished of human rights and the rich can get away with murder, literally, we follow Criminal Audit Office employee, Theo Miller. His job is to catalogue every offence and make sure the crime matches the payment, discounts are even offered for circumstances such as if a 'lowlife' was the victim or the offender turned himself in. If anyone is unable to pay for their crimes, they are sent to the 'patty line' to pretty much becoming a slave for society. Even though the Government are still in power, it is really 'the Company' that run the show. Although he has spent years trying to remain anonymous, a figure from his past could jeopardise everything he has tried to hide, when they turn up murdered. Putting a measly \$1 value for her life is the final straw and he sets out to end a world he can no longer stay quiet in.

Claire North is an icon when it comes to the fantasy and sci-fi universe! With books such as The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August and The End of The Day winning countless praise and awards, the hype around this book was insane and so the pressure was on!

The world itself she creates is absolutely astonishing and coupled with her writing style, you truly feel as if this could become a reality. Unlike most science fiction, this novel's premise was a lot closer to real life workings, allowing for you to truly picture yourself within this dark world. Her attention to detail leaves you mesmerised and somewhat haunted from start to finish. When imagining this world, it does give you a feel of a 1984 by George Orwell kind of society.

The book jumps between different time periods, making sure you don't lose focus on the true story at hand. Although, this can become a little confusing at times and leaves you rereading pages to figure where we are in terms of time. However, this lack of order really made sense with the plot of the novel, making it just as unique as the story itself.

The character Theo progresses so well throughout the novel. At the beginning, he is seen as somewhat a kind soul who just wants to live a normal life, but as we get further through the story, we learn that this not entirely the case. Whilst admitting he will do anything to get his daughter, we start to see more and more what he is willing to do to get what he wants, showing he is just as dark as the world he lives in.

Overall, this book was an insane ride from start to finish. Although I did worry if it would live up to the hype of her other works, Claire North did not disappoint with her new novel. She has really tapped into a section of the science fiction genre I didn't even know we needed until now. I will warn that this is definitely a heavy read and you may find yourself needing to walk away to take what Claire North has thrown you. However, for anyone looking for an action-packed book, I think you have found your answer!

Phryinne says

I would know this book was written by Claire North if I was to read only one page of it. Her style is so unique and distinctive. Sentences are left unfinished, sometimes words and phrases just pile up on themselves and yet it always makes perfect sense. Did I mention that she is one of my favourite authors? In my eyes she can do no wrong but I can understand why some people find her hard to read.

84K is set in a dystopian near future in England. The country is in a sorry state since the Company joined forces with the Government and took over everything. Life now depends on having money, lots of it, or dare we say it is not worth living. Our main character, Theo, while not being a particularly brave man, stands up against the status quo and attempts to 'break the world'.

This is a very dark book, much more so than any of the author's previous works. There is death and degradation by the bucket load but there are also occasional hints of human warmth and kindness. The story is not linear and jumps around times, places and people until my head swam. I am glad I was reading it - audio would be very hard to follow.

The ending is hard to take, but real although there were highlights. I closed the book with a smile and thought to myself I am so very glad I am a reader.

The Tattooed Book Geek (Drew). says

As always this review can also be found on my blog The Tattooed Book Geek:
<https://thetattooedbookgeek.wordpress...>

I received a free copy of this book courtesy of the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

What is the value of a human life? Well, honestly, it varies, are you young? Are you old? Are you a benefit to society? Are you a burden to society? Are you valued? Will you be missed? Do you have the potential for future greatness? Will you always wallow in mediocrity? Are you a somebody? Are you a nobody?

In 84K everybody has a price and every crime also has a price. Commit a crime, pay that price (or as its known an indemnity) and you get away with the crime. Yes, if you can pay then you can even get away with murder. Can't pay the price? Then you are taken to the patty line (which is the equivalent of slave labour) where you are treated as less than human working off the cost of your crime by making consumer goods and doing menial jobs, etc.

