



The Iron Duke

Meljean Brook

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After freeing England from Horde control, Rhys Trahaearn has built a merchant empire. And when Detective Mina Wentworth enters his dangerous world to investigate a mysterious death, Rhys intends to make her his next conquest.

The Iron Duke Details

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From Reader Review The Iron Duke for online ebook

Holly says

This was my very first steampunk novel and I liked it! It's a fun mixture of historical fiction and fantasy without being too distracting to the plot itself. However, for this book specifically there were so many secondary characters that I had trouble keeping them straight. But I just kind of went with it and in the end I found the story to be fun, if a bit confusing at times. I'll read more by this author and this genre in general.

Felicia says

I enjoyed it a LOT, just one thing brought it down from 5 stars, which I will specify at the end. (BTW Has VERY racy scenes as a warning to the non-smutty lovers, but that wasn't my -1 star point haha)

I would give worldbuilding: 5 stars. The first chapter is a bit confusing, but the world that is spun out over the novel is ENDLESSLY interesting, one of the few books that has made me read SLOWLY to see what all the steampunk stuff really is about. FASCINATING history with the Horde and the nanobugs, I just cannot sing praises enough about the rich playground the author has invented here. Looking forward to MANY more books in this world.

Heroine: 5 stars. LOVE LOVE LOVED THIS CHARACTER! I thought the worldbuilding lent itself to the creation of a very rich character, one that deals with ostracism and race in a way that is so understanding, so interesting SO NOT CLICHE. I really thought this character could be one that arcs over book after book without settling down with a guy, she was that strong. For a very romance book, it's a relief and a pleasure. I was rooting for her all the way pretty much.

Hero: 3 stars :(UHHHHHG. Ok, he was hot sometimes, but honest to god the word "Shag" just rubbed me the wrong way, IN ADDITION he was kinda a bully and just tried to force the heroine to do what he wanted in a way that felt almost predatorial. Now, some of this was because of his backstory, but no one else really called him out on his bullying, not even the heroine most of the time. If you read my reviews I'm not a big fan of "YOU MY WOMAN" men, so this might be my peeve, but I had to express some reservation for the record.

ANYWAY, loved the book, if you're into the racy steampunk/scifi/fantasy/historical romance genre, this will be a hit for you :) Looking forward to the next!

Jeaniene Frost says

I almost didn't try this because steampunk usually isn't my thing, but this is a great book.

Catherine says

I won this ARC in a contest at Dear Author.

I have a confession to make... I was afraid to read this book. I have a serious love affair with this author's Guardian series. I mean, how many of my Goodreads friends did I nag into reading it lately? Five? I know they finally broke down and read it just to shut me up, but that's okay, because they loved it anyway and I got more people to talk about it with. So, I was afraid something would happen and I wouldn't be able to get into the new series and I'd lose a favorite author. Thank God I slapped the neurotic out of myself and read it! It was great!

So this is an alternate view of England. Two hundred years ago some of the English, now referred to as bounders, fled the Horde and only returned to England after the Iron Duke had broken the Horde control. The bounders aren't very popular because they've come back to try to claim their titles and their land and are rich, while the people of England who stayed and suffered are poor. The Horde hid nanoagents (or bugs) in the sugar they traded with England. When the time was right, they activated the bugs and thus began the Horde control. Nine years ago, the Iron Duke had broken the Horde control on England. For his trouble, his pirating was pardoned and his was awarded a Dukedom.

This book opens with Mina Wentworth being called to the house of the Iron Duke to investigate a murder. She works for the Metropolitan Police Force and is very good at her job. The Iron Duke, Rhys Trahaearn, is willing to let her investigate, but wants to be involved and informed of all the particulars. Because of his particular status in England, Mina is forced to agree.

It took me a while to figure out exactly why Mina was a pariah in her own society. I don't know if the author was slowly hinting at it, or if I'm just slow, but it took me a while to figure out exactly who the Horde were and why her connection to them would be easy to spot. I was expecting something to do with the nanos or prosthetics. I had a lightbulb moment midway through and felt really dumb. Please let it have been the author's plan and not me being dense! :P Once I figured it out, those insults made a lot more sense...

The beginning of this book was hard for me to get into. Not because of the writing or the characters or anything, it just took me a while to fully acquaint myself with the technology aspect of it. I've got to admit, I find it a lot easier to watch a steampunk movie than read a steampunk book. A movie requires much less understanding for me than a book, and I'll own it - I just don't understand engines. The details start coming about engines and machines and it just blows my mind. So, I think this won't affect anyone who understands these aspects better than I do. I struggled for a while, but did eventually understand the technology and the world. But that lack of understanding isn't unique to this book. I *always* feel it when reading steampunk. It's just me.

I loved the characters in this book! Not just Mina and Rhys, but the side characters too. Yasmeen, Lady Cosair, a merchant captain with a bad ass attitude. Archimedes Fox, the adventurer who seems to have quite an attachment to one of the other characters. Scarsdale, an excellent character who despairs about Trahaearn's blunt speech and who is incapable of getting onto an airship without being extremely drunk, drugged, or knocked out. And then there's Mina's coworker, Constable Newberry... What an absolute sweetie. I really enjoyed his relationship and loyalty to Mina.

Mina was an excellent heroine. She's smart and assessing at all times. She doesn't go looking for trouble, but she won't back down either. The years under Horde control have had a huge impact on her. She *will not* be

controlled again. Not by a person, and not by her own emotions. Her situation in life is so sad. Where can she go so people will look at her and see something other than the Horde? She is constantly having to hide in the shadows and prove her own worth. Poor girl. She lives in fear, although it is not always apparent. Fear of being controlled, fear of being hurt, fear of being the cause of her family's suffering. Her every action is influenced by those fears.

