dark matter

Issue Four July 2011
SF, Fantasy & Art
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Cover Art & Design:

Cathy Larsen's Obernewtyn Chronicles illustration (see the interview with Cathy), gouache on paper

Issue 3 Corrections

Cathy Larsen pointed out that she is the designer of the covers for the *Obernewtyn Chronicles*, not the *Tales from the Tower Volume one, the Wilful Eye*. Zoe Sadokeiski is the designer of *The Wilful eye*, and very beautiful job she did too, says Cathy.

Thanks Cathy! apologies to Zoe. - Editor

In the cover letter for Issue 3, I briefly acknowledged the passing of Diana Wynne-Jones and misspelt her name. Steve Green was kind enough to point this out. My apologies to the memory of Diana, Diana's family, friends and fans.

- Editor

Art:
Ben Grimshaw
Ian Gunn's Silly Illoes used with permission of Krin Pender-Gunn
Images attributed where known

Photography:
Various, attributed individually where known, usually Nalini Haynes if not attributed.
Volunteers' photos are courtesy of the volunteers.

About dark matter

Dark Matter is an independent fanzine exploring science fiction, fantasy, art, life, the universe and everything.

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The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the editor. This is a fanzine, and as such is a forum for personal opinions and debate. However, the editor reserves the right to refuse to publish material that may be offensive. *Dark Matter* likes to give credit for contributions and sources for each issue. If errors or omissions have been made, please e-mail the editor. Uncredited text is probably the editor.

While I hope to respond to correspondence, this is not guaranteed.

Flamers and senders of dubious or explicit content will be put on a blocked senders list and removed from the distribution list.

Thanks to all the readers who are contacting *Dark Matter* with news, letters and invites to events that I hope will enrich the content of DM. And the photos! Facebook is an awesome source of photos and links to sites. Thanks guys! If at any time I don't give credit or tag the photos properly, email me and I'll issue a correction. I appreciate your contributions, and I want to get it right (Heinz Meanz Beanz Goodies quote).

Review Gradings

Not every review will have a grading, but when reviews are graded Dark Matter tries to be consistent. Therefore, where gradings are given, they will hopefully be consistent with the below rating system:
1 star - Very bad book/movie/game, many flaws, definitely not recommended.
2 stars - Mediocre or average with a serious flaw, not recommended, but can still be readable or watchable
3 stars - Good but not great. Can be recommended for fans of the genre.
4 stars - Great, highly recommended.
5 stars - Masterpiece.

Editorial

Dear Reader

Well, it's that time again, when *Dark Matter* finally goes out into the ether. Some have wondered why *Dark Matter*; the answer - I believe an independent zine will help build networks in the SF and Fantasy community. There are a huge number of zines out there, but I'm hoping *DM* provides a different focus with its news, interviews and reviews based in Melbourne.

You might notice that this issue is bigger than every other issue. The *Dark Matter* committee (of one) has met several times to discuss and debate the pros and cons of more frequent issues. The size of each issue has persuaded the committee in favour of bi-monthly publication, from September onwards (hopefully), in order to keep the zine within zine-ish size rather than aim for encyclopedic size.

On the topic of file size - *Dark Matter* has received numerous emails in response to the previous 3 issues, asking for more pictures to be included. I assure you, I have been listening. Unfortunately I had to remove numerous images for this issue to keep the file size below 5 MB. Publishing more regularly will mean more images, getting a better balance between file size and pics!

I would like to thank the numerous people I've interviewed in the past few months. Conducting interviews for publication has been a huge learning curve for me, so thanks to all who helped me along the way. While I hope I now have the basics down, I'm sure I'll continue to learn as I interview more people for future issues. A special thanks to David Freer and Bruce Mutard, whose interviews will be in the next issue of *Dark Matter*. They graciously consented to interviews but, well, I had space issues...

Publishing houses such as Hachette, Harper Collins, Penguin, Random House, Simon & Schuster and Allen & Unwin have generously provided books for review. Madman has provided DVDs for review. Thank you all!

You may note that this issue of *Dark Matter* sees some new reviewers come on board. I can't possibly keep up with the number of books available to review, so I've been sharing the responsibility around. Many enjoy reading novels, but reviewing novels, especially when the review will be published, is not such a popular pastime. So heartfelt thanks goes out to all the reviewers. And thanks to the proof readers - another difficult task.

Finally I would like to thank readers for their encouragement, their feedback and their support.

cheers, Nalini

News & Articles

Gun Laws & Cosplay

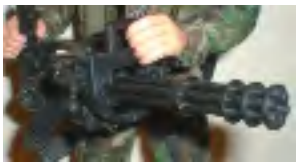
Australia has gun laws that laws vary from state to state. Some laws have caused difficulties for cosplayers. I heard of one person who was arrested and charged for carrying an imitation firearm in a backpack that was poking out the top, while sitting in a coffee shop. Another person recently attended Critical Hit's opening sale in costume with an imitation firearm in a thigh holster, resulting in police attendance.

If you intend to purchase, carry or sell imitation firearms in Victoria, you need to have an authority from Victoria Police. The police website says

There are a wide variety of firearm-themed items available on the market aimed at children and firearm enthusiasts. Depending on the overall appearance and function of these items, some may be classified as a registrable firearm or an imitation firearm **(and therefore require an authority from Victoria Police)** regardless of the intent of the manufacturers.

Items that do have the appearance of a working firearm but do not function as such are classified as imitation firearms. Whilst these items cannot cause death or injury they can nonetheless cause public alarm due to their closeness to a working firearm and therefore could be mistaken for a working firearm depending on the circumstances and level of knowledge of those in contact with it when carried or used within the community.

Go to http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?document_id=31899 for more information. This page of the police website was updated on 1 July 2011. Below: examples of imitation firearms for which authority is required.



Troopertrek 2011

Jacob French, a 21 year old from Busselton, Western Australia, decided to walk from Perth in Western Australia to Sydney in New South Wales to raise money for the Starlight Foundation.

On his facebook page Jacob says the following. Over the course of the trek I will cross 4 states and cover approximately 5000km's in modified stormtrooper armour. The plan for now is to push a lightweight buggy with needed supplies an average distance of 35-40km's for 5 days a week until the trek is complete.

I am a member of the worldwide "501st Legion", a volunteer organisation that wears quality star wars outfits for Star Wars related events and as a means to contribute to their local communities through charity work. My involvement with the 501st Legion has been a fantastic experience and I have had plenty of opportunities to put on my suit of armour and entertain the public.

In October 2010 I participated in the RunMelb Half marathon (21kms) in my stormtrooper suit. The suit was restrictive and got quite hot while I was running, but the seed was planted for the troopertrek idea. Since the marathon I have started to train regularly for this event and have acquired a much lighter and flexible set of armour that will be trimmed for better movement. I am hoping that by choosing to wear stormtrooper armour I will be able to gather more attention for the cause I am running for and have a bit of a laugh along the way. If there are any social events along the route that you think might benefit from having a stormtrooper attend, let me know!

Jacob French.

To make a donation go to www.everydayhero.com.au/troopertrek
To follow Troopertrek, go to http://twitter.com/#!/troopertrek or www.facebook.com/pages/Troopertrek-2011/191534147550377?sk=info

Troopertrek Diary

Monday 11 July - Lay awake going over the list last night, then a 6am wakeup to repack the buggy. Good thing it's waterproof because the rain doesn't look like letting up in the next few hours.

Day one complete! 22kms down, nice and easy so I can work up to the 40km average. Feet are still killing me though!

Tuesday 12 July - Just wanted to say a huge thankyou for all the encouragement and support I have received so far! This morning was harder to get out of bed, but I'm still planning on hitting 25km minimum today. Today's route takes me down the Roe Hwy until it hits the Kwinana fwy, at which point I can really start to power walk my way down south :) Having afternoon tea next to the freeway. Weather is great, but I picked a lousy day to wear thermals... My buggy (I'm sitting on the swag) about 2km before The front wheel snapped off ;)

Achievement unlocked: destroy the troopertrek trolley!

Still made it another 10kms :)

Today was eventful! Woke up with my stomach worse than yesterday and breakfast threatened to come back up a few times. I started walking at about 11am, wore thermals on what turned out to be a warm sunny day, and this afternoon the front wheel of the buggy sheared off. All up I trekked 29kms today :)

Wednesday 13 July - Day 3 of the trek and fingers crossed to hit the 40km mark today so I can reach mandurah. The buggy seemed to do alright on the remaining two wheels last night so things are well as I head off!

Made it to mandurah tonight, but was running a bit behind schedule because of the interview with channel ten earlier on the day. Rather than risk main road traffic in the dark I caught a maxi taxi driven by Shane, a top notch bloke, the last little stretch into town. Going on coast radio tomorrow morning and going back to walk the stretch I missed tonight :)

While I am in mandurah I am very blessed to have met Phil and Mary from Timbertop caravan park, two of the nicest people I have met. They have put me up in a cabin so I can get a good rest out of the cold, and a delicious dinner of pasta bake to fill the tummy. Very grateful for their generosity :)

Go to Facebook or Twitter to follow Troopertrek!

See Jacob: Channel 10 news http://ten.com.au/ten-news-perth.htm?movideo_p=44242&movideo_m=118059 and internet news http://m.watoday.com.au/wa-news/the-force-is-with-jacob-20110713-1hdcj.html. View or add photos of Troopertrek here www.flickr.com/groups/troopertrek/.

Hugo Award Nominees

Reno, Nevada, USA - Renovation, the 69th World Science Fiction Convention, is proud to present the 2011 Hugo Award nominees. The winners will be announced Saturday, August 20th, 2011, during the Hugo Awards Ceremony at Renovation in Reno, Nevada.

Best Novel

Blackout/All Clear by Connie Willis (Ballantine Spectra)
Cryoburn by Lois McMaster Bujold (Baen)
The Dervish House by Ian McDonald (Gollancz; Pyr)
Feed by Mira Grant (Orbit)
The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms by N.K. Jemisin (Orbit)

Best Novella

"The Lady Who Plucked Red Flowers beneath the Queen's Window" by Rachel Swirsky (Subterranean Magazine, Summer 2010)
The Lifecycle of Software Objects by Ted Chiang (Subterranean)
"The Maiden Flight of McCauley's Bellerophon" by Elizabeth Hand (Stories: All New Tales, William Morrow)
"The Sultan of the Clouds" by Geoffrey A. Landis (Asimov's, September 2010)
"Troika" by Alastair Reynolds (Godlike Machines, Science Fiction Book Club)

Best Novelette

"Eight Miles" by Sean McMullen (Analog, September 2010)
"The Emperor of Mars" by Allen M. Steele (Asimov's, June 2010)
"The Jaguar House, in Shadow" by Aliette de Bodard (Asimov's, July 2010)
"Plus or Minus" by James Patrick Kelly (Asimov's, December 2010)
"That Leviathan, Whom Thou Hast Made" by Eric James Stone (Analog, September 2010)

Best Short Story

"Amaryllis" by Carrie Vaughn (Lightspeed, June 2010)
"For Want of a Nail" by Mary Robinette Kowal (Asimov's, September 2010)
"Ponies" by Kij Johnson (Tor.com, November 17, 2010)
"The Things" by Peter Watts (Clarkesworld, January 2010)

Best Related Work

Bearings: Reviews 1997-2001, by Gary K. Wolfe (Beccon)

The Business of Science Fiction: Two Insiders Discuss Writing and Publishing, by Mike Resnick and Barry N. Malzberg (McFarland)
Chicks Dig Time Lords: A Celebration of Doctor Who by the Women Who Love It, edited by Lynne M. Thomas and Tara O'Shea (Mad Norwegian)
Robert A. Heinlein: In Dialogue with His Century, Volume 1: (1907–1948): Learning Curve, by William H. Patterson, Jr. (Tor)
Writing Excuses, Season 4, by Brandon Sanderson, Jordan Sanderson, Howard Tayler, Dan Wells

Best Graphic Story

Fables: Witches, written by Bill Willingham; illustrated by Mark Buckingham (Vertigo)
Girl Genius, Volume 10: Agatha Heterodyne and the Guardian Muse, written by Phil and Kaja Foglio; art by Phil Foglio; colors by Cheyenne Wright (Airship Entertainment)
Grandville Mon Amour, by Bryan Talbot (Dark Horse)
Schlock Mercenary: Massively Parallel, written and illustrated by Howard Tayler; colors by Howard Tayler and Travis Walton (Hypernode)
The Unwritten, Volume 2: Inside Man, written by Mike Carey; illustrated by Peter Gross (Vertigo)

Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1, screenplay by Steve Kloves; directed by David Yates (Warner)
How to Train Your Dragon, screenplay by William Davies, Dean DeBlois & Chris Sanders; directed by Dean DeBlois & Chris Sanders (DreamWorks)
Inception, written and directed by Christopher Nolan (Warner)
Scott Pilgrim vs. the World, screenplay by Michael Bacall & Edgar Wright; directed by Edgar Wright (Universal)
Toy Story 3, screenplay by Michael Arndt; story by John Lasseter, Andrew Stanton & Lee Unkrich; directed by Lee Unkrich (Pixar/Disney)

Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form

Doctor Who: "A Christmas Carol," written by Steven Moffat; directed by Toby Haynes (BBC Wales)
Doctor Who: "The Pandorica Opens/The Big Bang," written by Steven Moffat; directed by Toby Haynes (BBC Wales)

Doctor Who: "Vincent and the Doctor," written by Richard Curtis; directed by Jonny Campbell (BBC Wales)
Fuck Me, Ray Bradbury, written by Rachel Bloom; directed by Paul Briganti
The Lost Thing, written by Shaun Tan; directed by Andrew Ruhemann and Shaun Tan (Passion Pictures)

Best Editor, Short Form

John Joseph Adams
Stanley Schmidt
Jonathan Strahan
Gordon Van Gelder
Sheila Williams

Best Editor, Long Form

Lou Anders
Ginjer Buchanan
Moshe Feder
Liz Gorinsky
Nick Mamatas
Beth Meacham
Juliet Ulman

Best Professional Artist

Daniel Dos Santos
Bob Eggleton
Stephan Martiniere
John Picacio
Shaun Tan

Shaun Tan's cover for The Arrival.

Best Semiprozine

Clarkesworld, edited by Neil Clarke, Cheryl Morgan, Sean Wallace; podcast directed by Kate Baker
Interzone, edited by Andy Cox
Lightspeed, edited by John Joseph Adams
Locus, edited by Liza Groen Trombi and Kirsten Gong-Wong
Weird Tales, edited by Ann VanderMeer and Stephen H. Segal

Best Fanzine

Banana Wings, edited by Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer
Challenger, edited by Guy H. Lillian III
The Drink Tank, edited by Christopher J Garcia and James Bacon
File 770, edited by Mike Glyer

StarShipSofa, edited by Tony C. Smith

Best Fan Writer

James Bacon
Claire Brialey
Christopher J Garcia
James Nicoll
Steven H Silver

Best Fan Artist

Brad W. Foster
Randall Munroe
Maurine Starkey
Steve Stiles
Taral Wayne

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer

Award for the best new professional science fiction or fantasy writer of 2009 or 2010, sponsored by Dell Magazines (not a Hugo Award).

Saladin Ahmed
Lauren Beukes
Larry Correia
Lev Grossman
Dan Wells

Note: All Campbell finalists are in their 2nd year of eligibility.

The Hugo Awards are the premier award in the Science Fiction genre, honoring Science Fiction literature and media as well as the genre's fans. The Hugo Awards were first presented at the 1953 World Science Fiction Convention in Philadelphia (Philcon II), and they have continued to honor Science Fiction and Fantasy notables annually for nearly 60 years.

More information about the Hugo Awards, including details about how to submit a nominating ballot, is available from http://www.renovationsf.org/hugo/.

For additional information, email hugoawards@renovationsf.org.

2010 Aurealis Awards

On 20 May 2011, the winners of the most prestigious Australian SF and Fantasy awards were announced in Sydney.

Children's Fiction (told primarily through words)

• *The Keepers*, Lian Tanner, Allen & Unwin

Children's Fiction (told primarily through pictures)

• *The Boy and the Toy*, Sonya Hartnett (writer) & Lucia Masciullo (illustrator), Penguin Viking

Young Adult Short Story

• *A Thousand Flowers*, Margo Lanagan, *Zombies and Unicorns*, Allen & Unwin

Young Adult Novel

• *Guardian of the Dead*, Karen Healey, Allen & Unwin

Best Illustrated Book/Graphic Novel

• *Changing Ways* Book 1, Justin Randall, Gestalt Publishing

Best Collection

• *The Girl With No Hands*, Angela Slatter, Ticonderoga Publications

Best Anthology

• *Wings of Fire*, edited by Jonathan Strahan and Marianne S. Jablon, Night Shade Books

Horror Short Fiction

• *The Fear*, Richard Harland, *Macabre: A Journey Through Australia's Darkest Fears*, Brimstone Press

Horror Novel

• *Madigan Mine*, Kirstyn McDermott, Pan Macmillan

Fantasy Short Story (joint winners)

• *The February Dragon*, LL Hannett & Angela Slatter, *Scary Kisses*,

Ticonderoga Publications
• *Yowie*, Thoraiya Dyer, *Sprawl*, Twelfth Planet Press

Fantasy Novel

• *Power and Majesty*, Tansy Rayner Roberts, HarperVoyager (HarperCollins)

Science Fiction Short Story

• *The Heart of a Mouse*, K.J. Bishop, Subterranean Online (Winter 2010)

Science Fiction Novel

• *Transformation Space*, Marianne de Pierres, Orbit (Hachette)

Peter Mcnamara Award

• Helen Merrick

For more information go to www.aurealisawards.com

2011 Aurealis Awards to be held in Sydney again

Chimaera Publications and SpecFaction NSW are delighted to announce that the 2011 Aurealis Awards will again be organised by SpecFaction NSW and held in Sydney.

Aurealis Awards Co-convenor, Susan Wardle, said that after the success of the 2010 Awards, SpecFaction was thrilled to be back on board as the organisers of the event.

The nomination period for the 2011 Aurealis Awards is from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011. The awards website is expected to be ready to accept entries from mid-July 2011.

The awards website is at www.aurealisawards.com. Queries can be addressed to convenors@aurealisawards.com.

If you wish to register an interest in being on a judging panel please email the Judging Coordinator at judges@aurealisawards.com.

2011 Ditmar Awards

Winners were announced at Swancon, a convention held over Easter in Perth, Western Australia.

Nominees were:

Best Novel

Death Most Definite, Trent Jamieson (Hachette)
Madigan Mine, Kirstyn McDermott (Pan Macmillan)
Power and Majesty, Tansy Rayner Roberts (Voyager)
Stormlord Rising, Glenda Larke (Voyager)
Walking the Tree, Kaaron Warren (Angry Robot Books)

And the winner is

Power and Majesty, Tansy Rayner Roberts (Voyager)

Best Novella or Novelette

Acception, Tessa Kum (Eneit Press)
All the Clowns in Clowntown, Andrew J. McKiernan (Brimstone Press)
Bleed, Peter M. Ball (Twelfth Planet Press)
Her Gallant Needs, Paul Haines (Twelfth Planet Press)
The Company Articles of Edward Teach, Thoraiya Dyer (Twelfth Planet Press)

And the winner is

The Company Articles of Edward Teach, Thoraiya Dyer (Twelfth Planet Press)

Best Short Story

"All the Love in the World", Cat Sparks (Sprawl, Twelfth Planet Press)
"Bread and Circuses", Felicity Dowker (Scary Kisses, Ticonderoga Publications)
"One Saturday Night With Angel", Peter M. Ball (Sprawl, Twelfth Planet Press)
"She Said", Kirstyn McDermott (Scenes From the Second Storey, Morrigan Books)
"The House of Nameless", Jason Fischer (Writers of the Future XXVI, Galaxy Press)
"The February Dragon", Angela Slatter and Lisa L. Hannett (Scary Kisses, Ticonderoga Publications)

And the winners are

"All the Love in the World", Cat Sparks, Sprawl (Twelfth Planet Press)

"She Said", Kirstyn McDermott, Scenes From the Second Storey (Morrigan Books)

Best Collected Work

Baggage, edited by Gillian Polack (Eneit Press)
Macabre: A Journey through Australia's Darkest Fears, edited by Angela Challis and Marty Young (Brimstone Press)
Scenes from the Second Storey, edited by Amanda Pillar and Pete Kempshall (Morrigan Books)
Sprawl, edited by Alisa Krasnostein (Twelfth Planet Press)
Worlds Next Door, edited by Tehani Wessely (FableCroft Publishing)

And the winner is

Sprawl, edited by Alisa Krasnostein (Twelfth Planet Press)

Best Artwork

Cover art, *The Angaelien Apocalypse/The Company Articles of Edward Teach* (Twelfth Planet Press), Dion Hamill
Cover art, *Australis Imaginarium* (FableCroft Publishing), Shaun Tan
Cover art, *Dead Sea Fruit* (Ticonderoga Publications), Olga Read
Cover art, *Savage Menace and Other Poems of Horror* (P'rea Press), Andrew J. McKiernan
The Lost Thing short film (Passion Pictures), Andrew Ruhemann and Shaun Tan

And the winner is

The Lost Thing short film (Passion Pictures), Andrew Ruhemann and Shaun Tan

Best Fan Writer

Robert Hood, for *Undead Backbrain*
Chuck McKenzie, for work in *Horrorscope*
Alexandra Pierce, for body of work including reviews at *Australian Speculative Fiction in Focus*
Tehani Wessely, for body of work including reviews at *Australian Speculative Fiction in Focus*

And the winner is

Alexandra Pierce, for body of work including reviews at *Australian Speculative Fiction in Focus*

Best Fan Artist

Rachel Holkner, for Continuum 6 props
Dick Jenssen, for cover art of *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*
Amanda Rainey, for Swancon 36 logo

And the winner is

Amanda Rainey, for Swancon 36 logo

Best Fan Publication in Any Medium

Australian Speculative Fiction in Focus, edited by Alisa Krasnostein et al.
Bad Film Diaries podcast, Grant Watson
Galactic Suburbia podcast, Alisa Krasnostein, Tansy Rayner Roberts, and Alex Pierce
Terra Incognita podcast, Keith Stevenson
The Coode Street podcast, Gary K. Wolfe and Jonathan Strahan
The Writer and the Critic podcast, Kirstyn McDermott and Ian Mond

And the winner is

Galactic Suburbia podcast, Alisa Krasnostein, Tansy Rayner Roberts, and Alex Pierce

Best Achievement

Lisa L. Hannett, cover design for *The Girl With No Hands and Other Tales* (Ticonderoga Publications)
Helen Merrick & Andrew Milner, Academic Stream for Aussiecon 4
Amanda Rainey, cover design for *Scary Kisses* (Ticonderoga Publications)
Kyla Ward, Horror Stream & The Nightmare Ball for Aussiecon 4
Grant Watson & Sue Ann Barber, Media Stream for Aussiecon 4
Alisa Krasnostein, Kathryn Linge, Rachel Holkner, Alexandra Pierce, Tansy Rayner Roberts, and Tehani Wessely, *Snapshot 2010*

And the winners are

Alisa Krasnostein, Kathryn Linge, Rachel Holkner, Alexandra Pierce, Tansy Rayner Roberts, and Tehani Wessely, *Snapshot 2010*

Best New Talent

Thoraiya Dyer
Lisa L. Hannett
Patty Jansen
Kathleen Jennings
Pete Kempshall

And the winner is
Thoraiya Dyer

William Atheling Jr Award for Criticism or Review

Leigh Blackmore, for *Marvels and Horrors: Terry Dowling's Clowns at Midnight* (21st Century Gothic, Scarecrow Press)
Damien Broderick, for editing *Skiffy and Mimesis: More Best of Australian Science Fiction Review* (Wildside Press)
Ross Murray, for *The Australian Dream Becomes Nightmare - Visions of Suburbia in Australian Science Fiction* (ASIM #44)
Tansy Rayner Roberts, for *A Modern Woman's Guide to Classic Who*

And the winner is
Tansy Rayner Roberts, for *A Modern Woman's Guide to Classic Who*

Results retrieved from
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ditmar_Award_results#Best_Novel_10

For more information go to the Australian SF information site at http://wiki.sf.org.au/Main_Page. This page provides links to a number of awards and conventions along with links to Australian authors, publishers and more. Dark Matter is listed under Australian Fanzines. Be warned: this page does not provide an exhaustive list of awards, conventions, publications etc. The site needs more SF fans to more actively promote their awards, conventions and publications by updating this site.

2011 Chronos Awards

Best Long Fiction nominees

Guardian of the Dead, Karen Healey (Little, Brown)
Madigan Mine, Kirstyn McDermott (Pan MacMillan Australia)
And the winner is: Madigan Mine by Kirstyn McDermott

Best Short Fiction nominees

"Albert & Victoria/Slow Dreams", Lucy Sussex
"Her Gallant Needs", Paul Haines
"The Scoundrel's Wife", Ben Langdon
"Bread and Circuses", Felicity Dowker
And the winner is: "Her Gallant Needs", Paul Haines

Kirstyn McDermott receiving her Chronos Award

Best Artwork nominee

Australis Imaginarium, Shaun Tan

And the winner is: Australis Imaginarium, Shaun Tan

Best Fan Written Work

Review: The Secret Feminist Cabal by Helen Merrick, reviewed by Alexandra Pierce
Review: Soulless by Gail Carriger, Alexandra Pierce
"Deathless by Catherynne Valente - A spoiler free review", Ian Mond
And the winner is: Review: The Secret Feminist Cabal by Helen Merrick, reviewed by Alexandra Pierce

Alexandra Pierce receiving one of her Chronos Awards

Best Fan Artwork

Continuum 6 Props, Rachel Holkner

And the winner is: Continuum 6 Props, Rachel Holkner

Best Fan Writer

Alexandra Pierce
Chuck McKenzie
Ian Mond
Bruce Gillespie

And the winner is: Alexandra Pierce

Sue Ann Barber and Grant Watson receiving their Chronos Award

Best Fan Publication

"Boxing Day Super Mega Podcast", Alexandra Pierce, Alisa Krasnostein, Tansy Rayner Roberts, Jonathan Strahan, Grant Watson and Ian Mond
Galactic Suburbia, Alex Pierce, Alisa Krasnostein and Tansy Rayner Roberts
The Writer and the Critic, Ian Mond and Kirstyn McDermott
Bad Film Diaries, Grant Watson
Live Boxcutters Doctor Who at AussieCon IV, Josh Kinal and John Richards

And the winner is: Live Boxcutters Doctor Who at AussieCon IV, Josh Kinal and John Richards

Best Achievement

"Snapshot 2010", Alisa Krasnostein, Kathryn Linge, Rachel Holkner, Alexandra Pierce, Tansy Rayner Roberts, and Tehani Wesseley
Programming: AussieCon IV, Sue Ann Barber and Grant Watson

And the winner is: Programming: AussieCon IV, Sue Ann Barber and Grant Watson

A number of recipients were not present, including Shaun Tan who was absent, being in Europe to receive the equivalent of the Nobel Prize for literature!

Re-presentation of the A. Bertrand Chandler Award to Paul Collins. Bruce Gillespie and Kirstyn McDermott help display his trophies.

Renovation WorldCon

Klingon Language conference

Reno, Nevada, USA - Lawrence M. Schoen will lead the Klingon Language Institute's annual summer conference (qep'a') in Reno this year, just before WorldCon. Klingon speakers from all over the world will show up for three days of intense Klingon wordplay and curse warfare. Participants will start trickling in on Saturday night, but the official verbal battles begin Sunday morning, August 14, and run through Tuesday evening, August 16. Advance registration is $35, or $40 at the door.

Commencing at noon on Tuesday, August 16, the day before the start of Worldcon, the Klingon Language Institute will provide introductory lessons for newbies, beginners, and visitors dressed in Federation pyjamas (or other nonwarrior garb). Klingon grammarians will be on hand to help you use Klingon to chat, sing, play games, and insult one another. $10 advance registration fee is required for the introductory workshop, a small price to begin your interstellar linguistic education.

Interested? Visit www.speakklingon.info for more information or to register for either the main conference or the introductory workshop.

Plan on arriving in Reno early and learn to speak Klingon like a warrior!

qo'mey poSmoH Hol - - - language opens worlds

Dance Program at Renovation

Reno, Nevada, USA - Renovation, the 69th Worldcon, is delighted to announce that Dance Masters James and Cathleen Myers of PEERS (the Period Events and Entertainments Re-Creation Society) will be presenting a series of memorable dances throughout the

convention.

The dance program will open on Thursday with a Victorian Steampunk Tea Dance in the afternoon followed by the Girl Genius Ball in the evening. We are particularly pleased that this Ball will be hosted by the creators of Girl Genius, Phil and Kaja Foglio (www.girlgeniusonline.com).

Friday will focus on the Regency Period, with a Tea Dance in the afternoon and a Regency Grand Ball in the evening. There will also be a late night Club Dance after midnight.

On Saturday afternoon, fans can let their hair down at the more informal Toon Town Hop, with vintage and modern cartoon music.

Finally, Sunday will bring browncoats and other space travellers together for the Serenity Space Western Ball, inspired by the TV series Firefly.

All dances will be called or taught, and no previous experience is required. Costumes will be admired by all, but are also not required.

For more information on all of the Renovation dances, see www.renovationsf.org/music-dances.php.

Countdown - 100 days to go

Reno, Nevada, USA - With just 100 days to go before Renovation, this year's World Science Fiction Convention ("Worldcon"), excitement is building fast. Over 3,000 people have already joined as members and announcements of exciting plans for this unique, diverse, and global celebration of science fiction and fantasy are being made almost daily.

During April alone, Renovation has:

- Released the shortlisted nominees for this year's Hugo Awards
- Published ever expanding lists of Art Show and Dealers' Room exhibitors
- Confirmed a series of Dance Events ranging from the Girl Genius Steampunk Ball to the Serenity Space Western Ball inspired by the

TV Series “Firefly”

- Announced a Teaching SF Workshop to encourage teachers, librarians and parents to incorporate science fiction as a teaching tool

- Supported an SF Outreach event in which over 5,000 free science fiction books were given away to attendees of WonderCon, a major comics and popular arts event held annually in San Francisco

- Welcomed the Klingon Language Institute, whose annual conference (qep’a’) will be held in Reno immediately before Worldcon.

Renovation has also confirmed over 300 program participants. The list includes a wide range of leading science fiction writers, editors, publishers, critics, artists and fans. Notable writers who will be appearing on the Renovation program include Guest of Honor Tim Powers (whose On Stranger Tides is the basis for the latest Pirates of the Caribbean film), George RR Martin (whose fantasy series “A Song of Ice and Fire” has recently been made into a widely acclaimed HBO miniseries), Greg Bear, Greg Benford, David Brin, Lois McMaster Bujold, Cory Doctorow, Alastair Reynolds, Kim Stanley Robinson, Robert J Sawyer, John Scalzi, Robert Silverberg, Charles Stross, Harry Turtledove and Connie Willis. A strong presence from the comics and graphic novel community includes Paul Cornell (Action Comics, Captain Britain), Phil and Kaja Foglio (Girl Genius), Howard Tayler (Shlock Mercenary) and Bill Willingham (Fables). Major artists in attendance include Guest of Honor Boris Vallejo, Julie Bell, Bob Eggleton, Richard Hescox, Lee Moyer and John Picacio.

Voting for the Hugo Awards is open to all adult and young adult members of Renovation who join prior to the voting deadline of 11.59 pm PDT on Sunday, July 31, 2011. Members can submit their ballots online or by postal mail.

Renovation’s current Attending membership rates of $195 for Adults, $100 for Young Adults aged 17-21, and $75 for Children aged 16 or under will be held until July 17. Renovation still has rooms available at the luxurious Peppermill Hotel which will host the Hugo Award Ceremony and Masquerade Event. Potential attendees are encouraged to become members and to book their hotel rooms soon to be sure of receiving the discounted convention rate.

Patty Wells, the convention Chair, reflected on the progress made: “It is almost exactly three years since we launched the bid to bring the Worldcon to Reno. As we enter this last hundred days, I am delighted at the way our plans and aspirations are coming together, and look forward to a truly memorable experience for everyone who attends, works on or participates in the convention.”

MC for World SF Masquerade

Reno, Nevada, USA - Renovation is pleased to announce that the Masters of Ceremony for the 2011 World Science Fiction Convention Masquerade will be Hugo Award winners Phil and Kaja Foglio, creators of Girl Genius (www.girlgeniusonline.com). Always convivial hosts, the Foglios are joined by multiple-Hugo nominee Paul Cornell, who will be entertaining the audience while the judges deliberate with his special Worldcon edition of the BBC Radio 4 game show Just a Minute. The Masquerade will take place on Friday, August 19, in the Tuscany Ballroom at the Peppermill Hotel.

Masquerade Directors Kevin Roche and Andrew Trembley have also selected the first members of the judging panel charged with the formidable task of selecting award winners from the panoply of talent that will cross the Masquerade stage: Karen Dick and Lindsay Tallman will be backstage for close-up workmanship judging, with Toni Lay and John O’Halloran out front to judge the entries as presented on-stage to the Renovation audience. Assisting as Judges’ Clerk will be Aurora Celeste.

All talented costumers, the panel combines a wealth of experience on and off stage in international masquerade competitions. Ms Dick is the founder and owner of Costume-Con, the annual international costuming convention. Ms Tallman has been ably producing the always-packed Anime Los Angeles masquerade since 2007. Ms Lay has directed numerous Costume-Con masquerades and is one of the founding members of the New Jersey/New York Costumers’ Guild.

No stranger to the masquerade stage, Mr O'Halloran is most familiar to costumers behind the scenes, making sure they get across the stage safely and successfully. Ms Celeste has years of experience organizing the costume program track and the Costume Parade at Dragon*Con.

The Masquerade Directors are also pleased to announce that online entry is now available at www.renovationsf.org/masquerade/ for Renovation members who wish to appear in the Masquerade. While advance registration is not required to enter the competition, the Directors strongly urge anyone considering entering to do so, so that their staff and crew may better prepare to show all entries to best advantage. Once registered, competitors may return and update their details as necessary. The online entry system will be available until the Masquerade registration table opens at the convention on Wednesday, August 17.

Art @ Renovation

Reno, Nevada, USA - Renovation, the 69th World Science Fiction Convention, has confirmed exciting plans to highlight science fiction and fantasy art through exhibits, special events, and programming collectively called "Art @ Renovation". Two highly respected organizations are sponsoring these wide-ranging art activities.

Highlights of this unique event include:

- Art Night, a visual arts festival throughout the evening of Thursday, August 18. Art Night will kick off with the Chesley Awards, recognizing individual artistic works and achievements in science fiction and fantasy, and continue with panels, games, workshops, and demonstrations, along with highlights of the Renovation Film Festival.

- An Illustration Masterclass led by Chesley and Gaughan Award winner Richard Hescox.

- Portfolio review opportunities with Guest of Honor Boris Vallejo and leading industry Art Directors including Jon Schindehette, Lou Anders and David Palumbo.

- A substantial Art Show featuring original artwork and prints from over 80 artists. The Art Show is supported by an online Artist Showcase (viewable at www.renovationsf.org/art-gallery.php) as well as a printed commemorative publication that will be available for purchase at Renovation.

- A special exhibit and programming featuring the work of Artist Guest of Honor Boris Vallejo, as well as his wife and partner, Julie Bell, and her sons, fellow artists David and Anthony Palumbo.

- Greatly expanded opportunities for artists and fans to interact, including “Meet the Artist” hours in the Art Show and a special Artist Alley in our Dealers Room. Space is still available in our Art Show, Masterclass and Portfolio Reviews, and we urge established and aspiring artists to join us in Reno. For full details of all of our art-related events, see www.renovationsf.org/art.php.

We are deeply grateful to our two sponsors, without whose support Art @ Renovation would not have been possible.

Our lead sponsor is The Frank Foundation, which was established by renowned collectors Howard and Jane Frank in 1997 to support the imaginative arts. Since that time, the Foundation has made grants to institutions and organizations for various projects, including exhibitions, educational programs, and publications.

Our second sponsor is IlluXCon (www.illuxcon.com), the professional convention dedicated to art of the fantastic, now in its fourth year. We greatly appreciate IlluxCon’s kind financial support and would also like to acknowledge the inspiration of the energy and sense of community that is apparent throughout this unique event.

Iron Sky update

The Moon Nazi Film Iron Sky Gets a Release Date And a New Teaser

12-May-2011 Cannes, France -- Iron Sky, the Finnish-German-Australian dark sci-fi comedy, has released a new teaser titled “We Come In Peace!” The teaser also reveals the film’s release date: April 4th 2012. Iron Sky has been in production for five years and during that time it has done pioneering work on collaborating with the audience on content creation, publicity and funding the film.

Iron Sky completed principal photography in Germany and Australia this winter. Unlike the first two CGI-heavy teasers, the third teaser gives audiences a glimpse of the live action, actors and dialogue.

The teaser can be seen online here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNDaOFQ6g2I

“Iron Sky has been a huge undertaking, and I’m happy that we have wrapped it - and I think the end result is excellent”, said the director of Iron Sky, Timo Vuorensola. “Our adventures with Iron Sky have taken us from Finland through Germany to Australia, and back - and we’ve had a blast. We are still facing a long and interesting post production process with the visual effects, music and sound, but I can already toast the whole crew and our internet audience for one hell of a job they’ve done!”

“It’s finally becoming real. I can’t wait for next April to get it out there for our fans,” said the producer of Iron Sky, Tero Kaukomaa of Blind Spot Pictures. “It’s also very nice to get the new teaser out with live action, and to continue the very successful crowd investing scheme launched at Cannes last year. That initiative is on the brink of reaching half a million euros, which makes it a major success.”

Iron Sky is currently in post production and the first rounds of editing are finished. Energia Productions, the company behind the visual effects of the film, are busy crunching together the space battles, computer generated sets and other CGI effects in Tampere, Finland.

Location shoot in downtown Brisbane

The creators of Iron Sky are presenting a new promo at this year's Cannes Film Festival. Come and visit us in the Grand Hotel - it's time for the distributors to make the reich move now: www.blindspot.fi/cannes2011/ Sold territories: Australia & New Zealand (Hoyts), Benelux (Splendid), China (E-Stars), Czech Republic & Slovakia (Filmpark), Former Yugoslavia (Discovery Film), Finland (Buena Vista), German-speaking Europe (Splendid), Norway (Euforia), Poland (Kino Swiat), Romania (Programs4Media), Taiwan (Serenity Entertainment), and Thailand (Noori Pictures). Stealth Media Group is handling the World Sales.

Photos courtesy of Iron Sky.

Avi Bernshaw by Ben Grimshaw

Art by Ben Grimshaw

Ben is a cartoonist by profession and a geek by nature. Ben's challenge to Dark Matter fans is to post suggestions for Ben to draw. He'll draw the suggestions that most inspire him. Post suggestions to Dark Matter's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/darkmatterfanzine.

Not long after the above photo was posted on facebook, Avi changed his profile pic. I think Ebony (see next page) did the same.

Ebony Rattle as Electra, Art by Ben Grimshaw

The Girl in the Red Hood is Back … But She's a Little Different

by Darren Maxwell

There have been many variations of the *Little Red Riding Hood* fairytale since its creation hundreds of years ago. One of the more famous versions was from Charles Perrault in the 17th century that was then adopted by the Brothers Grimm in the 19th century which is the one that most modern people relate too. It's a simple tale that we all remember quite well, the big bad wolf eats the grandmother, assumes her identity, then taunts and (depending on the version you read) eats Red Riding Hood who is then saved by a huntsman.

What if the wolf simply killed the grandmother, chose not assume her identity and instead of eating Red Riding Hood opted to leave her alone to deal with the aftermath of her grizzly discovery? This is what the new short independent Australian film Red looks at. In this new version of the fable, Red Riding Hood is not a normal little girl anymore, she has been psychologically scarred by the gruesome death of her grandmother and her confrontation with the wolf which in turn has left her a deeply troubled girl.

Red was originally conceived by Rob Hamilton back in 2005 after seeing a Red Riding Hood flavoured milk drink commercial where Red Riding Hood has a wolf tattoo on her arm. After developing his story, Rob discussed his idea with Darren Maxwell who then revised the screenplay, turning it into a dark psychological drama.

Even though Darren's version of the film was written in 2006, the film didn't start formal pre-production until March 2010. The main driving elements behind the production were finding an 18th century village location and the creation of a wolf. With regards to the former, fortunately a perfect location was found at The Panton Hill Winery in Panton Hill Victoria. Although the winery was only built 10 years ago, it was deliberately modelled and styled on an 18th century European

establishment which made it perfect for the production.

With regards to the all important wolf, the production team quickly established that using a real wolf would be problematic and creating one in CGI wouldn't be possible due to the limited computer resources at the crew's disposal. The only solution was to physically build one from scratch and for this the production team turned to Dave Hankin of Arkive Studios. Dave was given the formidable task of sculpting and moulding a wolf for the film (who was given the nickname of Roam) with assistance from Adam Gill who took care of the electronic components and Michael Laizans who was responsible for painting and detailing the fur.

Casting was another key element for the film and naturally it was important to find the right actress to embody the concept of the Little Red Riding Hood character in both before her granny's death and in the aftermath of the trauma. Auditions were held in December 2010 and the role of the central character was given to the highly talented Australian actress Tamara Donnellan who brought the majestic grace of the Red Riding Hood character to life.

Another area of significance for the film was camera work and lighting, and for this the production turned to award winning film maker and professional Director of Photography Brett Anstey. Brett was well already known to the production team after his successful US DVD/ Blu Ray release of the feature horror film *Damned by Dawn*. Brett's experience, skill and artistic flair was crucial in ensuring *Red* not only had the right look and feel but gave the film a more epic quality atmosphere.

The film itself was shot over five days in May and June 2011 using an all volunteer cast and crew. At a cost of $12,000 the film is currently in post production and is expected to be completed by June 2012, if not sooner.

Details on the production as well as updates and production images can be found on the official website – www.redthemovie.net.

Photos courtesy of Darren Maxwell and DMFilms.

Launching & Gaining Velocity

On Thursday 16 June 2011, All Star Comics at Level 1, 410 Lonsdale Street Melbourne, hosted the launch of *Gaining Velocity*, a new anthology of graphic stories in a book format.

Gaining Velocity is a collaborative effort. It is published by Neville Howard from Melbourne, Australia and Moray Rhoda of South Africa, edited and written by Christo van Wyk, with art work by a long list of artists, including some established professionals and some new talent.

Mitchell Davies of All Star Comics said,

> 'We've known the book has been a long time in development and having Nev from time to time mention to us how it was going was great. The first time he spent us some finished art was fantastic. It totally blew us away. The look of it was totally top shelf, A+ quality. To finally see the book in the flesh was insane. The production value of it is beautiful. It looks like it belongs on the shelf in some fancy bookstore in Europe!
>
> We love this book. It is a shining example of the kind of talent we always knew was out there, finally showcased in one place. Nev has done a masterful job of collecting these artists together to create something that will hopefully be the launching pad for upcoming talent for years to come.
>
> Nev has a massive job on his hands now. Opening with such an incredible first issue, expectations for any later issues will be insanely high! That said we all believe that Nev is more than

Neville Howard

up to the challenge.'

A good crowd turned out to launch *Gaining Velocity*. A number of guys from the local comic book scene, including faces I recognised from the Monthly Comic Makers' Meet, were there. Everyone wishes the crew of *Gaining Velocity* well for the future.

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Geek and Nerd

Author unknown

Today I found out where the words "geek" and "nerd" came from.

The first documented case of "geek" dates all the way back to 1916. At the time, the term was used to describe sideshow freaks in circuses. Specifically, it was typically attributed to those circus performers who were known for doing crazy things like biting the heads of various small live animals or eating live insects and the like. These performances were often called "geek shows". The word itself, "geek", came from the word "geck", which was originally a Low German word which meant someone who is a "fool/freak/simpleton".

The first documented case of "nerd" was in Dr. Seuss's If I Ran the Zoo, in 1950. The specific text was: "a Nerkle, a Nerd, and a Seersucker too". It was just one year after the Dr. Seuss book, in 1951 in a Newsweek magazine article, that we find the first documented case of "nerd" being used similarly to how we use it today. Specifically, they used it as being synonymous with someone who was a "drip" or a "square".

There are two popular theories as to where the word derived from. The first is that it was perhaps derived from "drunk" spelled backwards, "knurd". This was fitting to describe people who studied instead of going out with friends and partying. A somewhat more popular theory suggests that it came from a modification of "nut", specifically "nert", which meant "stupid or crazy person" and was common in the 1940s, directly before the term "nerd" showed up. The word nerd ended up becoming fairly popular in the 1960s and by the 1970s was hugely popularized by the TV show Happy Days, where it was used frequently.

Bonus Factoids:

Before "geek", "nerd", "dork", etc, the proper terms for these same ragamuffins were "Dewdroppers", "Waldos", and "Slackers". Other common old slang words that were somewhat similar in meaning: pantywaist, oil can, drip, stinkeroo, mullet, roach, schnookle, kook, dimp, dorf, squid, auger, square, Joe Zilch, and dudd.

A similar term to "geek", in British slang, is "anorak". This is typically used synonymously with "geek", though it tends to imply an even greater level of awkward behavior patterns, more akin to someone who has Asperger's Syndrome.

Another British slang term that is somewhat similar to geek/nerd/etc is "boffin"; this is someone who is incredibly smart. Its closest American slang term equivalent is probably "egghead".