Human rights are a thing of the past in 84K, abolished with inhumanity and injustice now reigning supreme. The rich get richer living in luxury whilst the poor get poorer struggling to get by and survive with the divide

between the two continuing to grow. In the world of 84K money is power, money talks and capitalism rules.

Theo Miller works in the Criminal Audit Office, he is one of many who audit the various crimes committed by people calculating the cost, the discounts (yes, you can get certain discounts on crimes) and the price of the indemnity for the offence.

Theo's a nobody, his mundane life full of repetition with every day being the same for him, work, repeat, work, repeat and generally, he flies under the radar, keeping his head down, staying out of trouble and simply getting on with his job in the most vanilla way possible. Theo crunches the numbers and totals up the costs of people's lives all the while remaining apathetic to the fact that he's putting a cost on each individual human life.

Then, one day, Theo's life is turned upside down as the past comes back to haunt him with the reappearance of Dani, a childhood friend and ex-lover who asks for and needs his help.

Before she can reveal all that she knows Dani is killed. Dani is only a patty, a drain on society, a nobody and no-one of any importance will care about her death anyway. Theo working in the Criminal Audit Office ends up with Dani's file on his desk, given the task of totalling up the cost of his old friend's life, her murder and the indemnity that her killer must pay.

What did Dani know? What had she found out that got her killed? Is it big? Could it bring down The Company? Finally deciding that things have to change, that enough is enough and realising that Dani's life should have been worth more than her indemnity these are the questions that Theo must find answers to. Setting out on a quest that will take him on a journey across England and bring him face-to-face with a variety of characters as he attempts to uncover the truth.

84K takes place in England, the actual year that it is set is never mentioned but you get the feeling that the vividly realised and detailed setting is the not too distant future making the story very believable. The government still runs the country, at least in name but it is a token title as the government is controlled by The Company and all decisions of import are made by The Company.

Everything in 84K revolves around The Company, their rules, regulations and the costs that they place on every aspect of human life. They own and control everything and it can all be traced back to them, it could be a company that is part of another company that is an offshoot of another company but ultimately, it will go back to The Company.

84K is told in a non-linear way taking place across a few different timelines, flitting back and forth between them. Often showing backstory and highlighting moments and events that are crucial to the story. Personally, I didn't find it confusing and was able to keep abreast of which timeline I was currently reading.

84K is written by North in what can only be described as a rather different and unique way. Sentences and paragraphs throughout the book are often left abandoned, fragmented and unfinished with some due to the line breaks and formatting (or lack thereof) even coming across akin to poetry in style. This way of writing does take some getting used to and at first, it makes the book (in places) hard to read as you, the reader are required to pay attention, to question, to think and to follow the train of thought by the characters and by North filling in the blanks and in places the meaning yourself.

For some, say, those readers who are on the lookout for a quick, simple and easy read the writing style will perhaps be a deal breaker but if you look past the initial hardship then 84K is a book worth persevering with

and you will come to appreciate the style being used by North and the immersion and depth that it brings you.

It is easy to picture the world in 84K and how it has turned out. This also contributes to it being a hard read as you aren't having to suspend your disbelief, reading about outlandish endeavours and scoffing at the craziness of the world. No, instead you will find yourself thinking shit, this could actually happen.

84K is a tremendous read that will stay with you long after finishing it. It is dark, gritty, original and is an eerily plausible and bleak look at what could be our own future.

Liz Barnsley says

Easy 5* for me. EASY. Claire North writes so beautifully and in such a unique way sometimes I think it doesn't matter what story she is telling, it is all in the way she tells it. As it happens 84K has a brilliantly engaging theme and the whole thing is just wonderful. And a bit scary.

Full review nearer to publication.

Lata says

This was a dark book, a what-if story, taking the idea of privatisation of all sorts of public services to an extreme though logical conclusion, with government and one, all-encompassing company in bed together while they destroy a country together.