Rhys is a hero who just wants to be ignored. He likes the power and influence his name gives him, but he doesn't want the hero worship. He doesn't want people to look at him and thank him, it makes him uncomfortable. The public takes his image and runs with it and no one seems to care about the truth of his past. He doesn't care, a lie can serve him better than the truth at times. Unfortunately, he seems to forget the image he has been given and pushes Mina and tests her, not knowing that she's judging his actions by who she *thinks* he is.

Rhys had a really harsh childhood that has shaped his view of the world and his relationships to people. He values people by their use to them and keeps them or discards them depending on their value. He knows that everyone has a price, and has no problem with manipulating someone into the situation he wants them to be in. Thank goodness for Scarsdale. He's the voice of reason telling Rhys when he's fumbling things with his pursuit of Mina. I cracked up at the severe understatement of the term, "bad sport," that Rhys and Scarsdale kept throwing around. I loved Rhys though, because once he figured out that his manipulation was doing more harm than good he dropped it and started tweaking another angle.

There is a part in this book that I think is going to make some readers uncomfortable. I, personally, loved that it was there and that they had to deal with it in an honest and adult way. It was, sincerely, an honest mistake. Rhys didn't mean to do it like that, and Mina couldn't help her reaction. I loved how it all worked out.

Can I just point out that there are zombies in here! How cool is that? I didn't read the summary of the book, I just wanted it based on the author, so they were a big surprise. I loved their roll and I loved the explanation for their existence!

The only problem I had was toward the end. Mina and Rhys and their total miscommunication made me want to smack their heads together. It totally fit with their characters, and the fact that they seem to speak a different language at times, but I still found it a bit frustrating. I just wanted to sit them both down and have an intervention! But it was wonderful too.

I cannot wait to read the next book!!!

Katie(babs) says

My review of The Iron Duke won't do enough of justice. The entire time I read, my jaw was dropped in amazement. The Iron Duke has wowed me in some many ways. Meljean Brook is an author I'm loyal to, through and through. It's a great feeling to have started with an author since the beginning of their writing career and watch them evolve and continue to astound with every single book they've written. The Iron Duke is mind-blowing in such a way that it may just turn the romance genre on its ear, including the Steampunk genre that still has many readers scratching their heads in confusion because they just can't understand it.

The plot of The Iron Duke is one of the most complex I've read in a long time. The last author who made my head spin in such a way was Anne Bishop's Black Jewels Trilogy. Bishop's books have such intricate world-building, where it's nearly impossible to explain it all. The same applies here with The Iron Duke. What I can tell you is that the world Meljean has created is a very scary and uncomfortable place, and one I wouldn't want to live in. For the past two-hundred years, the Horde has ruled most of Europe, very much like a terrorist organization that sends fear into the hearts of many, including England. The Horde has far reaching hands, but those who were lucky enough to escape parts of Europe, mainly England, to America, are now slowly returning back to the land they left behind. The reason the British fell to the Horde was that the Horde hid things called nanogents, invisible bugs, into tea and sugar where they traded it very cheaply. Then the Horde activated the bugs. This gave them control over the British. Can you just imagine, with a touch of a button, where someone has the power to make your body do whatever it wants? Or suppress your emotions where you don't have the freedom to feel the way you want to? The Horde is able to do all this and so much more. And then one man rose up and went on a suicide mission to end the Horde's slavery. Nine years ago, The Iron Duke, known as Rhys Tarhaearn, former pirate captain and recently titled Duke of Anglesey flew his ship into the Horde's controlling tower, ending the Horde's reign over England and becoming their national hero.

Detective Inspector Mina Wentworth knows the Iron Duke's reputation very well. Mina's parents are poor even with their Lord and Lady title, and their daughter is ridiculed and spit upon because Mina was conceived during a state function the Horde held where all the peers of the realm were required to attend. The Horde planned a Frenzy, forcing the guest to engage in sexual acts with anyone and anybody. Mina was the outcome and has Horde blood running through her veins. But an important fact to bear in mind is that Mina loves her parents and visa-versa. They protect and care for one another deeply.

Mina finds purpose in her job as an inspector, even though her latest investigation leads her straight to the Iron Duke's doorsteps. A body has been dropped from an airship, and is some sort of warning against the duke. The Duke wants to handle matters himself, and away from the police, including "handling" Mina in his own special way. Mina refuses to succumb to the Iron Duke's regard toward her, but has no choice but to let him join her on the investigation because what he wants, he gets.

Someone is building an invention, a weapon the Horde would use, if they could to take over England again. Mina has a personal stake in the case when her younger brother, who's training aboard Rhys's former air ship, which is used by the British Navy, has been hijacked and the crew held for ransom. Now Mina has to rescue her brother and try to save England at the same time.

Mina won't be alone on this mission. Rhys will come with her, using not only his brains and former skill as a pirate, but along with a few trusted friends such as the Lady Yasmeen Corsair, the captain of her own airship, and Rhys's close friend Scarsdale, a drunk who is afraid of heights, but has a man's back during a fight. Mina has so much to lose because Rhys has targeted her for his own. He has laid claim to Mina, and the price he's asking is too high for her to accept. Rhys is not one to take no for an answer, and soon he's cutting away at Mina's resolve where she wants to give into the desires The Iron Duke is offering regardless of the consequences.

Everyone so often I'll have a call to action telling people to buy a book and drop any other book they're reading at the moment. Here I am again with that call for The Iron Duke. There are not enough adjectives to describe what a wonderful experience I had while reading The Iron Duke. This is one book that makes me want to applaud because it's so damn good. Meljean brings forth the steam, and I'm not just talking about the steam from the airships and machines within these pages. The things that come out of Rhys's mouth in regards to what he wants to do to Mina, and then does to her, had me blushing. Hello? Me, your pervy KB

blushing over a love scene? That takes immense skill from an author to be able to make me have such a reaction. The amount of times Rhys gives pleasure to Mina, and the way it's describe in graphic detail, will make you melt into a pile of goo. This is one relationship that's incredibly passionate and straight up sex on a stick. Something very important to keep in mind is that Mina is no pushover when it comes to Rhys. Poor Rhys never stood a chance with Mina. She is his salvation, and soon his reason for breathing.