Source: www.todayifoundout.com/index.php/2010/09/where-the-words-geek-and-nerd-came-from/

This all goes to show how English is evolving. I used to own a genuine 19th century dictionary (Mum threw it out, sadface) that defined cute as 'ugly but interesting' and twit as 'pregnant goldfish'.

- Editor's note

Peacemaker - A Comic Book

The award-winning author Marianne de Pierres and award-winning comic artist Brigitte Sutherland have teamed up to create the brand new comic book series *Peacemaker*. With its futuristic setting of a wilderness reserve located within a city in Australia, *Peacemaker* is a western speculative fiction story. I've looked at the first few pages and love the look. And at $0.99 (Aus) for a downloadable comic, *Peacemaker* is a bargain.

A number of the comic book guys I've interviewed believe the comic book industry needs increased involvement from women as creators and readers in order to become sustainable. *Peacemaker* is definitely a move in the right direction!

Dark Matter will review *Peacemaker* in the next issue.

MDP Web
MARIANNE DE PIERRES · BRIGITTE SUTHERLAND
PEACEMAKER
ISSUE #01
http://www.mariannedepierres.com/peacemaker/

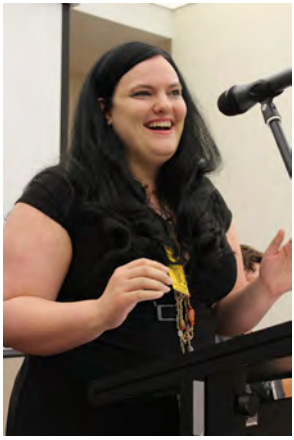
Continuum 7 Report

Continu-inu-inum 7 was held over the Queen's Birthday long weekend, 10 to 13 June 2011. Located centrally at Ether in Melbourne, in the basement of a hotel on Little Bourke Street, with easy access to coffee shops, a variety of eateries and public transport. Although there was no natural light, Ether provided reasonable lighting with down-lights offsetting traditional fluorescent lights. The rooms were mostly suitable although the foyer could have used a few more comfy chairs. A lounge room with comfy chairs would have been nice, but the games room, with its board tables and ergo chairs never seemed to be full. Plenty of filtered water was provided with clean glasses. Access to the lifts seemed to be through a large swing door. I'm not sure how well this catered to the wheeled attendees.

David Freer

David Freer and Catherynne M. Valente were the guest speakers for this conference, both of whom were articulate, intelligent and friendly. Numerous authors, podcasters and some artists attended, giving depth and variety to the various panels, from which there were usually a few to choose. Programming allowed for attendees to have lunch and dinner breaks, which I thought was excellent.

First off the bat for me was 'Continuum 101', offering advice on how to get the most out of the convention. The basic advice was the 5-2-1 rule, where experienced conference goers both recommended and requested that people have a minimum of 5 hours sleep per night (*not* per convention), at least 2 good meals a day and at least one shower per day, noting the latter as this was a shared space. Apparently people have collapsed at conventions because they've broken this rule, had too little sleep due to room parties and programming, and haven't eaten enough. Danny Oz recommended



Catherynne M. Valente

choosing only a few 'must see' items in the program so that people can go with the flow and enjoy the experience rather than feeling bad because they haven't kept to a self-imposed over-full program.

Next was a half hour chat by Bruce Gillespie and Tim Train, both of whom are zine creators, talking about the ongoing impact of technology and cultural shifts on zines. Tim and Bruce discussed the history of zines and traditional zines' decreasing circulation in recent years. Bruce acknowledged that a zine organisation, ANZAPA I think it was called, used to have a limit to the number of members, restricted its readership to its membership and refused to be included in the National Library Archives. Membership is currently below capacity. Discussion included Bill Burns' website, http://efanzines.com, where electronic fanzines are posted, facilitating networking and distribution of efanzines worldwide.

The Chronos Awards, a people's choice awards for SF and Fantasy creators living in Victoria, were presented next. Presentation was a humorous affair, with recipients missing in action (chatting in the foyer?) and one, our much-beloved Shaun Tan, in Europe receiving the Nobel Prize-equivalent for literature. A few recipients came forward to accept their awards. Paul Collins was awarded his A. Bertrand Chandler Award a second time as he wasn't at the NatCon for the original presentation. Paul's list of achievements, the justification for the award, was quite impressive. (See Chronos Awards, pp 16-17).

Books were launched on a semi-regular basis on Friday, Saturday and Sunday along with a number of book readings. A cash bar in the foyer supported these events, although a wider variety of drinks would have been nice (some cider for non-beer drinkers!). Paul Collins and Richard Harland launched books on the Friday night.

The Great Debate is an Australian Comedy Festival tradition that has extended into conventions. The topic was Immortality. Moderated by Jack Dann, who assured us he is Australian now. (With that accent?!) The debate was entertaining. The affirmative, arguing for immortality, were Heath Miller, Catherynne M. Valente and Kirstyn McDermott. For the negative, arguing for mortality and the need to die, were David Freer, Narelle Harris and Richard Harland. The debate is traditionally decided by the volume of applause of the audience, but when that failed to give a definitive result, it was decided by a show of hands. I

personally thought the negative had the better points but I felt, along with the majority of the audience, that the affirmative argued more persuasively and more humorously. Jack Dann awarded the plastic wicket (that he renamed the '3 penis award') to the affirmative.

New Melbourne Browncoats launched themselves as a new incorporated body and launched the beginning of this year's season of *Can't Stop the Serenity*. There was a quiz, a couple of items were auctioned and Act 1 of *Dr Horrible* was shown. Although not the end of the night for the convention, this was the end for me as I had a long trek home and needed sleep.

Saturday for me began with the opening ceremony, a short opening with a film sequence spliced together from excerpts of famous movies followed by a few short speeches. Catherynne's Guest of Honour speech followed at midday. Catherynne read out her short story '13 ways of looking at space/time'. This was an interesting short story with 13 'chapters'. Catherynne said the reaction to this story being published in a fiction magazine was mixed, with some vociferous emotional reactions – people were angry that a short story based partially on personal truth was published in a fiction magazine. Catherynne's story can be read at http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/valente_08_10/.

Heath Miller, Catherynne M. Valente, Kirstyn McDermott

Boxcutters ran a live podcast panel called 'Boxcutters asks a question – Australia has a great tradition of SF and fantasy children's television, but why don't we make it for adults?' Josh Kinal and John Richards from Boxcutters moderated the discussion between Chris Gist, ABC Commissioning Editor in Melbourne, Philip Dalkin, writer on *Sea Patrol* and *Stingers* etc, David Napier, director of *K9*, and Mark Shirrefs, co-creator of *Spellbinder* & *The Girl from Tomorrow*. The insights they gave were interesting as well as disappointing. In a nutshell, the reason we don't see more quality SF and Fantasy TV

made in Australia is cost, the cost of the show, lack of understanding of the market and genre (Channel 9 especially – see Dark Matter Issue 2, the article on Armageddon including Ben Browder's comments on working for Channel 9 on Farscape). To listen to this panel, go to http://boxcutters.net/2011/06/20/ep-269-making-scifi-tv-for-adults/.

Philip Dalkin, Mark Shirrefs and Josh Kinal

Next up for me was the Alternative Energy Panel with David Freer, Tiki Swain, Ben McKenzie and one other. With a self-supporting marine scientist, a PhD and research assistant, and a scientific commentator on the panel, this was interesting and informative. A large part of the discussion revolved around alternative energy sources and their real costs. Some energy sources, such as solar energy, have hidden detrimental costs that are not commonly taken into consideration. For example, the batteries used to store solar energy are full of acid. Also alternative fuels, such as bio-diesel, have a cost in terms of replacing food crops and displacing carbon dioxide. Discussion also ranged into sustainability, covering issues such as self-support and energy efficiency – for example, building better houses. The most interesting aspects of this panel for me were some of the alternative power sources I hadn't heard of before, providing endless fodder for SF stories.

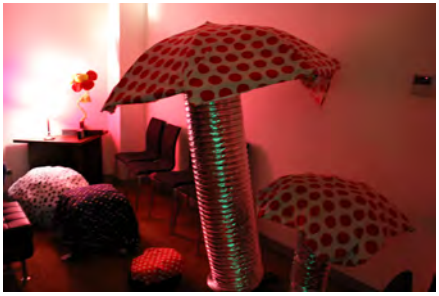
John Richards, Chris Gist and David Napier

'Do uploads dream of electric sheep' was next, with panellists Catherynne M. Valente, David Cake, M1k3y and Christopher 'Ruz' Hayes-Kossmann. Discussion revolved around duality – are mind

and body separate? Can the mind be separated from the body? For the sake of furthering discussion, the panel agreed that the mind could be separated from the body. Catherynne took the argument further, saying that if that technology was available, then it would be possible to simulate the effects of the hippocampus and amigdala in order to choose whether an event has an emotional reaction. None of the panellists referred to Iain M. Banks' Surface Detail and his hypotheses around uploading personality.

'Mind and Perceptions' was the next panel on my list – possibly, just maybe, because I was a panellist. 'Audience' is the wrong term to describe the non-panelists in the room, because they were highly involved in the discussion, asking questions and contributing opinions throughout. We touched on a number of topics all too briefly to do them justice, everything from evolution as it pertains to emotion (had the hive mind in Dark City evolved beyond love or had they not yet evolved to the point of being able to love? What is love?) to drugs; is a change of mood (depression to contentment) a loss or change of personality? Is an exoskeleton (or wheelchair) such as in Dark Angel a valid tool for use of the disabled? Mind-wipes – are the bodies responsible? (Passing Through Gethsemane, Babylon 5). I enjoyed this panel, and the audience participation so much, I think I'll volunteer for a few more panels next year.

After the panel I needed a break, so I took an extended dinner break before returning for the costume parade and Maskobalo. At the base of the stairs, there were a choice of 'doors' to pass through for entry. A tardis and a wardrobe with a lamppost and snow behind were the two doorways, although a wide path was left to enable access for wheeled attendees to view both sides (elevator access was through another door). David Freer and Catherynne M. Valente judged the costume parade, then the dancing began. Music included some classic pop music as well as SF tracks. A tardis console stood



before the DJ, to the delight of attendees young and old. In a 'time out' room, there were toadstools, comfy chairs, minature tea sets and decorative lighting. It was easier to have conversations in this room. Some people also hung out in the games room. From the attendance, this event is not overly popular at Continuum; perhaps it is a combination of Melbourne's numerous cosplay groups not being aware of the ball, and the Continuum attendees tending towards the more conservative. However, it doesn't take a crush to make a Maskobalo successful.

Sunday began for me with the panel 'Sexuality and ethnicity in Modern Fantasy', with panellists Catherynne M. Valente, Alice Clarke, Emily de Rango, Riannon Kraft and Kirsty Sculler. The discussion focused on 'good' and 'bad' representations of non-traditional sexuality and ethnicity in fantasy. For example, Catherynne criticised *A Game of Thrones* on the basis that she would have liked to have seen treatment of characters with homosexual relationships portrayed less realistically and in a more positive light. Catherynne argued that it's fantasy so everything can be changed. Trudi Canavan's *The Rogue* was held up as an example of approrpriate writing becaue Trudi's writing does not differentiate between relationships regardless of orientation, although same sex couples suffer discrimination in some societies. Other topics included

• society's reception of straight actors playing gay men as 'making' or proving their careers, in contrast with portrayal of lesbian relationships as 'soft' acting.

• Defining a character by ethnicity in the sense of 'he's X colour, therefore he's bad', and the double standard imposed when white mistreating black with the goal of showing it's bad to treat black that way, as opposed to black mistreating white with the goal of showing the reverse is bad – the latter is perceived to be racist although the moral is the same in terms of seeking to improve race relations.

• The lack of ethnic variety in Australian television, including tokenism such as Neighbours importing a Chinese actor from New Zealand because they 'couldn't' get a Chinese actor in Australia.

David Freer's guest of honour speech provided a potted history of his life and career as well as exhibiting his sense of humour. When Dave talked to Dark Matter, there was significant (although not consistent), overlap in the conversation. I highly recommend reading 'David Freer talks to Dark Matter'.

I took the rest of the day off and went home with an upset stomach. This was disappointing, but provided a valuable lesson – eat and drink carefully during a convention.

'Pick an Era, Any Era', was an excellent panel with which to begin Monday. Panelists were Dave Freer, Jack Dann, Richard Harland, Erika Lacey and Paul Poulton. The moderator had done his homework, bringing along a selection of alternative history books. The panel discussed alternative history novels, how so many stem from similar 'twists' in history, and some less common points of divergence from actual history. As Dave pointed out, a distinct advantage of alternative history is that you don't have to construct a detailed new world for a setting, instead our world provides the basis for the fictional world, with points of difference defined by the ramifications of the event or technology that caused the divergence.

While I intended to attend the panel 'Crones, witches and marginalised power in fairytales', I scheduled my interview with Dave Freer during this time, using Murphy's Law and a biblical precept (there are 2 types of people in this world, the quick and the dead) as my justification for getting that interview done as soon as possible. To my surprise I was told the panel refused to discuss any Discworld material as they said Terry Pratchett should have a panel of his own (but didn't).

'Forget the dice: Roleplaying as a Story telling experience' was the panel after lunch with Catherynne M. Valente, Hespa, Gareth Hodges and Patrick O'Duffy. Ben McKenzie was in the audience, not on the panel, which was a disappointment as Ben MC's Melbourne's Dungeon Crawl, a theatre improv comedy based on role playing games. This panel tended to focus on comparisons of various role playing games and the technicalities of each game. I was a little disappointed in this panel as my experience of role playing games outside of computers

ended in the 1980s, shortly after I rebelled against a party leader who treated everyone's characters as supporting NPCs to his main character. I split the party and headed off on my own, thoroughly enjoying the experience of actually playing the game as a participant. However, the DM allowed the party leader to take over the game and my character shortly afterwards. It wasn't that long afterwards that the DM and I separated… Since then, my experience of role-playing is entirely computer based, as it doesn't require knowing the right people and being able to synchronise timetables. This panel had minimal discussion of computer based role playing games.

'Adult content in Fantasy lit' starred Crisetta MacLeod, Richard Harland, Karen Healey and Steve Rossiter. The discussion focused on distinguishing between adults-only, YA-only and all-ages for literature, the problems associated with distinctions or lack thereof. Censorship, readers disliking age-related categories, and readers consuming age-inappropriate content were some of the issues discussed.

The closing ceremony was brief, and included a raffle draw for a free Continuum 8 membership. Yours truly won the raffle! I was so stunned, I thought she was just calling my name for a different reason – like not paying attention in class. It took a few seconds to sink in. This raffle prize membership will ensure Dark Matter has a report for Continuum 8 in 2012.

For more photos, look at Dark Matter's facebook page at www.facebook.com/darkmatterfanzine.

Starcraft 2 - Prae.ThorZain

An analysis of Prae.ThorZain's bio-expand variation

by Daniel Haynes

Prae.ThorZain is undeniably a rising star being made famous by his performance in the Team Liquid Star League 3 (TSL3). Plowing through some of the strongest players in the tournament including Fruitdealer, Liquid`Tyler and then arguably the best protoss in the world, oGsMC, he has shown the StarCraft world that he is playing at a seriously high level.

After watching his series versus MC, I was seriously impressed. His attack, upgrade and expansion timings, along with his general decision-making is something to behold. The purpose of this article will be to go back and examine my favourite game of his nail-biting series with MC: game 4 on Tal'Darim Altar. I will be specifically discussing ThorZain's variation of standard bio-expand play.

ThorZain starts out by producing a depot, barracks and refinery at standard timings, but immediately deviates from the norm by mining gas with only two SCVs (and sending one of those to mine minerals after reaching 50 gas). Following completion of the first marine and the second depot, ThorZain begins a tech-lab on his barracks and starts saving for a fast CC. A marauder is immediately produced and the CC is begun.

It was interesting to note that upon scouting MC's base, ThorZain found his opponent doing a FE with a nexus before gateway (a particularly greedy and risky build), but followed his original plan in expanding – not deviating and trying to finish the game with a 3-or-4 barracks all-in. A common mistake which many Terran players make is to cancel their fast expansion, abandon their gameplan and attempt to kill a

greedy build like MC's straight away. After abandoning their plan, the all-in attack will often be held off and the protoss left in terrific shape.

ThorZain fully saturates his single gas as soon as his expansion is started. He produces only marines after the first marauder, then adds a second barracks and begins researching stim. ThorZain begins his engineering bay at 5:20, continues to build constant marines, and starts a bunker. As soon as the e-bay is complete, +1 weapons research is started. So at roughly ~6:20, a quick look at ThorZain's base shows he has 6 marines, 1 marauder, a bunker at his natural, 2 orbital commands (OC), stim half researched and +1 infantry weapons underway. The army ThorZain has can easily defend any agression from MC at this point, so he is comfortable starting a third barracks.

At the 7-minute mark, ThorZain constructs a second bunker in order to be safe from any quick agression MC could pull off from having two bases. As it turns out, MC made several additional warpgates and attempted a bust. ThorZain managed to defend due to several reasons.

As soon as seeing a probe scouting his defenses, ThorZain immediately scouts for proxy pylons. He sees a few stalkers near his natural, and upon scouting a pylon pulls SCVs from mining preemptively to aid in repairing bunkers from a possible attack while building a third. This part of his defense is so important, because if his SCVs were pulled to repair after MC began his attack, both bunkers would have been destroyed, his remaining forces would have been decimated, and he would have ultimately lost the game. The pre-emptive SCV pull is one of the most important parts of a fast expand build versus protoss. Without a sense of when to pull, terran players will lose often to aggressive 3 gates, 5 gates and 6 gate builds.

As it was, ThorZain managed to deflect MC's attack for the loss of just one bunker, a couple of SCVs and very few marines. It should be pointed out that ThorZain's build is so different from the current Korean

norm, which is a gas-less expand into 3-5 barracks worth of pure marine production. The popular Korean build (I call it a Korean build as it has been popularised by the Korean players MarineKingPrime and IM_MVP) focuses on agressively expanding, followed by a solid defense and map control in the mid-game. ThorZains build relys on several key timings for defense, SCV/bunker repair to hold off aggressive mid-game pushes, and ultimately upgrades and fast tech (stim, +1, fast medivacs) in order to secure map control. After defending MC's scary 2-base attack, ThorZain was ahead economically.

As soon as ThorZain has stim and +1 researching, and collects 100 additional gas, he builds a factory and refineries on all three remaining vespene geysers. This ideally lets him follow on from bunker/marine/scv defense with a lot more gas, allowing him to then begin reactored starport production as well as rush along with his infantry upgrades.

Another huge factor in this build is the rush for superior infantry upgrades. ThorZain's armies throughout the early/mid-game are often smaller than normal (by normal, I'm referring to standard 1 Rax FE with or without gas, racing for many early units for defense). By utilising fantastic upgrades on his infantry, ThorZain manages to win engagements with fewer units and ends up in a commanding position if he hits his supply cap fairly early on. In terms of timings, ThorZain starts +1 armor as soon as his weapon upgrade finishes, then at 50% completion of the upgrade builds an armory, then begins a second engineering bay roughly hallway through armory construction. This timing results in +1 armor, the armory and the second engineering bay finishing at the same time, and he has enough gas to start +2/+2 straight away.

ThorZain pushes when his 1/1 upgrades are almost complete and he has a medivac to heal through stim. Barracks production is mainly focused on marauders, but at least one barracks should be upgraded with a reactor for marine production. When ThorZain pushes out and has control of the map, he can comfortably begin a third expansion. From that point on, the game becomes less about strict timings and

more about a flow of agression and defense. The build is extremely flexible at this stage in the game, as you have great upgrades and the opportunity to drop, expand, harass and poke your opponent. If you see Colossi or a robotics bay, vikings can be made after several medivacs. A Templar tech-path can be dealt with through ghost production and multi-pronged attacks and drops.

For the rest of the game, ThorZain proves his control and late-game prowess. The use of vikings, medivacs, marauders, marines and ghosts with super-fast upgrades caught MC completely off guard. There is a point in the game where ThorZain somehow defeats a ridiculously scary army of Colossus and Immortals with a relatively insignificant-looking force of MMM and ghosts/EMP. If you haven't watched this game or series, it is an absolute blast. Thoroughly recommended.

ThorZain's upgrade focused build is a refreshing take on Terran's fast expand. While certainly more fragile than other builds against early agression and busts, methodical defense and meticulous timing allows for stronger mid-late game play. This build is, after all, essentially 'playing for the late-game'.

I think we should have a moment of silence to comprehend what just happened

Good Friday Appeal

Being fairly new to Melbourne I'd picked up on the fact that the Good Friday Appeal was on TV, but it wasn't until I was invited to tag along with the 501st and Rebel Legion that I discovered the full extent of what happens in the Docklands to celebrate Good Friday and raise money for the Royal Children's Hospital.

On Good Friday I caught the train into the city, to discover the trains weren't running the city loop. I hot-footed it from Flinders Street Station to the Docklands, a short distance that seemed a lot longer because I was running late. Coming up to Etihad Stadium, I found set-up well under way at about 10:15 a.m. and people starting to arrive to enjoy the event. Following the directions I was given, I found myself at a bar on level 1 inside Etihad Stadium then called Rick, aka Obi Wan Kenobi, as instructed. He walked out a door straight away – I was there!

The 501st and Rebel Legion were set up in the studio room on level 1. A large window made this an ideal place from which to watch a football match, but the stage in the oval for entertainment on this day was too far away to see what was happening. This was a spacious room with tables, chairs, a bar well stocked with water, tea, coffee, and nibbles as well as adjacent toilets. When I say spacious, I should add that the 501st and Rebel Legions were making excellent use of the entire room. Men in black were pulling on white Stormtrooper armour, black armour or even Boba Fett armour. X-Wing pilots

of all ages were getting kitted out. An Imperial Officer or two marched around. Darth Vader pulled on his outer layers. Parents were helping their children into costumes. It was delightful to see a family in costume, father, mother and daughter all as X Wing pilots. I think one of the boys in another costume may have belonged to the same family. Watching parents and children all get ready in the studio room was great – the family who plays together, stays together.

Edward and I were included in the support team so we donned the appropriate tee-shirts. Edward tagged along with Darth Vader in an effort to help. Rick warned Edward that Vader's helmet is like looking through 2 toilet rolls, limiting vision. Vader is always mobbed by crowds wanting photos with him, so support from people out of costume is essential. A surprising number of dads wanted their kids to have photos with Vader – with the dads too of course. A lot of kids prefer Clone Wars and Clone Troopers.

My camera and I walked around trying to capture everyone in action. There were times when distressed children appealed to me to help them capture the attention of Vader or a Stormtrooper. Unfortunately it's hard to see and hear in the helmets they wear, and so many people want photos with them. Wranglers are needed to help manage crowd control, so I'd tap a Stormtrooper or Vader on the shoulder to get their attention for photos and donations.

There were quite a few favourite moments of the day. One was seeing Stormtroopers belly dancing with the belly dance ladies, complete with hip

scarves. Another was the Firies (firefighters) asking for photos with the Stormtroopers – 'for the kids' but I couldn't help asking exactly who the kids were!

Edward saw some police officers talking amongst themselves. One saw Vader and reached for his handcuffs, as if he was going to arrest Vader. The force was used – laughter ensued but no arrest.

Some really heart-warming moments occurred, like when kids raced after troopers to put money in tins. They didn't even want their photos taken, they just wanted to give. At the end of the day, troopers were also commenting on the generosity of so many people, with so many tins filled. While these tins were not counted separately, the overall amount raised for the hospital was in excess of $15 million. It was awesome to be part of such a good cause.

Behind the scenes was also very interesting. Every hour or so troopers returned to the studio room to rest, drink water, then venture out again. It's surprising how tiring it is to wear the costumes and engage with the crowd, so this is very important. Vader has a very heavy and hot costume. Even though the weather was perfect on Good Friday, when Vader went in for a break, he had sweat dripping down his face. He was only able to do 2 stints outside then he was too exhausted to continue. Other people came and went according to their schedules and their resilience. This was excellent because it meant that Star Wars characters were present for the entire event, even if the individuals came and went.

Edward and I talked to Bradley Bristow-Stagg, BeeJay, one of the 501st who organised the group for this event.

B - This is the 4th year that the 501st has been involved in the Good Friday Appeal.

The Rebel Legion has only been involved with the 501st here in Victoria for the last 2 years. That came about because of the Science Works Where Science Meets Imagination Star Wars exhibition. Predominantly it was only the 501st here. With Science Works we met a lot of people from Star Walking. Star Walking is predominantly a fan club whereas the 501st and Rebel Legion are costuming clubs. The costumes worn by the guys at Star Walking were not to our level, so these were people who were looking to do a little bit more. They got on board with the Rebel Legion. As a consequence we have a fairly good mix of Rebel Legion and 501st now. I believe the 501st is still the biggest costuming club in Victoria.

N - You've been doing this for about 4 years; do they contact you every year?

B - Yes, they invite us back. With a lot of these things you can make the initial contact but they have to invite you. Like with Myer, we get invited every year to re-attend. So for Good Friday they say, 'Hey, we've got Good Friday on, are you guys coming?' and we say 'Hell yes!' Good Friday and Myer Christmas parade are our biggest troops of the year. But the Good Friday appeal is a group favourite. People just love doing the Good Friday because you get so many kids out there and you also see some of the hospital kids there as well.

E - I was staggered at the amount raised. It was phenomenal.

B - Some of the guys were saying towards the end there $20 and $50 bills were going in the tin.

N - Some people were finding it difficult to stuff the money in as well.

B - Yeah, well, what I've seen with some other tins is that the have a circle for notes so they can roll it up and pop it in the circle. We do Good Friday because it is awesome, so much fun. One of our

troopers, Troy, couldn't attend and he was devastated because it's his favourite troop.

E - We had a lot of fun on Friday.

B Yes, you do. We had 30 costumers there. The 501st, Rebel Legion and the Galactic Academy. The Galactic Academy is a brand new costuming club set up by Albin Johnstone the founder of the 501st for the kids because in the 501st and Rebel Legions we cannot have anyone under 18 trooping for legal reasons and responsibility. So Albin has set up the Galactic Academy for all of those parents who are members and their kids want to troop as well. It's so cute to see the little girls in the X wing pilots and the boys in the tie fighter pilots.

N - And mum and dad and daughter in matching outfits.

B - Yes. It's really, really cute. So we had about 6 Galactic Academy, about 20 from the 501st, and about 5 Rebels. There were about 30 of us there.

N - There was a bit of the changing of the guard as well.

B - Yes, some of the guys had to leave.

N - You don't count the money?

B - All of the shaker tins we get are sealed and we return those tins to the organisation complete. Our charity officer would like us to look at counting the money ourselves so we can say how much we raised but I don't know if that's feasible because of the accountability .

N - When you shake tins for the TLC it's the same.

B - Yes, whatever charity we're raising for we get the tins from them, we shake the tins, we put them away when they're full and then we hand them in and give them back to the organisation. TLC for Kids is our nominated charity here in Victoria. Every $500 is another child they can do something special for. Usually when we do a troop we raise at least $500, so every time we troop we help a child. They love us, they love what we do for them and they're really supportive. The Good Friday Appeal is a different sponsor but we get invited and we are more than happy to rattle the cans for them. The 3 concepts the

501st is built around are 1) promoting Star Wars, 2) raising the art of costuming and props and 3) giving back to the community through volunteer and charity works. Charity work has come about more recently. The club's been around 13 years or so, but has only really grown in size 5 to 8 years ago as the charity work became more of a focus. Some people come just wanting a costuming club but a lot of people come knowing its not just costuming, but what we do with our costumes.

It was great to see Doc Brown the guy that has all the Back to the Future stuff. You would have seen him at Supanova. We've never seen Einstein before, it's the first time he's come out, and to see Doc Brown with a dog that looks like the dog from the movie was unreal. It was really funny.

N - He made sure I got a good photo of Einstein.

B - Cool. He's such a nice bloke too. We see him every year. We see him at Armageddon and now we see him at Nova.

N - So he's not actually part of a club or anything?

B - No, that's his, he owns the Dalorean, he's done the Dalorean up, he owns the memorabilia that's in the car, the majority of which is screen used props. He's just a very big Back to the Future fan. We first saw him at Good Friday one year, then he wheeled into Armageddon that same year. So every year we go up and say hey, how you going?

N - The firies asked for photos with the Stormtroopers, they said it was for the kids. By the end I'm asking 'yes, and who are the kids?' Edward saw a police officer going to get his cuffs out -

E - He was joking with his partner that he was going to arrest Darth Vader.

B - The volunteer forces, everyone loves Star Wars. It doesn't matter whether you're a copper, a firie, a nurse or Joe Blogg in the street, an accountant or a high level manager. Everyone loves Star Wars. Don't

give me that stuff 'oh only nerds like Star Wars' - it's crap. They're really iconic and it's part of our culture.

N - We grew up with it

B - That's right, so many people have seen the movies and loved the movies. If you only like one movie it's Star Wars. I was talking to a dad in Target the other day. I was cruising the aisles looking at the Star Wars stuff there, he was there with his little boy, holding a Tie Fighter. I turned to them and said the movies are being re-released in 3D starting with Episode One next year. He said 'Oh you know Lucas, out for more money'. I wouldn't say that, I'd say so many people love Star Wars. He said he didn't like the prequels, they're not as good as the originals. I said 'yes, but that's only because that's what you grew up with'. I bet your son likes Clone Wars better than the originals. And the son said 'Yes! Clone Wars are awesome!' That's my point. Each generation has it's own Star Wars now.

N - It's like Dr Who, who's your favourite Doctor, if they've watched Dr Who it's the one they grew up with.

B - Yes, well for me it was Pertwee and Baker. I mainly grew up with Baker but then as I got a little bit older they did some reruns. Of course Pertwee was there and I loved his very Shakespearean style and his cape and velvet and Bessie whereas with Tom Baker it was all about the scarf and jelly babies. That was really cool. It's what you grew up with is what you really like. Someone was really hanging on the Jar Jar. So I said, 'you're going to tell my best mate who's 6 foot 3, built like the proverbial, whose favourite character happens to be Jar Jar Binks, that Jar Jar Binks is crap?'

E - Mesa thinks

B - He loves Jar Jar Binks and thinks that he's the funniest thing ever. And a lot of people don't appreciate that Jar Jar had several roles. Ultimately he's a tragic character. He always has the best of

intentions, he's so innocent and naïve, he's eventually manipulated into giving the emperor exactly what he wants while he thinks that he's doing good. You have a look at that scene where he says we should grant the chancellor executive powers, and then everyone is roaring applause and he thinks yes, I've done the right thing whereas Palpatine's sitting there thinking 'you've played right into my hands' People don't understand he's such a tragic character.

E - That Vader costume looked really heavy. Hammer had beads of sweat just coming down him after a bit.

B - He can only do it for a bit. He was also saying he broke his collar bone so the helmet, because it's the 3 part, the faceplate, the neck and the helmet on top and the shoulder armour pressing on that he can't troop for long he can only do very short stints.

N - So how recent was the break?

B - I don't know.

E - So it wasn't broken because of the costume?

B - No not because of the costume it's not that heavy.

E - So that explains why he said he would pay for it later.

B - Yes. It's hard work.

N - There seem to be a serious number of Stormtroopers.

B - We've gone from very humble beginnings a couple of years ago, we only had about 20 members on the board from Victoria and Tasmania. Of that maybe about 10 were active. Now we have about 50 members on the board and maybe 30 to 40 active, which is just massive. I suppose that's why I was trooping all the time in that first year because that first year there weren't many of us. If there was a troop on you went and did it because there was no-one else to cover whereas now, after the influx of all the people, you can pick and choose the troops you want to go to. This is the 4th year the 501st has been involved and the 2nd year for the Rebel Legion. The 501st and the Rebel Legion are sister organisations but we are separate organisations. The 501st concentrates on Imperial

or bad guy costumes and the Rebel Legion concentrates on the good guy costumes. The slogan is that we are Lucas Films preferred costuming organisations. We have grace from Lucas Film to use their copyrighted characters because of all the charity work we do but there are certain restrictions. If we make a costume we cannot sell it outside of the Legion to non-members. Any merchandise we produce, you see my jacket I have all these patches predominantly 501st but also Rebel Legion. These can be created by us using Lucas Film's copyrighted characters but can only be sold to members for cost.

N - Which is why you won't see them for sale at Good Friday or at a convention.

B -That's correct. You should never see them for sale. But you can certainly be given them by members. This is the 4th year and the 2nd year for Rebels at the Good Friday Appeal. And the people who run the Good Friday appeal really look after us. Last year there was a football game on so we didn't get the studio room. We were down in the bowels of the earth but they still looked after us and gave us a snack card and whatever. Usually we have the studio room which is what you were in on Friday.

N - Lots of room and the toilets and bar with all the non-alcoholic drinks, tea, coffee and so on.

B -Yes and snacks donuts and hot cross buns. They just put it on for us. We go in there and have this massive area, we can relax in there, go out and troop, come back and refresh. There's always water there, which is always really important for a trooper to keep up their water. You don't realise until you costume how tiring it is. You're just wearing a costume, you wouldn't think it's any different from wearing your normal everyday clothes but you go out there and after an hour you can be really drained. You have to go back. Because of the enclosing nature of the costumes you have to keep your water up, particularly on hot days. It was good weather, good trooping weather on the Friday but 2 years ago on the Myer Christmas Parade it was a stinking hot day.

N - How did you cope?

B - A lot of our troopers found it really hard and Vader almost passed out. One of our imperial officers found it very hard towards the end. They looked after us a little bit as well because we had the shaded area and the water before we went out. That parade route was a killer in the heat in the costumes so we always try to go out for about an hour or so, come back in and refresh, top up on water, then go out again and just keep on doing that.

N - But you can't really do that for the parade.

B - No we can't. What we do for the parade is park at the end of the parade route, kit up so we get into costumes in the car park without our helmets, or buckets as we call them, off. We walk the parade route back to the top with our helmets off so we won't get stopped because if we've got our helmets on we won't get there.

N - Because you'll get mobbed.

B - Yes, we'll get mobbed. And then we sit around for 3 hours drinking water. They've been providing fruit which is great, so you sit around for a couple of hours in shelter and some seats and it's great and then marshal. It's probably an hour before you get to the end of the parade route after marshalling and waiting for everyone to slowly make their way down. You get down to the end and get your kit off and just chill. That is why we park at the end.

N - Why the waiting for 3 hours?

B - They've got to make sure everyone is there and ready.

N - The practicality of it – you can't go to the toilet in those costumes.

B - That's correct. You go before you suit up. 3 hours is probably an exaggeration, it's probably more like 2 hours. But even still that's a long time to hurry up and wait. But you're right, the practicalities of going to the toilet in a costume - some people put in a liberty fly in their under-armour so they can lift up their codpiece and do what they have to do, but most people don't, so to go to the toilet is quite a chore.

N - So they have to strip off.

B - Yeah. With my costume, with the clone, there's about 25 different pieces to put on.

N - I've worn a normal Stormtrooper costume, how different is that to a clone?

B - It's quite a lot different because the Stormtrooper doesn't have knee or elbow pieces. Apart from that I suppose it is similar. On mine I have shoes, shins, knees, thighs, cod, ab, chest, shoulder bells, forearms, elbows, biceps, hand plate, gloves, neck seal, helmet. The extra bits are mostly knees, elbows, having a separate cod and buck plate. But a lot of the TKs do that as well. It is different but similar.

Recently we've managed to negotiate a national agreement with Supanova and Armageddon for the Australian Rebel and 501st Legions. Very, very special. This was our first year back at Nova, but traditionally we have a big weekend for Armageddon. A lot of interstate troopers come down. Because it's in the exhibition centre there are those stairs going up to the mezzanine level and we usually do the 501st and Rebel photo shoot there.

E - That was our first exposure to the 501st.

N - Yes, the year before last, we were at Armageddon for the first time ever. I saw R2D2 and he looked like he was a man on a mission and I'm like -

E - Follow that droid!

N - I'm following R2D2 to the photo shoot, which was how I found out about it. Then I'm looking around seeing all these costumes and I thought 'oh there aren't many people in civvies here'. I'm thinking maybe I shouldn't be here and I thought right, well, I'm not going to talk to anybody and I'm going to make like I look like I belong and maybe no one will kick me out. I took lots of photos. And there was this really short guy standing really close by and I'm looking thinking I know him, where do I know him from, and then I realised it was Seth Green.

B - Yeah that was awesome.

N - He's so short!

B - Yeah, he's really, really tiny.

E - We just fell in love with the whole costuming thing.

N - But we didn't realise they were clubs at that stage, we hadn't cottoned on.

B - At Armageddon I was looking over my photo album, I've got three years of Armageddon photos on the steps. The first year it's a small group, then a little bigger, then voom, we're taking up the whole staircase. This year we've started planning already for Armageddon because I want it to be big. Supanova was good but there wasn't enough commitment from people to man the desks and areas and do the things that needed to be done. That wasn't fair to the people who got stuck on those props. So I want to organise it now and really get a big commitment up. We traditionally do a mixer on the Saturday night, go on a river cruise, a pub and chill out or a road trip.

Last year at the Euroa Spring Festival, they wanted us in their parade. They contacted us a year before, it was going to be a space theme. We organised it and we descended on the town. We took over a motel, it was all the 501st in this one motel and we took over their dining hall. They loved us in their parade; we had 15 troopers with Vader for their parade and they were stoked. This tiny little town and the 501st descended on them.

I'm starting to organise the mixer now as well, I've already invited some VIPs, Stewart McKenny the artist, Tom Taylor and Colin Wilson who write and pencil the Star Wars Invasion comics for Dark Horse and hopefully I can get in touch with some other people. There is talk we might do a boat cruise again because that was good. When we went to Adelaide we went out for dinner at a restaurant but we were at 2 separate tables and it was nice but we didn't really mix it

up. So I don't know whether it'll be a boat cruise or take over a beer garden. It has to be close to the exhibition centre and it has to be family friendly.

N - Rick mentioned doing hospital visits. Does that happen very often?

B - Probably not as much as we'd like or should. We try to do a hospital visit at least once a year. That's one of the things that usually happens around Armageddon. Because we've got so many interstaters, we try and organise a hospital trip on the Saturday afternoon. So we'll get a lot of interstaters and locals and do a hospital visit. Rick was saying we do about 3 a year recently, but I haven't been involved that much in previous years. I think it's really important that people go on these troops because these bring it home, this is why we're doing it. This is the whole reason that we have the grace that we have to do what we do. Being in the 501st is really inspiring because you get out there and you do these troops and you see these kids. You see what they go through and you think 'I've got nothing to complain about, I'm healthy, I've got a good job'. Even if you've got a crappy job, you're healthy. I've only done one hospital troop. They brought us into the Make a Wish room. They had all the kids there and they got us up on stage and we did all these dances and we were playing with the kids. We were playing Wii bowling with these kids, in Clone armour, TK armour, Biker Scouts, it's just magic when you see these kids. Have you seen Heart of an Empire? It's about the 501st, part of the documentary follows some troopers into a Hospital Troop. There's one very heart warming tale of this little boy. All he wants is to be a clone trooper. He eventually passes away, but his dad gets the costume and carries on for his son. A couple of weeks before he passed away the guys got a clone bucket and did it up for the character that he

really liked and gave it to him, made him an honorary member, his own TK ID, it was pretty special.

E - I can get really excited about what you can do to make a difference in kids lives, it's fantastic.

B - When you see that, it makes it all worth while. And that's another reason Amy (my wife) loves and is so supportive of my little hobby, because it's not cheap. Let alone the costumes, the merchandise. You get into the costume then you get into the merch. We're collectors already because we have our own little Star Wars collection already, then you come into this, then it's like Oh! My God! Tee-shirts and jackets and patches and whatever. There's something like 250 different patches and 300 different coins. The coins are spectacular. They're specially minted. We have one for Knightfall, with the Knightfall logo on the front, made from pressed metal like medallions. Amro is into the coins in a big way. I think he has one full set and 2 partial sets of coins and he has these beautiful boxes to display them in. It's like opening a Cuban cigar humidor. When you open it up and there are all these beautiful coins. The other thing we do with the merch is give it away. The coins we give to special people like VIPs and patches we give to friends. We do our own trading cards and we give them out to the general public so like your normal trading cards with a really cool figure on the front with stats on the back. It's like a picture of us in the Star Wars universe. Over 5,000 members with over 8,000 costumes world wide, there is a trooper on every continent on the planet including Antarctica. There's an Australian Doctor down in Antarctica who took his TK (Stormtrooper) down there. There were photos of him in the newspaper of him in his TK, out on the ice, in his TK. He should have been a Snowie (Snowtrooper) it would have been perfect. The Nordic garrison recently did a trek out to Finsk where they shot Empire Strikes Back and they got photos of a whole heap of Snowies chasing after an X Wing pilot and you can see Wow!

that's Hoth! because you can see the mountains in the background. It's a long way though because there's nothing there.

E - Do you have any kind of regular club meetings?

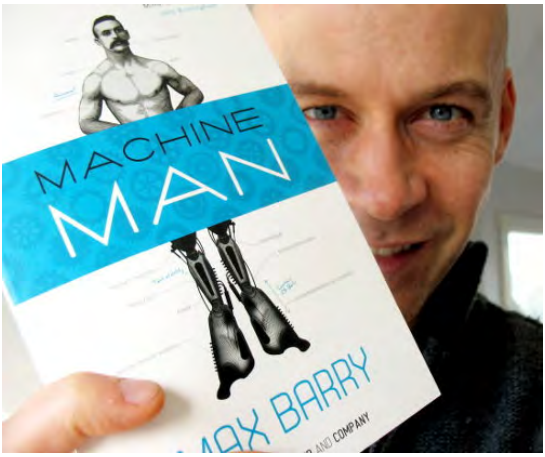
B - It's not an organised club with regular meetings. We have more social events particularly in Victoria. An armour party is actually a BBQ where you work on your armour. Previous to my joining, I was told there wasn't much done at an armour party, then Cen and Wendy came over from New Zealand and they really cracked the whip. Now we actually have a history of getting stuff done at an armour party. A lot of us are also into the roller derby. Lot of fun.

I love people getting involved. That's what people saw at Science Works and that's why our numbers just ballooned, because they saw us at Science Works and the costumes. Then they talked to us and found out what we're doing.

Thank you for talking with Dark Matter.

At the end of the day, the 501st pack up & head home

FAQ about the writing of Machine Man, by Max Barry



A real-time what now?

Serial. It comes in lots of little parts. I called it “real-time” because people read it (and commented!) as I wrote it. I didn’t pull an old manuscript out of the drawer and chop it up: I wrote this story on the fly, for the medium. Each day, I read comments from readers about the previous day’s page and used their feedback to guide what I wrote next.

One page per day?

Right. Well, actually, one page per weekday (Monday to Friday). Because I need a break, man. Give me that.

How long is each page?

They vary. Which turned out to be a great way to control pacing, by the way. There are longish pages of 800 words and pages that are a single sentence. Most are around 300 words. That’s what I think is an ideal length for fiction-by-internet: long enough to execute a scene, short enough to consume without interrupting your day.

Reading one page per day sounds weird.

It is. It’s almost more like checking your favorite website each day rather than sinking into a novel. But it’s a little addictive, too. A lot of people seem to enjoy that part of their day when a new Machine Man

page dings into their inbox.

How long is it?

One hundred eighty-five pages. Which is 37 weeks, if you stick to the one-page-per-day regimen. Less if you cheat and read ahead online.

What's it about?

A man loses a leg in an industrial accident and decides to build a better one. Because that's the kind of guy he is. He gradually gadgetifies himself, which attracts the attention of his employer, the Better Future corporation.

Is it finished now?

I posted the first page on March 18, 2009, and the final page on December 1. But you can still sign up for one page per day via email or feed reader, starting from page 1. You just aren't reading the pages the same day I posted them.

Why did you do this?

Partly because some of my readers were frustrated with the delay between novels. And by "frustrated," I mean, "accusing me of sitting around doing nothing all day." (See my blog about it.) An alarming aspect of being an author is that you spend a couple of years on a book, then someone reads it in five hours and asks when your next one will be out. I figured a drip-feed story would keep them off my back for a while. I was also interested in using the internet to successfully deliver fiction. I don't think the web is a great medium for novels, because novels are supposed to be immersive: you need to sit down and disappear into them. On the net, you can't give your attention to any one thing for more than eight seconds before feeling the urge to check your email. Don't say that's just me. It's how the internet trains us. I think there are a lot of gimmicky attempts to mash fiction and the web together, regardless of how well they fit. They are promotions for a print novel, essentially, rather than genuine attempts to engage the medium and work to its strengths and weaknesses. I wanted to write something that fit.

Thanks to Scribe Publications for permission to reprint this article.

J. Michael Straczynski says...

I don't have to tell you who Harlan Ellison is, or that he wrote some of the most seminal episodes of science fiction television in the history of the form. His scripts for *The Outer Limits, Star Trek, Twilight Zone* and others have won countless awards and are considered landmarks of the genre.

A while back, I got wind of a top-secret project being developed by Publishing 180, the company that publishes the Babylon 5 script books, involving Harlan's scripts for these series. (Important note: I do not own any part of P180 nor do I receive any financial remuneration of any kind from this project. My involvement here is strictly as a fan and admirer.) I now hold in my hand a preliminary copy of that book, and I wanted to give everyone a heads-up because folks, this is a doozy.