While the narration of the audiobook is good, I found my attention wandering frequently. And with the multiple storylines going back and forth in time and the frequent repetition of phrases and ideas, I kept tuning out, partly because of the repetition, partly because the society Claire North has created in this book is really dark and depressing.

Gary says

7/17

High-concept SF premise marred by style-over-substance execution.

Full RTC

William says

5-Stars

Another masterpiece of heart and genius, this one dark and sad, not an easy read but very rewarding. North creates a living, plausible, even probable world in which greed has triumphed. Everything has a price, every crime a monetary indemnity. The rich can do what they wish, and escape with only a fine. Even murder is excused for £84,000, more or less.

This story of the near future is a clear warning about **the 1,000 year Tory dream: Lords in the castles and the rest of us dead or naked in the fields.**

... the Prime Minister declared, "Too long our enemies have hidden behind human rights as if they were extended to all!"

North's prose carries you into this world, a stream-of-consciousness almost from "the one called Theo" now. She builds her dystopian vision, confusing at first, slowly knitting the threads together, and the poetry of this terrible new world seeps into you, into your heart. Small miracles, tiny fragments of kindness resisting the cruel greed of the Company, straining to be human, to care. No one does this kind of world-building better than Claire North.

There are two main threads of the story: the present and the past of 15 years ago, near the beginning of the takeover by the rich. Poor Theo is not a hero, just a boy and just a man. North switches the two threads mostly by alternating chapters, and weaving them ever closer together.

This is a brilliant mystery as well, two murders, many deaths and a kidnap. Theo and Neila, Theo and Dani, Theo and the two bullies, Theo and Lucy, Theo and Theo. Each relationship guides Theo from the past to the present, and into a terrible solution, but with ever-present hope and tenderness from some strangers.

A future home for your grandchildren?

Full size image

No one admitted that the enclaves held the bin men, cleaners, waiters, janitors, porters, shelf-stackers, carers who wiped the old women's bums, bus drivers and health assistants too skint to afford anywhere else. Everyone has to make a choice, the Company said. You have to choose success.

This dystopia is so close to today that you can feel its breath in the room with you as you read. Such beautiful prose, despairing and knowing, and we have hope, we seek hope in Theo and Neila and the lost, seek refuge from the bullies and the rich and their easily hired thugs.

Even the assassin kills someone. Then as she stands over the body, calls the police on herself, knowing she'll just pay a fine. Or rather, her bosses will. Almost like it is today. So close.

There was only one school in Shawford by Budgetfood. Once a year the mayor came to judge sports day, and they'd get special guest speakers from the factory to talk about Retail Branding for Social Media or Fish Waste Product Use.

Much of the story is with Neila along the Grand Union Canal. It ... was finished just in time for the railways to be invented.

Full size image

A narrowboat like Neila's

Full size image

Her husband dies, leaving her and her young son alone:

But her benefits had been stopped because she was fit for work (though no one would hire her) and if no one would hire her in Shawford she just had to look elsewhere (there was nowhere to go)

The triumph of jungle capitalism:

... says this country is a slave state. That there aren't any chains on our feet or beatings on our backs because there don't need to be. Cos if you don't play along with what the Company wants, you die. You die cos you can't pay for the doctor to treat you. You die cos the police won't come without insurance. Cos the fire brigade doesn't cover your area, cos you can't get a job, cos you can't buy the food, cos the water stopped, cos there was no light at night and if that's not slavery, if that's not the world gone mad...

There are rules and penalties for every transgression, and new rules invented every day to bleed the population on behalf of the mental illness of the greed of the rich.