There's a combination of swashbuckling fights that brings to mind the 1935 movie, Captain Blood, ravenous, crazed zombies, and enough science fiction and fantasy to make you agog because Meljean makes it work so well together when it shouldn't.

While reading The Iron Duke, I couldn't stop thinking about the 1984 movie, The Terminator. There are many subtle instances of that movie within the story, mainly because of what the Horde made people become. The Iron Duke can be taken somewhat in the literal sense when it comes to Rhys, but make no mistake; he's not a mindless machine, but very much a man who feels. If James Cameron ever got his hands on The Iron Duke, that movie would be a blockbuster of epic proportions.

If you don't read The Iron Duke, you're making a big mistake. The Iron Duke may be one of the most influential books published this year that I've read. Meljean, I applaud you, and invoke my phrase I use sparingly where, "I want to have babies" with The Iron Duke, and if I could, would roll around with it to soak up its excellence.

Kat Kennedy says

This is the third novel I've read belabelled Steampunk and so far it is the best.

Unlike Clare's rendition of Clockwork Angel, Brook's The Iron Duke doesn't nervously flirt with Steampunk but wantonly embraces it like a Steampunk addict chasing after its next hit.

Similarly to Carriger's Soulless, The Iron Duke is heavy on romance though with far more satisfying love scenes and lacking in the supernatural, paranormal element.

No, Brook understands Steampunk and she executed it well, creating a world styled off 19th century England but with a rich and textured history. Don't be fooled by the confusing, awkward and clunky beginning. Brook didn't choose the best method to relay the backstory of Horde control and a mechanical population at odds with the wealthy elitists who refuse "nanoagents".

However, this confusing introduction is soon swept away by the fantasy of men with piston-operated arms, mechanical eyes, steel-plated sabre-cats, Kraken, air-ships, automatons and all the whimsy that a novel like this deserves.

The story may revolve around the romance of the two leads, The Iron Duke and Mina, an intelligent, cold, strong Inspector, but it also focuses heavily on the mystery and adventure aspect. It includes a full cast of interesting and rich characters, enough turns and twists to keep you guessing and different, textured environments to keep you turning the page.

The romance began, for me, as the weakest aspect of this story. The Iron Duke, Trahearn, Rhys or whatever you want to call him, is An Alpha with a capital A. In fact, he rarely deviates from the genre mainstay as the

rich, capable, manly, intelligent person who is immediately dazzled and enchanted by the cold, resisting heroine. In fact, he was downright giving me Woodiwiss flashbacks.

[image error]

No! No! Please! No!!!!

You know who I'm talking about. The kind of RAM (Romanticized Alpha Male) who thinks No means, "You just haven't gotten me helpless and alone enough" and who eventually comes to hold dearer the heroine's continued rebuffs over any freely available blowjob. Every time I read one of these books, I can't help but think the writers are kidding themselves. Yes, your heroine is ewnique and special but if he can get it easier from a tavern wench, then why bother with the cold, frigid heroine? After reading that sentence, I'm kind of wondering whether I should have been born a man...

The bar wench is easier, she comes with beer and she won't expect you to call her in the morning. What's not to love?

However, all is saved by the female protagonist, Mina. Two words: Kick. Ass. There is nothing stupid, helpless, ineffectual or ridiculous about her. She manages to get through the ENTIRE novel without making me hate her for existing. Which is what female protagonists having been doing to me a lot lately (*shakes fist at almost the entire YA genre). Not only that, but her competence and intelligence makes sense since she is, indeed, an inspector and she damn well acts like one. She pulls a gun if she needs to and she gets shit done all the while being professional, capable, yet realistic and... well, pretty damn relatable. Also, the sex. And don't lie and think it's not that important. It's damn important and Brook definitely delivers on that part. Which makes Mina's character that little more likable to me as she isn't the virginal prude. In fact, a lot of this novel was about her developing a comfortableness with her own sexuality, which I really enjoyed.

And as the novel progresses, Trahearn becomes more human and less RAM. I wouldn't say I ever truly warmed to him completely. He still remained pretty firmly in the RAM camp but Mina and his relationship with her was just so awesome that I managed to forget it. Maybe it's because he came on way too thick at the beginning. I don't find it sexy when a man corners me and kisses me against my will when I've repeatedly told him no. I didn't find it sexy in this novel either. In fact, Brook was a little too happy with this plot device and at a couple of points managed to make me quite annoyed with Trahearn. But then Mina shot him and I felt so much better.

SOoooooooo much better!

Over all, I felt the writing was solid, the story telling became fantastic after the first clunky scene and that this book was a very solid four stars.

In fact, if Brooks had written Trahearn just a little differently, I think I might even have given this story five stars. Still, as it is, it's a very good read. I recommend it to romance readers, steampunk enthusiasts and anybody who's just into a fun, adventure novel that won't let you down in the imagination department.

This novel is kind of like that... awesome with a side of bullet sandwich!

Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says

I have to hand it to Meljean Brook. She created a wonderfully-detailed and fantastical world in this book. If a reader is wondering what 'steampunk' is, I will definitely point them towards this book. I was very impressed how she integrated nanotechnology into her world-building, and the nanotech fit very well in this universe. There are some aspects that seem rather dystopian, despite the fact that this is a Victorian-like setting. The use of robotic technology has some great applications, but some are rather horrific. In this story, a large degree of the world, particularly Europe and associated continents, has been subjugated by the Horde, which I interpreted to be the Mongols (as in Genghis Khan). Many of the major cities of Europe are under occupation or have been razed to ruins. Zombies roam the unoccupied territories, humans who were infected by nanobots that caused them to become vicious, cannibalistic monsters. However, many regular humans are infected with nanobots that enhance them in many positive, and some negative ways. The problem is that the Horde can control those humans, called buggers, with radio signals. In this world, the Horde are hated and despised, which creates a lot of problems for the heroine, Mina. She is the product of a Horde "frenzy" in which control of her mother's body (via control of the nanobots by radio signals) was overtaken by the Horde, and she engaged in a Horde orgy, resorting in Mina. She was so horrified at the sight of her half-Horde baby that she gouged her eyes out. Yeah, right away, I knew this story was going to be kind of dark.