The book, entitled *Brain Movies*, contains Harlan's scripts for "Soldier," and "Demon With a Glass Hand" from *The Outer Limits*, "Paladin of the Lost Hour" and "Crazy as a Soup Sandwich" from the *Twilight Zone*, "Memo from Purgatory" from *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, "The Face of Helen Bournouw" and Harlan's near-legendary manifesto on how to write good science fiction, written exclusively for incoming writers on *Babylon 5*. (The scripts for Paladin and Demon received the prestigious Writers Guild Award.)

In many cases, the book contains both the script and the treatment for the script, something almost never seen outside the studio. Most amazing of all, the book contains not just the shooting script for Harlan's *Hitchcock* episode, it contains an earlier draft filled with his handwritten annotations and changes.

When an episode is broadcast, you don't get to see the writer's mind at work, don't have the opportunity to experience the moment he decided to make a line of dialogue or a scene go thisway instead of thatway, how a turn of phrase was altered in just the right way at the last moment, you see only the end product. By including the draft with the handwritten annotations, you can see the creative process being enacted right before your eyes. The opportunity to see inside the writer's mind is unspeakably rare.

Best of all, these are not re-typeset versions of the script, they are

painstakingly scanned reproductions of the ORIGINAL SCRIPTS, exactly as they were written.

And for the budding science fiction writers out there, what better than having Harlan Ellison break down in his manifesto how to write effectively in the genre, how to avoid various kinds of traps and make your writing better?

The value of this book to up-and-coming writers, academics, collectors, fans, and just plain folks who love science fiction television is inestimable. This isn't just a book of scripts, it's an important piece of history.

When I heard that Harlan was going to include the B5 manifesto (entitled "A Terrifying List of Things Not to Do When Writing For Babylon 5"), I offered to write an introduction to the volume, entitled "Touching Magic." That introduction is now also in the book.

Last, and maybe coolest of all, because of the presence of B5 material, they are doing a limited number of books that are ***dual autographed*** by both myself and Harlan. With only one prior exception, this is the ***only*** time that Harlan and I have autographed something together, and never before for a published book. Once those signed editions are gone...they're gone.

Because Publishing 180 is a boutique publisher, they do not generally release information on its upcoming titles until right before publication. But this volume is so important, so extraordinary, that I asked if I could give the B5 fans out there, and the fans of Harlan Ellison who are also in that group, a heads-up on this event. This way we reduce the risk of missing the chance to get one of the double-signed editions.

The book will go on sale in a couple of weeks – I think it's somewhere around the 20th and those already on the B5 mailing list will get the announcement automatically – but I'll be sure to post the info here the second it goes online. If you want to be sure not to miss it, a signup page will be up soon at www.harlanbooks.com.

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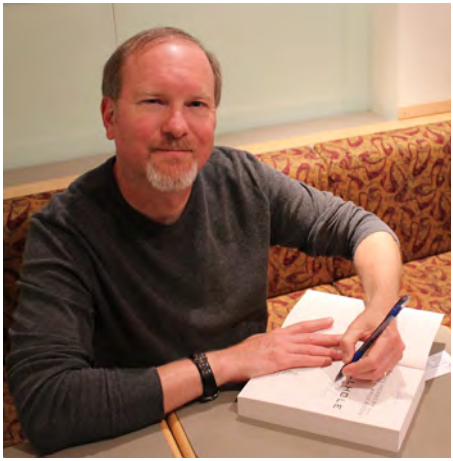
Interviews

Kevin J. Anderson talks to Dark Matter



On 21 June 2011, the day of the winter solstice, Kevin J. Anderson brought some winter cheer to Dymocks in Melbourne. A small group braved the wet, cold weather and clouds of volcanic ash to hear Kevin speak and have their books signed. Below is a transcript of a recorded interview, slightly edited, which overlaps somewhat with Kevin's author's talk.

The new book we have out is called Hellhole, the first book in a trilogy that I've written with Brian Herbert, with who I've written a dozen Dune novels. After doing a dozen Dune novels we decided we had practiced well enough. We were working in Frank Herbert's universe but we proved that we could write books together and we enjoyed writing together. We enjoyed exchanging ideas and everything. So we decided to come up with our own science fiction universe. Just to step you through how we developed the idea, this is going to be 3 books and six or seven hundred pages long, it's going to be a big story. I'd been reading about the crustaceous impact. The impact that struck Earth that made the dinosaurs extinct, but not just the dinosaurs, something like 95% of the species on Earth were wiped out with that one impact. Imagine if that happened on another planet somewhere, it would be interesting to be able to look at that planet five centuries later. It would be still reeling but most of the worst part of it would be over. It would not actually be spring time, but it would be a place you could actually try to settle again. We postulated a galactic empire where the humans are spreading out to new planets and that a new batch of planets have just opened up for colonisation including this one, called Hellhole because it's not a very pleasant place. Hellhole is the last place on anybody's list of where they would

want to go. It's not like going to some beautiful place to have an idyllic existence, only the hardiest of pioneers would go there.

Who would go to a place like this? Why would you choose this awful place? Well obviously only the people who have no place else to go, and that means the outlaws, the people on the run, they're misfits, they're exiles, they're criminals. It's a lot like what Botany Bay in Australia was like, it's a lot like what the American West was like. The people who expanded and went into Deadwood, South Dakota, Utah and Tombstone, Arizona, those places, those weren't the ones who had the comfortable life back in Boston or Chicago, those were the ones who had nothing left to lose, which makes for a whole cast of interesting characters. In Hellhole we developed a bunch of conmen, exiles and convicts. The main character is a rebel general who almost overthrew the existing government but failed, so he was captured and exiled to live his life. So General Adolphus has failed in his rebellion and been exiled to this planet Hellhole and one of his phrases that he likes to say, his last words that he gave as he was convicted, was 'It is better to rule on Hellhole than to serve on Sonjeera.' (the capital).

On the planet he has been able to keep his people alive because of his resourcefulness, his leadership abilities and because of his sheer bravery. He's managed to get the power running, the water going, industries going, everything to keep the colony alive and make them self-sufficient. Because this is a science fiction story, not just a human drama of pioneers in a rigorous environment fighting against a corrupt government, we also have to have a science fiction element. They find alien artefacts and the remnants of the previous civilisation that lived on this planet that were all wiped out with the asteroid impact.

Once they start discovering these interesting artefacts, then the old government decides maybe they want this Hellhole planet back after all. The people who live there don't exactly want to go away. So there is this immensely convoluted story with lots of characters and because it's a trilogy the story builds. Everything I just described is in book one setting up the situation. In book two things get much worse, there's another war for independence, there's more alien technology appearing, then book 3 things are even bigger and maybe the preconceptions the reader had are not quite correct and we change a few things. It's a big story, we plotted it right from the

very beginning. It's a really ambitious thing we're going to be writing in between *Dune* books. We'll be alternating *Dune* books now since Brian Herbert and I have written 12 *Dune* novels. The next one is called *Sisterhood of Dune*, which comes out in February. *Sisterhood* is all about the formation of the Bene Gesserit sisterhood, the spacing guild, the navigators, the mentats, all these classic and important great schools in the *Dune* universe. We've got that book, which is the start of a trilogy, then *Hellhole* which will be a trilogy, and we'll be taking turns every year with those books.

How did you start working with Brian Herbert on *Dune*?

Frank Herbert wrote six *Dune* books when he was alive. His last book, called *Chapterhouse: Dune*, builds up a big climactic battle against a bunch of the main power groups. Then it ends on a cliff hanger and after that Frank Herbert died without finishing the story. As a *Dune* fan myself, as somebody who loved reading all of the books, not just the *Dune* books but all of Frank Herbert's books, I contacted Brian Herbert to ask if he was going to finish writing this story. We talked and we hit it off right away. We realised we were very inspired just to brainstorm with each other. We decided to write the next *Dune* books together. We didn't have an outline because Frank Herbert supposedly didn't write with outlines, but as we started working and digging into the files and looking at the original books that Frank wrote, there were a series of serendipitous events that eventually got us the last outline that Frank had written plus thousands of pages of his notes and that was all the ingredients we could possibly need for doing our own Dune stuff.

Please tell me about the *Terra Incognita* series and how that relates to Australia.

The last time I was in Australia was about 4 years ago, doing a book tour for my *Seven Suns* series and some *Dune* books. I was writing this big epic story about sailing ships and sea monsters and brave explorers who would be going out to the edge of the world. The places on the map that were marked 'Here be monsters' or 'Here be dragons' because nobody had discovered it yet. I developed a big fantasy story about a religious war between to continents, very much like Christian Europe and Muslim Arabia back in the middle ages. The sailors in my stories, these captains from each side of the conflict, were looking

for these legendary lost continents that are basically where Australia is on the map. When we were here before I spent a lot of time down on the shipwreck coast not far from Melbourne. We were off in Perth and Fremantle and went into the shipwreck museum. A lot of the details we discovered there found their way into the plotting of *Terra Incognita*. I was also so enamoured of Sydney Harbour, I modelled my entire capital city of Calay on Sydney Harbour. I almost traced it on a map and put it as a fantasy map in my books. There's a lot of historical background of Australia in my books, both in *Hellhole* book and the *Terra Incognita* books. The third *Terra Incognita* book was just published, called the *Key to Creation*. The other two are *The Edge of the World* and *The Map of All Things*. That's a big trilogy that's all done. I have other things I'm working on too.

I've read some of your older *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* books. You've worked in so many different universes. What are some of the pros and cons of writing in someone else's sandbox?

The pros are, first off, I'm a fan. I grew up as a fan, so just the idea of writing in *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* or *X Files* is enough to make my skin tingle and get all excited about working on stuff like that. There's an excitement just as a fan to be working there. The drawbacks are that I don't own it, it's someone else's toys that I'm borrowing. A lot of the time the work I want to do has to be approved by groups of people that have to make decisions not necessarily for the creative reasons but because something has to match a new toy release that they're doing, or other reasons that it wouldn't necessarily be my choice to do that in the story. I've never been one to believe that there's only one way to write a sentence or only one way to tell a story so if I come up with a conflict where I can't do the plot the way I originally envisioned it, then we just do it a different way. I come up with something else. I love being the guy with my name on 50 different *Star Wars* covers or all the *X Files* books I've written and all the comics, working with *Batman* and *Superman*, working with *Star Trek* and it's just very exciting for me to do that. It's also very exciting to create my own world. *The Saga of Seven Suns* is my biggest series so far. Creating all that from scratch was a wonderful exercise, a difficult exercise, because you have to create everything. The history, the planets, the ships, the cultures, everything. Whereas in *Star Wars* it's all made for you. You can still create parts of it, but

you're operating within parameters that are already laid down. It's different to exploring brand new territory where nobody has hacked through the underbrush and made the trails for you. But I do both of them and I enjoy both of them and I continue to.

Would you like to share a bit about *Seven Suns*? I'm inspired to read that and the *Terra Incognita* series.

Good. That was the point of doing the talk. *The Saga of Seven Suns* is a seven volume science fiction epic. I planned it as 7 volumes. They're all big, enormous books. They're all out now so you can read the whole series from start to finish and it really is a start to finish, I'm not going to keep writing more books that drag the story on. It's about a giant galactic war among several races including the humans. Of course the humans, being humans, have a lot of factions and they're all at war with each other as well. It's my love letter to science fiction. Everything I've loved about science fiction I've thrown into this project. It's got giant star ships and space battles, ancient abandoned alien cities, powerful alien empires, killer robots, alien creatures, space battles, interesting environments and giant cosmic ideas that could bring about the end of the universe if it's not done right. I just put it all in there. It's got a cast of characters in the hundreds I'm sure. Each book was mapped out so I know where book 2 ends, book 3 ends, book 4 ends. It tells a giant *War and Peace* but on a galactic scale.

You've worked on a number of collaborations with a few different authors, what are some of the ways collaborations work?

Most of my collaborations have been done in the same way. It's a true collaboration process. I'll meet with the collaborator whether it's Brian Herbert or my wife Rebecca Moesta, or a previous collaborator was Doug Beason. I did a lot of books with him. We'd brainstorm the book, we'd talk it out, we'd map out the chapters, the whole thing. We'd divide up the chapters so each writer takes half of the work. By the time we started the writing we both had the same book in our heads because we'd talked about it so much. We knew who the characters were, we knew what the scenes were, we knew what led up to the conflict that was going on, then we'd go off and write up our separate chapters. Then we'd exchange chapters and edit them, putting it all together. It really wasn't a one person lending his name and the other person doing all the work. It really was a collaborative

process. You have to be friends before you can collaborate because there's to be a lot of discussion, a lot of give and take and negotiating that goes on. We've gotten through all of them and we really enjoy it. My wife and I have written 37 books together and we've been married 20 years so that has managed to work out just fine.

Did the relationship come first or did the collaboration come first?

The relationship came first. I had published a few books of my own before I met Rebecca. She became my reader and editor. She'd go over all the manuscripts and tell me what's wrong with them and she would fix things and proof read them. We started working on a few stories together, then some books together, and it has continued.

That's wonderful. As an author, how do you feel about having an IMDB rating as an actor?

I can't believe anybody knows about that. I've been in a few little fan films and I have no aspirations of being an actor. I don't want to make cameos in movies that I'm doing. I like to do different things and experience different things. I find it more impressive that I've written and produced two rock CDs. Being a record producer means more to me than the IMDB stuff. The two rock CDs are cross over albums based on my *Terra Incognita* books. There's a rock CD that expands part of book one, and a rock CD that expands part of book two. We're just starting to work on the third CD. They're performed by some of my favourite musicians. We've got Steve Walsh from *Kansas*, the guy who sang *Carry on Wayward Son* and *Dust in the Wind*, he's one of our vocalists. The lead singer from *Asia*, the lead singer from *Saga*, the lead singer from *Dreamtheatre*. All these people are performers I listen to, they're my favourite guys, and they're performing on this CD. I'm pretty excited by that. The band is called *Roswell 6*. You can find it on Amazon I'm sure.

I will now. It seems that every website that has information on you, talks about your Guinness Book of World Record.

Because there's nothing else! [laughter]

Why did you do it?

The publisher wanted to do a big promotion on a book I had out. They brought in lots of people, closed off some streets, they had a

band playing and gave away free banana splits. I signed a couple of thousand books in one evening. And I have a Guinness World Record certificate on my wall. And by now my wrist seems to be healed, even though it's been about 10 years from that.

I was going to ask about the RSI. You said last night that you've achieved all your ambitions, is there anything else?

I haven't achieved all my ambitions. I was asked what universe I would pick to work in. My answer was that I'm working in it now, I am doing the stuff that I really really want most to be doing. I enjoy my career, I enjoy my life, I'm telling the stories that I want to tell. I get to play with all the best toys. *Batman* and *Superman* and *Star Wars* and *X Files* and my own stuff. *Dune* of course is my favourite science fiction book and now I get to be working on new *Dune* books. I'm very satisfied and very happy. But I'm not complacent. Each book has to be better than the last one, and I have to try to find a way that I'm not just retooling the same thing all the time, that it's genuinely the best that I can possibly do, and then I figure out how to do it even better the next time.

Are you trying to set the Guinness Book of Records for the most number of books?

Well that's not going to happen. I'm a little bit over a hundred books right now I think. Isaac Asimov had three or four hundred I think. That's not something I'm even trying to do. I'm just writing the books I want to write and hope to pay the bills with them.

You mentioned that last weekend you were at Sydney Supanova and yet you managed to write 3 chapters. How?

I had a morning off. I write with a digital recorder. I was in Sydney and our hotel was not too far from the Botanical Gardens and Hyde Park, which are just beautiful places to walk around. I went out for half a day with my notes and my recorder and talked to myself and I destroyed a planet and I considered it a good day's work.

Joe Abercrombie mentioned he has been playing Red Dead Redemption as research for his next novel. Do you have any unusual sources of research?

Well I do. I live in the mountains of Colorado back in the States and I do a lot of hiking when I'm out in the mountains. A lot of that is

'research' (with the quotes around it) because I'm out in spectacular landscapes and I find that inspirational. I do all kinds of different things that could be writing related. Like I said before, that trip to Australia was hugely influential on my research for the *Terra Incognita* books. I knew it was going to be, but I don't think I realised just how much I was going to learn and be influenced by the stuff I experienced and saw. Just last October we were the guests of a sheik in the United Arab Emirates, who had read one of the *Terra Incognita* books and had invited us over to be his guest authors at a book fair. Experiencing that culture from the inside was mind blowing, it was like encountering an alien civilisation, it was just so different from what we're used to. We've been invited to go to Abu Dhabi this coming fall, which will be another amazing experience. Everything that we see and do and participate in all adds to the ingredients of what I can draw on from my imagination, and it all finds its way back into the alien cultures I write about.

What are you most proud of achieving?

There are so many things. I'm very happy to have reawakened interest in Frank Herbert's work because he was my favourite author. I feel like I'm paying back for some of the things that I got out of his stuff. I'm thrilled to have been one of the first people writing *Star Wars* books. So many *Star Wars* fans say they never liked to read until they read these books, and that makes me very proud. I'm writing original things that answer fan questions that have not been answered. I did *The Last Days of Krypton*, which is the whole back story of how Superman's planet was destroyed. That's not ever really been described before, so I put all that together. I'm just trying to do the best stories that I can and I'm entertaining myself and the fans seem to be entertained at the same time. What could be better than that?

That's fantastic. Is there anything you'd like to say to either aspiring writers or fans in general?

Something I'd like to point out is – well, this could be a much longer conversation. Because of the ebook revolution, where authors are able to put up their own ebooks, they're able to put up books that might have lost their audience and gone out of print. I have a lot of my older books that have gone out of print but I'm making them

available again. The same with short stories that I've written that were published in magazines, but have never been reprinted again. A lot of Frank Herbert's books have just vanished. Now we're bringing them all back. It's www.wordfire.com, where all of our ebooks are published. They're available in kindle and nook and all the basic formats. I'm just very pleased with that way of going about it. It's more of a direct contact from the author to the reader, rather than all the middle men and all the other process that's involved with getting a book released and distributed. I can put up a brand new short story in the *Terra Incognita* universe, which I just did, I wrote it and put it up just before the book came out. There isn't that entire year or more delay through the production and manufacturing process. I can write a story and you can be reading it within a few days. That's a very exciting way to go. We'll see if I can make a living at it, because there's a whole different model there. I'm just enjoying the added dimension of freedom that it allows, and to bring back books that should be in print that have been forgotten.

What is on the horizon?

Hellhole Awakening is the second one and I'm almost finished writing my chapters in it, Brian's still working on his chapters. The third *Terra Incognita* book just came out, the *Sisterhood of Dune* comes out in February and I've got a new *Seven Suns* trilogy I'm working on. That's enough to keep me busy for right now.

Thank you very much.

Thank you, Nalini.

Knowing that Amazon in the USA usually doesn't sell books to Australia, I tested out Wordfire. I bought a book for my kindle surprisingly easily, at a cost of $4.99.

Tom Taylor and Colin Wilson talk to Dark Matter

Tom Taylor and Colin Wilson are known locally as 'The Star Wars comics guys' because Tom writes and Colin does artwork for the official Star Wars comic books. I met them on Free Comic Book Day thanks to Paul Bedford, who steered me in the right direction. Talking to Tom and Colin I learnt about their contribution to the Star Wars universe and that there is much more happening for Tom and Colin, beyond the Star Wars universe.

We started chatting prior to turning on the recording, which is why we start suddenly with DC's reboot.

C - One of the big American comic publishers, DC, made a major announcement last week that they're rebooting their superhero material, renumbering everything from number one.

T – They're rebooting their entire universe to number one. So Superman, which is almost up to 900 comics is going to be number one. His origins are probably going to change a bit, the looks are going to change

C – It's good news for the geek fans

T - it is. But the really big news is they are also going to have same day and date digital publication so we'll see what that does to retailers and whether that brings more people to comics. This is Batman, Wonderwoman and so on. Star Wars isn't on digital yet, there's an extra licensing process to go through.

C – Dark Horse announced a month ago they were going to go digital as well, but not simultaneous, same day digital publication. They're all progressing quite slowly and carefully. The DC announcement last week is going to be really significant and start the momentum going a bit faster I think.

N – Straczynski apparently knew the reboot was coming, which

may have factored into his decision to depart, because anything he did wouldn't have mattered in the long run anyway. What do you think of that?

T – I haven't heard that. It doesn't surprise me though, because it must be incredibly hard as a creator to be working towards something … he was doing both Wonderwoman and Superman and he was doing 12 issue stories on that, and to know that what you're trying to establish is then going to be revamped would be really hard. He had *Superman Earth 1* which was an original graphic novel that sold incredibly well, it's probably one of the biggest graphic novel sellers. I think it made number one on the New York Times bestsellers list, so I think he's just focusing on original graphic novels, which is great.

N - In his blog on Facebook he said he was supportive of it, and he thought the guy who was behind it could do it all well, but he left.

C – I think all the creative people have to be supportive of it because it's going to be done no matter what and I think a lot of cases, from a writer's point of view, I hope they don't immediately get locked into another lot of horrible continuity constraints. Continuity is very important to so many of the fans, but it can quickly become very restrictive. It's hard enough for us in Star Wars that we have to fit into the Star Wars continuity. In a lot of ways, for creators it's an interesting reboot of the situation, and hopefully this was discussed with the creative people before it was announced.

T –Yes, everyone had signed non-disclosure agreements.

C – Most people had been consulted and knew about it, but obviously there were exceptions. Some decided that they'd rather not. Brian Wood for one seems to be losing a lot of presence at DC with this reboot.

T – I have to say I do think it's a brilliant thing for readers. As someone who has worked at DC, I find it hard to pick up a trade paperback for something at DC because there's all this continuity, there's all these massive events and stories spinning off in every directions and you need to know who the seventh Robin is to understand what is going on in this story.

N – There aren't many entry points for the new reader

C – Superhero comics to the uninitiated are just impenetrable. It's one of the things I can't relate to at all because there's just a wall of them and you have no idea, you really have to know what has happened to be able to pick up an individual story and make any sense out of it.

T – but in this instance, they are effectively creating a jumping on point for an entire generation if they get it right and that's huge because our kids aren't going to be reading books in a way. I think they'll be reading books on iPad or on a little chip in their head. They have to compete with all the forms of entertainment out there. Colin said he lost power at home the other night and he had this great night sitting with candles and stuff playing battleships with his youngest on their iPhones. In a blackout, this is great, we'll get together, light candles and play battleships ***on our iphones***. This is the world now, and it's going to be more and more so.

C – I was sitting there yesterday with the lights flickering when that storm first started, with the wind and everything, and I thought – shall I turn everything off? I can't, because these days everything runs through the computer. It's fun when it happens because it's such a clean cut and you have no choice, but given a choice I'm hanging on there… The real significant news from DC last week was the same day digital. It really is going to change the way publishing is going. We've just got to go with it. It will be interesting to see how it changes the whole dynamic of the retail situation, both for the creative people and the retail people I think.

N – I'm a fan of the electronic medium because there is so much control over magnification, which makes it easy to read. But to make a comic easy to read it has to fit the screen, it needs flow, so that's going to impact on you guys isn't it?

T – It depends if we're working towards digital completely. Producing a conventional printed comic book you have certain parameters. If someone says we want you to create something for the iPad, that's a different beast.

C – And that's quite a new exciting thing. To involve yourself with the mechanics of electronic publishing and to do something specifically for that format is really interesting. I think our problem is that at the

moment most conventional publishers are still locked into the same old way they've done business before, so you're working towards the model of having a monthly floppy and a trade paperback the following year. That philosophy is going to be difficult to change. The mainstream publishers will need to be making a lot of money out of digital before the light will come on and they realise that this can open up a lot of possibilities. From their standpoint, the artistic possibilities are the least priority of the whole thing. They're big companies and they have a lot of money at stake. They have a huge investment in distribution of printed comics. Big corporations with lots of money don't re-adjust easily. Look at Murdock's online daily newspaper it's just been a joke for the last few years seeing what they've tried to do to get it established. They just don't get it at all. I'm amazed. They're still putting things behind paywalls. They just don't seem to understand the world is passing them by. Big companies just don't adjust very well.

N – The New York Times just started putting itself behind a paywall.

C – In some ways the horse has bolted, because when it was free it was fantastic, to be able to read all my news on an iPad I no longer read newspapers, I don't watch television news anymore, I get my news from a huge variety of "new" sources online. As soon as one goes behind a paywall, you just go elsewhere. It's a silly decision for online news. Magazines are doing it better. Producing an electronic version of a monthly magazine, for half the cover price of paper, same day digital publication. I'm there. I'm already reading all my magazines like that now. Magazines actually have got it. They're producing magazines that have a lot of "new" functionality, functionality that only happens on digital platforms. All those possibilities are now available. Big money doesn't tend to want to risk it until they can see a big profit.

T – DC decided to risk it. They split the entire company in half.

C – Last year.

T –Yes, last year. There is an entire digital division of DC based in Burbank outside of LA.

C – And significantly, several of their top people have come up through

the creative side of things. So they're being much more adventurous because of those guys.

N – I think it's important to have balance on a team. If you don't have creative people on your team, you're in trouble.

T – And everything looks like it's created by accountants.

C – Unfortunately the suits are always going to be in control, but it's nice to see that the creative people can be consulted

N - Have a voice

C - Yes, very much so.

T - You asked me about *The Deep*. And then we got side-tracked.

C – That happens when we get together, doesn't it?

N – You've had lots of interviews in the last week, so tell me about *The Deep*.

T –*The Deep* is an original graphic novel, hopefully the first of many, by myself and a guy called James Brouwer. It's coming out from Gestalt Publishing, on August 4 2011, worldwide through Diamond distribution and hopefully in bookstores. It's about a multicultural family of explorers who live in a submarine. When I say a multicultural family, it's an Asian mother, a black father and their two children. We decided at the outset that not every family needs to look like *The Incredibles*.

C – There's no explanation for that. They don't need to frame it.

T - We don't ever say where they're from, we don't mention a country of origin, we just say the sea covers the entire globe and so do the Nekton family and that's it. It has been slightly refreshing to be able to write that and not make a statement about it, just have it there. It's getting some fantastic quotes from nice celebs. We have Dileep Rao, who's the star of Avatar and Inception and has just read the first issue and said it's brilliant and you know… wonderful and witty and vibrant. We have some nice things being said and a lot of interest. We hope it will have a life outside of comics as well and just go on.

N – When you say a life outside of comics, what do you mean?

T – Either a TV series, a film or computer games, who knows? We had early interest at San Diego last year, people coming up and talking to us having seen one image on the internet. It's because of James Brouwer's work on the art. He is incredible, you see the characters and you absolutely fall in love with them. The first issue of *The Deep* is 88 pages, it's already available for pre-order over the internet. It's fantastic doing interviews about this instead of a licensed property. This is something I've created and I'm very, very excited about it.

C – It makes a difference doesn't it?

T – It really does. I've put so much into it. I didn't write one paid word last week, not one paid word, I just spent the entire week writing press stuff for this and I was more than happy to do so.

C – Are you aware of Gestalt Comics publishing? The Perth publisher we're both doing quite a bit of work with. Tom more than me.

T – They're probably the largest dedicated graphic novel publisher in Australia and they're getting bigger and distributing further. They're distributing into Europe and America now. Two weeks ago they won the Aurealis Award which is the biggest SF and Fantasy award in Australia, for their graphic novel Changing Ways by Justin Randall. It's an absolutely stunning book. It's not just their content that's really great, it's their production values that are incredible. They're pouring so much into this.

C – Choose really carefully what they produce and do it really well. And work each product, to expand themselves with the distribution. Tom and I started with Wolfgang Bulsma at Gestalt about 3 years ago

T –Yes that's when they first published *The Example*.

C – They did an anthology with some of Shaun Tan's work, some of our works, a lot of local talent

T – Christian Reed, Justin Randall and some really good creators…

C – About 3 years ago and have just started original material specifically under their letterhead, this is going to work really well.

T – *The Deep* in August is one of 4 trade paperbacks they have coming out that month.

C – Really?

T –You didn't know that?

C – No. When is the next Changing Ways coming out?

T – probably next year. So Randall's working away busily for them, and I'm working on 4 other projects that haven't been announced. It's exciting. I said from the outset that I want to do all my own creator work out of Australia rather than go through an American company. Yes I might get paid more and it might look bigger and it might get more PR or it might have a great big company behind it to push it, but if we can get quality out of Australia that we're getting with this, and really solidify this company, it'd be fantastic.

N – That'd be good. There's the whole brain drain thing.

C – It is still important to go overseas, establish contacts and talk to people directly, and then maybe bring some of it back to this part of the world. But this is not as essential as it used to be. When I first left New Zealand in 1980 I never even imagined I could earn a living drawing comics. I went to London on a holiday and I was planning to be there a month and it turned out I've been away from New Zealand ever since

T – Because of the internet we can be based here. You do need the human contact with editors and stuff, but you can work from home. If I hadn't gone to America I certainly wouldn't be working for DC.

N – So you've both gone overseas to establish your careers.

T –Yes. To a certain extent. But I wouldn't be able to write *The Deep* if I hadn't written for Star War*s* first. A publisher wouldn't have just gone 'yes of course I'm going to invest in you and ask you to write this book' because they wouldn't have had anything to go on. But because I wrote two graphic novellas for kids set in the *Star Wars* Universe… Everybody knows what Star Wars is. It's not this little underground thing that nobody's heard of, so that really does help. Does it help you?

C – That everyone knows Star Wars? Yes. It can be a bit constraining

sometimes as well, but it certainly opens doors! I was really lucky when I went to Europe because I got some opportunity to work on a really famous western comic series in France - *Blueberry* - that was originally created by one of my idols. Getting the opportunity to work on something like that opened a huge amount doors for me there, and one thing leads to another.

N – So how did all this start? In 1980 you were living in New Zealand.

C – I went to London.

N – What were your qualifications, what lead to you going to London?

Young Blueberry, art by Colin Wilson

C – I'd been involved in commercial art and freelance graphics. I was writing an art column for a friend's science fiction fanzine in New Zealand and I discovered this whole fandom. Pretty quickly I started publishing a comic fanzine of my own - Strips. Then I went off overseas on a holiday. Because I'd also drawn some illustrations for fanzines in the UK and they'd been published, people introduced me to other artists, and I eventually got dragged over to the editor of 2000AD, the weekly UK comic that features *Judge Dredd*. They shoved me in front of the editor and said 'you've got to get this guy to do something'. One job led to another and I started to realise that I could earn a living drawing comics, which wasn't possible, and still isn't, in New Zealand as far as I know. It went from being a holiday for a month or 2, to living 16 years in Europe. In New Zealand I had previously discovered French comics, and I had never wanted to go into American comics because I'm not a superhero fan, I wanted to go to France. I found that I arrived in France at a really good time. It was always one job after another, for 15 or 16 years.

N – Who was your hero you worked for?

C – He was already very famous under his own name - Jean Giraud - in France drawing a western series, *Blueberry*, that I was a huge fan before I went overseas. In English language comics he became very popular using a pseudonym - Moebius - which he used for his more

personal, experimental work. Before I arrived in Europe Giraud and Jean-Michel Charlier head created a parallel series to their hugely popular western series *Blueberry* , and it was this I was offered to work on. Are you aware of what European comic books look like?

N – Not really, I'm on a sharp learning curve in the area of comics.

C – That's understandable considering how difficult it is to find any European comics in this part of the world. Comics are a huge business in Europe, and are very different to comics in America. One of the fundamental differences is that in Europe they are author owned, author driven and the authors retain copyright. So the authors of a successful story can choose whoever they want to work on it, irrespective of who's publishing. That's a very fundamental advantage of European comics. They have a huge circulation; each year a book is published, it can have an enormous print run. With *Blueberry*, I did six for that series over a 10 year period. At the same time I was also working on various projects of my own, and so I was often alternating work from one series to another.

N – So you were living in Europe until 1996. What brought you back?

C – Complications I guess. There was no one reason, it was just time for a change. My wife and I had bought a house in Provence, started a family, we were living the life in a 300 year old pile of rock surrounded by vines, it was fantastic. But at the same time, everything was becoming progressively more complicated because *Blueberry* was such a powerful publishing concern, there were a lot of big sharks in the pool . Although I was an author of the series I didn't own the character - because I hadn't created *Blueberry* - and so I was a small fish in a big pond of sharks and I didn't really enjoy it. It was getting too complicated. I didn't want to get involved in the business side of lawyering up. I preferred to have much more individual control over something. I was never going to get that with *Blueberry*, and never sought it out. So Janet and I decided we wanted a quieter life, and we moved to Melbourne.

N – Is it quieter?

C – Oh yeah. At that stage I was prepared to give up comics and work in a supermarket if I had to. From a family point of view we had friends here, it was a really nice change. In the 16 years we'd been in

Europe we'd lived in 4 different countries. For the first 6 years I, I was not allowed to work or live there officially. It was a huge job getting that sorted out. Coming back here is a much more enjoyable day to day life bringing up the family living in the suburbs of Melbourne.

T – He is still living here illegally though. But we don't mention that.

N – Well, he's a Kiwi.

T – That's right.

C – I'm actually Australian now, I've done my little bit. About 6 or 8 years ago we did the ceremony. There's much less stress. My life in Europe was one crisis after another. We were always skating on thin ice with no resources, no family, no backing at all, none of that safety net, it was always a real problem. It was a really stressful way to work. Very rewarding, but after 16 years I needed a bit of a break from it. It just happily coincided with the start of the internet, and I discovered after a year or two of working in Australia and delivering work via the internet, that I could now live here and work for anywhere in the world. So I was back into comics in a bigger way.

N – And you have the name.

C – Well I don't rely on anything like that.

T – He forgets he has a name.

C – No. You're only as good as your next job.

T – [leaning towards microphone] It's not true, it's noot truuuuueeee…

C – It's the way I've always treated it. But the internet changes everything. In my case it changes everything in the most positive way possible. We can still go to San Diego, see our editors at the conventions each year, but I can also stay in contact with people in France and carry on working there, or contact people at *2000AD* and get work there if they want it. All from Australia. You can do it all yourself here and send it away. It's great.

N – Do you go to ComiCon every year?

C – The last couple of years we've gone to San Diego. I'm not going this year, Tom's going. I've got too much work.

T – Come! Play! Come ON!

C – They are an advantage, just as much as they are an advantage here in Australia. It's a fantastic way of getting to know everyone else that's doing a similar thing here in Australia, or who wants to do a similar thing. Having Supanova and Armageddon here in Australia has been a great step up for the local people as well.

N – Before we get on to ComiCon, how did Tom get into this?

T – Do you want the real story or the fake one? The fake one's really good. It was 1949 and I was on an architectural dig – archaeological dig, sorry. An architectural dig is like when you build something in reverse. An archaeological dig in Egypt. This mummy shambled out, and stabbed in the brain with a copy of Ashen Comics Number 1. Then a month later, the crazy doctor removed it but left a piece in my brain. So I've been doomed to write comics ever since.

N – That's great. What about the other story?

T – The other story is that I was a play write. From the age of 9 I was a singer and sang in lots of school things. By 14 I was in musicals and already writing musicals. That led to me writing more theatre and more musicals. Then I became script co-ordinator of a large full stage musical with a 160 cast. I also wrote a lot of little plays for 10 minute theatre that have shown all around the world. I've had plays on about 4 continents, which sounds impressive but remember that they're only 10 minutes. My most famous play is called *The Example*, set on Flinders Street Station in Melbourne on platform 1. It's about an unattended briefcase. 2 people who are slightly conservative, very young and liberal come across this case. This case comes to represent terrorism, fear and racism all in one little thing. It's been a really successful play. Colin Wilson here adapted it into a comic book, which was the start. For me, comics have always been my favourite storytelling medium of any kind, better than books, better than film, certainly better than theatre. Theatre was really a stepping stone to get into comics. I guess I was a semi-professional fiction writer already, then comics came along thanks to Colin.

N – The theme here is that everything you were writing was for a visual presentation.

T – Yes. Comics is about the most freeing storytelling in the world, because you can do anything. It doesn't cost any more in comics to blow up a planet than it does to have 5 people sitting in a room talking. It's incredibly freeing not to have to worry about budgets. I can't say 'and then the shark drops out of the sky and eats the guy and then the aliens come' for stage, because someone has to work that out. But for comics, I can do anything. Sometimes that's daunting, sometimes it's freeing.

C – Rather ironically, with *The Example*, the first thing we collaborated on, was 2 people in one location, dialogue for 10 minutes. From my point of view, I was already drawing Star Wars comics for the states, and I met Tom in this very café. Tom gave me 2 or 3 short stories to look through. That was the one that really sparked it off because they were talking about it. But I was really concerned about how you could make 2 characters, one location, dialogue for 10 minutes, an interesting comic.

N – What era was this? Pre or post 9/11?

C – 4 or 5 years ago.

T – I wrote it the week after the London bombing. It went on to win Short and Sweet, which is the largest short play festival in the world, it was on at the Arts Centre, went on at the Opera House and went on to Edinburgh. It's done very well, but it's probably done better as a comic. A number of websites have talked about it in really fantastic terms. It's on its second print run already, and for an Australian comic that's fantastic. It was the first thing we got to do together. And it was Colin bringing me into comics. Thanks, Colin!

N – So you guys have been working together for 4 years now

C – It's probably 4 years now.

T – Probably, yeah. Scary but yes.

N – You were working for Star Wars first. How did that happen?

C – I don't know directly but I have been told that the editor that we work for now on Star Wars was a fan of my work from the 80s. He saw some of my stuff in the UK while I was living and working in

France. He said he wanted me to be working for him one day. He contacted me when there was a major relaunch of the Star Wars comic line being planned in 2005 and he contacted me at the end of 2005 to see if I was free to participate in the relaunch, and I wasn't. I had a year's work doing another American series at the time and I was in Europe on holiday. I contacted him when I'd finished what I was committed to, and said if there was still space for me I could do some work for you now. He said 'yeah, sure' and got me started on some Star Wars projects, and that was maybe a year before Tom and I met.

T – When you were doing Rebellion?

C – Yeah.

T – A couple of fill in issues of Legacy. It all started when our editor Randy Stradley, saw a picture Colin had drawn of Jeff Darrow, another artist, riding a triceratops. He wanted Colin to work for him from that moment. He's told me this story twice.

N – So how did you join?

T – I'd always wanted to work in comics but I didn't think it was possible from Australia. It's kind of like telling people you want to be an astronaut. There was probably only one guy working professionally in comics in Australia. One writer that is, there are a number of artists, but only one writer. When I say professionally, I mean consistently professionally.

N – Paying the mortgage?

T – Probably. Yeah.

C – With difficulty probably.

T – Yeah, with difficulty. I posted on a comic book website, I said I'm a play-write and I've had a bit of success and I wanted someone to adapt my plays. I didn't give my name because I didn't want my name to show up on Google. I was a bit weird about it. I was just destroyed and taken down in this forum by people. Because I'd blundered in and probably seemed a bit high and mighty, and because I didn't give my name they just didn't believe me. While all of this was going on, Colin stepped in and said 'hey guys, leave him alone.' And 'do you want to

come and have a coffee?' So that is how it started. Because he's nice. And we met in this café. [singing] Mem-ries…

C – It turned out we both lived in the same area in Melbourne…

T – and lived 10 minutes apart.

C – I said to Tom at that time that I was busy on Star Wars at the moment, but let's get together and talk about comics because I'm prepared to bore the tears out of anyone prepared to sit around and talk about comics all day. I quickly discovered that Tom knew more about Star Wars than I did, although I was working on Star Wars. So he immediately became a great source of material for reference and fire questions at. You know, the difference between a Sith and a Jedi, who's going to win, those kind of details. At the same time we began adapting *The Example* as a side project for me, and it turned out to be really interesting, to the point where we convinced Dark Horse to take Tom on as a writer for Star Wars.

N – So how has it all developed for you since then? You guys are known locally as *the guys* who are working on *Star Wars*.

T – Yes. Colin is also known for a whole lot more than that.

N – That's not what I hear about though.

C – Star Wars is a big banner name, for sure. And effectively that's our month to month regular employment, but we need to not be completely subsumed by the Star Wars universe. We needs some side projects going along as well to take a breather every now and then, so Tom's been doing a lot of work with Gestalt. I've done some work for 2000AD and some French projects as well. On a month to month, year to year basis it's been Star Wars. Unfortunately I can't produce work quickly enough. From a public point of view it may appear to be a little sporadic; big gaps between story arcs, but it's because I can't produce the work fast enough for it to be a regular monthly comic. Luckily our editors have cut us some slack, and are prepared to wait until we have each story arc on Star Wars almost finished before they start publishing it.

N – So they're working with you.

T – They're doing a lot to accommodate Colin's schedule.

C – At the moment I'm half way through the fourth book of the next story arc, Tom finished writing it several months ago, and that won't

start publication until next month.

T – And the last series probably finished in November or December last year. So it's a good 6 or 7 month break between publications.

N – So your fans have been hanging out?

T – Little bit.

C – I hope so.

T – I've had a few emails saying [squeaky voice] 'Whennn?' And they're already talking about it, because little bits come online in previews and stuff, all the people at Force.net and the fans get on and say 'what's going to happen?' It's great. It's nice having people in far off lands talking about you.

N – Cool. ComiCon. What's that been like for you guys?

C – It's been fun.

N – Maybe you should tell me about your first ComiCon.

C – My first ComiCon was in the late 80s as a tourist basically. I was living in Europe at the time and just happened to be in San Diego at the right time, visiting friends. My first couple were like that. We've only taken it really seriously in the last 2 years. Two years ago we went to meet editors and get a good feel for the place. Last year we had a stand with Gestalt at the convention itself and this year Tom will be working with Gestalt whereas I haven't the time to go. It's a really big adventure and it's an unparalleled way to meet other professional people, both editors and authors, people involved in the industry. It's fairly spectacular. I'd been used to doing huge comic conventions in Europe. In France at the end of each book I'd produce, I'd do a lot of book signings in specialist comic book shops and chain stores. And each year in January there is the big French comic convention in Angouleme. I'd got used to doing these kinds of things, but the American way of doing things is a little bit different. ComiCon is now a huge media festival dominated by the movie industry that tends to preview all it's upcoming movie releases for the next 6 or 8 months. The good thing about the States these days is there's a comic convention nearly every weekend at a different place, so there's a real circuit of conventions. If you want to go to a specifically comic dominated convention you go to New York in October. If you

want a media extravaganza, you go to ComiCon in San Diego in July. And they're fun.

N – Have you done many panels and speeches so far?

C – No, because it's very hard to organise from this part of the world. In many cases they involve people who have been invited by the convention itself, while we've been fairly independent of that. Effectively we're there under the banner of our editors.

T – I did a panel last year because I was writing a book called *The Authority* for Wildstorm, which was a DC imprint. I did about 8 issues. I sat down, got asked questions by the audience. And we do the panels here in Australia.

C – Tom loves performing in front of an audience, while I get very nervous.

T – I was a professional juggler for a lot of years. I used to eat fire and juggle knives. After writing musicals and acting in comedy festival shows. So I'm ok in front of an audience.

C – A Renaissance man.

N – Tell me about your first ComiCon.

T – It was only 2 years ago.

N – So your first one was with Colin.

T – Yes, with Colin, so we got to hold hands all the way on the plane which was nice. It was huge because I don't think I'd been out of the country since I was 11 although I'd been interstate a lot. It was a really, really big adventure. A whole other country and go to this thing that was absolutely enormous. It's in a building a kilometre long, it's packed and it's double story, so it's packed on both levels. It's incredible. It's restricted to about 120,000 people. They're talking about trying to add on about an extra half mile onto it, and if they don't add that half mile, they're going to lose ComiCon.

C – It's sold out in February of every year... 5 months in advance.

T – It sold out in 3 hours when they put it online.

N – I heard, they even had two or 3 different ticket disasters and they still managed to sell out.

T – Yes. They sold out in 3 hours. Now that so much of it

is Hollywood, Warner Bros will book an entire hotel a year in advance. It's impossible to get accommodation.

C – All the major comic publishers do that as well. Their bookings roll over every year for that same weekend, year in and year out. The entire city is taken over by the comic convention for 5 days. It's just amazing. Size wise it's fantastic, but it's chaos.

T – I think my experience is a little bit different from Colin, because Colin is so much more established where for me the first year was meeting editors and signing with Dark Horse. You're walking an entire kilometre of space, you're exhausted, you don't sleep, you're in a different time zone, you're excited, you're adrenalised, you've slept 3 hours that night, you've been out late the night before, then you're walking a kilometre long and doing job interviews for 5 days. That's how it feels. It's equal parts terrifying and exciting.

C – The first time we went I went through the itinerary and program for hints about what to do and what not to do at ComiCon, but I went through the schedule and cut and pasted, printed out, a list of all the things I'd like to go to see while I was there. There were discussions, people I wanted to meet and everything. I didn't see one of them in the entire 5 days.

T - Not even one.

C – I didn't get to one event that I was planning on because you get so tied up with being busy and encountering people who you wanted to meet or who wanted to meet you and it was just exhausting. Of course these guys were going out socialising. We rented a house in San Diego, the 5 of us, and I'd take a whole pile of books back to sign and do drawings for people. I can't socialise at all, not like these guys.

T – He's lying by the way. I reckon he's done that taking books thing like twice.

C – Yeah.

T – Every other night he's socialising.

C – I always wake up at 6 o'clock in the morning.

T – I know. Actually I was better last year. My first year I didn't sleep at all.

C – Except on the plane coming home. I don't like going out again for a day or two, so if we're going to be there for 4 or 5 days you're better to be there earlier and come away afterwards so you've got a bit of recovery time. So I put a 10 or 12 days' gap in our schedule that you just have to devote entirely to going to San Diego. This year I just didn't want to make that commitment. I've got this schedule on the Star Wars story arc, and taking off 10 or 15 days in the middle of it would be counter-productive.