And the long lonely night, the ache of constant fear, barely lifted by a friend:

Theo said, staring into flames, "There's a place where the words stop. She did this and it was . . . and then we stop. It was terrible. It was barbaric. It was beautiful. You understand. And we do. We know. Our lives exist in many different, contradictory states, all at once. I am a liar. I am a killer. I am honest. I am fighting for a good cause. I am burning the world. We want things simple, and safe, and when they aren't, when the truth is something complicated, something hard, or scary, we stop. The words run out. Everything becomes . . . "

Sound died on his lips. A dead place where he once thought he had the answers and where now he isn't so sure.

The poverty and fear drives many insane...

They've got this guy, this boss bloke, he goes to the sea every morning and rages at it. Just rages at it, cos of how he was born into this shit, and he didn't ever find no way to make his life good, and he rages at the sky cos it never helped him, and at the earth cos it never carried him somewhere else, and his raging it's . . . it's sorta good, you know? It's like going to church, only different like. Sometimes I scream, it's like praying, but different.

This passage straight from Ms. North's heart, her mission:

But caring isn't the same as doing something, and doing something is hard. It's very, very hard. But the Company is made of people, and people are weak. They are cowards, like the rest of us. They wear a nicer suit. I'm going to destroy them all, one at a time, until there is nothing left, and the cities can burn and the sea can turn red with blood, and when it's done I will make a better world for my daughter."

Thought through those words, looking to see if there was anything wrong with them. Couldn't see it.

"That's all."

"In tarot, the Fool begins the journey. With an innocent heart and a soul full of wonder he sets out on his wanderings, looking to explore the universe, delighting in all things, trusting in all things the Fool is a card of exploration, hope."

--

My view:

GREED is truly the most terrible challenge of our times, and capitalism is its tool, its means to power and more greed.

Greed is a (contagious) mental illness, an unfillable hole, a hunger that denies justice, a brutal expression of broken egos.

Greed is having a million times as much as the poor and still feeling you don't have enough.

Greed consumes the earth without respite, and is a cancer on humanity. Greed destroys us and our children and their future.

Greed is death.

--
A terrific review on NPR by Jason Sheehan

MTK says

A startlingly unoriginal book from a startlingly original writer.++

For me, Claire North is one of the few writers whose books I buy automatically. And one of the things I always appreciated most about them is how different they are to anything else published today. Not only does she have a truly unique voice, but the premise of all her novels has always been something new, exciting, innovative. The stories are timeless, but always told from a different angle, like being seen through a lens not only new, but not even invented before. Certainly it helped that I love magical realism, even when it's not very well-done, and North, again and again, did magical realism incredibly well. And I love her writing style, whimsical, a little bit "vague", a little bit "fey", though I realise it's entirely a matter of taste.

This book was a great disappointment. It was not magical realism; fair enough, it never claimed that it was. Sadly, what North decided to write, when she abandoned her usual genre, was the 849,954,654th dystopian novel published in the last year. Yes, I exaggerate, but it certainly feels true that everyone and their grandmother is writing dystopian these days; steady fantasy readers, like myself, feel like they have read these stories before, again and again. I sincerely hope this change of direction wasn't a conscious choice on the author's part to cater to perceived demand, just bad luck and timing. However, that's not the worst part.

Since the market is flooded with dystopian novels, it would be very hard to write an original one, I imagine. North, who pulled one original idea after another for five books in a row, certainly found it impossible to do so. A society in our not-so-distant future taken over by a corrupt government and a soulless company driven by profit to destroy the world. Freedoms taken away, oppression, economic slavery. An unlikely hero who tries to conform but after a time finds it impossible to do so. A new religion taking root amid violence and terror. Blah, blah, blah. Been there, read that. Not once, but plenty of times. Worst of all, this book is reminiscent of Octavia Butler's "Parable of the sower". Too reminiscent of it, not quite a rip-off, but very derivative.

I give it three stars, because North remains an excellent writer, though her whimsical writing style doesn't work as well in this kind of book. It's an interesting take on how the world can go to hell via rampant capitalism, it's well written, it's not a bad story plotwise. But I hope the change of direction is not permanent.