I was very impressed with the meticulous world-building and attention to detail in this story. In addition, there are several major players who all want a say in the future of England, and the rest of the world, grabbing any kind of power or edge they can to gain that. This book has everything: mechanically-enhanced humans and animals, pirates, zombies, giant sea monsters, airships, you name it. However, it was so well-done, it never came off as over-the-top. While this book probably wouldn't work for straight romance fans, or even some fantasy/science fiction fans, I loved it, because I got a kick out of how imaginative and unique this Victorian world was. Despite my enjoyment, this wasn't an easy read for me. I often had to reread certain passages to make sure I was getting a clear understanding (that's not due to Ms. Brook's fault, but to my inexperience in reading a lot of science fiction-type literature and not having a head for political intrigue storylines). That's okay, because I wanted to get a full grasp of this book, and it certainly enhanced my enjoyment.

In my opinion, Ms. Brook didn't let her romance fans down. The love story between Rhys and Mina is equally important. I was eagerly awaiting the arrival of The Iron Duke when I started this book. When he showed up, I was not disappointed. He's a very unique character, which some aspects that I had not encountered in a hero thus far. I loved his vitality, his ruthless nature, his determination. Mina has a pull on him that compels him throughout this book. He is the kind of man who will move mountains to get his woman, which definitely works for me. Even outside of that, I respected him for his strength in enduring a very rough past, his determination to do what was necessary and to protect others. He might have seemed self-absorbed (he put importance on protecting what was his, whether it was his ship, the sailors, on it, or his properties and subjects as the Iron Duke). He didn't really like the ceremony of being a Duke, but he took the responsibility seriously, because that was the kind of man he was. He wasn't a smooth, refined character, which is fine with me. When he considers his feelings for Mina, they are described in a very rough way, but the emotions behind them are pure, and he definitely shows his love for her, not just physical infatuation.

As for Mina, I couldn't have liked her more as a heroine. She's tough, really tough. But she's not hard or frustrating. Any armor she has, I can't fault her for it. Because of her heritage as half-Horde, she is despised by many in London. They try to attack and harm her physically, so she has to have a bodyguard at all times, the hulking but gentle Constable Newberry. Those who don't hate her, fear her because her features remind them of the Horde. This aspect of the story hit home with me. Prejudice of any kind always does. Being

judged by your features, your heritage, the color of your skin is wrong. Even if there are many of your heritage who are bad, that doesn't mean that you are. Because of being a woman and half-Horde, Mina has to work four times as hard just to be respected for her abilities as a Detective Inspector, and she's not afraid to do that. Rhys determined pursuit is a huge problem for her. She knows that their involvement is just going to cause more fodder for the distrust and lack of respect that the public holds for her. Even if she's very attracted to him, and he reaches her carefully guarded heart.

The relationship between Rhys and Mina develops very well. They start out as untrusting allies, with a reluctant attraction. As the story progresses, they come to respect and understand each other, and the love blossoms between them naturally. And their passion is red-hot. Rhys is a primal, demanding lover. However, he doesn't force Mina. Understanding what her issues are about being in control of her passions, he patiently works past those issues, and it's a beautiful thing to read. He won't be the kind of guy who whispers sweet, elegant words in a woman's ear. But he shows and tells a woman how much she means to him in simple, but effective ways. That definitely speaks to me. As for as Rhys and Mina getting their HEA, just being in love wasn't enough. They had to deal with the issues that they faced with their enemies, and the society they lived in. Although the romantic in me loves when a couple can easily surmount obstacles and be together, the realistic knows that's not always a simple thing. I like that Ms. Brook didn't allow their problems to just blow away in a puff of smoke because Mina was a "great person" and Rhys was the powerful "Iron Duke." However, I was completely satisfied with the romantic conclusion in this story, which I am very glad to say.

My experience with steampunk is fairly limited, but I love the ideas and the concepts of this genre of fantasy/science fiction. I highly recommend this novel to a reader who wants to experience this genre. Although this is not a simple world, there's a very fascinating world here that Ms. Brook created. The complex textures--Victorian setting, science fiction, fantasy, pulp fiction, adventure, romance, seafaring/pirate elements--just made this an even better read for me. This was a thoroughly enjoyable, engrossing book, and I will be looking out for the forthcoming books in the Iron Seas series with great expectation.

mark monday says

London freed by the former pirate "The Iron Duke" is still a London chock-full of resentment, violence, economic insecurity, destroyed body parts replaced by machinery, and racism against half-breeds descended from the city's former masters, the Mongolians known as The Horde. Detective Inspector Mina Wentworth is one of those luckless, product of - and later, victim of - the ability of the Horde to make their pet English do as they pleased, sexually and otherwise. Inspector Wentworth has a lot to deal with: everyday contempt from Londoners still angry over their former servitude, a noble family in dire financial straits, a body dropped from a zeppelin onto the Iron Duke's estate, and a beloved younger brother lost or kidnapped. Perhaps her biggest problem, one she won't admit even to herself: she has a hankering for that Iron Dick.