N – And your fans will thank you very much.

C – The Star Wars fans will certainly be happier, but I must admit I'm ahead of schedule at the moment.

T – Don't say that. You're admitting that!

C – The work I'm doing won't come out until December. It's going to be a shame not to catch up with all the friends we've made at SDCC over the last couple of years though, I'll miss that.

N – Do you think you'll go next year?

C – Yes. I'd like to do something really silly and take 2 or 3 months off, start in San Diego and drive across America on holiday. If America's still there next year, if it hasn't broken out in civil war. And finish up in New York because I really enjoy New York as well, I've only been there once. I'd really like to go to the New York Con because it's entirely comics.

T – I'd really like to go to the New York Con as well. And possibly Chicago.

C – Yes, we've got some friends in Chicago. It'd be interesting to catch up with them as well. They're a fantastic resource, to get to meet people who are like minded. We've met some really interesting friends.

T –Yes. Even the conventions here, Supanova and Armageddon, especially Supanova, you get a real family vibe by the end of it. We get really close to a lot of the guests and especially the organisers. This year there was a group called Kirby Krackle, a geek rock band of two people, one of whom does most of the performing. The other guy actually runs ComiCon, probably the third biggest comic convention in the world and a chain of comic stores. He's an incredibly lovely guy. It'd be nice to go

to Chicago and know that he'll look after us.

N – So you're planning to do some jetsetting.

T – I don't know. I have a young family and I get very homesick, so we'll see. If I did choose to do that I probably wouldn't do San Diego next year. This year I'm doing San Diego because Gestalt have asked me to. So I was probably going to go to New York this year, but Gestalt said we've got all of this coming up and we'd really like you to be there. I said sure.

N – And you want to promote *The Deep*.

T –Yes and some other stuff we'll be able to announce by then. And I've got a series called *Rombies*. It's a Roman zombies book, zombies in ancient Rome. That's through Gestalt, currently being serialised online at gestaltcomics.com. We did the zero issue that came out last year and now issue one that is currently being released a page at a time on Tuesdays and Thursdays every week. We just cracked 20,000 unique hits, which is just great. That will be printed probably in the next couple of weeks actually, Supanova for the first issue.

N – Who is doing the artwork for that?

T – A guy called Sky Ogden who is also the art director for Gestalt. He's based in Tokyo for now.

N – Tokyo?!

T –Yes. It's been a very disruptive year I must say. There have been a lot of things we thought we'd have out a lot sooner, but the earthquakes got in the way. Sky came back to Australia for a time but he's back there now. I think he's looking to move to Australia because he's just – he has a Japanese wife who's sort of blaze about it because she's lived with earthquakes all her life, but he's a bit shaken by it all. No pun intended.

C – Once upon a time when you used to have a major earthquake you used to go to the bottom of the line as far as scheduled earthquakes go, but it looks like Tokyo's still on top for the next big one. It's not a fun place to be for the future I don't think.

T – So hopefully he'll be here soon. So *Rombies* has been pushed and pushed and pushed as has something else we're working on.

N – When are you going to be able to tell us about these announcements?

T – I don't know. I can tell you I'm doing something for DC as long as you don't publish until after next week. I've done a 2 issue stand alone story in a book called *DCUO Legends*, which is the Brainiac Semester core war where basically 3 of the massive villains of DC are coming together, including the Green Lanterns and stuff, so I actually got to write Phil Jordan. Everyone in the world will know this guy's name very soon because the movie's coming out in three weeks. So that was huge, to write such a huge character in DC and play in the DC universe, characters I read growing up.

N – Have you already written it?

T – It's written, ready to go, it's coming out late in the year.

N – So if you've already written it, how come it hasn't been announced yet?

T – Because it's not coming out until October or November, and comics work on 3 months. So what we're hearing about now will be happening in September, so that's the big reboot and this isn't until after that.

C – Almost all professional comic people are involved with projects that they can't talk about, especially with American comics. You've got to allow the least details, leave it up to the publisher because they have to slot the details in with things going on with them. We're almost always working on projects we might have been involved in for a long time but we can't talk about.

T – Also creating things that won't hit the publishing ever. I wrote the first issue for Star Wars Invasion for the new series in November and it's not coming out until July. Colin will ask me something, he might not see the script for a month or two, depending on how long it takes to go through the process.

C – I had a script and a contract sitting on my desk at home for several months for a book coming out in France. It won't come out until 2013. I won't begin work on it until the middle of next year.

T – And he'll be asking the writer questions about it, like he asks me, and I won't remember, I wrote it so long ago.

N – And you've done half a dozen projects since then.

T – Exactly.

C – You've got to keep these balls juggling at the same time, which is really exciting.

T – Which, as an ex-professional juggler, is ok.

C – I can't. I'm getting too old for this.

T – So I've done this DC book. I'm doing a series called *Voice of the Dragon*. With an artist called Chris Scaps. We also did this other Star Wars thing, with Bobba Fett and Jabba Fett in *Blood Ties*. We've announced that; I haven't seen a single page of it yet, but we're working on that together so we decided to announce it. That's probably all I can talk about, but I'm working on lots and lots of things, which is good.

N – When you can announce the other stuff, I'd be interested in doing an update.

T – Certainly. Another thing Chris and I are working on is hopefully going to be ready for San Diego, but we'll see. He came off his bike a week and a half ago, was knocked unconscious and had concussion sickness for a week.

C – I saw a photograph of him, he didn't look too happy.

T – He didn't look well, did he? There was a big scare that maybe he hadn't been knocked unconscious, that maybe he'd blacked out before the crash but the neuro surgeons came back and said he'd been knocked unconscious.

C – With the marks on his head, you'd think he's been knocked unconscious. Push bike, not motor bike?

T – Yeah, push bike. He was riding at the time with his young son so it was a big scare for him too.

C – Showing his young son what not to do.

T – Yeah. It's weird. We were talking about the internet before. I have all these relationships that only exist on the internet.

C – Yeah. Where does Chris live?

T – Chris is in

C – Wisconsin or somewhere isn't it?

T – Yeah, somewhere on the East Coast.

C – Massachusetts or somewhere.

T – My editor at Gestalt, we chat every day via Skype. He called this morning, I was still in bed and we chatted about what PR we were doing, what he'd fixed up overnight. I have all these really strong relationships with people I never see. I've never met Chris Skape, and he and I talk probably 2 or 3 times a week via email. It's bizarre. That's why it's so fantastic having Colin living around the corner.

N – So you can actually have coffee together.

T – Yes!

C – I've been working on comics for 30 years, and this is the first collaboration I've really had, on Star Wars with Tom, where we've sat down and talked about comics together. We don't do it so much now, but when we first talked about what we wanted to do, we sat round every week over coffee and talked about things, where we should go and what kind of ideas we wanted in the story and what we didn't want in the story. It was a proper collaboration. Normally I work effectively as an artist for hire and I work with people I've never met, and in some cases in the old days I've never even talked to over the phone. I may have corresponded with. Of course these days, with the internet, you can be skyping people all over the world and getting to know them very well without ever actually meeting them face to face, which is very handy, it's a great resource.

T – Or you can have the opposite where I was working on *The Authority*, and I was going through an editor in the States, who was going through a translator in Argentina to the artist in Argentina. So you can have all these divides or you can have a close relationship. There is no standard way of doing comics.

N – How do you feel about these internet relationships?

T – Depending on who it is. Wolfgang, from Gestalt, is one of my best friends without a doubt. I don't know how much time we've actually spent in the same room together, but we worry about each other, we talk about our lives via skype, I'd probably talk to him more in a day than anyone else apart from

my family.

N – The office is in the ether.

T – Yes, it's the water cooler.

C – Writers are so gregarious. They're all extroverts. Most artists have got to be slogging away at home, grinding it out, looking at the same bit of wall space over a table. I'm in the process of pulling back a little from the internet side of things, because it can absorb so much of my time that I need to use to produce the artwork. So I'm finding now I need to spend as much time as possible at the drawing desk because it's really labour intensive. I use the computer more now for recreation, go and blow shit up, go and play Call of Duty for half an hour or something and clear out the brain cells before getting back to work.

N – What is it about *Call of Duty*? Just about everyone I've interviewed, from Joe Abercrombie to you guys, *Call of Duty*.

C – A couple of years ago it would have been GTA4, before that it would have been something else.

T – I don't play computer games I have a bad neck and I spend all day every day at my computer, probably far more than anyone I can think of with a full time job.

C – Writers are all terrified of RSI.

T – But *Call of Duty*, seriously, was fantastic. When Colin gave that to me, I was like this is brilliant.

C – Have you seen the new preview for *Modern Warfare 3*?

T – No

C – Take a look online. It just came out yesterday. It's amazing.

T – It's one of those games that even got through to me. It's just a very well done game. As will be *LA Noire* that's just come out, that a good mate of mine is a senior programmer for.

N – Yes, I've been hearing about *LA Noire* for the last 6 months.

C – That's the current game because it just came out 2 or 3 weeks ago.

T – It's a really great game, it's really well written. It's immersive. It's not a game you go from point A to point B in

N – It's gritty and it's supposed to have state of the art special

effects, like really good facial

T – Yeah, the facial expressions are what gets you over the line. You look at it and you've never seen that on a computer before.

C – It's also the most immersive game from a story point of view.

T – The writing is fantastic.

C – It's well plotted. In Call of Duty the plots don't matter because it's just sequential, you just shoot your way through the game and come out the other end. And then play online maybe, whereas with LA Noire they've suddenly rediscovered that you can use a good story. Well written dialogue.

T – Good dialogue too, so rare for computer games.

C – Really refreshing.

N – My son has wanted *LA Noire* for months.

C – How old is he?

N – 18.

C – That's alright then.

T – He's allowed to have it then. [laughter]

N – Is there anything you'd like to tell people who are interested in creating comics?

T – At the moment it is probably the best time to get into comics. It's never been easier than now because you can write something and get a friend to draw it, or even draw it in stick figures and publish it on the internet within a day. If it's good enough you will get a following. It's never been like this. It's not like it was years ago when you'd print something that you worked forever on, you'd print it out and photocopy it in black and white and hand it to people and hope that they'd actually open it up. We live in an age where you can tweet it within 15 minutes of having finished it.

C – it's also never been easier to meet kindred souls. You can find other people who are interested in the same topics. It's so much simpler than 20 years ago to find those people to share what you're doing with and get encouragement from. That's one of the good things about Melbourne because there's a great little comics community here

now, and everyone is supporting each other in their projects. Printing is still inexpensive so you can still go old school if you want to. The internet is pretty straight forward, everyone is starting to understand how that should work, so it really is a good time to just find out more. That's my major advice to anyone wanting to get into comics – learn as much as you can about the medium, and it's never been easier.

T – Printing is inexpensive but the audience is moving. We had a choice today to give our exclusive to papers, and we didn't want to give too many exclusive pages. So we're putting out 10 pages to one website and it's only an 88 page book. We had to choose between the New York Magazine and this website. We went to this because it will generate more interest. We'll be able to refer people to this at the click of a button. It's about the ease. If it's not available at the click of a button it's too hard. It's a really really good time.

N – How do you feel about being icons?

T – I'm not. Colin, how do you feel about being an icon?

C – I'm pleased I'm a 128 pixel by 128 pixel rather than 64 by 64 like I used to be.

T – That's true.

C – And colour now is nice.

T – My son thinks when daddy goes to work he goes to a convention. He's 5, and he's been to 2 conventions and he thinks that's what I do. He thinks I sit in a booth and people want photographs taken with me and ask me to sign autographs.

C – Pretty cool job.

T – It's a pretty cool job. But really this is something I'll do 5 or 6 times a year. The rest of the time I'm sitting just like Colin in a room by myself just working as hard as I can, working obscenely long hours, working until 4 in the morning if not later because it's nice and quiet then and everybody's asleep. So the glamorous side of it is a weird thing. It's a strange sort of fame.

C – Yeah. You can be working 6 or 8 months on a project that won't come out until the following year, by then you're already doing something else. You've got to be really passionate about it, because

there's a lot of other people out there wanting to do it as well. You've got to get to know the medium as much as possible and find out whether you are really serious about making the effort. It is very labour intensive. It sometimes can get a bit dispiriting, which is why it's good to meet other people and discuss things, talk things over at conventions. Otherwise you run the risk of slogging away at home and getting a little bit dispirited by it all. You shouldn't because it's such an easy, straightforward thing to do.

T – I was reading Shaun Tan in Melbourne magazine. He's just received one of the biggest literary prizes in the world and he's got $75,000

C - $750,000

T - $750,000, sorry, presented by the crown princess of Denmark. He's onstage and winning Oscars and he's just desperately wants to ignore it all and sit in his study and draw.

C – And do his next project.

T – And it's all a bit alien. It is fun, no doubt about it, but you can't just be doing that, especially in Australia. In America you can a bit more, because as Colin said earlier there's something on every single weekend, so a lot of comic book artists go convention to convention

C – for the real creative people making a living at it, that's the icing on the cake really, because the hard work's done in your studio producing the work. It is very time consuming.

N – How long does it take you to do a page?

C – It's impossible to say because it's all broken down so much. If I have to do one page possibly between 2 and 3 days. If I'm doing a cover maybe between 2 and 3 days. But it's all broken down into stages. I might have to do little sketches, send them away, get them approved, chosen, come back, do the pencils, get that approved online, and then do the inking. I could be working on 3 or 4 things at the same time.

N – So you draw at a drawing table and ink by hand?

C – Yes. Most still are. Some artists are now working with Waicom or Cintiq tablets and digitally inking a lot of the time but the bulk of the artists I know are still pencil and ink men producing art traditionally.

I've tried the digital side of it, and it'd be interesting to explore those possibilities one day, but at the moment nothing is easier than pencil and paper at a drawing table.

N – It takes time to learn something new and you're busy.

C – We have to deal with the computer side of it anyway, so I could get used to the equipment fairly quickly if I wanted to, but I don't see the need. For me I'd go digital to utilise the new possibilities that this would enable, at the moment I don't see the need to go that extra distance because I've got enough commitments at the moment to work traditionally anyway. With the technology that's available now, it opens up a whole lot of new things. If you're creative and can use digital publishing, either via print or direct to website publishing, all sorts of new things are possible. I haven't got the time to get to that level. I spend way too much time in front of the computer anyway, in Photoshop, scanning, retouching, corresponding with the editors and sending files away. If I didn't have to earn a living I'd be very interested in looking at the digital opportunities for comics now.

T – Fortunately Colin doesn't have to earn a living soon, because he's got a movie coming out with Sylvester Stallone.

N – Really?

T – Yes!

C – Maybe.

N – Tell me more.

T – There's no maybe about it. It starts shooting at the end of the month. He did a series called Flem de Tete – did I get it right?

C – No, *Du Plomb Dans La Tete*.

T – *Du Plomb Dans La Tete*, which means Bullet to the Head, which is being turned into a film with Sylvester Stallone.

C – It was a 3 book project I did with a French writer for a French publisher 6 or 8 years ago. It was optioned 2 years ago by Warner Bros. Because Hollywood takes a long time to move on these things, it looks like it might go into production in principle photography next month.

N – Is this going to be CGI?

C – No, live action. It was officially announced in February with the working title Headshot, starring Sylvester Stallone. It has a $55 million budget, it now has a page on IMDB with the name of Bullet In The Head. Since February it has been cast, and a director has been attached to the whole project. This is a director who made a couple of films I really enjoyed when I was first in London, his name is Walter Hill. He did a terrific western called *The Long Riders*, and many other films, including *48 Hours, The Warriors*. It might be quite an exciting film.

N – Cool. Now I know that it's based on something you've co-created.

T – That's been the issue for me. Colin hasn't whinged about it much but there's been a lot of press about this movie and Colin's hardly been mentioned although he's the co-creator. So get on the internet and spread rumours – not rumours, truths! – a Sylvester Stallone movie based on Colin's comic. Don't even mention Matz (the writer) [laughter]

C – He gets a mention on the IMDB site

T – And you don't! A travesty.

C – It's funny, I was just over the road talking to "my" guy in the local video shop. When I was doing the artwork for the series, I needed some reference material for a cop funeral in New York, so I went in and talked to the guys in the shop to find out what films I could look at to get some visual reference material for a sequence I was drawing at the time. They suggested I watch a film called *Copland* with Sylvester Stallone in it, and now we've come full circle 6 or 8 years later, it looks like it might be a done deal. It'll be interesting to see what happens.

T – But yeah. It's funny. Colin's working with Sylvester Stallone.

N – I would see that Sylvester Stallone is working with you.

T – That's a good point. Yeah.

N – On that note, thank you very much for your time.

For more info, go to www.gestaltcomics.com, www.facebook.com/dccomics & www.facebook.com/darkhorsecomics.

Simon Morden talks to Dark Matter

Simon Morden, author of *Equations of Life* (reviewed in issue three of *Dark Matter*) talks to *Dark Matter*.

How does a genuine rocket scientist end up writing science fiction?

It's a long story, though I'm guessing that I'm not that unusual. I started reading SF when I was nine or so, and pretty much exclusively SF and fantasy shortly after that. Having your head filled with spacemen, flying cars, jet packs and aliens, tends to subtly alter your life-choices: so I ended up as first a geologist, then a geophysicist with a special interest in meteorites. So that's one side of it. The other side came from being introduced to Dungeons and Dragons at an impressionable age – like a lot of folk, I began as a player and ended up DMing my own campaigns. All that world-building and character-creating meant that I was pretty much ready when the angels alighted on my shoulders and whispered "You want to be a writer. You want to be a writer."

Did you always have an inclination to write or was that fairly recent?

As you know, Bob, some writers emerge from the womb holding a pen and a sheaf of lined paper. Others… well, I guess we're kind of late developers. I'll tell you how it happened: I was writing up my PhD – seriously hard science – and I just started noodling this high fantasy plot, simply to throw the day job into sharp relief. And I finished both roughly at the same time. Fortunately, the thesis was better than the novel, which is busy turning into coal somewhere in a drawer.

So, that was me, aged 21. But I'd got the bug, and I was going to spend a lot of the next decade scribbling uselessly away in notebooks, and later, clattering on a keyboard. But it paid off. Eventually.

Has anyone particularly influenced you to take up writing? How?

This is where I get to point to those couple of thousand of science fiction and fantasy books on my shelves, representing the output of hundreds of authors written over the better part of a century, and say: it's their fault. They made me do it. Seriously. I've got stuff by Verne and Wells, Huxley and Orwell, Tolkien and Lewis, Clarke and Asimov

and Bradbury, Heinlein and Silverberg and Delany, Niven and May and Card, Russell and Smith and Lawhead, and now Baxter and Reynolds and Macleod. It's all good.

What writers and/or media have influenced your writing most?

Every time I get asked this, I end up changing my mind. Bradbury always goes to the top of the list of course – even though I don't write anything like him, I am inspired merely by the fact that Ray Bradbury exists. What I'm really interested in are story-tellers: people who can just sit you down and transport you to another place. Easy to say, difficult to do. I remember being hugely impressed by Julian May's Saga of the Exiles/Intervention/Galactic Milieu stories. She must have a mind like a steel trap. Neil Gaiman and Michael Marshall Smith can do it too.

But you said media, which allows me to get excited about stuff like Thunderbirds, Doctor Who, Star Wars (the original trilogy), Quatermass, and those fantastic fifties SF films: This Island Earth, When Worlds Collide, Forbidden Planet, The Day the Earth Stood Still. The Blob! With Steve McQueen! Anything using Ray Harryhausen's stop-motion models!

I'm going to have to lie down in a darkened room in a moment. B5, Star Trek, Farscape… and games! I haven't even mentioned Call of Cthulu and Gamma World!

Equations of Life hints that you are a genuine SF fan as well as writer. Please share your journey into SF geekdom.

The thing they say about greatness is true of geekiness. I was born geek: I never even fought against it by wearing suits and running off to become an accountant. I am, and always have been, one of us.

Do you read or watch much SF, fantasy and horror?

The question sort of implies that there are books and films out there that don't contain SF, fantasy or horror. If there are, I haven't seen them in a looooong time. I do make sure I keep up with the news, and developments in science and technology because in my line of work, that's important. I don't even get that much time to read these days, because I'm supposed to be writing. Books don't make themselves, you know.

You studied science and yet your career has gone in a different

direction. Did you follow the available work or did you choose to change direction?

My timing sucks. I've got the best job in the world – Post-doctoral research assistant – and my supervisor retires, I'm left being the only person in Europe doing what I do, and it's the middle of a recession. The money just dried up along with the post. You do what you do to make ends meet, and after a series of really unlikely jobs, I became full-time carer to my kids. The first five years weren't so good for writing, but once they'd both gone to school, I was able to devote more time to it while still being free to do all the dad stuff.

And in a strange turn of events, I'm back doing the science stuff, except I'm teaching 10-11 year olds how to build rockets and hovercraft and aeroplanes.

How much do you think your writing owes to your previous study of science?

It's not so much what I write as how I write – I've only ever used geology as the plot in one short story. Being a scientist makes me determined to try and get the science right, even the stuff I'm making up. How does that work? The real world and the made-up world theory has to mesh, and there has to be an actual basis for believing that it might be possible. And then I have to follow the science to its logical conclusion: if I can do that, then I should be able to do that, that and that. As you read through the Metrozone series, I hope I've done that. Please tell me if I've screwed up somewhere.

In this day and age many people find themselves redundant or having to change tracks, even put their dreams on hold, in order to earn money to pay the bills. Is there anything you'd like to say to them?

Dreams are funny things. Part of me thinks, I could have been a famous space scientist at a leading university, and I'd be called Professor Morden, and I'd be winning the arms race of letters-after-my-name with my older brother, who's not only just got a doctorate but is a reverend to boot…

On the other hand, you have to be a responsible member of society and pay your way. No one owes me, you, any of us, a living. That's a critical lesson to learn. However – the keys to success in artistic endeavours like writing, painting, music, movie making are talent,

luck and persistence: pick two. Also, the harder you practice, the luckier you become. No one said it was going to be easy, right?

What do you do to relax?

I read, obviously. It's an unalloyed pleasure for me, and it's a shame I don't get to do it as much as I used to. I'm also a bit of a fiend for the turn-based strategy computer games like Civilisation and the Total War series. You know, stuff that allows you to carve out an empire in the face of impossible odds and powerful enemies, leaving you the sole ruler of all you survey. And swimming. A series of unfortunate accidents has meant that I can't do high-impact weight-bearing exercise without bits dropping off me, but swimming and cycling I can do just fine.

How does this influence your writing?

In several, ill-defined and nebulous ways. Firstly, I want to write stories that I'd want to read. It's vaguely narcissistic, but I'm not sure that keeping one eye on the commercial aspects of your work as you're actually creating it is a good idea. Do it first, then see if anyone will buy it.

Secondly, the exercise means I don't keel over with a heart attack or have to reinforce my writing chair with extra bits of metal or bricks. Which is also important.

Thirdly, the computer gaming stuff lets me appreciate the importance of logistics and infrastructure, which are fundamentally uncool but entirely necessary to any culture or civilisation. For example, you can't just pitch up anywhere and have a war without having planned for it first. I'm pretty certain Sun Tzu said it more succinctly, but for a writer it's important to be reminded of all that off-stage stuff that happens just so your protagonist can get to where they need to go, and have them fed and dressed by the time they arrive.

How does your Metrozone series, and specifically Equations of Life, differ from your previous writing?

It's difficult to overestimate the effect that something as simple as point-of-view has on a story. In the past, I've tended to write a fairly loose third-person POV: in both *Heart* and *The Lost Art*, I used multiple POVs and the action is spread out over weeks and months. All three of the Metrozone series are written in a very tight third: the camera is

on Petrovitch's shoulder the whole time, and it's pointing only where he looks. He's in every single scene, and the one person he can't hide from is the reader. You go to sleep with him, and you wake up with him. You run and bleed and swear with him. And because the novel-time is only a matter of a few days – the same with every Metrozone book – it's an incredibly intense experience. If you read them right, you can actually do it in real-time! That's something you can't say about War and Peace…

What would you like to tell readers about the Metrozone series without giving away huge spoilers?

The London Metrozone was created as a defence against the Armageddonists – religiously-inspired nuclear-armed terrorists – by throwing up a wall of concrete, barbed wire and watch towers along the line of the London Orbital motorway. As the countryside emptied, the city filled up. England as a political entity vanished overnight. Ireland and Wales ended up almost entirely depopulated, and the rest of Europe became a disaster area. Refugees washed across borders like so much flotsam. Eventually, all the Armageddonists get caught, but the repercussions are terrible. So that's the Metrozone – the last city in England, twenty-five million traumatised people kept behind a barricade.

Then there's Sam Petrovitch, who's running in the opposite direction, east to west. He dragged himself up on the mean streets of post-Armageddon St Petersburg, and eventually he pitched up in the Metrozone. He's brilliant, friendless and cocky, and has rather a lot to hide.

Throw in the Yakuza, the Russian Mafiya, a corrupt police force, the Grand Unified Theory and the most ambitious computer project the planet's ever seen, and you just know it's all going to end badly.

Most writing gets put in a pigeon hole as SF, comedy, action, etcetera. If you had to choose which pigeon hole to put Equations of Life, what would the label be?

It is unashamedly science fiction. You could, if you wanted, call it a near-future thriller, but that's kind of missing the point. It's SF. It loves being SF. It's magnificently trope-heavy and stands on the shoulders of everything that's gone before. Even the cover is SF. Not that non-SF readers won't enjoy it – if you like the Clancy, Crichton, Ryan stuff

where things blow up and get shot at, it'll be right up your street – but there are extras for the SF fans.

You spoof so much SF, fantasy and horror in Equations of Life. How intentional and how hard was it to work all of these spoofs, some of them one-liners, into the story?

There are a great many pop culture references scattered throughout the Metrozone books – most of which, apart from the Monty Python ones, are SF related. And one day, I'm going to go back over the manuscripts and write them all down. The problem is, I use phrases like "nuke them from orbit", "you shall not pass", "there is no spoon", "use the force" and "I for one welcome our new … overlords" without even thinking of their provenance. I even pick up stuff from other people: I've never played Portal, but even I know that the cake is a lie.

So when Petrovitch uses them, it's only partly deliberate. Which means sometimes it's meant. One thing that does bug me about stories set in either the present or the near future is the often complete lack of a shared culture and history. It's as if one of the characters has a toothbrush moustache and no one says, "Dude, you look like Hitler." The Metrozone and everyone in it knows everything that happened up to my alternate-future break point of 2000. They have the internet and a wide variety of news providers. They go to the movies and they read books.

It means Metrozoners are a savvy lot. They're like us in lots of ways.

I particularly liked the reference to traditional, non-stair-climbing daleks. Did you intend to refer to any other SF with this comment?

No, daleks were exactly what I had in mind. When I was a kid, it was Jon Pertwee, followed by Tom Baker, and there were some absolutely terrifying monsters. Okay, the scenery wobbled, the sfx were rubbish and there were a lot of blokes in rubber suits – but I was a child. It didn't matter. You believed in it all. The cybermen never had the stair problem. The dinosaurs hung out in the underground. The spiders from Metabelis Three had eight legs, and could crawl along the ceiling. But the daleks were the scariest by far. Except they could be thwarted by running up a flight of stairs.

Now, the hovering dalek… fantastic.

In Equations of Life, Japan had sunk beneath the sea. This seems scarily prophetic at this point in time. How do you feel about that feature of Equations now?

Um. Yes. It's not like Japan hasn't had either big earthquakes or tsunami before. Tsunami is a Japanese word, after all. But the only reason Japan's there at all is because the Pacific plate is diving under the Asian plate, and the resultant volcanism produces a chain of islands. If, for some reason, the mechanics changed – it doesn't have to be the Big One that Tokyo is expecting – like a new plate boundary forming in the Japan Sea, or just a cessation of activity with a resultant cooling and sinking of the crust, then it could be curtains for the whole archipelago.

So that's the science. There are earthquakes all the time in Japan. It's a believable scenario, in the same way it would if I'd described California falling into the Pacific. Then just before the book came out, there was a massive quake off the north-east coast and it killed a still-unknown number of people.

Geological processes don't care about us, our hopes and fears, our families, our homes, or anything about us at all. Their occasional vagaries are the price we pay for living on a habitable planet. There's no particular reason for me to be embarrassed about that part of the book – over and above anything else: I trash the Irish Republic, the UK, most of Europe, Russia, and turn the US into a theocracy. All the same, I much prefer reading about it in a book I made up than watching it happen for real.

Equations of Life seems to belong on the big screen in a special effects blockbuster. Given the choice, who would you cast?

I'd give the principle roles to unknowns. They're supposed to be kids. Finding someone small and Slavic to play Petrovitch shouldn't be too much of a problem. Madeleine is two metres tall: there aren't many actresses like that. But then I had a thought, and you do get women basketball players who could fit the role. And they'd be athletic, too, rather than some wispy supermodel. Acting lessons are going to be easier than growing lessons.

It's a very international cast, too: the only major part for an English actor is that of Harry Chain. Otherwise we've got Chinese, Ukrainians,

Russians, Japanese, Nigerians and Americans. I'd be much happier if they were played by actors from those countries.

Though getting George Takei to play Oshicora would be all kinds of awesome…

On your website you talk about the roller coaster ride that is the aftermath of submitting your work for publication. What is the roller coaster currently doing?

It's … not horrible, but I ought to be handling it better. At the time of writing, *Equations of Life* is out, *Theories of Flight* is imminent, and *Degrees of Freedom* is due 1st June. It so happens that the US paperback of *The Lost Art* (different publisher) is out in June too. I could spend all my time worrying about how they're doing, and I probably spend too much time as it is fretting over it. There's very little I can do, really. I've written the books I wanted to write, my publishers were happy with them, and I've done all the edits and corrections. I make myself available for interviews such as this, and go to Cons for readings and signings. It doesn't stop me worrying, though.

What is within my control, of course, is what I write next. That's what's important.

Do you have any hints for first time authors in dealing with this part of the process?

Enjoy it? Seriously, you've done the hard work getting your book accepted by the publisher. You've done the rewrites and the editing, you've struggled with the back cover blurb, and now your book is on the shelves. You don't want it to sink without a trace in amongst all the other books that get published that month, so some good reviews on the internet and in print will come in handy. Anything that'll raise your book's profile – so an interesting blog post, a different angle for reporters to hang a story on, a book store signing, maybe even get interviewed on radio – it's all good.

It does take the author out of their comfort zone, though. I suppose that's what I'm getting used to!

I have heard complaints about how little genuine SF is currently being published, especially in Australia. Any thoughts?

It's a tricky one, this. I can't really comment on the Australian situation specifically (though I have been to WA, for five weeks some twenty

years ago. I'd love to visit again), but at some point science fiction got overtaken by fantasy as being the biggest genre seller worldwide. Then you have the phenomena of Potter and Twilight, who skew the figures so completely that my own publisher (Hachette) has to produce two sets of accounts, one with Stephanie Mayer, and one without.

I can't blame publishers for looking for more fantasy, and more specifically urban fantasy, because it sells by the bucket load. Anything with a goth-girl and a full moon on the cover has a ready-made audience, in the same way that anything with a massive spaceship did, back in the seventies and eighties.

These things are cyclical. Our turn will come again. And science fiction is almost mainstream these days – we all live in an SF world. But I still think that good SF books are still being written and published today – take a look at the Clarke shortlist for a year-by-year snapshot. Now, we can have a discussion about whether China Mieville writes SF, or whether Tim Power's Declare was eligible, but I like to think that SF is a broad church. The Metrozone series is old-school cyberpunk, but it contains a fat strand of both politics and religion along with the science. Still SF, though.

I understand that Orbit are launching a Australian-based imprint, that will hopefully not just publish overseas authors, but nurture homegrown talent too. My only advice is write stuff that's too good to turn down.

Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.

Visit Simon's website at www.simonmorden.com

Paul Bedford talks to Dark Matter

Paul Bedford, author of horror graphic novel *The List*, talks to Edward and Nalini. We met Paul at Supanova 2011, where he was selling *The List* with co-creator, artist Henry Pop.

P: Supanova was fantastic, mainly because we've finally finished the 3 volumes and, in doing so, completed the story. A lot of work in the Aussie scene doesn't get completed. They'll get one or 2 issues out but will usually fall short of completing the story. Those who bought all three volumes at once at Supanova 2011 said they've held back on buying the book because they thought it might not get finished, which is fair enough. But then there were those who bought just Volume 3 and were glad that we saw it through to the end. I'm so glad we did. It's a pretty good feeling, especially for the artist who did over 850 illustrations.

N: It's huge. I also noticed a few different styles as well. Most of the time it looked like pen and ink, some of the time it looked like pencil drawing, some of the time it looked like it was photoshopped with a layer over it.

P: Yeah, especially with the sepia stuff, with the flashback. Did you have a read of it? And you still came along to interview me, that's good. [laughter]

N: I must admit horror's not really my thing.

P: Mine neither. I'm not kidding. It's the first and only horror I've ever written.

N: So. Why?

P: I don't know, it came out of feeling really shit about life; I was having a tough time of it. I've never written horror before. I wrote these original scripts in 1999 when I was going through my anti-establishment *Fight Club* stage. Then I packed it away and moved house and didn't see the script for 5 years. I wasn't doing much

writing or anything, I was doing other things. I was unpacking and pulled it out and thought I should do something with this. And fuck I was angry when I wrote it! I was really angry!

N: So you were angry, what were you angry about?

P: Really personal stuff I've been through.

N: Shit happens.

P: Yeah, shit happens and you can either swallow it up or keep it inside and have a stroke. You've got to find some 'out' for it. Everyone's got their dark side, so what I did with mine was put it on paper. When I wrote the story it certainly didn't follow the Hero's Journey model or the typical story structure where you introduce the character, his wound, what he wants and slowly goes through the threshold guardians and finds the gold pot at the end of the rainbow. It was just a story I wrote straight out and didn't realise even what I wanted to do with it… but I knew I had to temper it so it was a readable story, not just rage on paper. That is when I started to introduce the religion side of it. When I say religion, it's the basis for it, it's obviously not religiously… I'm not religious, put it that way. It's a good basis for *The List*; religion is so buried in our psyche that even if you're not religious other people can relate to it, especially when you put a dark twist on religion. I'm pretty fascinated by that. That's when I introduced the angel to give it some sort of base, something to keep it going. Also with the Son's lofty tone that he uses throughout it, which is a nice quirky addition. The story doesn't really explain why he does talk like that but it just made sense to have it; it suited the tone of the story.

It's only a self-published thing and I've only had it released in Melbourne but I'm getting really good reviews and a really good fan base. I've had a lot of awesome reader feedback. These people don't have to write to me, but off their own bat they write.

N: With this fan base, is there a particular demographic or is it all ages, all sexes?

P: It's funny because when I sit at the conventions, firstly I think people expect me to wear black and be crying all the time with a story like *The List*. But when I go to conventions I'll see your Goths not even glance at it, but then you get surprised by those that do grab it: like a lady came up to buy 3 just straight off the bat and she was late 50s, early 60s. I stopped her and asked, 'Do you know about *The List*?'

because she just went bang, bang, bang, grabbed all 3 of them, gave me $50 and said 'Keep the change!' , and I asked her: 'Why did you just spontaneously buy it?' She said, 'I read your quotes, I like horror, so there you go.' So I get kids in their late teens reading it through to guys and girls from every walk of life. I think people like to tap into their dark side a little bit and *The List* is relentless in that respect. I really wanted to make it different from all the horror I'd seen. I didn't want the slasher; I didn't want the 5 kids on the camping trip killed by a serial killer blah blah blah

N: So you wanted to get out of the established norms.

P: Absolutely. And I really wanted to make it psychological. When you're writing something, when I'm really locked into the project and editing it and writing this panel and making sure the story flows ok and blah blah. Then I sit back and think 'What the fuck have I written? This is crazy! This is utterly nuts!' I'm not really a horror fan, I've never read horror. But when you can scare the crap out of yourself by writing your own story…

N: Maybe the fact that you haven't read horror helped you write an original story.

P: Yeah. Maybe also because I don't read comics, it might have kept me free of influence. I don't know if you've heard of a Melbourne creative called Bruce Mutard? He's an incredible man, he's been in the scene about 20 years and he's had graphic novels produced both by himself and the more main stream publishers like Allen and Unwin, they picked up 'The Sacrifice'. He's like the Elder Statesman. He said maybe the reason I outsell everyone at conventions is because I'm not offering superheroes, I'm not offering manga, it's something out of the ordinary. It's such a compliment to have people come along and buy something like that. Especially when the demographic for Supanova is – well, I instantly wipe out ¾ of them because it's 15+. I'll be like, 'No, sorry, you can't have it. No, sorry, walk away…' But I sold well over a hundred books at Supanova and the best I heard some of the other creators did was 20 or 25. I don't know what it is, maybe it's because it's a genre that isn't very common in Aussie comics, being horror. There are a couple of good anthologies around like Kagamono, they're really dark horror, I've got a story in one of those. But there's not much else in the horror genre.

N: So what other stuff have you written?

P: I've written a 700 page fantasy graphic novel… because everyone writes a fantasy graphic novel! It's just getting too large, it's a monster – at 700 pages I'm maybe ¾ of the way through it. So I've just turned around and adapted it into a screen play because it's just a monster. No publisher is going to take on a 1000 page fantasy. It's a massive work and it'd be 15 years coming out, like Cerebus or ElfQuest.

N: Sandman?

P: Yes, like Sandman. So I've written that fantasy. Also, I brought out a board game for Mattel in 1996. That was good fun. I think that gave me the creative bug because I produced something that a company bought and suddenly it was in the shelves across Australia.

N: That would have been exciting.

P: Yes, amazing!

N: What was it called?

P: *Roadwarrior*. It's like a Mad Max based board game. It was good fun, seeing this big company take on this game, produce it, bring it out and give me money for it.

N: How did that happen?

P: A mate and I came up with the idea. He had the original idea, but he didn't want to do much with it so I started playing it and realised it's potential so we developed it for a couple of years and eventually got it through to Mattel. They agreed to see it, they loved it and straight away gave us an expression of interest. The next year it was out, so that was a bit of a whirlwind, it was a real buzz. Especially sitting home and getting royalty cheques every 3 months. It was a good year. It didn't sell really well because the time it came out Martin Bryant went on his killing spree so Mattel pulled their entire marketing budget from anything with violence. We were doing interviews on Triple M and the Herald Sun and we weren't allowed to mention the violent side of it. It's called *Roadwarrior*, how are we going to get around that? 'So what do you do in the game?' 'Well… You roll your dice and move your bits and the first one around the track wins. That's it.'

So then I went onto writing some fantasy scripts. Fantasy is my first love. And now I've got that script that I've adapted from a graphic novel that I'm utterly blown away with. It's the first screen play I've written seriously. I was hit with a twist when I was at work about 8 years ago and I was just breathless from it, rushed and grabbed pen and paper and scribbled it down. 8 years later the twist still has the same amount of power now as when I conceived it. The twist is right at the end, so I was able to create the story backwards and thank god there's enough in it to make the twist not be the only good part of the whole bloody story, which is huge and vast. To be honest I don't think the chances of it getting produced will be high because 99% of screen plays don't get produced and I don't have any contacts or any experience, but then again I didn't with board games or comics, so you never know. I'll be entering it into screen play competitions next year.

N: Have you heard about *Young Einstein* and how that was made?

P: No

N: Yahoo Serious was a mechanic in a garage in Huonville which is this little town south of Hobart

P: Serious? He's a mechanic?

N: He used to be. Well, I don't know if he was a full on mechanic but he used to work in this little garage in Huonville. He put together what we might call these days a fan film, then he went and got a budget to do the big expensive scenes to finish the movie.

P: Nice one

N: Yes, it was quite a sensation in Hobart.

P: He came out with number 2 didn't he? Didn't he have two? Or was there something else?

N: I think there was something else. And every now and then I've noticed him popping up in credits for other movies. I think he's still over there working but I haven't followed his career.

P: I'd like to adapt *The List* to a screen play. Greg Mclean has got copies of it, so I want to send him number three. He's the writer and director of *Wolf's Creek*, a pretty nasty piece of work. The film, not him. He's a nice bloke, he's a really nice guy.

E: That had some well-known actors in it.

P: Yeah, John Jarrott was really amazing. I watched it again the other night because we had friends over from Scotland and they're doing a road trip around Australia so I thought I'd put on *Wolf's Creek* for them and they won't want to leave.

N: Oh you should have put them onto Drop Bears.

P: Oh they're onto that one, but they wanted to see *Wolf's Creek*, and I'm like 'You sure? You're doing a lot of driving tomorrow.'

E: This fantasy novel, do you have a title?

P: Yeah, it's called *Hiding the Sorcerer*. It pertains to the whole story. I couldn't believe when I started adapting it as a screenplay from the graphic novel it just worked; it just worked like a dream. It's going to take a lot of energy, and a hell of a lot of time. I'll have it looked over by professional screen consultants because I really want to give it a shot. I knocked out about 80 pages in 2 or 3 weeks. Having written the graphic novel, I already had the source material. They say that when you're writing a screen play 95% of it is the outline and the character work so I had all that already. So 5% is only the screen play itself, but to bang it out so quick and have all the scenes work is great. It'll be nice to finish the story. But for now my focus is getting *The List* into a single graphic novel format, and disseminating it overseas to see if any publishing houses are crazy enough to pick it up. We'll see because it's obviously a bit out there. It's going to have to have age restrictions on it. I'm not sure if it's something that America will pick up because they don't generally go for stuff that they perceive messes with religion. And it doesn't, it is not meant to be a statement on religion or a piss take on religion; it's not meant to be disparaging of it at all. It's just meant to be a good basis for the story. So that's the next move, get it into a single novel.

N: At Supanova I met your partner in crime Henry.

P: I actually met Henry for the first time at this café. When I found my script in 2004 and wanted to do something with it, do something with my life, it was Avi Bernshaw who introduced me to Henry.

N: This is Avi of Of Science and Swords.

P: Yes, that Avi. He used to have this manga anthology that they'd bring out monthly or bi-monthly in which a lot of Aussie manga artists put in their own stories. So Avi showed Henry *The List* script. He

liked it and we met here. I'd already had 2 artists that I'd knocked back for *The List*. It's so hard for a writer to find an artist, especially for a project of this size, but the first two just weren't right for it.

N: When you say they weren't just right, is it a personality thing when you've got to collaborate so closely or is it an art style?

P: Oh no, Henry and I absolutely hate each other… [chuckles] I'm kidding. Oh, no, it's just an art style. I wanted a sort of noir gritty realistic as possible look. I didn't want the DC look; didn't want the Manga look.

N: You don't want air brushed, glossy.

P: Yeah, exactly. It needed some darkness.

E: You wanted a style to create all kinds of nuances, mood, feeling and atmosphere

P: Yeah, exactly. Absolutely. I think Henry really succeeded in that, especially with the expressions and the angles that he chose. He's just so skilful and so perceptive. He knew what the script required. The only direction I gave was straight on, or rear view, or don't show this or that… 95% of the script I'd send to him and he'd just draw it. I wouldn't have to send back corrections. He'd just bang it out. He even changed some things and I'd be like… 'He changed that! And… you know what? It's better.' Sometimes I'd draw it out a bit where I'd have 3 panels or 6 panels and he'd do it in one. This is a collaborative process, no-one's being paid, I financed it personally. So for him and Tom Bonin, the inker on volumes 2 and 3, to see it right through on a project of that size that is so demanding and having to put up with me nagging at them all the time is phenomenal. That's why I was saying earlier that so many projects don't see it right through. Even a single 22 page floppy will sometimes fall apart because the artist wants to do it someway or the writer drops out or there's no money or whatever. For those guys to spend hundreds of hours on my script is phenomenal, it's humbling, incredible. I'm very, very lucky they came aboard.

E: We've got a lot of respect for people who see things through on this scale.

P: Yeah especially when the financing isn't coming from anywhere external. It's like you have 3 guys who are passionate about a script,

let's just keep doing it and see where it goes. We've still got a lot of work to do HENRY and TOM! [laughter]. You get one chance and I don't want to ruin 5 years of work because we can't be bothered putting another month or so into it.

N: What needed to be done? I haven't looked really closely at the printed books that you have but I looked at the electronic copy you sent me. It looked pretty complete. So what needs to be done?

P: It is complete to an extent. As the writer I'll never be utterly happy with it. Any creator is never utterly happy with their work.

N: It's your baby.

P: Yeah. Even Peter Jackson said he can't enjoy *Lord of the Rings* because when he watches it he goes 'I should have done this, I should have done this, I should have done this.'

E: Look at how many times George Lucas has edited *Star Wars*.

N: Tweaked

P: Yeah, absolutely. There are big scenes that I want to change. Henry, I hope you're not hearing this for the first time here! There is the rape scene that I want to change. It's a little cliché for me and I've done a bit of research on the stats and a rape happening in that sort of situation is pretty rare. So I want to take that away and make it a guy who's being beaten up so he's saves the guy. It's the same basis for the justice commandment. And a lot of dialogue. What? Go. Ask away.

N: It wasn't a question, it was more a suggestion, now I'm biting my tongue.

P: No, go, go ahead.

N: Well I was thinking if it had been a guy leaving one of *those* male toilets he might have been targeted.

