



Dear Reader,

Welcome to the October edition of my Special Operations Newsletter. I hope you're all chilling out over the half term break.

Have a guess... Every writer needs a decent pen. But this one's a bit special. It was issued to secret agents in the real Special Operations. Can you guess what's hidden inside? Answer at the end of this Newsletter.



Do you have what it takes to be a Code Master?



What's going on here? A tricky double maths lesson? A horrible English exam? No! Far more interesting than that. In fact, these students from Bury Grammar School (BGS) are competing in my 'Decoding Challenge' using a real WWII coding method.

All wartime secret agents had to be familiar with codes and ciphers. Mark Hone (Head of History at BGS) is an enthusiast when it comes to wartime codes – he even has some software simulating the famous German Enigma machine. He was keen for me to set his students a challenge. So, on my arrival I supplied the assembled 'agents' with a coded message describing their next 'sabotage mission' plus their Code Keys. Luckily, I had already sent them training materials and so they were raring to go. You could almost hear the hum of brains going into overdrive as they competed to see who could decode the message first. The WINNER was Hosan Aglan (pictured here receiving his First Prize of a signed copy of *Wolf Squadron* and WH Smiths voucher). Hosan managed the task in about ten minutes and without making a single mistake. Impressive! Afterwards, I gave a talk to all the Year 9 students about Special Ops. Many thanks to Ann Montgomery (Head of



the LRC) for inviting me to BGS and for giving me such a warm welcome – terrific library too!



If you'd like me to visit your school and run a similar decoding challenge, please tell your school librarian.

Some Year 9 Students from BGS

During October I also visited Crestwood School in Eastleigh during which I gave talks to Year 7 and Year 8 students and ran workshops on writing techniques for Year 10 students about to sit a timed English exam (Eeek! Rather them than me).

A right bunch of villains?

This month I joined up with fellow authors Andrew Norriss (left) and Mark Walden (right) at the Wessex Children's Lit Festival held at Winchester's Discovery Centre. The venue was terrific and the audience asked great questions.



Andrew's written for TV as well as books, and Mark used to design computer games. In addition to discussing our books and how we go about writing them – which varied considerably - we took a light-hearted look at some of the strangest questions we've ever been asked at an event – in

Mark's case it was whether he'd ever written a book about pole vaulting! For me it was whether I'd actually taken part in WWII, which made me suddenly feel extremely old! We also discussed villains versus heroes, my books focussing on the heroes, Mark's on villains (his HIVE series of books stands for Higher Institute of Villainous Education). The Wessex festival has attracted a host of top children's writers for all ages, including Rick Riordan, Jacqueline Wilson, Ali Sparkes, and Michael Rosen.

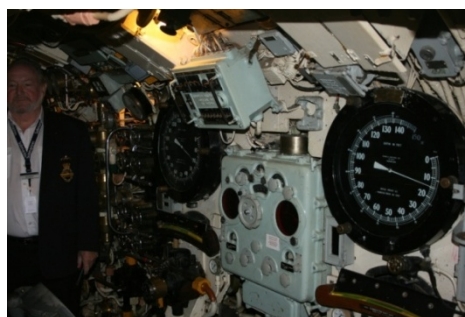
Dive! Dive! Dive!

Now, you may be wondering why I've chosen yellow as the colour scheme for this month's newsletter header. Well, I was humming the song that goes.... "*We all live in a yellow submarine....etc.*" You know the one. It stuck in my head after a recent visit to the submarine museum in Gosport. I've been meaning to go there for ages. They do a terrific guided tour in



which you see the entire inside of a submarine that first set sail just after the end of WWII. It doesn't feel too cramped inside until you realise that usually 68 crew would be on board. The museum's well

worth a visit. I went there as part of my research for Special Operations. The museum has another exhibit – a rather special one. It's called an X-Boat and they have the only remaining example in the entire world.



The X-Boat (not to be confused with the X-Men) is a 4-man midget submarine. They were built in order to go places where bigger submarines couldn't, e.g. enemy harbours.



HMS X-24

About 50 feet long and with a beam of less than 6 feet, she could dive to 300ft and had an endurance of just 82 miles (she'd be towed close to her target by a full size sub). They used a 'glue pot' for cooking and the diesel engine inside was the same as that in a London bus at the time! Cargoes of limpet mines were attached

to her outer hull. A key piece of equipment was a hairdryer. They used it to dry out the electrical equipment which was always getting damp. As you can see, the conditions inside were pretty cramped. This actual boat took part in two clandestine operations during WWII in raids on Bergen's floating dock for U-boats (German submarines) in Norway.



The cramped inside of X-24. Imagine being stuck inside for days on end.

Maybe, just maybe, it'll feature in a future Special Operations adventure.

Good Luck to all teams taking part in this year's International Kids Lit Quiz run by Wayne Mills (all the way from New Zealand)

I'll be at the following heats/finals

24th November: International Kids' Lit Quiz (Regional heat) in Havant

30th November: International Kids' Lit Quiz (UK National finals) in Oxford

The Guest of Honour at this year's national final will be Charlie Higson (last year it was his pal, the comedian Harry Enfield) and we're promised a sneak preview of his next Young Bond story. This year's quiz is a bit special for the team winning the UK finals, as the World Final is being held in New Zealand – so the lucky team are going on a trip of a lifetime!

And finally

Don't forget to visit my website regularly to follow my blog and see the latest content

www.craigsimpsonbooks.com

And if you'd like to ask me a question about my books go to the following website, click on 'Start a new discussion'

And get typing!

www.authorsplace.co.uk/craig-simpson



Answer: A compass. Also hidden inside is a short dagger, so if you guessed that, still give yourself a pat on the back.