Overall this was surprisingly impressive, despite its laughable cover and designation as some sort of Steampunk Romance (not that I have anything against Steampunk or Romance). Meljean Brook is a really talented writer and the world she constructs is almost dizzying in its complexity and layers of history. But the story never feels cluttered. This alternate England is deeply, richly imagined - so much so that it could have been too much. Brook's imagination is a fertile one, and in the hands of a lesser author, the story could have been easily overwhelmed by all of the creativity on display. But her smooth, exciting narrative and deliberate parsing out of details give her book an appealing suppleness. This is an easy world to get lost in!

The romantic elements are key - this being a romance novel, after all, and despite all of the fun, strange worldbuilding - and those scenes ended up being either the most tedious or some of the more striking parts of the novel. Fortunately, the romance improves over the course of the story.

To the former: Mina's constant perception of the Iron Duke as one very bad and very untrustworthy dude becomes very very tiresome, very very quickly. It really gets ridiculous and it just goes on and on. Eyes were rolled, very hard. The Duke's instant obsession with Mina alternates between creepily aggressive and amusingly sweet and soft; despite that schizophrenia, overall he was not a particularly interesting character.

But to the latter: the reader soon learns that Mina's hesitation around intimacy is coming from her experience with intimacy being forced upon her. (And it turns out that that is something she has in common with her paramour.) Rape and its emotional aftermath are topics that deserve to be treated with delicacy and empathy; I really respected Brook's skill and care when dealing with such things. She made those past traumas central to her two protagonists' psyches and profound influences on their sexual behavior, yet she also made sure that the impact of those traumas could be overcome. Good job, author.

Ridley says

A few hundred years before the novel opens, the Asian Horde took over much of the Western world with a mix of force and superior technology. Lacking any navy of merit, they had to be a bit creative in their attack on Britain, choosing to smuggle nanoagents into the cheap sugar and tea they exported to the island nation. As the people ate and drank, they unwittingly infected themselves with tiny bits of self-replicating machinery. While the "bugs" made people stronger, hastened healing and allowed a wide range of prosthetic enhancements, the downside was that the Horde could control the infected via a radio frequency transmitted by a tall tower in London.

The story takes place nine years after Rhys Trahaearn, now known as the Iron Duke, blows up the tower, freeing all of Britain from Horde control. After a bloody revolution where a mad populace attacked the Horde and each other in a fury borne of a lifetime of tight control suddenly ended, Britain is at a crossroads. The descendants of the wealthy Brits who fled England before they were infected have returned, creating tension between the infected "buggers" and the uninfected "bounders" as to who has more right to Britain. Does it belong to the people who spent the past few hundred years hiding out in Manhattan City in the New World, or to those who endured and overcame Horde rule, but will always be susceptible to control because of their bugs?

In the midst of this heady drama, a body literally lands on the Iron Duke's front steps and Detective Inspector Mina Wentworth is called in to investigate. Born after a "Frenzy," where a Horde signal causes all buggers to copulate with each other, she's the half-breed daughter of a English countess and a Horde member who was at the state dinner her mother was attending. Though her parents are noble and she's a distinguished member of the Metropolitan Police force, she encounters constant abuse due to her Asian features. As a result, she's a bit like Eve Dallas - a big squishy ball of insecurities well hidden under a granite facade. Through the love of her supportive family and a singular dedication to her work, she gets by in a world she feels completely apart from.

Working on the mystery of the body tossed onto the Iron Duke's steps tests her resolve. As a former pirate, Rhys is accustomed to taking whatever it is her desires, and he decides that Mina will be his latest acquisition. As they fly and sail around England, Europe and Africa unraveling the murder mystery and

uncovering a doomsday plot that endangers all the buggers in Britain, the two also are working to figure each other out. Rhys is determined to have her, and Mina is determined to resist him, lest everything she or her family has worked for go up in smoke in the subsequent mockery of the Iron Duke taking up with a "Jade whore."

The world-building was superbly done, creating a full, complex world and divulging it at a natural pace throughout the book. All of the secondary characters were fully-fleshed out, providing bits of humor, drama, action and everything in-between when the plot required it but without feeling convenient. The action keeps a steady, energetic pace throughout the book, making it a hard book to put down at times. Brook has created a stunning steampunk setting that's creative and expansive while remaining entirely accessible. There are easily drawn parallels to our own world and the messy politics of today without anything being obvious, sanctimonious or preachy. It's complex enough a world to let you forge your own theories of what is afoot, and approachable enough that you'd want to do so.

While I loved the steampunk aspects quite a bit, the romance didn't move me. There was just something about the romance that left me kinda cold. I almost resented the breaks in the action plot and half-skimmed the sex. Their emotions towards each other felt a bit forced, so I felt like a voyeur watching them together. The sex didn't seem to be resolving a tension between them - anguish over memories of a past Frenzy notwithstanding - and so it felt gratuitous.

Part of the issue might have been that I didn't feel I really knew Rhys or Mina. I loved them as catalysts for the action - Rhys the alpha, protecting what he considers his and Mina the fighter, always trying to forge order from chaos - but didn't get a good feel for them as humans. I was told that Rhys "respected the hell out of" Mina, but I was never really shown why. What made her so special to him? What about Rhys tempted Mina? I needed to see more talking, vulnerability and emotional intimacy between them. As it was, I was told they were hot for each other, and I watched them bone, and that was the romance.

As a romance, it lacks a certain something. As a straight sci-fi, I think I'd have loved this book unreservedly. The world she's created and the secondary characters she populated it with are absolutely spellbinding. For all its faults, it was still a hard book to put down. I'm certainly itching to read the sequel a year from now.

Eh?Eh! says

Rbrs #9

This was a shock. I kind of liked this one! It's a decently written action book and for more than half the pages it has a real plot, mostly. There are phrases that make me think "steampunk," like this nifty one: *...they ran into the street, past a long vehicle that clipped along on dozens of narrow legs like a centipede, the seats loaded with children and guarded by hard-eyed nuns armed with scimitars.* I guess there isn't too much that's steampunk about that sentence, but I like it.