P: Oh, ok. That's not a bad idea. That's good. Yeah. Absolutely. Especially if it's meant to be a hate crime like that. Hang on, where's a pen? Thanks Nalini. Yeah. [to Dictaphone] She's probably edited it in to make it sound like her idea. [laughter] That's probably not a bad idea. It's the only part that makes me cringe a bit. It's a bit angry teenage guy and as well drawn as it is I'm sure that we want to feel as good about the product as possible and I think if we remove that scene – well, not remove it but –

N: Tweak

P: Yeah tweak that scene.

N: Following in George's footsteps.

P: Yeah, I'll do a 3D version then I'll do it in blu-ray.

E: High def.

P: Yeah. Then you can look really close at the big screen. So. It's all going really well. I can't believe the reviews I'm getting.

N: So where have you been reviewed?

P: I've been reviewed by *Broken Frontier*, an English website. They're really good, a pretty big site. *Scary Minds*, an Australian Horror website focusing on pop culture across the board, so movies, books, graphic novels and the like. He's an amazing critic; very insightful. *ComicsBulletin*, which is an American website. They've agreed to review number 3.

There was a guy who did a review for Friday Mad Science and he did a great review of volume 1. So I wrote to him when volume 2 came out and asked would you mind reviewing it? He said he'd stopped. He just got sent so much stuff that he felt bad not being able to get through it. He did a bloody great review for volume one. That was the real test. The Australian scene is so small and your chances of getting it published are something you're completely ignorant of until you send it off. We didn't want to put in 4 or 5 years, 200 pages and have it complete and everyone hates it. That was the reason for breaking it into instalments. We finished volume one and sent it out to find out what critics and the public thought of it. It came back that it's selling ok, reviews are good and readers seem to like it. We can't afford financially and emotionally to put out a massive project like *The List* and do it all in one hit. I think you'd lose motivation along the way. It's 200 pages.

N: I think it's good to have short term goals as well as long term goals.

P: Yes, exactly. The series is finished, pretty much apart from the tweaking. But that's only the start. I sell it in Melbourne and online and I get a few overseas sales and the like but it hasn't been tested on the real market yet because it hasn't been picked up yet. It's exciting and terrifying. We'll see where it goes from here.

E: Stick at it.

P: Yeah. I'm quite willing to go through *Diamond* to see if they'll pick it up. *Diamond* are the biggest distributor of comics in the world. They probably handle 85% of titles and distribute them to about 4,000 or 5,000 comic book stores around the world. So all the big publishers send their stuff to Diamond and they send it out. They do have the option where independent guys can send their stuff in. So I can send *The List* in, if they think it's a reasonable standard they might put it in a previews book and it might get picked up, because I think a lot of publishers aren't even going to look at *The List*. But if Melbourne is anything to go by, it's getting a great reaction. Financially it would be better we did it ourselves, but obviously I won't have all the power of a marketing department and all the budgeting and networking.

E: Is doing all this work like burning the candle at both ends so to speak?

P: Yeah, my fiancé's and mine. She's pretty amazing. It always happens that we're getting so close to the release of a volume and it's busiest time for her at work. One of her biggest weeks was the week I had to lay out *The List* Volume 3, so she'd come home after 8 hours of – 8 hours, bullshit! - 10 or 11 hours of work flat out and I'd say 'I'm so sorry babe' and then she'd spend 4 to 5 hours on InDesign. So basically her break was driving home! She was a real backbone of getting it out on time and making it look as beautiful as it does.

E: It's a real labour of love

P: Yeah. We didn't know what we were doing, we've never done this before. So we had to learn how to make word bubbles, make panels and lay it all out. *The List* is – what do they call it? - winging it. That's what I should call my company, Winging It.

E: How long have you been doing all this for?

P: You mean *The List*?

E: Partly *The List* but all this creative work generally.

P: When I was 7 I had a book on dinosaurs published in school; the teacher photocopied it and gave a copy to every single student in the primary school, so that might have planted the seed. It was like, look at the popularity and the power, the addiction! I'm a real nerd. I always liked my own company. I was an only child until my brother

came along at 7, so I had a lot of time to sit alone. I had a single mum so we didn't have heaps of cash so a lot of the time it was just me using Lego blocks to make different armies and I'd sit in my room for heaps of hours and have heaps of battles. Then came *Masters of the Universe* and *Micronauts* and *Shogun Warriors*. Then I went into the fighting fantasy books, where you roll the dice and play.

E: Choose your own adventure

P: Yes, them, I became obsessed with them and I wrote my own one of them. It never really occurred to me that I was doing something creative, it's just what I like to do.

N: So you weren't a TV zombie.

P: No. Not really, I never have been. Now I don't watch much TV. I love movies but on the flip side I'm hooked on *Call of Duty* and *Medieval Total War* so I play a lot of computer games. They're my vice.

N: Well, you're in good company. Joe Abercrombie plays *Call of Duty* and *Red Dead Redemption*.

E: His excuse with *Read Dead Redemption* is it's research for his next novel.

P: Oh absolutely, I understand that. Right. [laughter] What does he do?

N: He writes epic books. The only one I've read was this epic fantasy called *The Heroes.*

E: Do you have any other favourite authors?

P: George R. R. Martin. Chuck Palahniuk, author of *Fight Club*. He's so clever with his angst. I saw *Fight Club* just up the road here. And I finished it and walked out, bought another ticket and walked back in again. Read the book. His other stuff doesn't really stack up for me. *Survivor* is a great book but reading *Fight Club* really tapped into something.

N: I didn't realise it was a book before it was a movie. How does it stack up against the movie?

P: Yeah. In my opinion, different monsters, I think they did an incredible job of the themes and the essence of it and a lot of the scenes and it's probably got a better ending than the book if I remember correctly.

It's been a long time since I read it. It's like with a lot of stuff, like *Watchmen*. I think there's a lot of things they did better in the film, especially the ending than the comic. I'm not a big Alan Moore fan. He sort of drags things on. I didn't finish *V for Vendetta*; it was boring the shit out of me. I feel like I should apologise because I don't like Alan Moore. [laughter] But you're allowed to not like an author.

N: I'm a bit the same with Philip K Dick, I think the movies are so much better generally.

P: Like *Minority Report*? Is that him?

N: And *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* is *Bladerunner*. I'd take *Bladerunner* any day.

P And *I Robot*? Was he *I Robot*?

N: That was Asimov, kind of based on Asimov. But again if you look at the movie and read the stories it's very very loosely based and the movie is actually much more watchable.

P: Sometimes a screenplay can get to the essence of what the author is really about. That's why I'm happy with this screenplay and adapting my own work. I've just really got to the essence and knocked out a lot of shit and tightened it up. Once I'm done with the trade version of *The List* I'm going to write the screen play. It'll probably only be short, probably only half an hour. When I wrote *The List* – I think each comic creator has his own way of doing things. Mine is to really make a scene realistic, so when you see a fight one thing I can't stand is colourful violence or cartoonish violence or cutaways not showing the actual result.

E: A bit too glossy

P: Yeah. Making it palatable makes it worse for the public. You make palatable, colourful violence and then kids go out there and whack each other and wonder why blood comes out. With *The List* I want to show what violence really is, to show the fear, the pain, the struggle and the result. So when I have a fight scene in *The List*, it's a fight scene. Blood comes out. Pain is shown. Fear is shown. Damage is done.

N: Except for the guy (in *The List*) who isn't allowed to show fear.

P: Yeah, that's one of his parameters. He's not allowed to show pain. He's utterly fearless because he's on a quest from God of course.

The List could have been 80 pages. The scene where the brother enters the house in volume three goes over 6 pages, walking around to build tension. I could have shown him leaving the apartment and arriving at the door to see the mother in a page. You want to see his fear. It's a visual medium. If I get to 5 panels on a script page I'll be like 'oohhh' maybe that's too many. I want impact.

N: That's something I liked. You've got mostly black and white but you've also got black background with maybe 3 panels on a black background so you've got space. It jumps out at you more than in a comic book where you've got little narrow margins and everything is fitted.

P: Yeah in a little grid. There are obviously comics that works for but when you've got a story that is meant to be horror, meant to be visceral and repulsive.

E: And gruesome.

P: Yeah really gruesome.

N: and it succeeds!

P: It'd be a terrifying film, I can't wait to work on the screen play. That's why 3 or 4 panels per page works, and the big splash pages. It was really fun to write and cathartic. I've got a lot of ideas for a screen play, but it'd probably only be for 30 minutes because you can't stretch a fight scene out for 20 minutes, people would just get bored shitless. It'd be crazy.

N: Good luck with it all

P: Thanks.

N: Are you working on anything else at the moment? Apart from planning a wedding?

P: Yeah, I am planning a wedding. Did I tell you that?

N: You mentioned your fiancé. So that kind of…

P: Very true, you're right.

E: You should have said you've done very careful research… You're all over Google.

P: Yes, so, we've found a place and put a deposit down this morning.

E: On a house?

P: No, on a place for the reception. That'll be for this time next year. We've been together 6 years. She puts up with me, it's really cool.

N: It sounds like you're working together on *The List* and doing things together as a team.

P: I don't think Fleur loves working on it; it's just that she happens to have these skills and I happen to need these skills. I make her breakfast in bed, so it's a give and take. The other thing I'm working on is an anthology of short stories with a philosophical tilt so that won't sell at all because kids just love action and horror.

N: *The Matrix* sold.

P: True but that had a lot of machine guns. Unnecessary machine guns.

E: They had some very cool scenes in there.

P: Trench coats and all that.

N: Is the anthology all written word or is that graphic again?

P: Graphic again. I can't seem to get myself out of that format now. It's hard to write prose after you've just been working on graphic novels. When you're writing scripts you don't have to be literally brilliant with prose, word craft and all that. You just need to be able to tell a good story and to tell it visually. I have a mate, William Schaeffer, who has a book coming out called *The Wolf Letters*. I suppose you could compare it to Dan Brown's genre, but the writing's a lot better than Dan Brown. I've read the first few pages and I'm like – I could never write like this, how could you do that? No way! It's quite intimidating. Hopefully he'd read my stuff and thought to himself that he could never do what I do.

E: And the question is how many hours per day does he pour in to getting this result.

P: Yeah. Absolutely. It's so well done. I say that I choose not to write prose, not that I can't…

N: We all have different strengths.

P Another way of putting it. Absolutely. Swapping from one to the next… like Neil Gaiman who can write a novel, then write a screenplay then write a comic, I think 'How the hell do you do that?' Yeah so, that's what I'm working on. I also work full time, I'm a storeman, I drive a fork lift. Empty containers full of vacuum cleaners,

N: That must be a really nice rest after spending hours working on *The List*.

P: Yeah it is. I work with a bunch of rough headed blokes who take the piss out of me all day. Well, we take the piss out of each other. A good bunch of blokes. After living in your head all day, it's very grounding; gets me back down to earth. Plus it gives you your body work along with your mind work.

E: I congratulate you on following your dreams though.

P: Thank you. Cheers.

N: it's not easy

P: No it's not but I think if you tried to stop you just couldn't. You'd feel like you're letting yourself down a bit. And then sometimes you just think you wish you could stop. It's like why this, why couldn't I write something like *Star Wars*? Why *The List*? That's not going to make any money.

N: When it came out *Star Wars* wasn't taken seriously. You realise *A New Hope* was passed over for every award when it was released. It wasn't taken seriously because it was too low budget.

P: Unbelievable isn't it?

N: there are lots of stories out there like that.

P: I love them. I love stories like that, they're fantastic. Like *Monopoly* being knocked back 30 times. The *Trivial Pursuit* guys took it around all the shopping malls and play tested it there, 9 years it took them to get it off the ground. I think as much as the struggle is difficult it's also addictive. I'm out there, out against the world… [to Dictaphone] I'll put my hands on my hips like Superman [laughter] I think a lot of creators probably have that moment in their lives when they sit back and think 'this is pretty surreal what I'm doing. Strange.' Age 15 I never thought I'd be writing comics and producing board games and all this stuff. It's strange to see things on the shelf, one day to be autographing books and the next day driving a fork lift. Good fun though. Gotta have fun with it, that's the main thing. When it becomes a slog, which it really can, then it becomes a test. I think that's when people start to give up at that point where it goes from being a dream to 'shit this is a lot of work!' and it's a real test of your passion and character to keep going. It's not climbing a mountain or

anything. I don't think any creators out there are like 'it's the cure for cancer' or anything, but it's still something pretty amazing to be able to sit down and have the balls to see something through. It's also nice to have something aside from work.

N: It certainly makes life more enjoyable, it adds flavour.

P: Yeah we're absolutely spoilt rotten living in a country where all these things are possible. All these things that can enhance your life, all these great books, films, places like this. The mere fact that you'll live a life where all this stuff is possible is amazing in itself.

N: Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.

Cathy Larsen talks to Dark Matter

Cathy Larsen, book designer at Penguin, talks to Dark Matter about her work in publishing, including working with Ian Irvine and Isobelle Carmody.

Cathy was wearing an awesome gothic style costume at Supanova, so I bowled up to this complete stranger and asked for a photo. This lead to Cathy telling me about her reason for attending Supanova - as a personal friend of Isobelle Carmody, who was one of the authors signing and speaking at Supanova. Excited about talking to someone involved in a different aspect of publishing, I asked Cathy for an interview.

A few weeks later I met Cathy and three of her four cats for an interview to learn more about designing books.

You said you're a designer and you work with an illustrator; what is the difference between a designer and an illustrator?

As a designer you are responsible for the total look of the book - not just a picture but how everything - type, images and colour all fit together. You are in charge of coming up with a concept, whether it be illustrative, photographic etc. In the case of an illustration you work with the illustrator to get the desired results so you're the intermediary. You are solving a visual problem posed by the brief.

Does that cover brief come from the author or the publishing company?

The cover brief comes directly from the publisher who commissioned or chose to publish the book and the editor who is working directly on the manuscript.

Ok, so they come up with a brief, how much flexibility do you have within that brief?

Sometimes it's very prescribed, other times it's much more open ended. A brief will give you an idea of the book's market, age group, genre etc and include a short synopsis. They usually suggest a direction

whether they see the book as being typographic, photographic or illustrated. There might be a clearly defined direction with a really good idea or it may be more open ended. One of the things everyone asks is 'do you read the book' It is probably only at manuscript stage when you're actually designing it, so may not be available at the time. Sometimes I will read manuscripts but it depends. If the book has a really involved photo section where I need to know all about it in order to make decisions on the choice and placement of photos then I probably will read the manuscript or at least pieces of the manuscript to get an idea of what to choose and what it means. A lot of the time the editor will give me some references, maybe include a chapter or something for me to read. It would be impossible for me to read every book because I'm usually working on about 12 books at any one time. When I get a cover brief, I'll also get a text brief.

What is the text brief?

If it's a novel it's not a big deal. Basically what you're controlling is how the text sits on the page, the look of the text, the kind of headings, any other elements.

So it's not just the cover, it's the whole book?

It's the whole book. Basically we're responsible for the whole book from the beginning to the end. We'll have a schedule for the cover and the text. For the text there's a sample set, which will get approved. They'll say the manuscript will be so many thousand words, here's the digital file, and we want it to be 420 pages.

So you have to make the text fit the pages. That's got to be challenging at times.

You get a good feel for it, whether you want a very open text, whether you want to bulk it out, you get an idea of whether it's going to be tight or loose, you get a starting point and then if you need to adjust it you just make the type a bit smaller, less leading, or more leading, adjust the margins a little bit, its all about little increments… Cast off, you've probably never heard about cast off.

Not in this context, what is it?

You do everything in multiples of baseline grids. The first thing I do is throw a grid through the whole text, set up master pages, margins and everything, running heads and folios, whatever other repeating

elements I have. You have your chapter drop, you've usually got less text on that page, you have the title of the chapter, you might have an epigraph or little quote or something. You count an average of how many words in your chapter drop, then times it by the number of chapters, then subtract that number away from the total word count. Then you get an average of how many words there are in a full page and divide it into the balance. This gives you a rough number of total pages. Add your number of chapters to your number of full pages and there you have your estimated extent.

What software are you using? This is sounding a lot like Adobe InDesign.

Yes it is, I'm working in InDesign, Illustrator and Photoshop essentially. I do a cast off based on my initial text design which I can adjust if I need to have either less or more pages.

I'm sure that experience makes it easier.

Yes. It's also what kind of typefaces go best together because I might have a poem at the beginning, set down text, all sorts of things. Some authors want to show email or text messages. There will be a text brief to draw attention to the various things in the text. I assign a code to each one of those. Typeface, point size, leading…

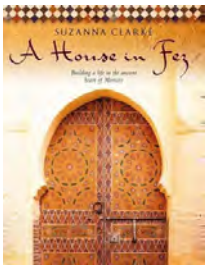
So it's not just cover design.

People say 'People design text?' Cover design is about giving a person a little bit of a taste or sparking the interest of the person who might like to read the book. Sometimes I think I'm trying to do too

Sashiko with some of the covers Cathy has designed

much on the cover, trying to show the whole book. It's better to show a little hint, kind of an emotional feeling or something on the cover.

You have 3 books here, they are all very different. *A House in Fez* really looks like its building a life in the heart of Morocco, with a door that needs to be opened.



That was the idea. On the back there's an image through the door, the market and the cat.

I love the cat. On the cover there is a border at the top made of Moroccan tiles - It looks genuinely Moroccan.

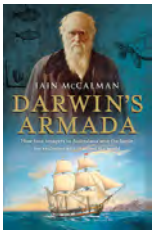
Oh it is, but I've had to step and repeat to achieve the tiled border. One of the photos shows a Moroccan laying tiles, which I have taken and extended in photoshop. You notice the Islamic design with the numeral on the outer margin of the book? The practical idea is that when you thumb through the book you immediately see the folio.

Is this a book you would have read before you worked on it?

Some of it. I read certain things. With this one I had to get a fairly good idea of what they were doing in order to choose the photographs.

How do you choose which bits you're going to read?

The editor is in charge of doing the structural edit on manuscripts, between the editor and the publisher they pretty much know the most representative part. They might give me a chapter in which the main character starred or a particular scene they want me to illustrate.



What about this one, *Darwin's Armada*? Not only is it a beautiful contrast with *A House in Fez* but it has this traditional tall ship.

Sometimes I have a real image in my mind of what I want. Sometimes it's about finding the images, hunting on the net. One image on the cover of *Darwin's Armada* is of a tall ship. While doing a search for Darwin's ship the 'Beagle' I found this wonderful painting, done by a German nautical illustrator for a box for a model kit. I managed to track down the manufacturer of the kit, to ask him who's the illustrator; he turned out to be a friend of the manufacturer. He supplied the high resolution image. Unfortunately I needed to extend quite a bit of the sea around the ship in photoshop.

That's part of the image and then you've got Darwin up the top.

Yes, there are a few layers to the image. The diagram there is Darwin's tree of evolution. I've also shown some of the engravings from the 'Origin of Species'. The end pages show Darwin's letters. And there are all sorts of engravings, I found a cartographer and briefed the maps. Often they publish in a C format so you've got to keep in mind that it will be reduced later, when you design the cover you have to design it for a reduction grid for either a B format or A format.

Is that like a trade format and normal format?

All paperbacks are called Trade paperbacks as distinct from hardcovers. A C format, which is 152 by 230 (also called a Royal) has more prestige and is usually the first edition unless you are doing a hardback. The next is a B format which is 121 by 198, then the smallest which has been nicknamed the 'airport novel' is 111 by 181.

So the biggest one is C. It seems a little funny they call that the C because my understanding is the hardcover comes out first if they're going to release a hardcover.

I don't know why.

Then you've got *Keep Rockin' Billy Thorpe* which is very different to the first two, with a photo on the front. The contrast between these books is really good, really interesting.

I was presented with a huge stack of material, grouped into chronological folders, it was quite overwhelming frankly. For each chapter I chose a colour. The chapter opening photograph is tinted to the chapter colour. The text is composed of many elements - the main narration of his wife Lyn, pieces where friends have written their memories of Billy, Interviews, Billy's own comments, pieces of his unpublished work (with a stamp to identify it). There is a different style of text for each element, so you can recognise who is saying what.The book is done like a scrapbook - there are press clippings, objects, a book within a book. There are interviews with other people. There are all sorts of things, bits and pieces of notebooks, bits of paper, tiny little cuttings, here you have these tips with sticky tape on the side which means he's making a comment about that particular photo. Contact sheets of photos, with colour picking out particular people.

It definitely has a feeling of a scrapbook.

There were actual fan scrapbooks as well. I was given everything. There was the basic text but a lot of material was left up to me as to how to arrange it. There is some lovely retro stuff. The endpapers show all his album covers. Through the chapter pics in the contents you can chart the various looks in the stages of his life.

There is so much work that has gone into this book. How long did it take you to work on this particular book?

That was a pretty big project, 3 or 4 months, straight through.

Just one project or were you doing other things?

A few little things, I tried to get as much stuff done as possible but 3 or 4 months straight through.

Here is a series of covers for Isobelle Carmody's *Obernewtyn Chronicles.*

I wanted to work out a branding for Isobelle's name so I worked out a distinctive type in Illustrator, which is actually a mix of a few typefaces.

In the PDF you sent me, you had an idea and showed how you got to the outcome. Did your idea come first?

Yes. The thing is I end up seeing it in my mind and then madly search through stock image libraries to see what I could make of it. With the *Obernewtyn Chronicles* the problem was initially I imagined them all to be illustrated. The illustrator did great backgrounds but the faces weren't suitable for what I had in mind. I had short deadlines, so it was all pretty rushed. I did a bit of a trial myself in case I needed to illustrate the whole series, but they said let's use the background and do the images photographically. The computer thing is a bit of a double edged sword, instead of doing a little sketch you more or less have to show them before it's actually done. Then they lock into that idea, so I have to make everything out of found images, splicing it together. It was taking days to look through various photo libraries to get a girl who could possibly be the main character again and again.

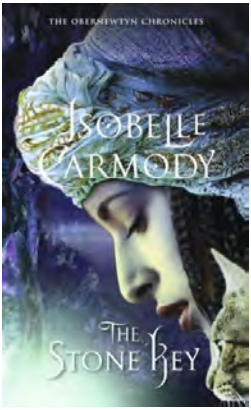
Is she a found image or a model?

She is a found image, so is the cat. I've had Les do the background, the turban and the plaits and then I've spliced it together. And put this glow in.

That's really difficult to put it together so the light is consistent.

I've given him the rough idea and told him I wanted it painted like this.

That's a huge amount of collaboration.



Yes, well, we ended up becoming really good mates at the end of it. That's the test I painted (artwork on the cover of *Dark Matter*).

That's really haunting.

I used to do illustration many years ago which means if something's wrong I can spot it. I used gouache as a student so I'm used to it, and I do line and dot using technical pens.

I think author branding in a series is important. I did this for Ian Irvine's name.

People also like to know their books are going to be a set.

Yes. People who are collectors will wait for a certain edition. Ian supplied me with this idea of the 3 worlds that are one, painted in a red gold and silver colour. With the first series that is the logo and it gets painted in the corner. Each of the 3 series is different. Each of the series has a different variation of the logo ghosted on the cover. The series have different fonts, but Ian's name is in the same font. And this border, wasn't that fun. Ian was saying there was all this really exotic writing around the mirror and there is a view from the mirror. So this was supposed to be the edge of the mirror. So I said what is this writing supposed to look like? So he sends me back this piece of paper with some writing on it, but I said "Ian! You did that in half an hour!" It had no progression, it didn't look like a set. So I took it on myself using the pen tool in Illustrator using a mouse.

So it's freehand with a mouse, you didn't have a wacom or anything?

No. All this stuff is done with a mouse. I have a wacom now but I'm a bit in trepidation of using it because I spend half my time deep etching things, like deep etching that cat's whiskers (on the cover of *Matthew Flinders' Cat*).

I did a colouring book adapted from Grame Base's *Waterhole*. I think it's a colouring book for complete obsessives just frankly. I had prints

of his pictures on my lightbox, which I traced onto fineliner paper, using 4 widths of technical pen, constantly making judgements about which line weight to use for each part.

And here is me thinking the artist did it!

He said my line work was much better than his.

That's a compliment!

I did it for freelance on top of my other work as well, so every 3 days I had to turn over a double page spread that took about 8 hours. Basically ruined my social life, I didn't have one. I worked until midnight every night on the light box. And there were the invisible animals put in with the 0.18 pen. So if you look at it you can feel my pain.

That brings a whole new perspective to that book.

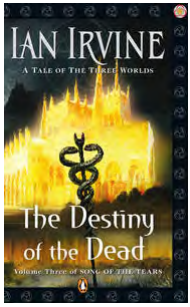
The cover was done by blending my line rendering into the coloured-in linework into Graeme's illustration. I laid photos of pencils across the cover. People have no idea how much work goes into these projects sometimes.

Back to Ian Irvine, I did an alphabetic progression with a pen-like quality and sent it to him. So he promptly sent me back an arrangement for going around the mirror. This was all in Illustrator as a border. It meant that the sides of the book were static but every time the spine changed I had to equalise the spaces to make the border fit. I had made a rod for my own back. This illustrator was Mark Sofilous and he did this beautiful bridge but he was working too hard so he pulled out later. We decided originally should we have characters in it, but it ended up looking too childish with characters so we decided this alien landscape would work. It's all very formal and centralised because of the way the type fits. I ended up ghosting that symbol on the cover for the second series. I had the illustrator draw up this sort of moebius strip of the 3 worlds in Illustrator, which was ghosted over the cover image in Photoshop. That's the huge crystal cave.

He's very practical, Ian, he'd give me really good descriptions. Sometimes I'd ask what this thing looked like and he'd say he hadn't got that far. We got to this telescope idea and how it all worked. So Mark Sofilas and Nick Stathopoulos did the covers for this set. Nick is quite famous now, he's done work for the Archibald Prize. And this is Les Petersen's work, on the covers of a later set. Sometimes we'd

send each other little black and white sketches then I'd look at it and bounce that to Ian to find out if this was how it would work. We'd communicate in these little black and white sketches until we had the composition right. And then we'd go ahead.

How does that work? To me seeing this in black and white would be worlds apart from seeing it in colour. In colour it looks absolutely gorgeous.



It's just placements of elements - composition. Les is more the one to do rough concepts in colour. When I briefed the artist I would supply them with the grid of the cover with all the type that needs to go on the front back and spine. The landscape wraps around the book. The part on the back cover needs to be dark and featureless enough to have the blurb reversed out of it.

So you know how thick the book's going to be?

Not always but I've got a fairly good idea. With Ian the books just started getting thicker and thicker. One time Janet, an editor, turned up with his manuscript on a trolley. I think she sent him an email, 'next time write a shorter book!' I just couldn't get over it, he's not a man who is over the top word wise when you meet him. Obviously as soon as he gets in front of the keyboard it just runs. Otherwise he's just very practical, he's not hyper or anything. You might think he's the sort of person who can't stop talking but that's not it at all.

Someone who is an author said it's a very isolated profession so maybe they need to be introverts?

It's the same thing with illustrators. I'll be out and about and yak yak yak but the very nature of the process means I'm sitting alone at a desk for most of the day. It's the very nature of the process. You know about the ice berg principle don't you? It's the 1/10 above water. Particularly illustrating can be isolating because you're just there at your desk for hours.

Obviously you need to be able to talk to the illustrator and the author but you're working independently.

Pretty much. You're responsible for the whole look of the book. The text, cover and then there are the maps. When asked to do maps

Ian asked about the maximum scanning size. I said 700 by 500mm. Then these enormous maps turned up! I thought Oh My God. What am I going to do with this? The other thing is I had to work out the scale. He just had these on big sheets of tracer, not labelled so I had to do the labelling. These are so dense that I had to put a layer underneath the label with a white box so you can actually read the label. I had to work out the scale from one map then translate that to the other maps. Then I had to put the legend together. When we commission the artwork we are only paying for reproduction rights. Generally unless we have specifically bought the artwork it remains the possession of the illustrator, or in Ian's case, the author.

I also do maps myself for various things, like the latest Isobelle map. A map for *Finnekin and the Rock* by Melina Marchetta. I'm a bit like *The Goodies*. I do anything anytime. I have to be fairly adaptable. Not all graphic designers can draw, quite a lot of them can't. Other graphic designers get me to do extra things. I often do maps and hand lettering.

There was one children's book, Terry Denton and Margaret Wild did *Big Red Hen* and I ended up hand lettering the book. There is software where you can turn any kind of a script into a font. So one of the guys asked me to do a few more letters and now we have Cathy's Big Red Hen font which is essentially my hand rendered Bembo. Since then I've seen it used in about 4 books.

I also do things like Moncia McInerney's romances. I used to paint the Monica McInerney covers. Now they are all updated to be photographic. With *The Wrong Thing* I designed the compositions for the illustrator - graphic design can be very hands on. It's a child's book about a little fairy that gets into the house and the cat sees it.

Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.

Cathy is an active participant in Spaced Out, Melbourne's SF club for the GLTB community. That is for any science fiction fan who is gay, lesbian, transgendered or bisexual. Supportive friends are also welcome. Spaced Out is a non-profit science fiction club run by volunteers. It's a social group with monthly meetings and social outings. They get together once a month, have dinner and chat then watch a DVD. It is very friendly and casual. Activities include movie nights, discussion of SF, dinners, picnics etc, mini

conventions, guest speakers, Pride March to name a few. The newsletter is called ŒDiverse Universe[1] and welcomes stories, articles and artwork.

Photo of Spaced Out courtesy of Cathy Larsen, photographer unknown.

Spaced Out

Russell, Toh Yung Hun, Scott Ross, Ivan Sun, Kate Harrison, Daniel Kupina, Mark Sarrazin, Mikey Sui.

Madeleine Roux talks to Daniel Haynes

Hi Madeleine. Thanks for agreeing to this interview.

It's my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Please tell me about yourself.

I'm fresh out of college, a writer based in Wisconsin, though I grew up in Minnesota and then relocated here for university. I work part-time at a bookstore, which probably isn't much of a surprise!

Hobbies? Interests? Apart from the whole zombie invasion thing.

I'm definitely a video game junky, but I also love to read, cook and travel.

Is there a particular person in your life who encouraged you to write?

I grew up in a creative family. My dad is an artist and works in advertising. My mom is sort of the superhero of mothers – she made matching clothes for me and my dolls, sat through all of my one-woman shows, put themed notes in my lunch box every day in grade school and chauffeured me to drama club, speech team... It was a nurturing environment. My brothers and I were always encouraged to embrace our creativity and imagination.

What authors have influenced you the most?

It's a cliché to say this, but I love Jane Austen. Neil Gaiman is another influence – he comes up with the most magical, believable worlds. Reading classics like Thackeray, Faulkner, Steinbeck and Fitzgerald always inspires me to try harder and reminds me how far I have to go still.

What do you enjoy in other media (like movies, blogs, Youtube etc)?

Does Youtube have videos other than people filming their cats doing idiotic things? If so, I'm not aware of what those other videos might be. But when I'm not watching cats slide into empty boxes,

I like reading snarky blogs. Pajiba (www.pajiba.com) is one, they do brilliant reviews of books, movies and television. I love to cook, so I'm addicted to *Top Chef* and *Masterchef*. I'm also a videogame fanatic. It's a dream of mine to someday head up the writing team on a videogame.

Where did the idea for Allison Hewitt start? How did it come to fruition?

I work at a bookstore and it's wonderful, but sometimes you can't help but daydream. So naturally, a person in perfect mental health, like myself, starts to consider how we would survive a zombie outbreak at the store. That was the bud of the idea, it flowered when I started to consider using the blog format to tell the story. Then it really fell together, once I realized how perfect the medium is to tell a survival journey.

Why did you choose to work with/on wordpress?

It's simple. I know a bit of html but not enough to be really competent. They make it easy for simpletons like me to update and change the look of the blog. That's not a plug, they don't pay me, I just like how intuitive their system is. They also make it possible for more computer-savvy sorts to take control if they know how to fuss with the innards.

You included comments from the wordpress blog itself, are you satisfied with them as inclusions to the story?

Absolutely! I didn't use all of them, but I picked the ones that added the most to the world and the story. It was tricky to choose them and then expand them in the book because one, I wanted to honor what those real people had contributed, and two, I hadn't seen it done before so there was no precedent.

When you went to write the blog, did you plan it out beforehand or did you just 'go with it'?

A bit of both. Any writer that says they're "just going with it" is probably lying. Good stories need an element of planning. There was spontaneity, certainly, and some of the ideas that came up surprised me, but I planned out the first few chapters pretty clearly. After that, I wasn't working from a strict outline, but I had a general idea of where

the story would go. There are always changes in editing, so I was able to refine anything that didn't work when I initially put it up on the blog.

What is your primary target audience for Allison Hewitt?

Everyone? Maybe not the undead. They might be offended, although they also can't read. But honestly, I've had all sorts of people enjoy the book. Generally, I wrote it for a crowd of readers that want action and adventure but also want a bit of brain stimulation. I'm not a fan of pure escapism, so the book is for people who want something light but don't want to leave their brains behind.

What would you describe as the biggest influence for the story *Allison Hewitt*? What about Allison's character?

Probably my job, because it gave me a great setting and foundation for the outbreak and the ensuing mayhem. The story itself was influenced by Allison's character, because I wanted her choices to be logical in an illogical, scary world. Once the motivation to find her mother pops up, she has the drive to do whatever it takes to survive and a destination in mind. Allison's character comes from a lot of people, friends and heroines from stories I admire and there are elements of me in her, too. One of my big goals was to have a romantic subplot that didn't turn her into a flailing mess. I mean, she's awkward with Collin at first but she doesn't drop everything to follow him, her mother is still the priority. That doesn't sound groundbreaking, but it's kind of shocking how in many, many novels and movies the female protagonist suddenly tosses everything out the window to follow around a man. Men are great and everything, but her mother is much more important.

Are the characters based on anyone from your life?

Some of my co-workers are there, but they're exaggerated and changed around. Luckily, they didn't fire me or tease me too hard. They've been great sports about the whole thing. There are aspects of friends and family sprinkled throughout, but nobody is wholly taken from my real life.

How much was the story/events contained within *Allison Hewitt* affected by outside sources? Friends? Family? The Internet?

Quite a lot, actually, especially because I took into account what the commenters were saying as I wrote the blog. If they advised Allison

not to do something, I always took that into consideration. I wanted the blog to function, not just as the vehicle but as a guide for me, too. There were times I put an intentionally shady character into the mix to see if the readers would catch on and say something. Sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't.

What are your favourite Apocalypse (Zombie or otherwise) stories, books, films or shows?

Shaun of the Dead ranks very, very high. The book *World War Z* is also a great take on the zombie outbreak, and works brilliantly as an audiobook, too. *The Walking Dead* is pretty much required reading for any zombie enthusiast. Some videogame lovers will probably have played *Undead Nightmare* (from *Red Dead Redemption*) and experienced the terror of the zombie bears, which make my zombie squirrel look like a sweet little fellow.

Where do you see Zombie fiction 'going next'?

I don't think it will slow down, if only because it's so versatile. Zombies can represent anything you want them to, and they can be the primary threat or the background. I'll keep loving the genre as long as we keep seeing character-driven stories and films. Those never get old.

What are you currently working on?

I've got the finishing edits for the sequel, *Sadie Walker Is Stranded*, and some new projects that are in early stages. I'd like to dabble in several genres, so where I go next might surprise you.

What does the future hold for you in addition to your writing?

I'm moving to a new city soon, which is always exciting. It's hard to imagine what would be coming down the line that doesn't involve writing in some capacity! I'd love to branch out into videogames, in terms of design as well as writing, and going back to school for a graduate program might be in the cards too, but it's all up in the air, which is the way I like it.

Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.

Chewbacca is Coming

At the Good Friday Appeal I had a few people (all adults!) who said they wanted to see Chewie. Some almost seemed miffed that Chewie wasn't there, so I explained that there is more to costuming than ordering online. Chewie is indeed coming. Bradley Bristow-Stagg, also known as BeeJay (not to be confused with BJ!), is currently building a Chewbacca costume. Beejay talks to Edward and I about building Chewie and other Star Wars costumes.

B - Chewbacca belongs to the Rebel Legion as he's a Rebel in Star Wars. There are a couple of guys in the Rebel Legion who have done Chewie so there are about 10 or 15 Chewies world wide now. I looked at a lot of them and was really put off by some of them because the most important thing with Chewie is getting the face right. If you don't get that face then it doesn't look like Chewie, it doesn't matter how good the suit looks. So I looked and found this guy called Duck. I saw his photos and I went 'Oh that's awesome that's fantastic!' I read through and he's exactly the same height and weight that I am, so I'm going to follow the way that he does things.

A lot of people will use drywall stilts because they're not tall enough.. The problem is that if you're using the stilts you have the curve of your foot as almost a second knee. When you're looking at their legs they have one knobbly bit which is their knee and another knobbly bit which is their foot and then it goes down to the actual base of the leg. I've always been a bit iffy about that. Chewie is meant to be 7 foot 8. The guy that plays Chewie is 7 foot 4 but the mask puts an extra 4 inches on him. I'm 6 foot 3, plus 4 inches on the mask and then 8 inches in the lifts that I've made. Instead of actually using stilts I've got a massive boot for want of a better word where my foot is actually on an incline so I get a smoother line coming down the leg and it sort of flairs out like an over-extended arch over my foot.

I didn't pick that up at the Star Wars dinner but it seemed like you had thick soles, it looked like you have heels as well.

That's one of the things that I liked about Duck's build method was the way he did that.

How tall will you be in the costume?

I will be 7 foot 3 because the feet give me 8 inches of lift and with 4 inches on the mask that gives me an extra foot.

You can loom quite effectively without any additional lift.

The idea is that as long as you're taller than your tallest Vader, you're ok. You don't have to be the full 7 foot 8. In 501st Legion we cannot discriminate in any way shape or form. We have members in the Japanese garrison who love Darth Vader and want to be Darth Vader, so as a consequence we have 5 foot 8 Darth Vaders. If that's the character that you love and the character that you want to do, then do it. But it has to be movie quality. It's all about perspective and putting on a show. So if you can do that and have that presence then that sells it a lot more. Here in Victoria we have 3 Vaders. There's Stuart Hallam; Shiney is his board name. It comes from his black TK because it's all shiny, his black storm trooper, Shane who was Vader on Good Friday and Amro Tawfik. The feet give me 8 inches of lift and the extra 4 inches on the mask give me a full foot on my current height, which makes me taller than all our Vaders. So that was the corporate Chewie without the plugs, without the fur on the feet.

The way this particular chap makes his suit is to make a fabric mesh shirt and pants and then latch hook the fur on which is fake human hair. The fur is quite frizzy so you have to straighten it first. Well, he didn't know that, which is why he looks a bit like a poodle in the first shot and then in the second shot he looks more like the Chewie that we know and love.

How does he un-frizz the hair?

With a hair straightener. The good thing is because it's fake human hair, it's plastic basically, you only have to do it once. It won't re-frizz. So the lesson to learn here is to straighten the hair before you put it

on the suit.

So how far along are you with that?

Not as far as I'd like to be. I've been in the 501st for about 3 years now. The first year I went pretty full on. I was at every single troop. Of course the club was a lot smaller then. We've grown rapidly since the Science Works gig. That was massive, it was great exposure for us. But I basically trooped myself out in the first year. Last year I took it a little bit easier, I didn't go to very many troops as the enthusiasm wasn't that high. I decided at the end of the previous year I wanted to do Chewie. So I started to get the gear together but then I had the year off, I really didn't have the enthusiasm. Then this year we went for a drive over to Armageddon Adelaide and we went with our friends Cen and Wendy. I got the bug again, so I thought I've got to get back into it. Ever since then I've been making strides towards doing more with Chewie. I've just found someone to sew the suit, so I'll be going for a fitting in 2 weeks so I should have the actual mesh suit 2 weeks after that, so by the end of May I should have the suit. Then it'll essentially be 2 to 3 months of latch hooking which is going to be fun, but no where near as much fun as actually doing the mask which is another thing again. For the mask you have to take a life cast of your head, which I've already done.

When you say life cast, I have a family who is kind of into art, and what Mum's done is put glad wrap over people's faces and then taken a plaster mould which is all very complex.

Very similar, but instead of using plaster we used algenate

Which is?

Algenate is a moulding material you use for soft impressions.

That sounds like dentistry.

Yes. We used dentistry algenate because Amro is a dentist and he supplied the algenate

And the instructions, very handy.

Well Dave Hankin gave us a hand because he's done it before too.

He made Yoda.

Yes, he did. So I sat in a chair while they poured goop over my head completely covered. The only thing that was bare was like 2 little holes for my nose.

So they didn't put straws up your nose or anything?

No. I did wonder how geez how am I going to go with this, but I found my zen, I just sat there and trusted the guys and it was really quite relaxing because you have this gentle pressure all over your face all over your face and it's a cool pressure, you can't see a thing because it's all pitch black, you can hear the guys still talking and yabbering on so its really quite meditative. When they finally pulled the mould off my face it was quite blinding because I'd been in pitch black for an hour at least.

They pour the algenate all over your face and then they put plaster bandages over the algenate for what they call the mother mould. That's to help keep the algenate in shape. You pull your head out once it's all set then you put it all back together. You mix up something like plaster of paris, I can't remember the name of it, but it's a very fine stone thing much like concrete. You pour the mould full of that, wait for that to set then you rip the mould off and there you have a mould of your head, a life cast.

Which you only have to do once?

Yes. Hopefully. Then from that I have to build up Chewie's face using clay so I can make an under-skull. I build up on top of my head in clay Chewie's head just in the raw shape, no markings or anything. I'll take a cast of that then make the fibreglass under-skull and that will provide the structure for the mask. I'll do a silicon skin from the mould which goes over the top of the fibreglass and then individually punch the hairs into the silicon skin. That will take a while as well.

Just thinking about making a human wig that doesn't cover the face, that it'd be an epic project for someone who hasn't done it before.

I like taking on these projects. Most people, when they come into the 501st, they take on a TK or storm trooper. I did a clone trooper. A TK you can slap together in a weekend a clone trooper is considerably different because all the armour has to be seamless. You can't show any seams. With the TK you've got lips and grooves that you can

use industrial Velcro in, you can glue it all together. But with a clone trooper you have to physically bond the 2 pieces together to fit your particular shape and then go over it with either car bond or marine grade bond and then sand that down so it's smooth so you can't see the join. Then your entire armour has to be painted. TK armour is raw ABS so it's the raw plastic whereas the clone armour has to be painted so you can't see the seams. I like taking on these big projects.

So that's Chewie. I've got the feet done, I've got the head cast, I got the fabric for the mesh and I've got a large box full of hair.

Have you straightened it yet?

I've straightened some of it. Someone else was telling me what might be a better way is to have a big pot of boiling water and dip it in and that will straighten it out. So I'm going to try that next. If I can do that it's going to save me so much time because I can dip the whole braid (they call them braids of hair) instead of separating it out into 10 different pieces and straightening them individually and then putting it back together. The wookie workshop will be open every weekend until it's done. I have no idea how long it'll take. I'd love to have him for Armageddon, and I'd have him completely finished for the Myer Christmas Parade but we'll see. I want to have him completely done before next year for some special events coming up, like the trip to Dreamworld.

It can be done under that with a lot of work. It's all about finding the people to help you. I mentioned Amro before, he's chomping at the bit to do Chewie's teeth, pardon the pun, and I've just found Lowana who is going to sew the suit for me. Lowana was the imperial officer at the Good Friday Appeal. She made that all by herself, there are no patterns for the imperial officers.

She gave me a business card, it looks like she's into costuming.

Yes she does corsetry and… it's actually really cool what it says on the back of her card, it says 'exquisite clothes for the discerning lady or gent' or something similar. We'll see how it turns out. Duck made

his under-skull out of foam and carved it out of foam. The one I'm doing is made out of fibreglass. It'll probably be about the same weight because that foam is the same foam that I've used for the feet, it's quite solid.

E - It's really compact foam then?

Very compact. You can sand it to shape, it's not like your normal foam. It's still lightweight but it's very dense. You see the jaw is separate, you see these holes next to the nostrils there. That's actually for the piano wire to go through to hold on to the top lip so when you open the jaw the top lip curls up so you get that snarl. It's all about getting the pieces together now. I'm looking forward to it, it's great, it's a lot of fun. There are so many characters and so many costumes, but I've been told no more characters until Chewie's finished. There's a Weequay pirate captain called Hondo Ohnaka who is very flamboyant and roguish, he's a lot of fun and I'd love to do that character. So he might be the one after Chewie. He has a little monkey lizard, like Salacious Crumb (Jabba's pet). A lot of costumers in Victoria are dual members. The way a lot of them get in very cheaply is by doing an X Wing for around $300. Another thing they've started doing is the X Wing pilot shoot at Armageddon. Doesn't that look awesome? I want to be a part of that!

E - I'm keen on doing a storm trooper.

Don't buy anything from EBay, anything on EBay will be crap. This is a copyrighted licensed character. We have the use of these copyrighted characters as long as we abide by these precepts purely for the charitable work we do. We have a fantastic relationship with Lucas Film. I don't know of any other club in the world that has as close ties to the organisation that it's based around than the 501st and Rebel Legion. Whenever they want TKs or Vader or whatever they call on us. They say hey, we're going to be promoting the new game that is coming out, and we say Sure!