Meljean's world-building is scattered throughout the book, a little frustrating because I couldn't pick it up easily by skimming and had to actually read it (and many things were confusing until the background explanation caught up), but not all dumbed down. She doesn't make the mistake of trying to get too detailed with the science and screwing things up, although this also seemed to introduce holes. It's pretty convoluted...I think the gist is that over 200 years ago the leader of the Asian Horde/Mongols requested a delegation of European scientists to visit. These scientists were seized and forced to create things for war,

including nanobots (yes yes, big stretch, but this is a place where she skips explanation) that were placed in sugar for years as a preliminary measure. Before the Horde invaded, these nanobots were activated and radio waves were used to control everyone who had eaten that sugar. Fast forward about 200 years, the Iron Duke was able to destroy the radio tower and the Horde was overthrown in England (another explanation skip, one that's confusing instead of maybe unnecessary, why wasn't he affected by the radio signal? different frequency, but how? did natural reproduction affect the nanobots? was he able to alter them somehow?). Nine years after that revolution, the nation is still dealing with recovery from that time, the return of those who had fled to America and their wealth (and lack of suffering), the nanobots that are still present in everyone and provide benefits but also the fear that control may be re-established, and prejudice against those with Asian features. Oh, and in nations where the Horde cleaned out the people and wanted to prevent uprisings, instead of salting the earth they salted the people with another kind of nanobot that turned them into zombies.

Aaaaaand then our story starts. Sheesh. The background was more interesting than the main couple.

The story starts out fairly simple but involving, a murder mystery that turns out to be bigger than expected. The world-building, again, fun and quite interesting. Unfortunately, just past the halfway mark, she seems to have gotten into a panic about the relatively slow development of the romance part of the story and just inserts sexytimes without much reason. They way the Iron Duke plots to get the woman? Dumb. The actual sexytimes? Egads, why is it always unwilling and then she can't keep away from him? Dumb. There are numerous side characters who are introduced as if they'll be important but then removed - they're in they're out. And then the climax. Dumb.

Blah, maybe I didn't like it, now that I think about it. The first half wasn't bad, or maybe my standards are greatly lowered when I tackle an RBRS selection (admittedly they're not what I'd select for myself, but we're reading them anyway in a group). Just thinking about the romance though, the "romance," makes me dislike it more.

karen says

zombies. kraken. pirates. automatons. marriage reform. nanotech. mongols. just another classic steampunk romance, right? or maybe not - this is my first one.

it was crazy - none of the other bodice rippers wanted to read the shapeshifter romance!! come on guys!!shapeshifters!!! romance!!! i am so curious about the mechanics of it, but i am not going to read one without the protective cloak of the rest of the rippers.

so -steampunk...

i mean, honestly, there wasn't anything *wrong* with this book; it replicated a lot of the typical romance conventions and fell into the same booby-traps (which is totally not the right word, but i got to say "booby") - two strong-willed people like this shouldn't really spend this much time running away from each other, legitimate reasons or no. sex should not be this complicated. in this book, racial and gender issues were legitimate roadblocks, but between the two of them they had guns and money and a title and and self-confidence and an iron freaking skeleton - these two should not have anything standing in the way of whatever they want. these are the kind of people who tell other people the way things are going to be, not sheep people who are slaves to silly societal norms. i mean, i personally would not have put up with his

sexual pushiness, but she seems okay with occasionally being pushed up against a wall and getting the physical equivalent of "you mean yes when you say no, right??" so to each his own.

but he is such a schizophrenic male lead. sometimes he is a calculating pushy rapist, sometimes he is all secret philanthropy and delicate treatment of the feelings of others. but who needs consistency? who reads to reconcile conflicting personality traits?? shes got a burning knot, he's got a hot ridge of flesh - these crazy kids were made to clench and twine and growl and clutch and rub!! we are in romance country, it doesn't need to make sense or have any real-world applications!

and her - she can save kids from monsters but she can't figure out how to get laid?? this world is kind of awesome; i would much rather have had the conflict be external (zombie, war, monsters) than internal "noooo don't put your mouth on my vagina, it makes me too craaaaazy". i mean, there is plenty of external conflict, i just think her sexual resistance was (while explained adequately) retarded and less interesting than zombies.

but the rest of it was pretty fun. i should probably read more fantasy, so i can get those muscles honed, because it took me more time than i care to admit to get myself situated in this world. i had to go back and reread several pages over and over, and it wasn't her fault, it was me - there were so many details that i had trouble cementing them in this here swiss-cheese brain.

so, for a bodice ripper read, it was better than most.
i like reading things i would never read otherwise - it makes me (a) broad.

j says

Dear dad,

I know you follow and read my goodreads reviews, which I appreciate, really, but I just wanted to let you know that while this is a sci-fi/alternate history book that is pretty interesting in a lot of ways it is also a romance novel that I read for a book club and it has lots of VERY EXPLICIT sex parts that I might mention, explicitly, in this review. So it is ok if you don't want to read this one.

Sincerely, your son

The Iron Dukes sits at the intersection of everywhere and nowhere in terms of my reading habits: it's science-fictiony, which is a genre I enjoy and read a decent amount of (I even have a dedicated book club!) and it's a romance, which I have never read at all unless you count just reading the sex scenes in books I thought might be dirty when I was about 11. Which I think we can agree is really not the same thing.

I certainly had some preconceived notions about romance books that I can't say have been proven or disproven by this one, because being an alternate-history steampunk story that is actually a rather ambitious yarn, I wager it makes an effort in terms of narrative that something like Wicked Harvest perhaps does not. That said, there are also sex scenes that are, if anything, rather raunchier than what I expected to read, forgoing polite euphemisms almost entirely (*Search Results: Showing All 24 Instances of the Word "Cock"*). And it still has a rippling, shirtless male chest on the cover -- thanks for the save, Kindle edition!