There are two things I tell new recruits. Let the costume choose you with a caveat being that if you really love a costume then do it. Don't

let anyone tell you different. If that's the character you want to be then be that character and be the best damn version of that character that you can be. But let the costume choose you otherwise because there are some body shapes that are more suited to different types. The second thing I say is research research research and then more research. I spent 6 months researching my clone before I bought a single thing because there are so many different ways of building your clone, of the armour, of the character. Each one is different. The episode 2 clone is pretty much standard but with your storm trooper there is a different one for movies 4, 5 and 6. This is the thing that distinguishes the 501st from other costuming clubs. We concentrate on movie accurate costumes. It's not enough to put a TK together and I'm a storm trooper. If you don't have enough stripes, if your ab section is upside down you'll get knocked back. We have different detachments in the 501st that help with the costumes. We have bounty hunters, the clones, the first imperial storm trooper detachment, the Mos Eisley Police Department, that's the sand troopers.

The bounty hunters are becoming more common.

Yes they are becoming a little bit more common, but Bobba Fett and Darth Vader are the most difficult costumes to do and end up being the most expensive. You can go upwards of $5000, I've heard of at $10,000 Vader. Which is just ridiculous. You can do Vader for $2,000, to do a TK you're looking at at least $1,000. Wranglers are always welcome.

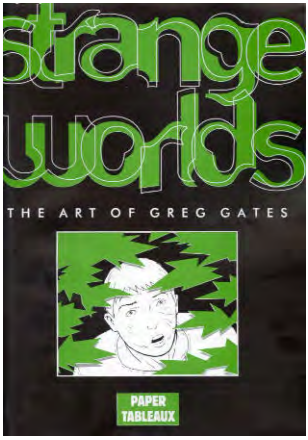
E - I ended up spending a lot of time wrangling on Friday and it was fun.

That's how I got involved, it's a lot of fun. It's really good to apprentice yourself first of all by being a wrangler so you understand what it's all about so when you actually are in the costume you've got a greater appreciation for what's happening.

Thanks for speaking to Dark Matter, Beejay and Edward.

Laff it up, Fuzzball!

Greg Gates talks to Dark Matter



I met Greg Gates on Free Comic Book Day, because Paul Bedford invited me to the Monthly Comic Makers' Meet. This was the beginning of my journey to enlightenment. Greg talks about his work and the comic book scene in general, including what he's reading at the moment.

Strange Worlds is a 'best of' my work. They're all short stories, real life, comedy, and some strange fantasy bits and pieces. In one story someone is plugged into a virtual world and he's trapped. There's a parody of ABC art's programs. I don't think we even changed the guy's name. The presenter was well known in art circles and was on TV all the time. There's also a parody of 50's horror stories with a Geoffrey Eddlestone parody as well. He's the guy who bought the Sydney Swans. As you do when you're filthy rich. It was the first time it happened in this country I think. There were always people looking for excuses to put him down. He was also extremely ugly with an extraordinarily beautiful young wife. That can always get you into trouble with your critics. Another is a romance story mixed with fantasy - George Bernard Shaw, the statue that comes to life.

Is this pen and ink?

Yes except for the cover which I drew with a pen and tablet on screen.

You have a Wacom?

Yes it's wonderful for colouring with, but I find it hopeless for drawing with; slows me way down.

It's much quicker to draw by hand?

I think so, yes.

How did you get into comics in the beginning?

I read them as a kid, when I was like 10 years old. I didn't like some of them until friends at school said to check out Marvel comics. I went crazy, a Marvel fan after that. I always drew when I was little,

you know, crayons on walls.

I bet your mother loved you!

Um, but I was otherwise a model child of course! I was terrible as an artist like all kids, but I decided I wanted to be as good as my heroes so I just worked and worked and worked and 30 years later here I am. [I'm not really THAT good, just a lot better than I was.]

Did you do a particular training course or degree to get you from high school into this career?

Yes, I did a couple of years of Graphic Design, the closest thing they had to a comics course and had an illustration component, which was pretty useful. I only really got better through practice. You don't really learn as much as you think you do through illustration courses. You just get it by doing it.

I don't think you learn as much as you think you might when you're doing any kind of degree.

Yes, that's just the start of your learning, to point you in the right directions.

You get that parchment that is the key that opens the door to the career where you start learning.

Well, if I got that parchment I probably wouldn't be doing comics now, I'd be doing graphic design, but I did graphic design old school. The computer I just taught myself, with a little help from a couple of friends.

This would have been in the 70s?

A student in the 70s, then soon after I got a job in a comic book shop but they didn't get the good comics in, so I started my own with some friends. Minotaur Books, that was the start of it. Melbourne's first street front comic bookshop back in 82 or 83. But it really wasn't for me, I was turning into an old crank, so I got out of that. And I've just had ordinary day jobs since. And drawn in my spare time. I'm still a hobbyist I think, but I like to draw as professionally as I can.

What's your day job?

At the moment I'm between jobs. But I'm about to start another one, scanning office documents. I'm not sure who it will be for, last time it was scanning in old, boring records. It was interesting because we

were allowed to talk and play the radio because it was such boring work that we had to do something to stop from going crazy. And I'd draw in my lunch times sometimes. And there happened to be, the first time I've ever experienced, some other people into comics too. And there were some guys in a band, and a writer and some others that were not so interesting perhaps, but they were all good people. Best job ever.

It's interesting, some of these really incredibly boring jobs seem to have the most creative people. They need a day job or maybe the boredom at work helps them to be creative outside. What do you think?

Interesting work or interests usually don't pay, so you have to do a boring day job. It's all it comes down to. It's the same for actors and musicians. As I was saying, there were a couple of musicians at work, an author… maybe they all gravitate to Melbourne because it's such cold weather and they're stuck inside all the time, writing and drawing. Comics are something I do when I can. I haven't done a lot in recent years although I keep getting people pressuring me to do more so I will. I have plans for a medieval comedy that I'm looking forward to doing. It's not fantasy although there are fantasy elements. It's mostly about a couple of drunks in medieval times. So I'm looking forward to doing that. Probably as a web comic. So in six months time, your readers can look up *Vultures of Vinegar*.

Do you think it'll be a bit like *Looking for Group*? It's a comic available on the web, but if you want a copy to keep, you buy the books, but you can read it online for free. The reason why I ask is I bought some e-comics from Dark Horse and I was not impressed. I couldn't download them to set up a user interface on my computer and their user interface was a small window inside a much larger screen with limited options to read the comic online.

I think it has to be iPad or iPhone or similar to work. I've looked at a few comics on iPad and when it's set up right it looks great. Some set it up so we see one panel at a time, so we never have to worry about any reveals getting through too soon. It makes reading a comic even more suspenseful.

Yes, like when you look at a page and there's this big give away screaming at you from the bottom of the page before you get

there.

Most people try to do that on the turn of a page but that's very hard to gauge in the middle of a story. I don't know if the whole digital thing will take off or not. Do people really want a print version or not? Some people say it's fine and other people can't stand the digital look, or having to hold an iPad or a computer screen. A comic you can roll up and read on the tram or the train. I guess you can with a kindle too, or an iPad but you're paying for something that's not actually physical.

I'm in both camps. Reading a comic is really hard for me because I've got bad eyesight. Reading on a computer screen is my preferred way to read a comic. A couple of years ago I started looking at comic books again and I got blown away by the art work but it didn't have that impact for me on the page. So I'm pushed towards the electronic version, on the other hand I like owning books, not just reading online. If I want a trophy for my bookshelf, I'll buy the hardcover. Like other people collect miniatures or coins.

That's fair enough. I do love print. I used to be a printer too, that used to be one of my day jobs for a long time. It was just instant print, business cards and letterheads, things like that, very simple printing. I couldn't print some of the comics I've seen printed lately, they print it digitally so they don't have to worry about the print not drying because it's toner. And some of them look sensational. If you can see them.

I'm a real fan of modern technology.

There are a few artists, I know of one in particular, a guy called Brian Bolland who drew the most famous version of *Judge Dredd*, and his sight is terrible now, so he does everything on the computer screen. He used to do it traditionally with a brush, paper and pencil, but he does it all on screen now. He's pretty slow, I guess because he just does covers mostly now. You can't tell the difference, they look just the same. So if you want your digital version to look exactly like your hand-drawn versions, you can do it, but most people don't bother. They just paint instead of doing line work if they work entirely digitally. The computer is just a tool, you can use it however you like. I love Photoshop.

You don't use Photoshop for this?

No, not in the past. I still only use it for colouring. I'm currently doing a cover for a comic called *Airhawk*, which is a reprint of an old newspaper strip from the 1960s. They're re-releasing it and they want a cover for each of the reprints, I'm doing one of those. But I'm still drawing it on a piece of paper, and I'll colour it in Photoshop. I'll scan it in 2 halves on a little A4 scanner and put the 2 halves together. You can do that while it's still a simple black and white image. Once it's in colour it's hard to match up. It's great for colouring. Photoshop has probably made better colourists too, because you can always click 'undo' for anything you don't like.

You're an artist who works with a writer.

Yes. *Tide of Dreams* is more to do with mood than it is to do with character or plot. It's more expressive. It's more about capturing the feel of this guy who grew up in South Australia and went to the Glenelg carnival, which is no longer there. It's his memories from the 1950s, so there are a lot of icons from the 50s. There are vampires and the Creature from the Black Lagoon. It was serialised by Fox Comics in the late 80s. For a lot of issues I would have drawn the stories in my spare time while I had my day job.

You work with other people, with the writer and the company. How does that come about?

Usually just do the work and show it to them and they either accept it or they don't. But this was for a fanzine so it was not paying so they probably would have accepted anything, although the standard was pretty good in most of Fox comics. It's still considered one of the great little art comics of its time. Comics is a strange thing, it gets in your blood so you do it whether you're paid or not. It's a unique way of telling a story. You can do real stories or science fiction. Technically there's no budget but don't ask me to draw a thousand characters on every page.

The last person I interviewed was Paul Bedford, the writing half of the team. He talked about collaborating from his perspective. How does it work for you?

It's different with every writer, they all work in different ways. You just figure out how to make it jell. Usually it's written as a screen play-type script but not always. I've drawn others that are laid out by another writer/artist who doesn't have time to draw it, so he'll send me bits of

A4 paper with rough layouts and all the script written on it so I don't have to think about it at all except maybe change the pacing or put an extra panel in or take one out if I think it's redundant. Change the angle to make it more dramatic.

Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

There is a huge amount of space to work in interpretation. Mostly they leave it pretty open. They won't tell you the angle, pick your own, your own lighting, mostly it's just the dialogue and the setting and time of day and that's about it.

Have you done work and had it sent back because they want it done differently?

I think I usually know how to do it better and I'll tell them so. I do know others in the same position like Bruce Mutard working on *The Sacrifice*, he wrote that himself. He's currently doing educational comics for Macmillan. A glorious gig he gets to do in full colour, 12 pages in a big hard cover book (with text as well). But the writer has never done comics before and they usually get it wrong, so he has to teach them how to do it. Most writers don't think visually.

Having read a lot and reviewing things, I'm constantly comparing. Some people almost give no descriptions while others will labour the descriptions. I think George R. R. Martin is one of the few people who seem to get a balance.

Is he writing the TV series? (Game of Thrones)

No, he's not actually writing the TV series, but it's obviously his book. What do you think of the TV series?

In your issue of Dark Matter there was a link to one site with some clips, so I saw one clip. I didn't want to spoil it, so I haven't seen anything else, I'll wait until it's finished and buy the DVD set because it's full of ads; so yuck. I'm looking forward to it. I read the first chapter of the Game of Thorns.

Game of Thrones. 'In the game of thrones you win or you die.'

Yes, well, probably a lot of dying goes on in that I should imagine. But I like the fact that it seems to mostly be about politics, which, for fantasy, is unusual. It would put a lot of readers off I guess but I love it. When he's finished writing the last book I'll get it. I'll probably get a kindle just for it.

Considering the books are that fat.

Yes I've got one, the first one. I'd love to draw that too as a comic but it'd take forever so I'm not going to. Other authors of fantasy have their books adapted into comics. Not always with good results. It's a bit like William Shakespeare. Most comic adaptations of Shakespeare are terrible. There's been a very good adaptation recently of *Hamlet* by Nicki Greenberg in Melbourne for Allen and Unwin. I don't think you'll see it online, it's a huge doorstop of a book in full colour and she's done all the characters as ink spots but it works. It's quite amazing

Have you ever turned a novel into a comic?

No only short stories. In my spare time. Graphic novels take years of almost full time to draw and that hasn't been possible except for the last 5 to 10 years, except for in a few places, like America; Japan probably. It's changing now so the new generation of artists will be able to take advantage of that.

What about your generation of artists?

Oh well, graphic novel to an old fogey sounds a bit laborious to draw. If I was paid to sit down and do it, I'd do it, but most of those things happen through the artist's impetus like Nicki Greenberg who did an adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* (before she did *Hamlet*), just to amuse herself. This is hundreds of pages of a graphic novel. Allen and Unwin liked it and said copyright in Australia becomes free next year, so they went ahead and printed it. It can happen, but I'm not going to start a graphic novel on the hope that it'll go there. This medieval comedy that I'm thinking of, the Vultures of Vinegar, could become a graphic novel. We'll probably put the first episodes online for free to see what the reception is and pimp it around the net a bit to see what happens. If a publisher says okay here's some bucks, go ahead and draw it, I'd be happy to do it.

A lot of people do want the paper, so what's on the internet gets people hooked then they collect the paper version.

It's hard to print if it's not a standard size. If they want to have up an episode or two a week, they'll put what I call a tier of panels, so they would have drawn the original art on an A3 sheet of paper and scanned it in 2 or 3 or 4 tiers and put up one or two a week, but they've drawn it as one original page.

You're looking at putting up a taster?

The author doesn't want to put up too much of it. I think we should put it all up. If people only see a few pages, people will be not sure if they like it, unless they've seen all of it. Enough people still want a physical product, so it will actually help sales if you put it all up for free.

If you look at Sandman, people are spending hundreds on the leather bound editions.

It's probably a different story for big publishers. If you're an unknown, it's better to put it all up for free. If it's any good… For your readers there's one I'm really enjoying at the moment called *The Meek*. It's a fantasy. It's exhilarating to read, fun, serious, beautifully drawn, well written… It starts off as a comedy then changes entirely into a political thing

You like your politics.

Not especially. Not real world politics, if it's fantasy politics it doesn't have any nasty implications, it's not going to hurt anyone. If it wasn't about politics I'd still be happy to read it. If it's well written, I don't have a favourite genre. I also like *Cerebus the Aardvark*. It's funny and political, in a fantasy setting. A real world with a talking aardvark in it. It's gorgeously drawn, stunning to look at. Hundreds and hundreds of pages, a master in control of the comics medium. It only works as a comic. If you tried to do it as a film, you'd have to rework it to get down to 1 ½ hours. It's a bit too idiosyncratic to work as a TV series.

You don't aspire to write, you just draw

I have tried writing but I don't have the time to get better. Writing takes a lot of time to improve your craft, as drawing does. Probably authors reach their best at retirement age. I'm nearly there [laughs].

You have put the energy into drawing - do you think it's the old idea of jack of all trades, master of none?

Maybe. I think I draw pretty well, well enough to get by anyway, but my writing is terrible. *The Strange Worlds* book is a hundred pages. I would have done another 50 to 100 pages that is not nearly as good, particularly early work. No-one wants to see my stick figures.

I'd love to see your crayon drawings on the wall.

We didn't get a photo. We didn't have an iPhone in those days.

How many hundreds of hours do you think you've put into these comics?

I haven't worked it out but I'm pretty slow. It takes about 3 days to pencil and ink a full page, if it was full time 8 hours a day. That's figuring out how to lay it out, trashing it, starting it again, carefully pencilling it, carefully inking it. Probably now I could colour it in that 36 hours too. I've speeded up a bit but not enough to be fully professional. If I was thrown into a professional job I think I'd learn all the short cuts. I just methodically do it

And you work as well and presumably you ate and slept as well.

10 pages might take 10 weeks because of working in spare time.

It's a huge chunk of your life.

Yes, I'm quite proud of the bits that have been printed. I don't think I drew anything for print before the first story in *Strange Worlds*. I would have started projects and not finished them, I wrote and decided it was terrible, had someone else write it and then we decided that it wasn't as good as we thought it was. For all those aspiring drawers and writers out there, get someone else to read it. If they're having trouble reading it, you know you have to think about it again.

Is this why you're part of this monthly comic makers meet?

It's just fun. We get together, have a few beers and talk about comics but mostly other stuff. Occasionally we'll do in-depth stuff about comics but that'd be boring all the time.

I suppose if you're eating, sleeping and breathing it the rest of the time…

That's right. When you're an artist stuck in your garret you have to get out now and again and see some people. The meetings have been going on for 15 years. Not all of it was run by me. Someone else started it, it lapsed a little then started back. There've been a number of venues. If any of your readers are comic creators and want to come along, check out pulpfaction.net. On their events forum there is a thing for Melbourne creators' meet. I use the forum occasionally but I read it once a week to see what people have been talking about. The forum is about Australian comics mostly, there's a big chunk to do with comikaze that is basically a loosely organised 24 hour comic

session done in artists garrets around Australia on the one day so they all try to draw a 24 page comic in 24 hours. Working together or separately doing their own stories. It's been a real eye opener for some of them because it gets the adrenaline juices flowing ... and the coffee.

Coffffeeeee

Yes, V8 or red bull. It gets rid of the emphasis on carefully drawing the page. You're forced to tell the story as efficiently as possible to get to the core of comics hopefully and maybe come up with a good story that you can then carefully re-draw later and sell it

Do you do comikaze?

My own writing I'm not happy with anyway, so no. I'm more interested in drawing a story that's good, rather than one I've knocked up in a flash and is terrible

Do any people work as a team for the comickaze?

Occasionally, yeah. The guys that do *Sawbones*, sawbonesonline.com. There's a writer called Jen Breach and an artist called Trevor Woods, that's how they got together doing a 24 hour comic. They're now doing a different one, a web page every week, which has forced him to draw and now he's done 200 pages and now has a print version that's damn fine. So you can work any way you like with comics. One guy called Douglas Holgate did a 24 hour comic. He just did it in pencil and scanned it in. Later he rendered it up and sold some beautiful 24 hour comics.

How do you feel about being part of this community?

It's awesome. There used to be not a lot of this before the online world became alive. Suddenly it's all connected and you get to know what everyone's doing before they've finished it, which is great. Someone's coming up with a new story, I've just finished reading their last printed one, they've already got a few pages online… it's very exciting times. Comics were dying. Recently mainstream publishers have discovered comic books, like Macmillan. They're doing comics within an educational context. They could have been doing it for 50 years but they're doing it now because of the buzz surrounding comics which is great. At the right age when you're just starting to read, if they're struggling with the words the pictures will help them

figure out the words.

Have you written anything for a younger audience?

Absolutely. There is a story called *Da and Dill* given away in showbags. Dillon, the guy who wrote and drew that, before the company went broke, they would print up hundreds of thousands of copies and distribute it around the country for kids. I drew a few stories for Dillon and loved doing it. I still like doing comedy. Before I was a serious young man, now I like comedy!

Before, I was a serious young man, now I like comedy!

That's a quote!

I speak only in quotes. Kids comics are fun, if they're humorous stories.

Do you think that it's different working on a comic for kids?

I like the fact that it's aimed at an innocence that we all lose. I recover it a bit by going back there [and working on those comics]. Every now and then I go back and look at comics I read as a kid, like *Asterisk, Tintin, Uncle Scrooge*, all very sophisticated comics but they're aimed at kids.

Is Asterisk really aimed at kids?

Well, maybe the kid in us. I'm not sure.

Vitalstatistix, Geriatrix

And Dogmatix. In Europe kids would get most of that because it's Latin, they've slaughtered Latin in that book. Particularly *Tintin* I think stands up extremely well. It's still set in the original time, the 50s or 60s, when ever it was, but they're beautifully illustrated and it doesn't date, it's easy to look at. It's not too complicated in the way it tells the story visually, it draws you into the characters, their body language, the way they talk and act. They're elegantly plotted. It's hard to plot anything and they've done a fine job. Even now, with comics coming more into the mainstream every day, most authors tend to do the layout in the simplest way, so people who are not used to reading comics will have no trouble reading it, so tiers of panels straight across. I've often spoken to people who have tried to read comics but they've picked up a comic I would consider a bad one where the storytelling is too flashy and it makes it too difficult to read.

I've picked up a modern comic and it's too hard to read. I blame certain creators who are popular and have started up a trend of being more flash than substance. Marvel and DC really took that on in the 90s, but now they're coming back to more proper storytelling. Their storytelling is reverting back to some basics, but there is still a lot of flashiness for the sake of it where it gets in the way of telling the story and immersing the reader in the experience. Basically you want to make the mechanics of reading the comic effortless. Even if the story is complex and you can make very complex stories in comics just like anything else. We're just starting to do that now. It's exciting times.

How did someone who started out loving superheroes get to the point where you don't like them any more?

When I was growing up it seemed like every little while there would be a quantum leap in the quality of comics. When Marvel started, all comics were like superman. Clarke Kent was a cipher for superman, he wasn't an interesting character. When Stan Lee and Jack Kirby started the *Fantastic Four* it was more about their characters and their inter-reactions and their problems with life. Before that the superheroes had no problems in life, they just went out and beat up the bad guys and that was all they did. Stan Lee was the first to introduce that. I started reading after he'd been doing it for a while and was getting pretty good at it. Through the late 60s every few months there would be a quantum improvement where they were learning to do it better and they did. It might look a bit antiquated now but people who have followed have also added something too. One of the big changes was that comics used to be printed very cheaply. They decided if they charged a little more and printed them like any magazine, they could do full colour. Wow, that's a huge quantum leap in the physical look of the product, and some good writers came along. You'll hear the name Alan Moore will crop up regularly. He's still probably one of the best writers in comics. So I've seen comics improving all through my life and there's still exciting, interesting and new stuff coming along because it's still a relatively virgin area.

Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.

Richard Harland talks to Dark Matter

I met Richard Harland at Continuum 7, where Richard was on a number of panels in addition to launching his new book, *Liberator*.

How did you get into writing?

My getting into writing story is really torturous, slow and painful. I wanted to be a writer since I was about 11 years old and fell into a state of writers' block. I started thinking I should write literary stories, but that's not really where my talent lies. So for 25 years I had writer's block. I've still have 30 novels at home unfinished. Some were just a chapter or two from the end, but every single time I got stuck.

So when you say literary novels, do you mean like classic literature?

More modernist literature. I had the disaster of winning a prize where I wrote stuff kids my age wouldn't normally write, full of symbols and stream-of-consciousness, very avant garde. I won the prize so I thought that's what I should be writing. I was basically writing too far away from myself. I thought I could draw it out of book knowledge so I struggled.

Would you say write what you know?

I write fantasy so I wouldn't really say that, but somewhere deep down you have to draw on real feeling that you've experienced yourself. The feelings in my novels are generally supercharged compared to my own experience, but they're based on my own experience. I know where they come from.

So you were originally trying to write too far out of your experience.

Exactly. I was trying to write by what I knew rather than what I felt. That kept me blocked for a long time. Even when I started to write fantasy I still had the habit of writer's block. I actually finished my first novel at the age of 45.

You give me hope!

I'm a shining role model to all late starters because I am the latest of late starters.

That means I have 2 years to catch up.

Two years is plenty of time. [laughs] I kept on struggling to write, I never gave up. I did other things with my life, playing folk-rock music around Sydney, and I became a university lecturer for 10 years. But the dream of being a writer was always there. When I finished my first novel it came out from a small press, and by some amazing fluke it was reviewed by the Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian. I wrote to the reviewers at the newspapers saying, "thanks for writing such glowing reviews." A reviewer at the Sydney Morning Herald wrote back and said, "loved your book, if you've got another manuscript send it my way and I'll see if I can recommend it to a mainstream publisher." That is one in a thousand. I've never heard of another author with that story, but that's what happened. I just had an amazing fluke of luck that got me from a small publisher to a mainstream publication in one jump.

That's fantastic! So what you were lecturing? Anything related to writing?

Yes, I used to lecture on English literature and English. I did manage to set up some courses in fantasy but I don't think that has anything much to do with my own writing. I think writing is a gut thing really. You have to have the story telling instinct. I've put up this writing tips website, as big as a small book. It's a free resource for anyone wanting to be a writer, 145 pages with everything I know about writing. There's one part of my mind, which I think of as the university lecturer part, which stands outside and analyses while the creative part goes its own way and does its own thing. That's the way I like to keep it. I don't want the analytical part getting in to influence the creative stage.

Does the analytical part come back and edit the book later?

The analytical part recognises where I'm going right and where I'm going wrong, things that work and things that don't work. The analytical part has helped me learn as I write. It's helped improve me as a writer, and it does come in more with revision. With my first novel, *The Dark Edge* from Pan Macmillan, a sci fi thriller, they wanted some miniscule revisions. The only thing I'd been able to write while I

was blocked was poetry, which was reasonably successful in its own way. But, writing poetry and also academic books and articles, I was extremely arrogant because I expected that what I write is accepted as final.

So you were very precious about your baby.

I was. I made revisions on *The Dark Edge*, tiny revisions, then got a shock with the next novel when they suggested big revisions. I remember walking along the beach at Wollongong trying to adjust to this in my head because I'd been floating on such a high and suddenly realised that people didn't automatically love what I'd written. The world was actually a much tougher, meaner place than I'd realised. I adjusted, and I now would say that I'm probably very good at revising because when I revise now I totally rethink. *Worldshaker*, the first of the two steam punk novels that were my breakthrough success, I totally rewrote 3 times. And when I say rewrote, I actually start at page one and go all the way through until the last page. When I believe in the revisions to be made, I absorb them into the story and they spread their influence through the whole novel. I can't just do little chunks. I now almost enjoy revising, as long as I can feel the book improving. It's like a challenge to lateral thinking. Writing the first draft, I have to believe that this is exactly the way that it happened and I'm writing down the way that it happened. Then I get readers' sample feedback as well as hearing from publishers and editors, and they say, maybe this bit isn't working too well. Which means I need to unpick it and think maybe it could have happened a different way. I'm good at that now, I think I'm able to get my mind around breaking up something I had locked into place and saying yeah it could have happened another way.

Tell me about steampunk.

Steampunk is what my 2 last novels are. I can see bits of steampunk creeping into my earlier novels although I didn't think of them as steampunk at the time, when the sub-genre was hardly known in Australia. Steampunk is a fantasy version of the 19th century, especially with regards to developing technological possibilities and what could have happened. It's the science fiction of an alternative past where you develop technologies that never really happened in the 19th century but could have done.

Like with William Gibson's *The Difference Engine*. Where the Babbage engine was built.

Yeah. Gibson was almost at the end of the first steampunk wave, where it was very much a minor branch of science fiction. The current branch of steampunk is pretty much between science fiction and fantasy. The good part of that, the fantasy part of it, is that it's not just a matter of imagining alternative technologies, it's a matter of imagining whole cultures. Getting a real Victorian feel into it without it having to be a genuine Victorian age. It's the Victorian age that might have happened. That's what I like. That's what *Worldshaker* and *Liberator* are.

With *Worldshaker*, I had the ideas of a Victorian age that might have happened from a couple of dreams.

You're another author who's dreamt your story and written it.

Yes, when I say it, it sounds so corny. I've stopped saying it at conventions because it sounds so corny, but it's true. But it was 10 years before I started writing the novel, *Worldshaker*, and at the time I couldn't have had a novel like that published in Australia. I wrote other novels that I could get published and after 10 years the wave started. This is the second wave of steampunk, when it spread to Australia, where it became a clothes thing, a fashion thing and a much wider thing. Then I realised now's my chance and I wrote *Worldshaker*. It took me 5 years but when I finished it, it was almost the perfect time because steampunk was reaching a crescendo. Timing is one aspect of being lucky. I've been very lucky there.

There was a panel about Australian steampunk because Australia didn't really have an industrial 19th century. Do you have anything to say to that?

Probably Dave Freer has much more to say because he is actually writing novels that are steampunk set in Australia. The second novel in my duology, *Liberator*, moves to Australia, to Botany Bay. In my alternative history, the colony that was New South Wales has shrunk back again to just a coaling station where the juggernauts go to refuel. So it is Australian in the sense that it has Botany Bay and the escarpment behind Sydney but not a lot else. Because of the nature of the world I'm creating it takes place mainly on board the juggernauts themselves, these moving cities that are 3km long by 1

km wide. The surrounding terrain doesn't enter into it much except as it's seen from the decks of the juggernauts.

You made a shift into steampunk, what were you writing before you started steampunk?

One thing I've told myself is that it's necessary to settle into a particular genre.

Why?

It's necessary for sales. I've indulged myself. I've enjoyed… because of feeling rejuvenated, feeling inspired, it's great to move from one thing to another. So I started off with 3 science fiction thrillers for adults. Actually, I started off even before that with a gothic macabre cult novel, which came out from a small press. After the SF thrillers, I moved into a kind of fantasy based on angelology, which became the *Ferren* books from Penguin. They are drawing on all the lore of angels, levels of heaven. It's about a war between heaven and earth. I was writing it pretty much around the same time Philip Pullman was writing *His Dark Materials*.

I've also written an animal story *Sassycat* for younger readers. I've written books for children as well – an Aussie Chomps book and a set of four for Scholastic. Then there was a sequel to the *Vicar of Morbing Vyle*, the gothic macabre one, just because people kept asking for a sequel, so eventually I did it. I've kind of really enjoyed moving around from genre to genre and age-group to age-group, but people never know what to expect from a Harland novel and that's not a good thing if you want to build up a reputation. People want to read the same kind of thing by the author. It just so happens that steampunk is my most natural genre, so for a few novels at least I'm happy to write steampunk.

Have you thought about doing what Iain Banks has done? He has an Iain Banks brand and an Iain M. Banks brand.

There is a lot of sense in using pseudonyms or alternative forms of your name. Not many people in Australia do it actually, but if you're writing clearly different genres it's a good thing to do. But even then, your publisher may not be too keen on you moving into a different genre, because it means relaunching you with new promotion, a whole new effort of publicity.

You said you're really happy with steampunk so what does the future hold?

More steampunk. The next novel will be steampunk. The thing about *Worldshaker* is that it began as a standalone novel, then I thought about what might come after, so I thought of it in terms of a trilogy. My publisher at Allen and Unwin got back to me and said it'll be a 2 year gap between books, which is a bit long for a trilogy. Plus we think the middle volume isn't as strong, it's basically a bit of a bridge to the last novel. When I had recovered from screaming for a few days, I saw how I could lock those two stories and make them into one story and it fitted perfectly. Whereas *Worldshaker* took 5 years to write (after 10 years of planning), and pretty much every other novel has taken about a year to write, this one took me about 6 months. I roared through it, it just wanted to tell itself. I love the bit about novel writing when I'm about ¾ through and if I've set the story up right, it starts carrying me along. This happened with *Liberator* about 1/3 of the way along. It reaches a climax very early on and the climax keeps on developing from there on. The duology wraps up and the relationship between the main character concludes in the final chapter. The romance is wrapped up, there's nowhere you can take the characters after that.

The next novel will be steampunk in the same universe but at a different point in time with different main characters.

Speaking as someone who is part way through a number of trilogies at the moment, I think there's a lot to be said for the stand alone novel.

I've never yet written a trilogy. I've always written a stand alone novel that built out to become a trilogy or duology. That happened with the *Ferren* books. I wrote a stand alone novel where I left a few strands open at the end, that I later built into a trilogy. You could think that it was written as a trilogy from the beginning because so many of the seeds planted into the first book turned out to be incredibly fruitful for the later books. The same with *Worldshaker* and *Liberator*.

You have separate stories set in the same universe, you've finished this story and then you've thought yeah, these guys have a life afterwards so we'll go with that.

Yeah but more than that. Things that were opened up in the first

novel, you explore later and find depths you didn't realise were there. *Ferren* is a classic example because of the Morphs. I didn't realise this, it was my editor at Penguin, Dmitri, who's one of those creative editors who was so much in sympathy that he could make creative suggestions that really worked. He said we want to find out more about them, you've got to put them more in the next books. I thought about it and discovered there were all sorts of things about the Morphs and their history that I hadn't thought of at the time. They were just a chapter of the book that worked really well, one small adventure along the way. The more I thought about it the more I realised how significant they were in the overall story.

That's what makes me feel there's always a story out there, you just have to find it. It's a good feeling about a story when you feel that you're its servant, bringing it out.

Do you have anything to say to people who want to write and have experienced frustration along the way?

Hang on to the dream but be realistic with it. Don't have foolish dreams. There are so many foolish dreams about being a writer. The dream is the ultimate goal but along the way you've got to be prepared for so much frustration, so much rejection, build it into your expectations right from the very beginning. Don't expect to write a first novel that will get picked up. Have a number of novels in you. You've got to form long term plans because writing a great novel is not enough, you need a great novel and the contacts to make sure it's considered seriously by publishers. That means building up a reputation slowly, getting to know people, make contacts. A 5 year plan is an absolute minimum, or 10 years. If you reach the end of 5 or 10 years, then despair but don't expect things to happen sooner than that.

I heard Watership Down was rejected 19 times, Monopoly got rejected 30 times.

I thought it was more for Watership Down. The thing is when it did come out it came out as a Puffin in the kid's section, the wrong category to start with. It was just good enough to overcome all the hurdles. Harry Potter got rejected a dozen times.

And look how much J K Rowling has made.

Often the books that become huge successes don't have the factors

that publishers are looking for in the first place. Harry Potter is a boarding school story; all the publishers who rejected it must have thought 'an English boarding school story? Now? That's not going to work'. Or Watership Down: a tale about furry animals with all these more adult things in it, that's not going to work.

I've interviewed a few people who've made comments that it's taken them 10 years to become an overnight success.

That's exactly right. The overnight success comes from a coincidence of various factors you can't control, like the market place really wanting a certain kind of book at a certain time, the publisher wanting to bring it out, the publishing happening to chance on your book at that very moment. It's like planets coming into alignment.

Thank you for speaking to Dark Matter.

Letters

Must get my bid in for Discovery real quick. ;-)
- Andy

What a great collection of articles about everything SF, Fantasy & Art. I went to the fanzine looking for the article about HNBF (Help Nathan Buy Firefly) but found so much more. Really a wealth of information to be found at the fanzine and I'm so glad we're included in such good company.

- Chica Miller

Wow! A massive issue and a darn good one. I still haven't made it all the way through, but man, there's a mass of stuff here and it's really solid reading.
I'll get ya a real LoC in the near-future, but just wanted to let ya know I'm already into it!
Thanks, Chris

Thank you for the bumper Dark Matter issue 3. I am not sure if I have ever received a 200-page fanzine, but this letter obviously shows that I got through it, and made what comments I could make. A real labour of love here, it looks tremendous.

Yvonne and I just got back from the Canadian National Steampunk Exhibition just northeast of Toronto… a great time was had by all, and we saw amazing performances. If anyone things steampunk has jumped the shark, I'd say they're wrong. There were far too many people enjoying themselves to think that.

I am looking at the list of potential new SF shows coming up you've got here…not a single one of them appeals to me at all. I think that's more a function of my interests changing, and my cynicism with various studios producing something of quality, and not ripping off successful ideas from others. I may be interested in Doctor Who, given that I keep reading how good it's been, especially the new season, but I haven't been able to follow it at all. I'd need time to watch it from Christopher Eccleston onwards.

I must admit that I would watch some more Matrix movies, even if it's just to give Keanu Reeves a pay cheque. He's even looking at another Bill & Ted movie, so we know that life is a little desperate for

this fellow Canadian. But, I know what I like…bring on the next Trek movie, and I cannot wait for The Hobbit, both parts.

I think Canadians can now watch Riese online, but again, finding the time to watch it is difficult. Riese may be available on Space: The Imagination Station (Canadian SF channel) soon…looked it up, it's there. Not sure of showing times, and it might be downloadable there.

Congrats to Shaun Tan on his Oscar win, and I see he's got another couple of Hugo nominations this year! He's having his season, and getting lots of shiny trophies to go with it. The Hugo nominations for this year were announced…I had hopes to be on the ballot again, but that's life. Yvonne and I have plans to go to Reno for Worldcon, and have ourselves a time.

The Gunny Award…didn't know about that, and wish we had something like that here. I never met Ian, but communicated with him plenty via papermail and the first tentative messages over the Internet. I'd respond to the issues of Ethel Ian edited and mailed out. I always worried about being a cash drain on the MSFC, still do, too. I now get electronic Ethels, or e-Thels. That Doodle of Comment is great…I don't know if there was ever any response to it.

Your rant is spot on re the way the press sees fans and others who enjoy science fiction in all its forms. Journalists sometimes need a reminder that no matter what they are supposed to be reporting on, they have to maintain their objectivity, and not fall back on old stereotypes and tired phrases that go back generations. The old stereotype of fans being nerds and geeks living in their parents' basements have a kernel of truth from long ago, but it simply doesn't apply now.

When I go to conventions that feature actor guests, and that doesn't happen often, I don't go looking for them either, not because I don't think they're good people or anything, but it's that I probably don't know who they are. Another function of getting older, I guess. You mentioned John deLancie earlier… Years ago, we had a great chat with John about being a struggling actor with a mortgage and family, and we helped him kill a bottle of Jim Beam. He's an honest bloke, and he deserves the success he's had and more.

Thank you for remembering Mike Glicksohn here. Mike was an old

friend, and he is missed by many. He deserved a better retirement than he had, with progressive illnesses and cancer. We mark his passing with the quotation of Glicksohn's Maxim…IF3. If Fandom Isn't Fun, It's Futile. That's common sense for all of us.

Slowly but surely, I am accumulating a steampunk library. The Difference Engine, the Moorcock books, plus a Stephen Hunt, a copy of Leviathan, and Jeff VanderMeer's Steampunk Bible, to name a few. They are being published faster than I can afford them, so I hope there's someone who is keeping track of them all. I remember the Polish website that kept track over the years of all steampunk influences, and there is a publication that you can download from eFanzines.com called Steampunkopedia. Excellent assembly of titles.

I will wrap up my letter by saying it's a pleasure to see some Ian Gunn illustrations I'd never seen before. Thank you for 200 pages of SF fun, and I can hardly wait to see what you put in the next issue!

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Dark Matter 3 was a great read. I loved all of the interviews, reviews, news and letters. I haven't read any of the books reviewed, I haven't watched any of the movies reviewed, I haven't played any of the games reviewed (then again I don't own a Xbox or Playstation), and I haven't watched any of the anime reviewed. It's great to know what is good and what is bad, in which case I can avoid it.

It's great to see that you have a few people helping you out with the reviews. I like a variety and you definitely have a variety of reviews, with different view points from your reviewers. It makes for a better all round fanzine. Keep up the great work.

I know Derek Screen. He's a good friend. I first met Derek when he did a Multiverse event to celebrate Space 1999. It was a SF trivia night and then later a disco was held. I had a good night.

All the best.

Regards,

Robert :-)

Thanks guys. Please bear in mind that all reviews are subjective. While we try to take other people's tastes into account, our personal biases do show through. - Nalini

Anime/Animation

The Sacred Blacksmith Collection

Studio: Manglobe
Director: Masamitsu Hidaka
Distributor: Madman
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Cecily Campbell became the head of the Campbell house upon the death of her father a month earlier. Tradition dictates that, as head of the family, Cecily join the Knight Guard of the Independent Trade City of Housman. Cecily has more faith in the family sword than in herself, so takes up this sword only to have it break in a fight. Cecily seeks out someone to repair the sword.

Luke, a blacksmith, and his assistant Lisa, who save Cecily with their power to create a new, powerful sword. Luke refuses to make one for Cecily, claiming he has vowed only to make swords for himself. His refusal seems contrary as he leads Cecily on when, at times, he appears to agree to make her a sword only to make the cost too high. Lisa and Cecily become friends in spite of all this.

A Demon Sword who can take the shape of a young woman called Aria joins the trio as prize to be protected, then quickly becomes a friend. Later Aria protects Cecily in battles.

Fanservices include a focus on weaponry, a running joke about Cecily's rather large breasts, her armor that draws attention to them and the armor's tendency to fall off at inopportune times. It appears Cecily does not wear undergarments. The rest of the animation is well drawn, some of landscapes look like pretty watercolours.

From the limited number of episodes in the preview copy it's hard to tell how the series develops or if the series relies on a forumula. Theron Martin gave the series a B; an excerpt of his review can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sacred_Blacksmith. I thought this was worth watching.

Summer Wars

Distributor: Madman
Cover: ©2009 Summerwars Film Partners
Reviewer: Daniel Haynes

I'll come out and say this first: *Summer Wars* is an enjoyable anime with a lot of wasted potential. The easiest way to describe this anime would be 'Studio Ghibli meets Pokemon'. Summer Wars has a great setting, occupying a world completely reliant on an exaggerated future vision of the internet, where everyone has a virtual 'avatar' and navigates a virtual reality. The network, known as OZ, is populated by billions and is connected to all major infrastructure (nuclear power stations, roads, traffic lights, essential services etc) and was considered completely safe behind unhackable security. Kenji Koiso, a part-time OZ programmer and maths prodigy is implicated for hacking OZ's 'unhackable' encryption, while at Natsuki's (a high-school friend who forces him to pretend they are in a relationship to her great-grandmother) house to celebrate her great-grandmother's 90th birthday. A virtual intelligence, nicknamed 'Love Machine' hacks OZ and wreaks havoc on earth's infrastructure and services. The climax revolves around Kenji needing to destroy Love Machine in OZ in order to deter a catastrophe.

While I was really impressed with a lot of the world setting and the creativity surrounding OZ, *Summer Wars* failed to meet its full potential with a mature and engaging storyline. The plot is rather juvenile, the first act akin to a typical high-school romance anime, while the later stages feel like pokemon/one-piece on steroids. The avatar battles feel forced and often out of place.

The animation is of a very high standard. While the 'real world' animation isnt the greatest, it fits the story and setting quite well. OZ's animation is spectacular.

The english dub/voice-acting was absolutely terrible, so I recommend watching with subtitles and the japanese audio track.

While *Summer Wars* had a great premise and failed to deliver, that's not to say its a bad anime. I still enjoyed it, but was ultimately disappointed at the conclusion, and felt it wasted so much of its enormous potential. 6/10

Evangelion 1.11 You are [not] alone

Creator: Hideaki Anno of Studio Khara
Cover: © khara. All Rights Reserved.
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Shinji Ikari is a boy called to a government agency, NERV, to pilot an Eva 1, a giant robot, in defence of humanity. In a rewrite of the creation legend, Lilith is an angel who fell to Earth bringing life. Lilith remains alive but crucified under NERV headquarters, while other angels come to free her. If Lilith is freed, humanity will be completely wiped out. Misato, a lieutenant, takes Shinji to live with her. Shinji is also enrolled in middle school, where he is bullied as the new kid and the pilot who failed to prevent damage to the city. Shinji's father works for NERV. Having left Shinji alone for 3 years, Shinji questions his existence while seeking his father's approval. When approval appears impossible to gain, Shinji starts to question why his father seems attached to Rei Ayanami, the girl who pilots Eva 00.

Throughout the movie there are hints at deeper workings. Shinji's father appears cold-blooded towards his son. Plans for Shinji's life and Shinji's relationship with Rei are hinted at. There are occasional scenes where audio-only communications discuss theology and politics of this situation. This is left for future development while providing hints to greater depth in the story.

Art work is of a good standard for anime, with a similar style to series such as *Full Metal Panic* with the long legs and big eyes. Some scenes have 'fan services' such as more detailed, 3D-style depictions of robots. Other fan services include a focus on the women, both clothed and unclothed, for which Evangelion earns a rating of PG. At the close of the credits there is an announcement advertising the next movie instalment, with a cheeky comment about more fanservices in *Evangelion 2*.

Evangelion 1.11 is part of a story, without a final revelation of the politics or a final conclusion to the story. Characters are set up well, with a plot continuing at a good pace. My curiosity is definitely aroused – I want to see where they're going with Shinji's father and the angels. Highly recommended.

Evangelion 2.22 You can [not] advance

Creator: Hideaki Anno of Studio Khara
Cover: © khara. All Rights Reserved.
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Shinji Ikari, Shinji's father Gendo, Misato, Rei and others return in this next installment of the Evangelion story.

Evangelioin 2.22 opens with Mari Makinami piloting test unit 05 and destroying the third angel. Asuka Shikinami pilots unit 02, which is dispatched to Japan. Asuka moves in with Misato and Shinji in order to teach them to work as a team, providing numerous opportunities for character development and fan service. Shinji cooks lunch for others, which inspires Rei to cook dinner as a means of bringing Shinji and Gendo together.

Audio-only conversations reveal that the humans are split into factions based on their interpretations of legend or their drive for power. It isn't quite clear what is going on here; this appears intended to build suspence until the true underlying agendas are revealed. More angels are killed, relationships develop, more fanservices, all in the lead up to the conclusion that will probably occur in Evangelion 3.

Wikipedia says 'The film won first place in the Animation category of the French Lyon Asian Film Festival, narrowly beating Symphony in August in an audience vote. It won the award for Excellent Animation of the Year by being nominated for the Japan Academy Prize for Animation of the Year in 2010.' There are also numerous accolades in the form of reviews, to be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelion_2.

I enjoyed this movie and I'm looking forward to the conclusion that will provide answers.

Book Reviews

The Razor Gate

Author: Sean Cregan
Publisher: Headline
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Maya, daughter of a refugee and US citizen, a journalist whose career is in shreds after a libel suit, witnesses a bombing on Green Street. Garrett is a cop who was busted down to the streets after becoming personally involved with a victim of a crime. Emi, the victim, has been effectively murdered – given a year to live. Emi isn't alone, there are well over a hundred others like her, called Clocks because their time is running out. The police force is crooked, dancing to the tune of the suits watching like vultures.