So first let us discuss the part of the book I liked, which was the non-romancy part: Steampunk is a genre I

have a passing familiarity with, having read quite a few books often categorized that way (though like most sub-genres of sci-fi, categorization is somewhat arbitrary). It's also the hot fad right now, which is why it totally makes sense that an author who just got done cashing in on paranormal romance would give it a go. And as a genre effort, *The Iron Duke* is... surprisingly good. It creates a pretty interesting alternate Victorian era in which Europe has been ravaged by a mysterious force known as The Horde that has infected the populace with tiny nanomachines that allow them to be controlled via radio towers, and *The Iron Duke* is lauded as a hero for saving the populace from the mind control menace. There are a bunch of well imagined extraneous details that I loved, such as the fact that cats infected with nanoagents have become armored, unkillable predators, and also there are steel sharks and giant kraken (!).

This is all absolutely ridiculous, of course, but steampunk almost always is -- I haven't read one book yet that truly justified how such advanced technology could be invented so long ago with just a few tweaks of the timeline (did you know if Abe Lincoln hadn't been assassinated, for example, by 1900 the U.S. army would have defeated Mexico with the aid of robotic exoskeletons? It's true, look it up). The important part is that it is fun to read about, and the book does a pretty good job of sketching this world without going into exhaustive and unnecessary detail (which might have resulted in me *not entirely understanding the plot*, but based on other reviews, that was my fault). And it actually has a well-developed (not like that!) (No, really, not like that, we are told) and interesting female protagonist for the most part. Police inspector Mina is strong-willed and opinionated and unwilling to sit back and act pretty in proper Victorian fashion, and she is a lot more fun to read about than the bland heroine of *Boneshaker*, which was one of the most-celebrated sci-fi novels of 2009 that I happened to find very nearly terrible. She's investigating a murder that will come to involve politics the world over, as well as, of course, *The Iron Duke*!

Because yes, it is also, unfortunately, a romance novel, and why? The answer seems to be that romance is the kind of book the author can sell, because she doesn't seem particularly into creating a nuanced relationship between Mina and the Duke (who has a name but it totally doesn't matter). Because while Mina operates in an interesting political and social sphere, where we can see how the influence of Horde control has changed the ways traditional gender roles are perceived, with many women freely allowed to be badass and promiscuous without anyone batting an eyelash, the attraction between the leads is rote and unmotivated and totally uninteresting, like instantly HE MUST HAVE HER and even though she wants to resist, the Duke just makes her feel all HOT DOWN THERE and this goes on for pages and pages, often stopping the very interesting thriller/murder mystery plot cold.

At first the purple prose is just annoying ("*No armor. No buckles. Only a few layers of cotton and ten feet of parlor separated his mouth from her breasts.*"), but then the sextimes really kick in and the author just starts cutting and pasting and rearranging stock phrases like "rigid" and "lips" and "wet" and "suck" and "arching" and calling them sex scenes, and they aren't particularly interesting. I couldn't stop thinking of "I put on my robe and wizard's hat", which if you have not read you really must go and read *RIGHT NOW* (and then go read all of these).

I mean, this: "*Her musky scent threatened to drive him out of his mind, more heady than any perfume, any wine.*" Or this: "*You inspired me... You didn't have to fight when you destroyed the Horde. So I decided to make your tower explode.*" Or, god, this one: "*His heavy sac (?) buffeted (!?) her clitoris with each annihilating (!?) stroke.*" I mean, come on, get back to the giant squid attack.

And I haven't even touched all the really odd gender dynamics at play, and the way Mina is independent but really appears to want to be dominated and the Duke is a caring dude but also *pretty much a rapist* by the end (and he is doing it for her own good question mark?). Ceridwen's review made an interesting point about how Mina is trying to come to terms with a past sexual violation through her experiences with the Duke (the

Horde used to use their tower to whip the populace into sex Frenzies so they would produce more worker bees), and that aspect makes their interactions a bit more compelling, but I don't think it is developed consistently enough to be interesting rather than just... off-putting (unless you like to read about rape). I know some people who have been sexually abused can certainly become aroused in recreating those situations through sex play (thanks for the info, Dan Savage's Savage Lovecast!), but it didn't quite work for me here. I needed more of Mina than her lame internal struggles if I'm going to give the book that much credit.

Um, so this is getting pretty long. I will say that for my first romance, it was A LOT better than I was expecting it to be, and I think toning down the explicit sex, reducing the emphasis on the myopic leads' hormones and beefing up the sci-fi elements a bit more could have made this an excellent genre entry. Instead it's a weird hybrid, but a pretty good read.

Search Results: Showing All 13 Instances of the Word "Rigid"

AH says

Hordes! Buggers! Bounders! Frenzy, oh my!

What a world. It took a while for me to understand this extremely imaginative world, but I enjoyed every moment of this book.

The Iron Duke portrays an alternative history in a very different Europe. The Horde controls people through nanotechnology. People, especially those living in polluted London, are infected with these agents because they have healing properties. When certain radio frequencies are transmitted, the infected people, known as the Buggers go into a Frenzy.

This is a world full of imaginative contraptions and genetically/mechanically altered creatures and zombies, too! There are airships, mechanical carts, mechanical page turners, even mechanical sex toys. Mechanically altered people exist as well, reminiscent of Star Trek's Borg.

Our story begins when a man is dropped from an airship on to The Iron Duke's house. Inspector Mina Wentworth is dispatched to investigate the crime. The Iron Duke, also known as Rhys Traheaern, is immediately attracted to Mina. Rhys arranges to use his former pirate contacts in order to help Mina solve the crime.

Rhys uses this opportunity to get closer to Mina, the woman he wants to shag. The romance aspect is not spectacular, but there are some hot and heavy moments.

I really enjoyed the author's sense of humor. There were some really funny lines and some very clever pillow talk.