Maya's history of living with her father in a refugee camp equipped her with skills to function in the refugee district that others didn't have. However, Maya didn't appear to have any connection to people in the refugee camp at the time of the story, even though most refugees never managed to leave the camp.

Garrett had been sitting in on support groups for the Clocks until he was busted down to the streets for getting involved with a Clock and pushing the investigation too far. Garrett's mother had cancer, lending added impetus to his relationship with Emi and his determination to find a cure. Garrett's grief is a running theme in the story, as is his internal conflict, tearing him between staying with Emi and seeking a cure to save her.

Emi, an artist, spends her time drawing and painting and trying to fill her last year with as much living as possible. Even so, her grief at her impending death is overwhelming. She clings to Garrett and to life.

In the beginning Cregan sets the tone, 'The business suit is the SS uniform of the modern world.' Just before the climactic resolution of the story philosophical and ethical issues are raised, presented as an argument between opposing sides. I would like to have seen more of this woven throughout the story.

The Razor Gate is a crime/thriller with an SF premise (the manner

of the murders) bracketed with moral and philosophical exploration, of which I wanted more. 3 out of 5 stars from me, but those who really enjoy action oriented crime/thrillers will probably rate this book higher.

Angelica

Author: Arthur Phillips
Publisher: Scribe
Year: 2011
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

In 19th Century London, Joseph Barton, a scientific researcher, declares that his young daughter, Angelica, should no longer sleep in her parents' room but in her own. His wife, Constance, resists this separation, as well as the impending resumption of intimacies with her alienated husband this move implies. As her daughter sleeps, Constance steadfastly watches over her and becomes aware of both supernatural visitations and physical manifestations in the house. A Spiritualist is then brought on the scene, which only heightens the less than benign intentions the distant Joseph appears to have towards his daughter. Could he be behind the spectral attacks on Angelica?

Told in four parts, and from four different viewpoints (although by a single, un-named narrator), this part-supernatural, part-psychological tale initially appears to be an updated re-working of the classic Victorian ghost story. It does not take long, however, to realise that the scenario is much more complex than this. Although the writing is extremely literate and Phillips is obviously a very talented writer, the experiment seems to have just missed its mark. Phillips has done his best to recreate a Victorian novel, with its thick and dense language and archaic idioms – something I usually enjoy reading – but in this case, coupled with a great deal of character introspection, I found it difficult at times to wade through. And ultimately, I am still unclear as to exactly what had happened. Overall, a book I enjoyed and will probably read again, and recommended for those who enjoy pastiches such as Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*. I look forward to other work from this author.

The Map of Time

Author: Felix J. Palma
Publisher: Scribe
Year: 2011
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

Victorian London, and a young gentleman, Andrew Harrington, is on the verge of committing suicide. He is unable to function, completely filled with grief over the death of his girlfriend at the hands of Jack the Ripper eight years previously. A young woman, Clare Haggerty, feels restrained within her society and longs to escape. H.G. Wells, currently feted for his success with *The Time Machine*, is frustrated that an old nemesis has set up a time-travel company. The stories of these three people become entwined, as they travel into the past to change history, and travel into the future to observe.

Upon first reading the blurb, my first thought was of the 1979 movie, *Time After Time*. But apart from the inclusion of both H.G. Wells and Jack the Ripper, these two tales have little in common. The story here is told in three parts, each focussing on different characters and with some overlap in time. As with any good time travel story, the narrative is not told chronologically. The narrator, both omniscient and supernatural, tells the story with a great deal of humour - once refusing to reveal what occurs behind closed doors out of a sense of propriety, and another time telling a background story as the characters had not yet arrived at their destination.

The dialogue and description perfectly capture both the sense of London in the 1890s, and the feel of a Victorian novel. This is all the more remarkable considering the book has been translated from its original Spanish. I've previously read translated books where the language doesn't flow, they just don't feel right – but the writing here is taught, witty and very, very clever. The characters too, are authentic. And the writer has obviously done his research. Be prepared a host of other characters too, both fictional and actual, including Bram Stoker, Jules Verne and Henry James. This cross-genre novel (romance, science fiction, steampunk, adventure, romance, historical fantasy and so on) is superb, an engaging narrative that I had trouble putting down. Thoroughly recommended.

Die for Me

Author: Amy Plum
Publisher: Atom
Release Date: 2011
Reviewer: Elyse Taylor

I've noticed a formula emerging in young adult literature, and I'm sure I'm not the only one. 'Average', plain, bookish, un-popular girl starts at a new school in a new town/country. Girl is accepted by a new crowd. Girl meets boy. Boy has strange appeal and an air of mystery. Boy and girl hook up. Boy (or even occasionally girl) turns out to be some kind of mythical creature.

That's right; it's Paranormal Romance. Again... but hey, at least it's not more vampires...

This time, well, let's just say that the love interest is "mortality challenged", but he's not a blood sucker. Heroine Kate meets the man of her dreams, Vincent, after moving to Paris to live with her grandparents following the death of her parents. She doesn't fit in at school and struggles to connect with the 'typical' pleasures that her sister Georgia distracts herself with. Big surprise. Why is it that the girls who attract supernatural boys always seem to be outsiders and a little bit different? Don't answer that one.

One interesting development is the reason for the fledgling romance falling at the first jump. Thankfully, Vincent does not possess Edward Cullen's annoying demon complex or believe that he is basically bad. Yes, he does think that he is bad news for Kate; and yes, he does attempt to instigate a separation. For once through, the problem is really hers (no I won't tell you what it is; read it yourself!), and of course, it doesn't last long.

In addition to the un-dead boyfriend (complete with oddball family) there is of course the mandatory supernatural, semi-immortal bad dude; who just happens to have a grudge against Vincent. Well, it is a tried and true way of developing a conflict without turning the story from a romance to a tragedy. Romeo and Juliet would clearly have done better with an ogre or two.

Plum seeks to create a different feel by setting her novel against the backdrop of Paris; however, the heroine is still a typically American school girl. Paris is certainly more romantic than your average small American town, but there is definitely a lingering feeling of American style rather than French and, despite constant references to the fact that the story takes place in Paris, really the events could take place just about anywhere.

Among the rash of teen romance where one or both of the lovers are un-dead to hit the shelves in the last few years, *Die for Me* is a fairly standard sample. The writing is enjoyable if you like the genre, and the choice of a new creepy dead thing to love refreshes things a little. The plot moves at a reasonable pace and contains enough action to keep all but the most indifferent of readers going. If you liked *Twilight, House of Night*, or even if you aren't a big reader and prefer a T.V. series like *Supernatural*, then *Die for Me* is definitely worth a look.

The Gathering

A Darkness Rising Book
Author: Kelly Armstrong
Publisher: Atom
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Maya is a much loved adopted child of the park ranger and an artist living in Salmon Creek, a small community on Vancouver Island in Canada. Maya is Navajo by her looks, although, as a foundling, no-one is certain as to her heritage. Daniel is the son of a drunk, from whom his mother ran away. Rafe is the new kid, living in a cabin outside of town with his 19 year old sister Annie.

In the opening scene of *The Gathering*, Serena drowns despite the best efforts of Maya, her best friend, and Daniel, Serena's boyfriend, to save her. Maya and Daniel are haunted by Serena's death as anyone would be by the death of a close friend in similar circumstances, not

by Serena's ghost.

Salmon Creek is a medical research centre with residents hand picked by St Clouds, the research company. Nearly all residents are long term, even those in support roles outside of the research facility. This story differs from the usual formula in that the central character, Maya, is on the inside of the small community and is the popular girl at school. Even so, events unfold that lead to Maya asking questions about her heritage and looking for answers as to why Serena, a champion swimmer, died.

The Gathering has the traditional love triangle that differs from the norm in that Maya is not self-destructive in her impulses, not waiting to be rescued and is genuinely derisive of the girls who are attracted to the 'bad guy' image. Maya is a capable teen, competent in bush lore and in the care of animals. She is physically active and independent although not anti-social.

Early on in *The Gathering* I thought the idealistic description of the small town from Maya's point of view was unbelievable and shallow, but later character development showed Maya as idealistic, revealing the usual pecking order inevitable in any school and community.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: I don't like *Twilight*, I don't like sparkly vampires and I don't like Bella's unhealthy relationships. What I did like was Stephanie Meyer's version of the American Indian heritage, which I would have loved to see explored in a different manner. Kelly Armstrong has taken a similar idea, that of the mythical skinwalkers, and developed a new story without vampires, substituting an admirable yet flawed Maya for the helpless Bella. While Armstrong is not a new George R. R. Martin, she has presented an enjoyable story suitable for teens, young adults and anyone interested in paranormal fiction/adventure with romantic overtones.

Recommended for fans of the genre.

The Undivided

Author: Jennifer Fallon
Publisher: Voyager
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Darragh and Ronan are psychically linked twins who, thanks to a centuries old treaty, channel magic from the Tuatha De Danann (Fae) to the Druids. Together the twins are the Undivided, but at 3 years of age Ronan was tossed through a rift into an alternate realm (reality) that, at first, appears to be late 20th century Earth as we know it. Ronan was rescued from drowning by a stunt man, Patrick Boyle, on a movie set. Adopted by the star of the movie, Kiva Kavanagh, raised by Kiva's cousin Kerry who married Patrick, Ronan grew up in the lap of luxury but also under the paparazzi spotlight. Fourteen years later in 2001, the race is on between druid and the fae to find Ronan.

Darragh remains with the druids, being trained as a warrior and to rule his people. This training results in numerous injuries that were psychically passed on to Ronan, who was accused of self-harming and attention seeking. The rules of the psychic transfer of injury do not always seem consistent. As a theme this is both thought-provoking and entertaining, especially in the introduction of Murray Symes, a child psychiatrist whose patients are invariably diagnosed with Oppositional Defiance Disorder.

Trasa is the daughter of Amergin, a druid who betrayed his people and whose deathbed confession resulted in the escalation of the hunt to find Ronan shortly before the events in *The Undivided*. In his confession, Amergin revealed that he had personally sent Ronan through the rift into 'our' world. Due to her half-human and half-sidhe, more specificially half banshee (beansidhe) heritage, Trasa is one of the few sidhe who can survive visiting 'our' world. Marcroy (think a younger-looking Malfoy senior but sidhe) is the sidhe envoy entrusted with overseeing the treaty between the fae and the druids. Marcroy spent two thousand years trying to oversee the end of the treaty without allowing any fae being responsible for breaking the

treaty. Marcroy sends Trasa and a leprechaun (Leipreachan) to 'our' world to trap Ronan, preventing his return to the druid realm.

Hayley is Patrick Boyle's daughter and has grown up as step-cousin and best friend of Ronan. Brydie is a court maiden to the Queen of the Celts, sent to Darragh to seduce him to ensure his bloodline continues. There are many other characters who shape this story, adding flavour to the narrative.

Fallon contrasts the worlds with ruthless accuracy. Not content with idealising the druid realm, Ronan complains about body lice and gruel for food in the druid realm. However, all the characters who visit 'our' world feel the losses incurred by progress, contrasting overpopulation and pollution with the fresh air and magic of the druid realm.

Movement in the story is consistent throughout *The Undivided*, with the plot steadily accelerating towards the cliff hanger finish. Characters have depth, enabling the reader to engage with them. Even Marcroy, the supposed villain, appears to have layers that Fallon intends to strip away in future instalments. Humour seasons the story, sometimes it's a chuckle, sometimes it's laugh out loud. At one point a line is delivered apparently innocently but full of double entendre, so much so I had a vision of Jenny telling one of her funny anecdotes at Supanova, with that straight look Jenny gives, honesty cloaking wickedness, while delivering a punch-line. I wonder how much more I enjoyed the book because I had met the personality behind the book, which sparkled in these gems.

This book 'has it all' as they say, meaning it has nudity, sex, drugs, politics, romance, conflict and more, and yet *The Undivided* is rarely explicit in its descriptions in the bedroom. *The Undivided* is fantasy, possibly epic fantasy, not a paranormal romance nor an erotic romance.

I highly recommend *The Undivided*. I would probably have given it 5 stars if I hadn't just read *A Game of Thrones*. But that probably says more about my tastes than it does about this novel. 4.5 stars.

the twilight saga: the official illustrated guide

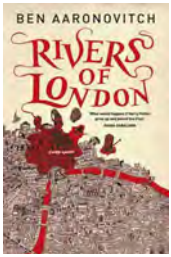
Author: Stephanie Meyer
Publisher: Atom
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

This book is an encyclopaedia of the *Twilight* series, detailing information about characters, vampires, werewolves and much more. Family trees, 'factoids' from the series and covers from the different countries in which *Twilight* has been released are presented in comprehensive format. As an encyclopaedia this book works well for fans of the series.

I collect art books on various pop culture icons, including *Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, The Dark Crystal, World of Warcraft* and more. I expected something similar to those books; significantly larger than novels with beautiful illustrations, working drawings and photographs. *The Dark Crystal* art book excels, with transparent overlays used to vary underlying drawings. This illustrated guide does not have much in the way of artwork, and what is there does not seem to be from the movies. Many of the drawings are very simple, and could easily feature in children's picture books. There are far more pages with only text than there are pages with illustrations. There are some drawings that are nice, and the family trees aim to impart information well.

The Twilight Saga: The Illustrated Guide is a book aiming at fans of *Twilight* only, instead of aiming at collectors like myself.

Rivers of London



Author: Ben Aaronovitch
Publisher: Gollancz
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Peter Grant is nearing the end of his probationary period in the Metropolitan Police Service, expecting to be transferred to a paperwork desk job, when he interrogates a ghost at the scene of a murder. Peter is of mixed-race; a crack about passing himself off as an Obama look-alike gives you an idea of his natural skin colour. We learn more about his background and meet his parents, but it is really Peter's uniqueness that caused him to fail his A levels, just as this uniqueness brings him to the attention of Inspector Nightingale, a wizard in the Service.

Lesley May is a peer of Peter's, a classmate and good copper with unresolved sexual tension creating an interesting relationship between the two. They work well together, even after being transferred into different sections at the close of their probationary service.

Nicholas Wallpenny is the ghost who lurks near the Actor's Church, near an apparent locus of mayhem and violence.

This urban fantasy unfolds as comedy first and mystery second, with the mystery taking the driver's seat as the plot accelerates through twists and turns, heading towards the conclusion. A lot of popular mainstream SF and Fantasy seems to have been comedically referenced in the story in one-liners or in Peter's internal dialogue in some form or another. This is laugh out loud humour at its best.

Rivers of London would be an urban fantasy/comedy masterpiece except for one thing – the editing lets it down, bringing it down to 'highly recommended' with a caution. There are a string of comments about Peter destroying his mobile phone. Later an anecdote describing the destruction of a mobile phone reads like it was the first mobile that was ruined. It seems that the anecdote was added in the wrong sequence. There are a few sentences that do not make grammatical sense, although the meaning is clear. Nicholas Wallpenny becomes Thomas Wallpenny at least once. Peter's magical lessons are described in detail, then suddenly we're given a paragraph or two

that retrospectively accelerates his learning to fit the plot. A slight rewrite to work it into the storyline smoothly was in order. However, this is still a very intelligent, funny story that has left me waiting for the sequel.

Highly recommended.

Moon over Soho

Author: Ben Aaronovitch
Publisher: Gollancz
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

This is the sequel to *Rivers of London*. Peter Grant is a somewhat erratic cop who needs constant supervision to protect himself and others, as established in *Rivers of London*. However, in *Moon over Soho*, Peter is left largely unsupervised while Lesley May is dealing with the aftermath of *Rivers* and Nightingale is recovering from being injured early in this book. Peter's abilities range from idiot to savante, causing havoc in spite of his good intentions.

Two apparently unrelated incidents occur early on: the sudden death of a jazz musician and a date rapist's penis is bitten off. Peter investigates both, pulled in to the penis investigation by the conventional police.

The focus in this book is in and around Soho; Aaronovitch develops Soho's character as an active participant in the story. The history, culture and personality of Soho in the current day is woven into a complex and colourful tapestry that serves as a back drop to the narrative. When Peter is taken out of London for an investigation it comes as a surprise, expanding the possibilities of the investigation.

Jazz music is also a significant feature of *Moon over Soho*, and almost a character in its own right. Jazz afficionados are sure to appreciate the depth of knowledge and understanding of jazz culture revealed here. I found it informative as I'm more of a rock person myself, yet it was interesting. If I had a jazz friend living locally, I'd be asking to listen to albums and asking for more.

The plot was well paced. Peter's role of Mr Plodd, the dim witted copper, was entertaining. I found key aspects of this plot to be predictable, and yet this did not detract from the story for me. *Moon over Soho* is also about the journey, which is entertaining with Aaronovitch's characters, pithy observations and pop culture references, especially the SF and Fantasy references. Suspense was generated because, in *Rivers*, Aaronovitch proved himself to be ruthless in terms of dishing out consequences to central characters, thus any fan will read *Moon* with trepidation.

Highly recommended.

The Rogue

Author: Trudi Canavan
Publisher: Orbit
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

This is the second in the Traitor Spy trilogy, so we pick up where we left off last year.

Lorkin, the son of Sonea and Akkarin (the dead black magician) is still a prisoner in the Traitor city, living under the scrutiny of Kalia, the head of the healers, who hates Lorkin. Lorkin's friend Evar takes Lorkin to the stonemaker caves to see the magical stones that are under construction. Evar is officially disciplined and unofficially punished – brought close to death by the draining of his powers during a sexual act. Still in love with Tyvara, Lorkin attempts to navigate the political maze in the Traitor stronghold.

Lilia is a novice in the Guild, training to be a magician. Naki is an older novice, surrounded by rumour about her sexual inclinations. Naki takes an interest in Lilia, who discovers an attraction to Naki. As their relationship progresses, Lilia is drawn in to Naki's life and home in spite of being the child of servants while Naki is the daughter of a Lord.

Sonea is still trying to capture Skellin, the rogue magician in the city of Imardin. Skellin proves as elusive as ever, but with Sonea's freedom (won in the previous book) she pursues her career in healing. More settled in this book than the previous instalment, Sonea still navigates Guild politics but with more maturity amidst developing, maturing relationships.

Dannyl is still Ambassador in Arvice, struggling with his attraction to Achati, their taboo desires, and his loss of status after losing his assistant, Lorkin, to the Traitors. To make matters more complicated, Dannyl's old lover shows up and plays chaperone.

Canavan writes about real issues relevant in today's society. Gay and straight relationships are developed without fear nor favour, the only judgement passed being that of the societies in which the story is set. Drug use and addiction is a consistent theme in the story, including outcomes for addicts. About a third of the way through

The Rogue there is a murder. Canavan does not cheat with her story telling, so the observant reader knows who did it and how. The suspense focuses on whether the innocent or guilty will be held accountable. Just as the personal relationships develop, so do the international relationships, opening up numerous possibilities for the next installment.

Highly recommended for fans of fantasy and for people interested in exploring fantasty for the first time. Start with part one, *The Ambassador's Mission*.

The Game: The Valley

Author: Krystyna Kuhn
Publisher: Atom
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Julia and Robert are teenage siblings starting at an elite college for gifted and talented students in the middle of the Rocky Mountains in Canada. Their origins are surrounded in mystery, impacting on their ability to integrate into the college. They are assigned to separate apartments with 3 other students each (Debbie, Rose, Kate, Daniel, Chris and Benjamin), creating a clique of 8 in spite of personality clashes. The student mentors Alex and Isabelle are somewhat drawn into the circle, Alex more so because of Debbie's infatuation and pursuit of him.

Intelligent narrative seamlessly incorporates mathematics, game theory, philosophy and ethics. The characters are gifted in the intellectual sense, which is reflected in their personalities, their approaches to problem solving and their classroom discussions. Thus *The Game* defies the usual 'young adult' tag with appeal to adults of all ages.

The Game is an unfolding mystery, which will be spoilt if I say much more about the plot and characters. Suffice to say I found this unexpected, compelling and chilling. This is the beginning of a series, with much hinted at left unresolved in the first book.

Highly recommended.

The Legion

Author: Simon Scarrow
Publisher: Headline
Year: 2010
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

A renegade gladiator, Ajax, has taken to attacking naval bases and villages along the coast of Egypt. Disguising themselves as Romans, these rebels are fomenting anti-Roman sentiment. To make matters worse, Nubian armies are attacking Roman garrisons in the south. Acting Prefect Cato and Centurion Macro are hot on his trail. Not only battle strengthened warriors but best friends, they have a personal interest in putting an end to Ajax's activities. But it appears the vengeful and crazed gladiator also has a personal interest in bringing the battle to these two Romans. And once Ajax joins forces with the Nubian army, life in Egypt suddenly becomes a whole lot more dangerous for Romans.

This is Scarrow's tenth book in this best-selling series featuring Macro and Cato. Although not generally a reader of historical fiction, I enjoyed this publication as the battle strategies and fighting elements kept me interested. When so much fantasy is based on swordplay and scenarios such as this, often it's really only the inclusion of magic that separates the two genres. Obviously researched and rich with detail, the First Century Roman Empire and the Mediterranean are brought easily to life through the descriptive writing. Scarrow appears to have made a deliberate choice in tempering the archaic dialogue, as the speech is littered with modern language usage and phrasings. It didn't take long to get used to this, however, and this choice ultimately makes for an easier read. From what I've been told, Scarrow's previous books in this series are similar in style, narrative and setting – and readers of this series will know exactly what to expect.

Branded by Fire

Author: Nalini Singh
Publisher: Gollancz
Release date: 2009
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

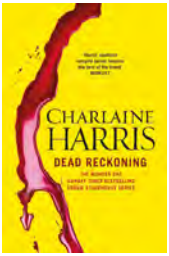
Mercy is a changeling leopard/human, a dominant female in her pack DarkRiver and as such, a Sentinel. Riley is a wolf/human changeling lieutenant in his pack SnowDancer. They both feel an innate attraction for one another that is potentially volatile due to the historical animosity between cats and wolves. The current alliance between the two packs is still somewhat tenuous, with the juveniles pranking one another.

To complicate matters further, the other two dominant species in this alternate reality Earth are psychics, called Psy, and humans, the weakest species. Territories and legal jurisdictions have been established enabling a semblance of co-operation, but underneath it all is ongoing conflict and battle for supremacy. Psy are becoming violent although conditioning should prevent it; mass murders are taking place, and suicides occur in attempts to avoid committing mass murder.

This is the sixth Psy-Changeling novel series. It is possible to read this book as a stand-alone story (I did) but I felt I was missing some of the story. Personally I was frustrated that sex is such a big focus in the story. I thought there was huge potential for the political climate that was left under-developed in favour of sex scenes.

Branded by Fire is erotic romance in a SF/Fantasy setting. Aimed at a mature audience with explicit sex scenes, this novel seeks to balance the eroticism with the storyline. I have some reservations about Singh's interpretation of the animals involved, but in an alternate world everything is open to new interpretation. This is a New York Times bestselling series. Recommended for fans of the genre.

Dead Reckoning



Author: Charlaine Harris
Publisher: Orion
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Sookie Stackhouse is a waitress in a family bar/lounge called Merlottes in Louisiana, near New Orleans. Sookie is part fae, telepathic and is in a relationship with a vampire while her best friend and boss, Sam Merlotte, is the shapeshifter who owns the bar. Sookie's current squeeze is Eric Northman, a former Viking turned vampire who loves power and is currently sheriff of a vampire territory. Eric's child Pam looks prim and proper but is also vicious and lethal. In *Dead Reckoning* Sookie is living with Claude, a full-blooded gay fairy who works as a stripper and Dermott, Sookie's great uncle who is half fae and looks very similar to Sookie's brother Jason. Sandra Pelt, a shapeshifter who has tried to kill Sookie in the past, returns to try again.

In *Dead Reckoning* Victor, the real villain of the piece, has been appointed Regent of Louisiana instead of king. He decides to take it out on Eric, to provoke Eric to attack so Victor can kill Eric without reprisals. However, Sookie and her friends decide to kill Victor instead. The change in Sookie's character leading to her decision to kill someone in cold blood is acknowledged although I felt it was somewhat shallow and unjustified – you don't murder your business opponents and other bastards just because they're taking your customers away and making life difficult. That way leads to the dark side and probably a gaol cell - without cookies.

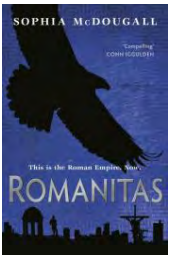
Dead Reckoning is the 14th in the series so the characters have a considerable amount of history. This is balanced with explanatory references to what has gone before, but I suspect that a reader starting with this book would be somewhat lost and probably frustrated by the lack of understanding of the characters in this book. I found the explanatory references to be excessive and somewhat repetitive – I was repeatedly reminded that I haven't read the book where Sookie is locked in the trunk and Niall, Sookie's great-grandfather, returns.

I started reading this series from the beginning a while ago but 4 books

ago decided to give it a rest. In the four books I missed there doesn't seem to have been much development in the characters. Although a few melodramatic incidents have occurred, it seems I haven't missed much. It was nice to revisit Sookie and company to catch up. I find this series is like chocolate – a guilty pleasure but I don't want a lot of it. My very occasional interest in soapies like *Glee* and reality TV series like *Big Brother* is always short lived, which probably tells you more about my tastes and attention span than you need to know.

Readers who enjoy soap operas and paranormal fiction will love the series and this book.

Romanitas



Author: Sophia McDougall
Publisher: Orion
Release date: 2005, 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Una and Sulien are sibling teenage slaves living in the Roman Empire in London in 2005. Separated after the death of their father, who was also their mother's owner, they have been working towards being reunited, until Sulien is condemned to crucifixtion after having consensual sex with a free woman who cried rape.

Marcus, nephew to the Emperor, lives in Rome where he is filmed during the funeral service for his parents. An attempt on Marcus' life causes him to flee, seeking the underground for slaves, on which quest he meets Una and Sulien. *Romanitas* focuses on their journey, their personal histories, the politics of the empire and their aspirations for the future.

While alternate world stories are not unusual, McDougall has chosen an less common setting in that the Roman Empire did not fall, thus changing the political face of the Earth completely. International politics is hinted at in *Romanitas*, but has largely been left to later books for development. McDougall has given herself a feast of opportunity with this setting.

Character work is solid, with development throughout the book. The development of a love triangle seemed a little sudden and contrived, largely because the third in the triangle, Dama, is not given enough time and attention in his development and entanglement. The politics of the royal family could have been developed more, but this omission could have been intended to obscure the identity of the villain. Revealed at the close of *Romanitas*, the villain may plot in full view of the reader in future installments.

Romanitas has such a solid base of world-building and character work, I wondered why I wasn't as enthusiastic about it as I am about, say, *A Game of Thrones* by George R. R. Martin or *Undivided* by Jennifer Fallon. The difference lies in the prose and the detail. I prefer ambiguous characters and grittier stories. When we should be getting up close and personal with McDougall's characters in their grief, the scars they bear from abuse and so forth, the prose slips into a more formal or distant style of writing that left me feeling somewhat removed from the characters. I want to feel their hopes, joys and pain vicariously.

Overall, this is a good novel from an author with great potential. Recommended to fantasy and especially alternate world fans.

Passion

Author: Lauren Kate
Publisher: Random House
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Lucinda is a 17 year old girl desperately in love with her soul mate Daniel, a fallen angel. Their love has spanned thousands of years as Lucinda has been repeatedly reincarnated to fall in love with Daniel in every lifetime. Lucinda is always baptised or has a related covenant from the religion of her culture imposed upon her at birth. Every lifetime ends with Lucinda dying because of a curse. The only exception has been this current, 21st century, lifetime where she has

not been baptised.

At the conclusion of the previous book there was a battle between angels and demons that Lucinda only survived due to the deception of an Outcast who carried her reflection up towards Heaven. Cam, a fallen angel turned demon, shot the reflection down while Lucinda escaped. Lucinda took a shadow and turned it into an Announcer, or portal in time. Lucinda begins this instalment of the series by creating an Announcer then stepping through time in an effort to break the curse. Daniel follows Lucinda, trying to catch her, but he always arrives too late. They play tag through time but eventually their paths diverge. Daniel knows the origins of the curse so his path takes him to the source.

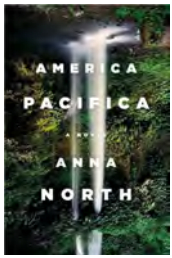
More research into the historical periods was needed, or at least more consultation with experts, to give this story the resonance of truth. Lucinda 'slipped' a bolt into her cross bow and apparently that is all it took to ready and fire the weapon repeatedly from horseback, with apparent accuracy. At another point Lucinda picked up a telescope – a millennia or two BC. There were additional details that needed correction.

Lucinda's companion Bill, a creature in the guise of a gryphon, complained about Lucinda's total self-centredness that is typical of teens absorbed in their first great love. This book will speak to young adults and the young at heart who identify with an all-consuming love that eliminates concern for anything external to the relationship. However, for the more cynical or jaded reader, this may lack a certain groundedness.

I strongly recommend readers begin by reading *Fallen*, the first in the series. *Passion* was my first introduction to this series and this author. While there are recaps, they in no way compensate for having read the full story.

Passion is recommended for fans of young adult paranormal romance. Lauren Kate is a New York Times bestselling author.

America Pacifica



Author: Anna North
Publisher: Virago
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Darcy and her mother Sarah live in a one bedroom apartment on an island called 'America Pacifica'. When Sarah goes missing, Darcy is devastated as her entire world revolves around her mother. Darcy begins to search for her mother. Before disappearing, Sarah didn't speak to Darcy about her past. Throughout Darcy's search for Sarah the history of the settlement unfolds, giving Darcy a new understanding of her mother and herself.

America Pacifica is a volcanic island in the tropics to which survivors of the new Ice Age escaped many years before. A society has grown up based on which boats people arrived in and how much Tyson, the founder, trusts them. Food, drugs and building materials are largely jellyfish or seaweed derivatives with a little 'real' food thrown in for the wealthy. The island is a city comprising of re-creations of mainland cities including Las Vegas and Little Los Angeles. The last boaters, the lowest of the low in this new world, live in Hell City where cave-ins are most common due to landfill collapsing.

In *America Pacifica* the veneer of civilisation stretches so thinly that the worst of humanity is exposed. At one point someone appeals to Darcy to trust her, pointing out how much alike they are. Darcy's response reveals great honesty and self-awareness.

Ansel was introduced as a victim hiding then running from people who later allied themselves with him. Darcy went from being an insignificant teen who lost her mother, to being a vital figurehead for both sides of the conflict. There didn't seem to be sufficient justification for these shifts, but North may have used history to justify these shifts in political power.

Overall I felt that this was *Lord of the Flies* for the 21st century, with global warming followed by an ice age replacing shipwreck in World War 2 as the setting for this speculative fiction. The plot is well paced. The characters are well developed and believable. Highly recommended speculative fiction.

The Conqueror's Shadow

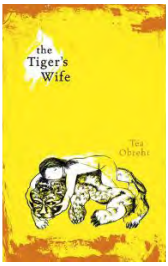
Author: Ari Marmell
Publisher: Gollancz
Release date: 2010
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

Corvis Rebaine, known as the Terror of the East, leads an army on a path of destruction through Imphallion. Armed with a demon-forged axe and accompanied by a flesh-eating witch, an ogre and a demon slave, none dare stand in his way. And yet below the city of Denathere, just as he's about to claim victory, he suddenly changes plans and disappears, abandoning his allies and his army and releasing them from their duties. He also takes a young woman as hostage, ensuring safe passage for himself.

Many years later and he lives a life of peace, farming in obscurity. The hostage has become his wife, and they have two children. He no longer feels any need to rule the known world. Or to don his armour and take up arms of any sort - that is, until his family's wellbeing is threatened. Can Rebaine convince his former allies to rejoin him in taking up arms up against the warlord that is endangering his peaceful existence?

The Conqueror's Shadow contains all that one would expect from a fantasy novel of this type. Magical weapons, witches, ogres, goblins and large armies. And blood – lots of blood. The book has clearly been written by someone who loves the genre. Nothing incredibly surprising in originality, the writing is nevertheless solid. The story works – filled with danger and darkness, yet tempered with humour and wit. Marmell's dialogue is convincing, his characters have depth and the world he's created works. Although I'm not a regular fantasy reader, I do enjoy the genre from time to time. And this book is worthy of a spot on my shelf. A sequel, Warlord's Legacy, is already available in hardback. If you love demons, ogres and battles, then this is definitely an author worth checking out.

The Tiger's Wife



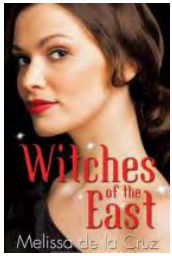
Author: Tea Obreht
Publisher: Orion
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

Natalia is a doctor in the Balkans. With her friend and colleague, she is visiting orphanages in the war ravaged region. During her travels she hears of the mysterious death of her grandfather, a man she loved dearly. Curious as to why he was so far from home when he died, she looks for clues in tales that he told her when she was young.

During World War 2 a tiger escapes from the zoo and makes his home in the mountain above a small village where Natalia's grandfather is a young boy. His most prized possession is Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, and he sees Shere Khan in the visiting tiger. Most of the town, however, see evil at work – particularly as rumour and gossip give the beast increasingly mystical powers. Along with the tales Natalia recalls of the so-called 'deathless' man, she realises that these might hold the key to her grandfather's mysterious death.

I suspect the one thing you will continually read in reviews of this novel is how young the author is. Obreht is young, born in 1985, and yet writes with an insight and maturity of one well beyond those years. I was blown away by not only the writing, but the tale itself. Three separate narratives that weave perfectly, leaving the reader panting for more. The writing is crisp and precise, descriptive yet understated. If the locations and characters' names were less European sounding, this book could easily be mistaken as a magic realist text, produced by one of the South American masters of the genre. Obreht currently appears as the youngest writer on The New Yorker's Top 20 Writers under 40, and I don't believe it will take very long for her to assert herself as an author to watch with anticipation.

Witches of the East



Author: Melissa de la Cruz
Publisher: Sphere
Release date: July 2011
Reviewer: Jade Hounsell

North Hampton, a place of rolling green fields, pristine beaches and rustic farmhouses, is the sort of town the modern world seems to have forgotten. The place is not listed on any map and is shrouded in fog year round. making it hard to view from sea or land. Directly across from the township is Gardiners Island, long ago abandoned and left to ruin. The island has only one building; a single manor house called Fairview. It has been untouched and unoccupied for as long as anyone can remember, but for some reason never sold.

North Hampton is also home to Joanna and her two daughters, Ingrid and Freya. To the citizens these women are the same as them, just like anyone else in town. Joanna is a stay at home who loves to redecorate and renovate her house. Ingrid works at the local library and fulfils every stereotypical view of what people think of when you say librarian. Freya is a newly engaged party girl working nights at the local bar. But they are not the same as everyone else, they have a secret they have been hiding from the town. They are witches. During the Salem witch trials, the women were all bound by the witches' council to not practice magic of any kind and in return they got to keep their immortal lives. Without their magic they may as well be the same as everyone else.

Freya's magical heritage enables her to see flashes of intense emotion and everything she makes or cooks taste delicious. When she sees a separated couple in the bar that she believes should still be together she uses her magic to make a love potion. She waits for the repercussions from the council but when none come she begins to think maybe they have forgotten the ban and they can be free to practice magic again.

Ingrid has the ability to see a person's future and 'witches sight', the ability to see illness or problems and to make a charm infused with a little magic to help fix it. Emboldened by Freya's experiment, Ingrid

decides to use her magic to help a fellow co-worker and friend who just cannot seem to fall pregnant. She too waits for the repercussions from the council and again nothing.

Joanna's ability is healing and bringing back the dead to life if they have been deceased for less than 24 hours. When a friend of the family nearly drowns and is put on life support in hospital, Joanna steps in (after a push from her daughters) and brings him back from the in-between world. Again the women wait for the council to step in and reprimand them, but still nothing.

Emboldened, the women then begin to use their magic more and more, but then things start to go wrong, very wrong. Three Osprey are found dead on the beach in a cross formation. Freya becomes deeply attached to her fiancés brother. An oil like silvery substance appears in the ocean killing birds and sea life. Vampires are showing up in town, people are going missing and the residents of North Hampton are getting an illness the hospital cannot seem to treat. Is it because they have using their magic or is it something else, something bigger?

On a bit of a down note some of the story does seem a little hurried and really could have done with a bit more explaining and at times was a little confusing. However, that may be explained more thoroughly in the sequel.

This is the first book that I have read by Melissa de la Cruz and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The characters are all beautifully written and likeable, even with their considerable flaws. The story flows and what you may think of as a bit random at the time, all ties in to the story somehow.

Note: this book ends on a huge cliff hanger.

Hellhole

Authors: Brian Herbert, Kevin J. Anderson
Publisher: Simon & Schuster
Release date: 2010
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

General Adolphus led a rebellion against a corrupt Empire and lost. Instead of martyring the General, Diadem Michella, the empress, exiled him to a planet called Hallholme, named after the general whose dirty tactics defeated Adolphus. Colloquially named Hellhole, the planet is recovering from an asteroid impact 5 centuries earlier that wiped out most of the life on the planet. Ten years after exile the settlement is growing, populated by the General's loyal soldiers, other exiles, convicts and misfits.

Vincent Jenet was exiled to Hellhole after being convicted of a theft of which he was guilty to raise money for medical treatment for his dying father. Fernando Neron is a confidence trickster who took ship to Hellhole to escape investors after numerous 'businesses' failed on other planets. Fernando seemed like a human tornado, sucking the less assertive Vincent along in his wake. Fernando leads Vincent to discover the slickwater springs that house the personalities of the former inhabitants of the planets. Fernando takes on the personality of a Xayan, a native Hellhole alien, in addition to his own personality. This leads to further discoveries about this alien race and its abilities, revealing the potential for the resurrection of the species. The goal of the Xayan race is ascension, a goal the human hosts of Xayans do not understand. (And it worked so well for Daniel Jackson in *Stargate*!)

The General is secretly working to create a republic independent of the empire, working to foil investigations of his activities by spies sent by the Diadem. One of the Diadem's spies and wetworkers, Ishop Heer, is obsessive-compulsive with aspirations to rise above his station in life. These aspirations are used by his assistant whose agenda and background is not revealed in this book.

There are two primary locations of action in *Hellhole*, one is Hellhole itself and the other is Sonjeera, the capital world of the empire. Other

planetary locations are described in detail along with the political situation motivating the inhabitants. Colonies are being plundered for short term gain by the Diadem with no consideration for the affected ecologies and populations. Characters are developed by giving the reader snapshots of their current situation, flash backs that describe their past, giving them history and motivation for the current action. Two humans and the alien race are given a more superficial introduction. I strongly suspect that these characters will be the source of the plot twists in book three of this trilogy.

Hellhole closes with a cliff-hanger; there is no pretence at wrapping up even a portion of the story in this volume.

Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellhole_(novel)) cites two conflicting reviews of *Hellhole*. I disagree with *Publishers Weekly*'s statement that the characters are one dimensional. In contrast with *PW*, I thought at times that there was too much emphasis on the internal world of some characters, to the point where I don't think those characters have the capacity to surprise me. I noted the characters to which this does not apply, and I'm expecting the plot twist Kevin has been spruiking to come from those sources. While I like surprises in a novel, it is more important for authors not to cheat. Cheating is avoided by careful planning, which Kevin and Brian have clearly done.

Hellhole seems to strike a middle ground in the current fantasy market. Complexity is fuelled by political machinations and interpersonal relationships. However, *Hellhole* does not have the huge cast or numerous primary locations of George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* about which so many people have complained. Some readers of *A Game of Thrones* have only read the chapters of their favourite characters; these readers will be able to follow *Hellhole* without feeling overwhelmed. *Hellhole* is recommended for fans of the fantasy genre. It is possible to read *Hellhole* on the train at the end of a hard day's work.

Power and Majesty

Author: Tansy Rayner Roberts
Publisher: Harper Voyager
Release date: 2010
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

The short version: *Power and Majesty* won its category for the Aurealis Award, Australia's most prestigious judged award for SF and Fantasy as well as the Ditmar (people's choice) Award. These awards are well deserved.

The long version: Velody, Delphine and Rhain are three young women who moved to Aufleur, a city in an alternate world version of Italy, to take up apprenticeships. Velody wakes up one night to see Garnet fall out of the sky. Garnet, a member of the fae Creature Court, took Velody's animor, the spiritual essence that made her fae. Years later Garnet has risen to be the king of kings, called Power and Majesty in the Creature Court, only to be sucked into a rift in the sky during a battle. Just before he was sucked into the rift, Garnet released Velody's animor and that of Ashiol, another member of the Creature Court. Velody and Ashiol become the only two kings of the Creature Court and one must become Power and Majesty, ruling the court in order to defend the city against the sky. If the Creature Court loses the battle with the sky, the city will be sucked up into the sky and all memory of the city and its inhabitants will be lost to daylight folk living elsewhere.

The Creature Court comprises several ranks of fae and even some mortals, all of whom have agendas, most of whom are completely self-involved and more than a little insane. Character development partially focuses on Velody and her friends' journey of discovery of the Creature Court and how they respond to these new relationships. The Creature Court itself is Machiavellian, brutal and sexually-oriented, so encounters with any Fae bring uncertainty while revealing new aspects of the characters.

Opening with the establishment of characters Velody, Delphine and Rhain, swiftly followed by the revelation of the sky battle and the fae where Velody lost her animor, the plot then slows slightly while

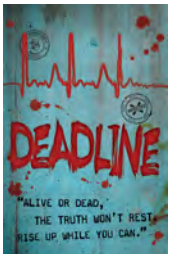
other characters are introduced. This brief lull sets up the action that powers through to the finish. I had to take breaks from reading but I couldn't wait to get back to finish the story.

There are a couple of sex scenes in *Power and Majesty* but, although explicit, this novel does not fall into the category of paranormal romance nor do the sex scenes detract from or interrupt the storyline. While the intimate sexual encounters described are heterosexual, it is made clear that the Creature Court has no inhibitions concerning homosexual encounters.

Roberts has created an exciting new fantasy world with different kind of Fae; they are the capricious, powerful fae of legend coupled with aspects of vampirism, battling a new foe. Engaging with this story requires an effort of suspension of disbelief beyond any novel I've read lately, but was well worth it. Character development was interesting, with characters for the reader to love and hate. The plot powered along with twists and turns. *Power and Majesty* is highly recommended as a wild, adult fairy story for fans of the paranormal fantasy genre. This may even be a masterpiece – it's hard to judge based on only a portion of the story. The series is ongoing.

Deadline

Author: Mira Grant
Publisher: Orbit
Release Date: 2011
Reviewer: Jade Hounsell



Wow, I'm not too sure where to start with this book. Initially I was a little unsure when I saw that this book was based around zombies, but I was blown away from how good it was. Guns, action, news reporters, bloggers, government conspiracies and, of course, zombies all rolled into one fast-paced and fast-flowing book. Also not having read the first book, *Feed*, I thought I may have trouble keeping up with some of the characters and events, but it was very easy to follow and past events are explained enough to get by.

The story is set in the future, where the cure for cancer and the cure for the common cold have been found. Unfortunately when the two viruses combine in the human body and in any mammal over 20kg, the result is the Kellis-Amberlee virus, or zombies.

The story is told from Shaun Mason's perspective, the owner of After the End Times, a blogger news organization, which he built up with his adoptive sister Georgina. From pretty much the start we see that Shaun has lost all passion in life due to George being killed after she was injected with the Kellis-Amberlee virus and began to amplify (become one of the living dead). The problem is that George has taken up residence in Shaun's head and constantly talks to him, helping him figure things out. Crazy? Well he thinks so, and so does the rest of his team, but everybody thinks its Shaun's way of dealing with his loss and let him get away with constantly talking to him self.

Enter Kelly Connolly, a CDC employee/scientist who has faked her own death (using a clone mind you), so that she could bring Shaun and his team some startling and unsettling news that the CDC is trying to cover up about the Kellis-Amberlee virus. (The CDC is the Centre for Disease Control, a part of the government who conduct investigations into disease outbreak. In theory they are supposed to be trying to find a cure for the virus and helping to control/stop outbreaks where possible.) Even before Kelly has finished telling her story things start to go horribly wrong. An outbreak has happened in the city where After the End Times is situated, an outbreak so bad that the CDC has decided to bomb the town in order to stop the virus from spreading. Shaun and his team pack up and haul ass only to just narrowly escape the bombing. With nowhere to go and a conspiracy to get to the bottom of, what will Shaun and his team do?

As stated before this book is fast-paced and so well written it makes you check your doors and windows are locked and peer into the dark corners looking for zombies. Each chapter is punctuated by blog entries from various members of the team from either the past or the present giving the reader an insight on how other members of the team are feeling about the situation as well. I really would recommend this book to anyone and everyone who likes the supernatural/fantasy gene; it's just a fantastic read that I found hard to put down with a really twisted ending leaving the reader wanting more. I really am looking forward to the next book of the series, *Black-out*.

Divergent

Author: Veronica Roth
Publisher: HarperCollins Children's Books
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Beatrice is a 16 year old girl living in a class based futuristic society based on factions, where the factionless are outcasts. After a cataclysmic event survivors chose factions as a reaction against what they felt was to blame. Those who believed selfishness was to blame became Abnegation (aspiring to selflessness), those who blamed ignorance became Erudite, those who blamed cowardice became Dauntless, those who blamed conflict became Amity, and those who blamed deceit became Candour. Beatrice has grown up in Abnegation, suffering a form of invisibility within her society. Yearning to be something else, she watches Dauntless arrive at school and in the corridors. When all in her year are tested before choosing their factions as adults, Beatrice is revealed as Divergent, with equal potential for 3 factions. Beatrice's tester conceals the result, telling Beatrice to keep this secret as it is dangerous.