Did I mention that there are sea monsters in this book? "Release the Kraken!" A most memorable scene with a very large, mechanically enhanced sea monster kept me at the edge of my seat.

I loved the secondary characters, especially Yasmeen, The Lady Corsair. Airship pilot, mercenary, I hope that there are more stories planned for her – just her acrobatics alone were spectacular.

So there you have it – a book with zombies, sea monsters, Borg-like people, all sorts of mechanical gadgets. Can't wait to read the next book in the series!

Update May 23, 2012 - The Iron Duke is now on the Badass Book Reviews' Best Badass Zombie Books List. Check it out!

Miriam says

This book was both lots of fun and quite disappointing.

The alternate history of a Mongol-dominated England with mind-controlling nanoagents, steampunk body grafts, and forced social reorganization was original and fascinating. Brook worked the steampunk elements into the story and the lives of the characters in a more intimate and plot-effecting way, and she also showed how the political and scientific changes common to this genre would not be superficial window-dressing on the same old Victorian-stereotype world but would cause changes in gender roles, family relations, local and world economies, international diplomacy, religious practice -- this is some fascinating territory for exploration she is setting up here.

And then. Then. Instead of developing all this **really awesome material**, she decided to write a romance. And not even a good romance. A generic romance. The same disgusting, sexist, rapey "romance" people have been writing for decades. A woman who seems strong and independent but is afraid of her emotions and desires. An ultra-alpha-male man who overpowers her and forces himself on her, because no doesn't mean no, especially if women are saying no for practical reasons like not wanting lose their jobs and reputations. But because this is a romance the reader knows the two main characters are Meant To Be so it doesn't count as rape. And we know they are in love even though they pretty much just think about and have lots of un-hot sex. Because in Romancelandia being really horny for a particular person proves that person is your One True Love. Even if you don't like them.

I don't want to go on an anti-romance rant here. I have no issue with stories including romance as an element. I even think the romantic pairing here could have been good, especially if Brook had spent more pages fleshing out Rhys' personality instead of his, er, flesh. His character here seemed, not precisely two-dimensional, but one-sided. We see his aggression, his controlling nature, his sense of responsibility – the elements anyone meeting him would identify. Even when we get the story from his point of view, there aren't a lot of other personality traits. And that made it hard to see him and Mina falling in love. Rather than instant lust followed by standard romance-genre manipulations and throbings, I would have enjoyed a process where in the course of fighting zombies and solving mysteries, two people learned to respect one another and fell in love.

This uninspired, unoriginal romance story was especially disappointing because it took away time from a story and a world that I really did want to hear more about. There were several elements that could have been explored more fully, and some fairly important inconsistencies that should have been worked out. For instance, if marriage hasn't been the norm for generations, and most people don't live in nuclear families, why is it that it would ruin Mina's reputation to have people know that she had a lover? Brook actually states at one point early on that most women live in small groups with their kids and support themselves and one another, so obviously they must be taking lovers. I felt that Brook wanted think about ways in which society could be different and explore how mores are artificial – and then at the same time she wanted to stick with

hoary old tried-and-true romance themes even when they didn't make sense. I wish she had used the page space spent describing sex to instead develop how society had changed or why the Horde made giant sharks or giving more details about the Ivory Market. Or even working out some of the kinks in the plot!

Alisha says

Initial reaction: *This book was exquisite.* If I could give it 6 stars, I would. :o)

All I want to know is, what kind of peyote was this woman smoking when she dreamt up this amazing world? ^_~ It is proving exceedingly difficult for me to adequately express what it is about this book that makes me love it so. In fact, I can almost guarantee I won't be pleased with this review. ^_~ But I'll make mention of a couple thoughts in broad strokes.

...beginning with the world. Brooks' world(building) was perhaps my favorite aspect. The story begins much as I'd expect some Austenian-like historical novel to do; at a ball and amongst the polite society of England. But almost immediately, Brook starts to "pan out the frame" so to speak, revealing bits of curious descriptions until we realize that while this world is familiar, it's altered most considerably.

To call it simply "steampunk" does not do enough to capture it all, either. At one point I thought to myself that the book had a somewhat post-apocalyptic feel to it. Also that there were serious machinations about race, culture, identity and human nature. Many steampunk books can be fun and fantastical, and though this book presents such a characteristic (in great style, mind you), there's something quite grim and horrifying, as well.

I love that Brook clearly put much deep thought into the history behind the Iron Seas world; it actually plays quite considerably into the motivations of individuals and group entities. Not many books of this subgenre do so: things simply are because they are (which is not inherently a bad thing, btw). I visited Brook's website and found a short writeup on what actual historical events were altered to arrive at the universe in this book. I appreciated the consideration, and am impressed by the relevance it has in so many aspects of the story.

Now, the cast of characters. They are perhaps what brought out much of that aforementioned "fun and fantastical" nature. Every last one of the main cast displayed a beautiful range of emotions and personality. Each one did or said something that at one point made me chuckle, and at another point made me sad. In short, the supporting cast was superbly compelling.

The main couple is fantastic. I can't really put into words the extent of my adoration for Rhys and Mina, both separated and when interacting. I felt that the progression of the romance was well-paced and complemented the main storyline very well. And that's all I'll say to that end. *Trust me* when I say that--if you've yet to read the book--you'll want to discover both characters for yourself, and learn about their complexities in context.

Okay, as predicted I'm already fed up with my review. So I'll sum up: I found this world to be so different, so exhilarating, so chilling. I would recommend this book to just about every PnR junkie I know...especially those who can appreciate 1) some complexity in their storyline and 2) extensive worldbuilding. And zombies. ^_~

P.S. - Apparently the second book of the series will follow one of the minor characters from The Iron Duke (starts with a Y- and ends with an -asmeen) ^_^). I already have it at the very top of my 2011 to-read list.

^__^