At the choosing ceremony, Beatrice's brother chooses Erudite and Beatrice chooses Dauntless, causing a scandal. Beatrice does not return home, but goes with the Dauntless to their headquarters to be trained for initiation. She promptly changes her name to Tris, and begins her new life. Tris has many hurdles to overcome while concealing her personality result. Tris makes friends among the initiates, experiencing growth and conflict as relationships change and the initiates compete for the few available initiation places. The factional conflict escalates, impacting on Tris personally as her father is a government leader. Tris visits her brother at the Erudite headquarters. This breach of rules coupled with her extraordinary test results, causes Dauntless leaders to take more interest in Tris. *Divergent* has everything you would expect in speculative fiction and a coming of age story.

There are some holes in this story, the most significant of which is the description of the roles of the factions in this society. The societal structure is a good idea that needed more development. Fortunately

this lack doesn't impact much on the story as the story focuses more on Tris and her friends alongside developing factional conflicts. Roth sets up factional conflicts early and consistently, providing the necessary impetus for the climax.

Divergent is marketed as a children's book. This decision may well be based on the content of the book (no sex scenes, intimacy is limited to kissing) and the age of the central characters. However I enjoyed this book as a good speculative fiction read; I believe that SF fans of all ages can enjoy this story. Highly recommended.

The Devil's Diadem

Author: Sara Douglass
Publisher: Harper Voyager
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Maeb Langtofte is a young woman living in the time of King Edmond, father to the notorious brothers and future kings Richard and John. After the death of her father, Maeb had two choices: enter a nunnery or go into service in a noble household. Maeb's connections enabled her to join the household of the Earl of Pengraic, serving the Lady Adelie. The Pengraic household flees a plague shortly after Maeb joins them, moving to the seat of Pengraic in Wessex, where the plague catches up. On the journey Maeb sees an imp from hell whilst also struggling to deal with court life.

The reader is constantly on the lookout for the Devil's Diadem, especially once it is clear the imps are seeking something. The attentive reader will probably be kept guessing, as I was, as to the location of the diadem.

The story is largely told as the reminsciences of Maeb from 30 years in the future, so the reader is aware that Maeb survives. Suspense is engendered in the dangers she faces without knowledge of the consequences. Maeb is the centre of her own story as well as a focal point of danger, seeing imps, experiencing the plague and accusations of theft of the Diadem.

The Devil's Diadem combines genuine history with myth to create a story successfully combining elements of love, loss, politics and horror all in a fantasy setting. Douglass has written a number of enthralling trilogies with broader scope. While not as broad in scope, *The Devil's Diadem* has the advantage of not leaving the reader in suspense whilst waiting for the next installment. (I'm currently part way through several trilogies, so I'm over the current trend of releasing stories in installments.)

Highly recommended for fans of fantasy and myth.

Hit List

Author: Laura K. Hamilton
Publisher: Headline
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Kristain Goree

After being put onto an Anita Blake book in a 2nd hand book store many years ago I have been hooked, and after being off the bandwagon due to the amount of sex and lack of progress in the last few outings, I relented and returned to the world of Anita Blake.

Hit List has restored my faith in the series. After the aforementioned amount of sex in the previous books there is surprisingly little in this one, Anita seems more in control of her powers and we are able to get back into the story proper.

Anita and Edward are investigating a spate of were-tiger murders and we pick them up at the third one. With Edward in the story we get plenty of opportunity for interaction and great dialogue. As always we have prejudiced police and other marshals to interact with, the Harlequin are in the shadows for good and ill, and the ever present threat of the Mother of All Darkness looming over everything.

The St Louis characters that have been so frequent in previous books are barely mentioned. Bernardo and Olaf also appear in this book, with Olaf still able to creep the reader out and cementing his return in further works.

I finished this book quickly and wanted more. If you're a fan it's a must read, for new readers it isn't the best jumping on point as the events in earlier books are referenced enough to provide background with no depth.

With 20 books in the series it's a long haul to start at #1 but well worth the journey.

Heartless

Parasol Protectorate 4
Author: Gail Carriger
Publisher: Orbit
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Lady Alexia Tarabotti Maccon lives in steampunk Victorian England. Alexia is married to Conall Maccon, a werewolf who is alpha to his pack. Alexia also associates with vampires in the course of her duties as mujah to Queen Victoria. The prologue gives a brief recap of the most pertinent points, which are that Alexia is pregnant to a werewolf and there is great concern about her projeny in supernatural and government circles.

Heartless opens with Alexia indignant over being confronted by Conall Maccon, Professor Lyall (beta werewolf to the pack) and Lord Akeldama, a rove vampire, who have decided that Lord Akeldama will adopt the baby to prevent further assassination attempts on the child and Alexia.

A ghost confronts Alexia with news of an assassination attempt on the queen, inspiring Alexia to continue working although only weeks from her expected confinement.

I hadn't read any of the *Parasol Protectorate* series; word of mouth had me curious. In the first chapter, the descriptions of Alexia pregnant and the survival tactics of those around her had me laughing out loud. Throughout the plot moved smartly, building to a timely climax, providing many chuckles along the way.

Heartless is a cross between *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* with a steampunk setting, plus vampires, werewolves and preternaturals experiencing much more action. I'd recommend starting at the beginning of the series as some of the basics of this world were not explained. I'm definiely a fan, and want to read the rest of the series. Highly recommended.

American Gods

Author: Neil Gaiman
Publisher: Headline Review
Release date: 2011 (10th anniversary edn)
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Shadow has done his time in gaol and is released, only to find that his wife Laura was killed in a car accident along with Shadow's employer (for parole purposes) whom Laura was giving a head job to at the time. Mr Wednesday attaches himself to Shadow as Shadow travels home. At first Shadow turns down Mr Wednesday's job offer, but eventually he turns to Mr Wednesday for employment and a purpose. Shadow unkowingly resurrects his dead wife in her deteriorating state.

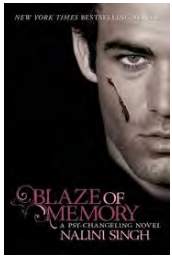
The old gods of Europe migrated to America with their worshippers. As people started serving different gods, the old gods lost power, currently struggling for survival not unlike some of the immigrants. New gods have arisen, empowered by faith and worship of the current age; these include media, drugs and technology. The old and new gods are preparing to face off against each other in an epic battle.

Graphic sex includes a scene where Bilquis, a goddess, poses as a prostitute to absorb her client through her sexual organs to increase her powers. At first this seemed gratuitous, but later this proved to be part of revealing the nature of the old gods.

Gaiman blends the mythical with the everyday so that the ordinary becomes weird, out of kilter, unpredictable. *American Gods* is a reinterpretation of our world and our time, invoking mystery and exploration whilst simultaneously building the threat of the epic battle between the gods. Darker than *Stardust*, darker than *Neverwhere*, *American Gods* is a novel for those who enjoy gritty tales, myths connecting with contemporary times, those who want something other than paranormal romance, and most especially for Neil Gaiman fans.

This is a classic as evidenced by its release as a 10th anniversary edition. Highly recommended.

Blaze of Memory



(Psy Changling #7)
Author: Nalini Singh
Publisher: Gollancz
Publish date: 2011
Reviewer: Jade Hounsell

Be warned what I am about to say may seem like a huge criticism, however already being a fan of Singh's *Guild Hunter* series, it's really not. Most of Nalini's books follow the same common thread, boy with a troubled past meets a girl with a troubled past, they get thrown together by some sort of dilemma, they fight their attraction, then give in and have some sexy times, dilemma gets solved and they live happily ever after. You would think that by the second or third book you would be sick of the repetitive structure, however you would be wrong. Nalini has a way of writing such strongly likeable, but oh so flawed, characters that you cannot help but cheer for them. No matter the dilemma that each book deals with, it is new and interesting enough to make you not even realize the common thread until you really think about it.

Ok, now saying all that this is the first book I have read in the *Psy-Changeling* series so please forgive any ignorance of past characters or incidents in other books.

Devraj Santos, commonly called Dev by those around him, runs the Shine Foundation, which is a type of shelter for human children with Psy abilities, or as they are commonly called, the Forgotten. Dev himself has some abilities, which seem to make him colder and more remote with each passing day, even though he has people around him reminding him, urging him, to not forget his humanity.

Enter Ekaterina. She has been left on the Shine Foundation doorstep, unconscious, starved and severely abused. They take her in to be assessed and given treatment, and she is discovered to be Psy. When Ekaterina gains conscious it is discovered that she has amnesia, but she is soon identified by an ex-Psy called Ashaya, as a scientist who worked with her in a lab that was doing experiments on children. Upon hearing her name Ekaterina shuts down completely due to being mind raped and coerced by a very powerful Psy. Due to

her complete melt down whenever her name is said, it's decided to give her a new name, Katya.

Dev is deeply suspicious of Katya from the start, he knows she cannot be trusted, and that he may have to kill her, but at the same time he is inexplicably drawn to her and wants to protect her. She is like one of the children that Shine protects, she may appear fragile, but he knows she has a core of steel and is a survivor.

In time Katya realizes that she has a living death sentence hanging over her as her memory starts to return in bits and pieces. She remembers the torture that she endured and how broken she had been. Then she remembers who did this to her and the order that he deeply imprinted in her mind, to kill Dev. Dev feels he has to find a way to save Katya and eliminate the Psy who did this to her before Katya's mind disintegrates from not carrying out her orders.

Between some chapters there are letters written by a mother to her son, Matthew, that give readers some insight into why the Psy decided to choose Silence. There are also some entries titled *Earthtwo Command Log: Sunshine Station*, which may be confusing at first but as the book progresses, gets explained in further detail. I actually went back and read over these logs once it was explained and it helped me to understand better than just reading it at the time, you may not need to though if you have a better memory than me!

I would be very interested in starting this series from the start so that the characters that pop in and out throughout this book may mean something more than reading it as a stand alone, however that did not take anything away from the storyline and it's easy to follow enough with the small back information given with their appearance.

The Glass House

Book One of The Morganville Vampires
Author: Rachel Caine
Release Date: Nov 2009
Publisher: Razor Bill
Reviewer: Jade Hounsell

I was at Supernova in Melbourne this year when I was given the first book in this series for free and what can I say but very clever marketing! Upon finishing the book, I actually went out and brought the other 9 in the series. Yeah, I'm a sucker I will admit it! It's just that even though these books pretty much (but not quite!) wrap at the end of each one, it still leaves you wanting to know more, more, more. Each book seems to bring in more characters from the town and expands upon your knowledge of Morganville, its rules and regulations. And it's not like the majority of characters are only touched upon in one book, once introduced they continue to disappear and reappear throughout the series, developing insight into their motives. There is a core bunch of characters throughout the books though and it's their interaction with the citizens of Morganville that makes it possible for Rachel to be able to do this without being confusing.

First up there is Claire Danvers, she is the character that we see Morganville through, its how she feels and her actions that we follow. Claire is a freshman at the Morganville's College, TPU, she's only 16 years old but so smart, and well kinda geeky. Claire knows she will never fit in with the cool kids or the in-crowd, but she is fine with that; she is happier studying anyway. Then Claire inadvertently shows-up Monica in front of everybody and she makes an enemy, a very dangerous one.

Unable to stay in the dorm after a very vicious attack by Monica and her 'followers', Claire begins looking for off-campus accommodation. There's not much going and the only one that seems ok is a shared house. So she answers the ad and is accepted into the Glass House, which she shares with odd housemates Michael, Shane and Eve.

Michael is the 18-year-old owner of the house, and well, very, very good looking. All blond hair and blue eyes that would make most girls melt and if that doesn't get them, he is also a very talented musician.

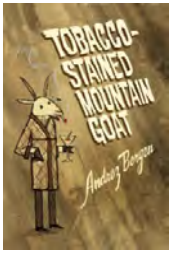
Michael is a complete night owl, so much so he is never seen during the day, ever.

Eve is a 17-year-old Goth girl who works at the local coffee shop, Common Grounds. Eve seems like fun and great company, even if she dresses odd, until she tells Claire that Morganville is run by Vampires, so she may very well just be a little crazy

Then there is 18-year-old Shane who doesn't seem to do much expect lay on the couch, play video games and make chili. Oh, and apparently Shane is quite a hottie as well, but more in a surfer kind of way.

Claire loves living with her new housemates and they quickly become one of the best things about moving to Morganville. Then it turns out that Eve isn't quite as crazy as Claire thought and vampires do run Morganville, so maybe Monica wasn't the worst thing after all. Now there are two choices, pledge allegiance to a vampire and become protected or become a mobile blood bank and fair game. Leaving town is not an option, not without permission from the town founder, Amelie, and that's not likely to happen now she knows. What will Claire and her friends choose?

Tobacco-Stained Mountain Goat



Author: Andrez Bergen
Publisher: Another Sky Press
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

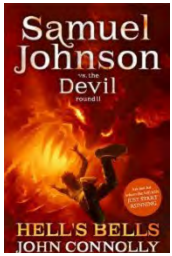
Floyd, the central character, is a Seeker whose job is to capture or kill those who are deemed by the government to be deviant. He was recruited into this job to pay for his wife's medical treatment after she fell ill. Laurel, a Lauren Bacall lookalike, is Floyd's girlfriend.

Written in a pseudo-stream-of-consciousness style, *Tobacco-Stained Mountain Goat* requires the reader to be familiar with numerous films from the mid-twentieth century. The films Bergen references are used as substitutes for descriptions, as references for trains of thought and as analogies for Floyd's life. Floyd appears to be a pseudo-Bogart character, self-obsessed and addicted to alcohol and cigarettes. The title of the book is apparently a reference to a George Sanders movie, where he refers to the dog as a tobacco stained mountain goat. When this was revealed about a quarter of the way through, I gave up on the book in the belief that I just won't get it.

My reaction to this novel is in no way a reflection on this novel. I suspect that *Tobacco-Stained Mountain Goat* may fall under the umbrella of 'Literary Fiction' of which I am not a fan. I've read some Jules Verne, Bronte sisters, D. H. Lawrence and more simply because it was Literature and so commonly referenced. I felt my education was incomplete without having read these works. From these works I learnt that I must be a Philistine. My tastes in Literature are limited to Austen, *Brave New World*, *Lord of the Rings* and similar. Therefore I call upon readers who are movie buffs of the black & white kind of movie, and who also enjoyed *Tobacco-Stained Mountain Goat*. Please, write in with reviews of this novel.

Primary & Middle School Books

Hell's Bells



Samuel Johnson Vs. The Devil Round II
Author: John Connolly
Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Samuel Johnson is a 13 year old boy at high school with a loving dachshund (weird looking dog) called Boswell. In the first book in this series Samuel met Nurd, a demon with whom he made friends and saved the world. Nurd now lives back in Hell with another demon called Wormwood (there always has to be a Wormwood!). Four dwarfs, Jolly, Dosy, Mumbles and Angry (all appropriately named) also featured in the first book and return for round two, along with the police who would like to lock them up. Mrs Abernathy, AKA Ba'al the demon who tried to destroy Earth, is once again trying to reach Earth but this time to entrap Samuel in Hell for revenge as a precursor to another invasion.

Connelly's writing seems to be a mixture of Eoin Colfer and *The Office*-style humour (at a PG rating), but occasionally he falters out of this style into a more formal style that works less well. Somewhat subtle spoofs of classics such as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Lord of the Rings* abound. Comic-style gore will appeal to boys in the target audience without alienating most parents and teachers.

At first Connelly refers to Samuel as 'a small boy', which may annoy the readers for whom this book is intended. Early in the book we meet two demon guards, whose names are switched by the end of the book for no apparent reason (editing error?) At one point late in the story a new kind of demon is introduced, making the action on the next few pages no surprise at all. I prefer authors who seed this kind of introduction early, and surprise us later with the return of this character at a crucial point.

Overall an enjoyable story with humour targeting its audience well. Recommended for fans of Eoin Colfer, and readers in upper primary to high school.

Grim and Grimmer: The Desperate Dwarf

Author: Ian Irvine
Publisher: Scholastic Australia
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Ike, a 14 year old boy, seems to have fallen down the rabbit hole. Ike lost his memories of his earliest childhood but is on the path to recovery and fulfilling his quests. Mellie is an apprentice thief, whos occupation causes ongoing conflict. Pook, aged 12, lies compulsively and behaves erratically. These three are in the middle of a few quests including recovering the *Book of Grimmery* from the dwarf city of Delf so the princess may be crowned, thus preventing the Dark Queen from taking over the land.

The Desperate Dwarf has an eclectic cast of characters. The villain is the wicked queen of the Fae who steals children's nightmares. Tonsil the demon climbs up a shaft belching flame (groan). Con the dwarf lives up to his name. Monty is a headless horseman who talks through his backside. This is a fast paced, crazy ride aimed at primary to middle school students, with enough snot and fart jokes to satisfy any desire for baser humour.

It appeared that there were a couple of inconsistencies in the story. For example, Shizzt was inexplicably deaf in one scene and then could hear in the next, but that could be explained [spoiler deleted!] At a few points I wanted Irvine to slow down and explain things a bit more but I suspect his target audience prefers the fast paced action without interruption. This was also the first in the series I have read, so I came in quite late to the story.

The Desperate Dwarf had the feel of a children's version of Piers Anthony's *Xanth* novels without the reader being bludgeoned by riddles and puns. Recommended for fans of Eoin Colfer and Morris Gleitzman-style humour. This book will also entertain the reluctant reader while meeting his or her reading quota, a prime consideration for any parent. I strongly recommend beginning with book one in the series, *The Headless Highwayman*.

Novels, Graphic and otherwise

Dark Matter would like to acknowledge receipt of the following comics and novels that will be reviewed in coming issues:

The Sacrifice
Lady Luck
Strange Worlds
Tide of Dreams
Ian Irvine's original *View from the Mirror* quartet
and numerous books from a number of authors with supportive publishers

Sorry guys, my reviewers and I did our best but we ran out of time.

Dark Matter is looking for someone interested in reviewing graphic novels. I can say what I think of a story and the art work, but I cannot comment on the broader comic book/graphic novel scene. Nor can I place a book within the scene. Dark Matter is also always looking for more reviewers for novels. Email darkmatterfanzine@gmail.com with an example review to apply.

- Editor

Game Gambit

For comments on Call of Duty and LA Noire, see Tom Taylor and Colin Wilson's interview. To read a discussion of a particular game of Starcraft 2, read *Starcraft 2 - Prae.ThorZain* on page 40.

To volunteer to write reviews for Dark Matter, email darkmatterfanzine@gmail.com with your review.

Hopefully the next issue will have more on SF and Fantasy based games.

Graphic Novel Reviews

The List (MA 15+)

Author: Paul Bedford
Artist: Henry Pop
Inker: Tom Bonin
Publisher: Dog with a Bone Studios
Reviewer: Michelle Kasparian

Warning: this review employs wanky narratological terms for cohesion and brevity; there is a definitions list at the end of the review.

The List (Bedford, Pop, Bonin) has been completed; all five commandments are fulfilled. It asks three main questions: Is the Son insane? Who is the Angel? Then the third, perhaps the most important: Where are we left now? We certainly remember where we began, a father and a son in a car, but what we are left with is the Angel and our very own List.

I have eagerly devoured *The List* (or I should say allowed it to devour me) since 2007 and now at its finish I try to pin-point exactly what *The List* has given me—and I am dumbfounded because it has not given me a moral lesson, but an amalgamation of our psyche, our beliefs and our world: the entity of the List itself.

The List does not offer enlightenment or transcendence, but Baudelairian immanence; the Son constantly seeking enlightenment, working his (and our) way up the List, only to die, keeping us all within our earthly bodies and boundaries.

The beauty is that we are allowed to do it over and over again, almost reaching the epitome of the sublime and then plummeting back down. We are assured this pleasure, intrigue and knowledge without ever reaching the ultimate knowledge, —and to paraphrase Nietzsche – to become the Super-Man, our own human god: looking straight into the abyss and having that nothingness stare straight back more intensely.

The List allows its audience to take multiple layers of meaning away from it, employing very subtle, yet effective, hypo-diagesis[1] as the List is then physically passed onto Luke and ourselves. The success of this graphic novel hinges on audience interpretation and

the continuation of our own List: the audience's participation and engagement becomes essential to its telling.

The story works as a palimpsest[2] narrative. The key to truly working out the full intention of *The List* is to discern where the different narratives merge and elaborate on the others – something I'm sure only the creators know – this allows more realisations and layers of meaning to be deducted with each read.

On this note I'd like to consider the use of homo-diagetic-analepsis[3]; these well-synthesised insights into the Son's past are teasingly placed throughout all three volumes of *The List* and infer possible motivations influencing the protagonist without spoon-feeding the reader or giving away the plot. A commendable achievement as these flashbacks advance the story rather than bog it down.

The List works as an organic narrative[4], this indicates the level of thought, planning, preparation, revision and passion all three creators have invested into the graphic novel. This is why *The List* is real; it reaches a diverse audience encompassing many different genres and disciplines (horror, thriller, transgressive, psychology etc), while still satisfying each individual sub-genre successfully.

The List defies recommendation, it is simply a graphic novel that any intellectual graphic novel reader needs to have in their collection. If anyone has not yet read *The List* I would say you must read it, it is the epitome of intelligent and masterful story-telling.

You will be left wanting and that is the purpose of *The List*.

The Commandants are completed.

[1] The form, or medium, of a text becoming a part of the story.

[2] Multiple layering of different texts and symbols.

[3] A flashback centred around the protagonist of a work.

[4] A text that could not function with any diagetic or extra-diagetic elements omitted.

* Diagesis: elements of story.

* Extra-diagesis: the form of a text; conscious structural choices made by the creator to the text to advance story.

The Silence

Author/Artist: Bruce Mutard
Publisher: Allen & Unwin
Release date: 2009
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Choosy is a 'suit' by training and nature, working as an art gallery manager in Sydney. Dim (Dimitri) is her partner, an artist who is struggling to find purpose and meaning for continuing to paint. Choosy believes Dim's problems are unfulfilled aspirations for fame and fortune, while Dim's struggle is more existential.

They travel north up the coast to visit Fred, an aging and successful artist who has work to be exhibited by Choosy's gallery. Choosy has heard of an inspired artist living near Fred, and is determined to find him in order to exhibit his work. Much of the story revolves around Choosy's search for the elusive artist and her love of his work, whilst the dialogue focuses on the more philosophical arguments around the meaning and value of art.

Silences are a product of conflict in the relationship between Choosy and Dim, but the silence of the title seems to be the comparative peace of the Australian bush in an unspoiled setting. Choosy and Dim find this silence both attractive and frightening.

It is clear the author understands the art world and has grappled with the philosophical and existential issues discussed in this graphic novel. For this alone I think *The Silence* should be compulsory reading for all art students and faculty.

The illustrations are in black and white; mostly line drawings interspersed with black areas where appropriate. Each panel is drawn with great care, depicting both characters and background in detail. The sequence of panels is logical so the reader can become immersed in the story rather than focusing on finding a path through the maze. Pages are not overly filled, providing space around groups of panels or even individual panels to create pauses in the story. This is a story whose theme is meant to be pondered, and the artwork reflects the mood.

It is with trepidation that I begin to review comic books but I would have to say the combination of artwork and story in *The Silence* is very highly recommended.

Movie Mayhem

Thor

Director: Keneth Branagh
Writers: J. Michael Straczynski & Mark Protosevich
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Thor (Chris Hemsworth) is a young, headstrong god, about to be crowned ruler of Asgaard so elderly Odin can rest. The Ice Giants break into an Asgardian vault in an attempt to reclaim the source of their power. Thor takes his brother Loki and three closest friends to wreak havoc on the Ice Giants, starting a war. In his fury Odin strips Thor of his power and casts him out of Asgaard to Earth.

After landing on Earth, Thor is promptly hit by a car carrying Jane Foster (Natalie Portman), Darcy Lewis (Kat Dennings) and Erik Selvig (Stellan Skarsgard) who take Thor to hospital. A secret government agency moves in on their headquarters. Meanwhile Thor's hammer arrives on Earth, to be found by the local lads who have an Excalibur-style contest and BBQ that makes *Thor* well worth watching for that alone. J. Michael Straczynski cameos in this scene.

Comic book movies are a genre in their own right, judged by different standards than other movies. The makers of the movie must respect the superhero genre and established conventions, or the movie is a disappointment such as with *X Men 3, Daredevil* and *Electra*. The makers of *Thor* understand the genre and have worked well to bring the comic book superheroes to life on the big screen.

In this genre of movie, the characters are not necessarily developed as they already have a mythos around them making further development difficult. The central characters like Thor and Jane are developed within the movie, but other characters like Thor's three friends remain two dimensional. Casting is brilliant: Chris Hemsworth is the new Heath Ledger working alongside many familiar, high-calibre actors.

Special effects are good, along with the use of 3D as a means of conveying the story. The 3D does not try to compete with the story.

Highly recommended. Top of its genre.

Monsters

Writer and Director: Gareth Edwards
Release: 2011 on DVD and BluRay
Distributor: Madman
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Monsters opens with Andrew Kaulder, a photographer, searching for Samantha Wynden, the daughter of his boss who was in Mexico on holiday. Sam was injured in an 'incident' with an alien that resulted in the destruction of her hotel. NASA had found alien DNA in space and brought it back to Earth for study, however the space shuttle broke up on re-entry, releasing this DNA into the atmosphere. The infected zone is marked on maps like a country, running through northern Mexico and southern USA.

Andrew finds Sam in hospital, with her wrist wrapped up but otherwise well. Andrew reports back to his supervisor that he found Sam. He is instructed to escort her safely home. Andrew refuses, arguing because he needs to photograph an alien in order to further his career. Andrew takes Sam to buy a ticket on a ferry to take her back to the USA and safety. After purchasing this ticket, they go out to celebrate. After Sam turns down Andrew, he finds another woman with which to occupy the night. This predictably ends with their money, passports and ferry tickets being stolen, so they have to travel through the infected zone to get to the US. This is where the predictability of the movie ends.

Everywhere Andrew and Sam travel there is evidence of the 'alien invasion'; quarantine signs, warning signs marking the infection zone, and gas mask signs similar to those in WW2 in Britain are everywhere. Street art also reveals the impact of this 'alien invasion' on the lives of

locals. The scenery is littered with demolished buildings including portions of the aliens who were killed during air strikes. As they travel into the infected zone the scenery changes, with less buildings but occasional debris as evidence of the destructive nature of the conflict in process.

The viewer learns more about the aliens, not from scientists as has become somewhat cliché, but from laypeople who have observed the alien lifecycle in process and have learned to live alongside the aliens to some extent. Some of the scenes are fascinating and even somewhat beautiful. Alien song acts as a threatening soundtrack increasing tension throughout their journey.

Suspense is developed well throughout this story that reads somewhat as a travel dialogue with horror overtones. The finale is unexpected, an excellent conclusion to a unique alien invasion story. I think this is excellent science fiction and a must see.

Monsters won Best Director at the 2010 British Independent Film Awards and was officially selected for the 2010 Melbourne International Film Festival.

A Million

Distributor: Madman
Year: 2009
Language: Korean (with English subtitles)
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

Eight young Koreans become contestants on a Survivor type reality TV show. They are flown to Australia, then transported to a house in the outback. All they have to do is play seven games, one per day, with eliminations at the completion of each. The last contestant standing will win $1,000,000. But not everything is as it seems, and it doesn't take long for them to realise something is a little fishy.

This low-budget, B-grade Korean movie requires the audience to suspend its disbelief for almost two hours. I certainly realised not everything was right well before the smartest contestant asked any questions. Having said that, however, this film is by no means terrible. Sure, the characters are obvious stereotypes, the dialogue and narrative are somewhat clichéd and unsophisticated compared to other productions of a similar ilk, and the acting is uneven throughout the film, but as someone who has spent several years living in Asia and watching a fair amount of Asian cinema, I am well aware there are different ideologies and sensibilities at play.

It was certainly interesting seeing Australia through the lens of an Asian director, although I must admit to being puzzled by the appearance of what seemed to be a jaguar (the animal, not the car) in the middle of the Australian bush one night. Perhaps I was mistaken – or perhaps the Australian dingo isn't recognisably dangerous enough for Korean audiences.

Want a late night in watching a weekly rental? Then this is the sort of film that will sit nicely alongside other B-grade horror films.

Cover: ©2009 Showbox/Mediaplex, Inc.

Valhalla Rising

Distributor: Madman
Year: 2009
Language: English
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

A thousand years ago, a mute warrior is held prisoner by a Norse chieftain. In desolate and bleak mountains he is made to fight other slaves to the death in gladiatorial-type games. Finally able to rebel, he slays his captors and heads into the wilderness, accompanied by a young boy who names the warrior “One Eye”. In the middle of nowhere they stumble across a band of Christian warriors, who invite the pair to join them on a quest to liberate the Holy Land. The Viking longboat they travel in, however, becomes caught in a calm sea and completely engulfed in a mysterious fog. After finally coming to rest in an unknown land, they decide to continue their trek. But what are the dangers that lurk in the forest, await their every move and threaten to kill them all. And should they be more concerned about the menace from within?

This film will polarise audiences – and it’s easy to see why. The setting, the people and the tale are all bleak, extremely bleak. A Danish-British co-production filmed in Scotland, it uses that location well, and has the sense of space and moody hopelessness that so often accompanies Scandinavian cinema. The cinematography is stunning – very beautiful, a visual feast. And there’s blood. Lots of it. Personally, I don’t really like too much gore in a film, but I wasn’t concerned by the violence in this film. It seemed right, and certainly wasn’t gratuitous at all. The narrative is divided into a number of chapters, each encompassing a section of the journey. The acting was first rate throughout, from “One Eye” (apparently a Danish star named Mads Mikkelsen) to the young boy (Maarten Stevenson). In many ways, Valhalla Rising reminded me of a Viking retelling of Heart of Darkness (filmed as Apocalypse Now). And I found myself pondering the movie for the next few days. This is one I will return to in the coming days.

Cover: © 2009 Valhalla Rights APS, One Eye Productions, Blind Eye Productions, Scanbox. All Rights Reserved.

A Town Called Panic

Distributor: Madman
Year: 2009
Language:French (with English subtitles)
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

Cowboy and Indian share a house with Horse in a small town called Panic. And there is a reason why the town is named thus.The film opens on Horse's birthday. Unfortunately Cowboy and Indian have forgotten to buy him a present. They finally decide to build him a brick barbeque, only to realise they don't actually have enough bricks. And so they must order the required bricks online. And from that simple premise, incredible events transpire and things go from bad to worse. The other townsfolk all become involved - Policeman, Postman, Steven (the shouting farmer), Janine (Steven's wife), and Madame Longrée, the piano teacher at the local music school (who also happens to be a horse.) Together our three heroes end up on a journey through the bowels of the Earth, across an Arctic wasteland, and into a pond where Black Lagoon type creatures dwell.

This Belgian production is a beautifully filmed stop-motion animation. Utilising plastic cowboys and indians, farm animals and other toys similar to those I played with as a young boy, the makers have created a childlike and dreamy world that I fell in love with from the moment the film started. The settings are vivid, colourful and wonderful to watch. For the first thirty minutes I was completely intrigued, lost in this bizarre world. And then I became a little bewildered as the storyline appeared to wander off on inconsequential tangents and events occurred that were never fully resolved and seemed only to have happened in order to keep the narrative progressing. Part psychedelic, part surreal and part stream-of-consciousness, you really need to suspend all disbelief and sit back to enjoy the trip. But who could not fall in love with a piano playing horse, a robotic penguin controlled by three mad scientists (who delight in throwing snowballs at unsuspecting victims) and an angry farmer who starts fights and shouts all the time.

This film is a spinoff from a series of twenty minute shorts produced for Belgian TV, and I can well imagine the animation being more

effective at that length. The middle of the film seemed to drag a little during an extended chase sequence, but certainly picked up towards the end. Not all the humour was to my taste, but I know there are others who loved every minute of the film. I thoroughly recommend *A Town Called Panic* to kids of all ages, especially those who are tired of the usual selection of animations. And, I suspect, this could become a favourite for a number of adults as well.

Cover and stills © 2009 – La Parti Production – Beast Productions – Gebeka Films – Les Films Du Grognon- Made In Productions – Melusine Productions – Rtbf (Television Belge)

Metropolis

Director: Fritz Lang
Year: 1927, re-released in 2010
Distributor: Madman
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Freder is a young man living in Metropolis, a city built on the blood sweat and tears of the worker underclass. One day Freder is at play in a garden open only to the sons of the elite class, when a group of worker school children enter on an excursion with their teacher. Promptly expelled from the garden by attendants, the group leaves, but not before Freder is entranced by the vision of worker children calling him brother.

Joh Frederson, Freder's father, rules Metropolis from the penthouse in the Tower of Babel. A harsh employer, he sacks Josaphat for not informing Joh of an explosion and unrest. Freder sends Josaphat to his own dwelling while Freder explores the worker areas of the city. The workers are seeking a 'heart' to act as mediator between the 'head' (thinkers and rulers) and 'hands' (working class).

Meanwhile, Joh engages a villain to follow his son, whose own agenda unfolds later. Joh visits Rotwang, the inventor, who is still angry over the loss of Hel, whose romance with Joh ended in death in childbed. Rotwang builds a machine man and plans his revenge on the city, Joh and Freder.

Metropolis is more a cross between theatre and dance than contemporary cinema. Dating from before sound, ideas are conveyed using melodrama and imagery. Text is interspersed to convey some meaning, put on screen as a break in the cinematography, not with subtitles, as was traditional during this era. This edition has been released with footage previously lost adding approximately 1/4 of the viewing time to restore Fritz Lang's original director's cut accompanied by a new recording of the 1927 soundtrack. Approximately 150 minutes, which I watched in installments. This re-release of *Metropolis* is a must for collectors and movie buffs alike; it is an archeological epic revealing the development of cinema in the 20th century.

Cover: © 2010 Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau Foundation, Wiesbaden

Short Stories

All the Clowns in Clowntown

Author: Andrew J. McKiernan
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Binko is a clown living in Clowntown, spending the night on watch because Alfie the Hobo has a job elsewhere. To Binko's horror, he hears the sound of the carousel and calliope whilst on watch. Racing back to his friends and safety, he warns them – the circus is coming to town! In a role reversal, the circus comes to Clowntown periodically to capture clowns who are forced to perform. The clowns know the risks, but their very natures war with their knowledge, making them susceptible to the superficial charms of the circus.

As this is a short story, the less said the better or a review becomes a reveal. I spent most of the story anticipating an awful horror story, but I was surprised. If this was a TV show, it might rate PG.

White-face style clowns tend to polarise audiences; you either love them or you hate them. Those who love clowns will love this story for its elements of story telling, mild horror and humour. Descriptions of slap stick humour evoke white-face clown performances, which would benefit greatly from a more visual medium such as a graphic novel or screen.

This short story was sent to *Dark Matter* for review as an excerpt from an anthology, *Macabre: A Journey Through Australia's Darkest Fears,* edited by Angela Challis & Dr.Marty Young, from Brimstone Press. This anthology was nominated for an Aurealis Award. The Aurealis Awards are Australia's most prestigious SF and Fantasy awards, so nomination puts this work in an elite category.

TV Series

Art & Soul

Distributor: Madman
Year: 2010
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Hetti Perkins is a curator taking us on a tour of Australian Aboriginal art, meeting some of the artists and learning a little of the cultural and historical setting of their art. There are 3 episodes in the set, titled *home + away, dreams + nightmares* and *bitter + sweet*. Part of a larger project that includes an art exhibition at Yiribana gallery at the Art Gallery of NSW and a book release by Miegunyah Press.

Hetti visits sacred sites, interviews living Australian Aboriginal artists and shows us contemporary art interspersed with recordings of deceased artists and historical events. The unfolding of events surrounding Aboriginal rights juxtaposed with the artwork was insightful, bringing new meaning to historical events.

I loved Destiny Deacon, an internationally reknown Australian Aboriginal artist, gently dissing Hetti on Hetti's privileged upbringing - this brought a strong sense of character and relationship to the program.

Another favourite segment focused on Richard Bell, Aboriginal artist and general character. Bell has been the focus of controversy as a result of his activism and sometimes outrageous clothing. (Photo: of Richard Bell with his art, from http://benmackayindigenousdiary.blogspot.com/2010/10/artist-richard-bell.html)

Art + Soul was able to show a recording of Albert Namatjira painting and speaking and had the support of his family to show his paintings. A company owns not only the paintings themselves but copyright to

the paintings, thus this company prevented *Art + Soul* from showing any images of Namatjira's finished work in this important historical document. The politics of this situation were not explained, merely stated as fact. This was a disappointment as the work should be seen in its own merit and its historical context. Any legal and political impediment to showing his work also needs to be explained, thereby exposing some of the politics currently surrounding Aboriginal art.

In the first episode it seems a large part of the focus is on Hetti rather than the artists, with Hetti seeming to feed the artists their lines. I would have liked to have seen more in-depth interviews in a more relaxed atmosphere, although this may not be possible due to artists being taken out of their comfort zones and language barriers. In this episode more care should have been taken to ensure the camera lens was clean; the dirty lens was quite distracting in a number of outdoor shots.

Some recording is shown with a voice-over talking about the 19th century, although the recording was probably taken in the 1960s or 1970s and I think was not intended as a re-enactment. I think the viewer is meant to realise this, but it's important to be careful when making what will, undoubtedly, be a significant historical document (the *Art + Soul* DVDs and books).

Overall I found this to be an interesting and informative documentary that will take its place as an historical documentary of Aboriginal art in Australia. I was left wanting more, more context, more history, more art, more artists. Overseas viewers unfamiliar with the history and political context will find *Art + Soul* to be a good launching pad for learning about Australian Aboriginal art, its history and contemporary context.

Highly recommended.

Bran by ben Grimshaw

Game of Thrones

If you enjoy reading door stops, especially epic fantasy doorstops, you've probably read George R. R. Martin's book A Game of Thrones that is part of the series A Song of Ice and Fire.

My teenage son read *A Song of Ice and Fire* after it was recommended to me and I bought him the books (I'm trying to instill a love of reading into my gamer son). It kind of back fired on me though - MTS then started nagging me to read the series. I held out for as long as I could because I was concerned about the series not being finished. After meeting GRRM at AussieCon and hearing so much about the HBO adaptation of the first book, I threw in the towel and started to read the series.

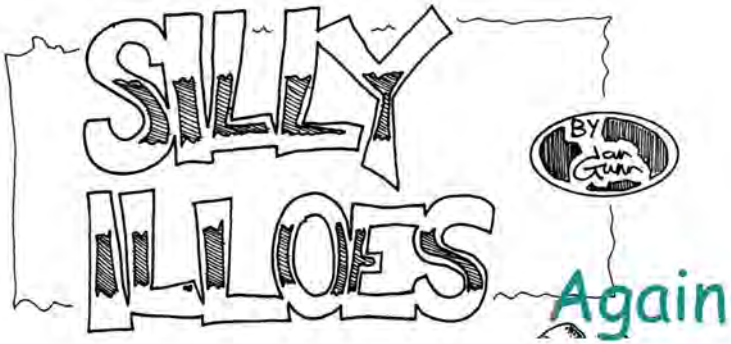
A Game of Thrones sets the scene by introducing the Stark family who rule Winterfell, a protectorate in the north of Westeros, which is ruled by Robert Baratheon (Mark Addy). Eddard Stark is the head of the family, which role is played admirably by Sean Bean in the TV series. Robert is married to Cersei Lannister (Lena Headey from the *Sarah Conner Chronicles*), a beautiful woman with ambitions for her family. Cersei has two brothers, Jamie, with whom she has an incestuous relationship and Tyrion Lannister (Peter Dinklage) who is a dwarf with personality plus both in the book and on the screen.

There are many other characters, too many to list here - as I said, the book is a door stop. The Stark children, all six of them, are all well developed characters with significant storylines. On the next page is a picture of Bran Stark, aged 6 in the book, 10 in the series, practicing his archery in the opening episode. (Art by Ben Grimshaw)

Tyrion Lannister

At AussieCon George said his writing of *A Game of Thrones* was a celebration of writing without constraints. He had been

previously constrained by consideration for budgets and time frames in jobs like writing for *Beauty and the Beast*. As a reaction against and celebration of freedom from these constraints, George gave this series a cast of thousands, with epic sets like The Wall of ice, a massive geographical feature to the north of Westeros. Then, of course, people came knocking, wanting to turn this epic series into a movie or three. George kept turning them down, especially when he saw how much his beloved books would have to be hacked to fit the proposed formats. Finally someone, an agent I think it was, asked George what it would take. George thought about it and said it would need to be a TV series. One thing led to another, and HBO decided to make a 10 part TV series out of the first book in the series as a test run. Even in this format the book has had to be cut, but this was the best available means of conversion possible.



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Meetings and calendar of club events

The weekly events calendar may be found on the web site **www.msfc.sf.org.au**

Melbourne Science Fiction Club (MSFC) meetings are held every Friday except Good Friday and between Christmas and mid-January. Premises open at 8:00 pm (20:00), Events commence at 9:00 pm and everyone out of the pool at 11:00pm. Location: St David's Uniting Church Hall, 74 Melville Road, West Brunswick, Vic 3055. Melways ref: 29 C5 (or catch a #55 Tram from William Street (in the city) to tram stop 36).
Hot food, coffee, chocolate, soft drinks are available to buy at the kitchen.

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New Melbourne Browncoats

Browncoats are fans of "Firefly" and "Serenity", who gather to celebrate the works of Joss Whedon and his many Whedonverses at conventions, charity events and a wide range of social gatherings throughout the year.

The New Melbourne Browncoats recently became an incorporated nonprofit association, strengthening our commitment to our fundraising, and to the local Browncoat community.

"Can't Stop The Serenity" is an annual, global fundraiser now in its sixth year. New Melbourne Browncoats are proud to announce that in 2011, we'll be hosting a whole season of events, including screening Serenity, Dr Horrible's Sing-Along Blog, The Guild, Browncoats: Redemption and more.

You'll also find our Browncoat Booth at local conventions, selling a range of Firefly / Serenity and Whedon-related merchandise, and raising money for charity.

In 2011, we are supporting Red Cross. The New Melbourne Browncoats invite you to visit our new website at www.newmelbournebrowncoats.com and our shiny new forum at www.newmelbournebrowncoats.com/forum

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Spaced Out is a non-profit science fiction club run by volunteers. We are a social group with monthly meetings and social outings. Our activities include movie nights, discussion of SF, dinners, picnics etc, mini conventions, guest speakers, Pride March to name a few. Our newsletter is called 'Diverse Universe' and we welcome stories, articles and artwork.

who can join?

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Spaced Out, PO Box 12033, A'Beckett Street RP, Melbourne 8006, AUST.
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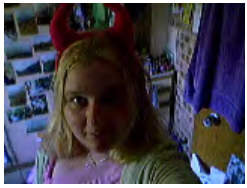
Dark Matter Volunteers

Ben Grimshaw

Realising early on that his dreams of working for an evil galactic empire would be unfulfilled, Ben settled for as close as he could get. Working for Walt Disney Animation.

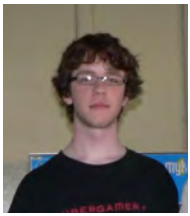
After six years of drawing big cute eyes, and being beaten into submission by The Mouse, the studio closed and Ben escaped to Melbourne, where he has since worked for several smaller studios, in a variety of artistic roles. He is also currently teaching cartooning at CAE and working on an autobiographical comic."

Clare Elaine



Clare was destined to be interested in Science Fiction from the moment she was named after one of the actresses on *Red Dwarf*. Highlights of her life include bringing an ewok to the teddy-bears picnic, meeting 3 of the Doctors and finding Ian Mckellen down a dark alley in Sydney. She is currently living in Melbourne and working on getting a career which will involve attending as many Science Fiction and game conventions as possible.

Daniel Haynes AKA deth



Daniel first watched the pilot of *Babylon 5* on the big screen at the Tas Uni SF club when he was about 8 months old. He has continued the family tradition of being a total geek, and his parents are very proud. Except when his father disconnects the cat 5 cable to get chores done...

Daniel is a *StarCraft 2* player and caster, having won about $1,500 in cash and prizes to date. He enjoyes games when they're good, but he's not afraid to rip on anything that is substandard. He considers *Call of Duty* and other popular franchises to be extremely lacking because they just pump them out every year. And he doesn't play *StarCraft 2* for the story - it's only for the competitive gameplay.

Edward Haynes

Edward was a precocious child who didn't start talking until he was four years old, but he started talking in sentences. This is a fair indicator of Edward's personality - don't do it at all unless you get it right! Not surprisingly, Edward is *Dark Matter*'s proof reader. Any errors are most likely because DM was published before he finished proof reading.

Edward is a true geek - he works in IT. Edward grew up with SF but hardly reads, except for Dark Matter and IT books. Edward prefers movies, TV and computer games.

Elyse S. G. Taylor

Spends most of her time in the world inside her head, which is a strange and frightening place. Despite her mother's best attempts to create an upstanding citizen, she is a self confessed nerd; although she won't make a good geek until she stops drowning in the training areas of WoW. Possesses a degree in English Literature and Music, which honestly isn't very useful. Has been accused of teaching VCE English which she maintains is a bare-faced lie and wants to know who told you that.

Ian Gunn 1958-1998

Ian was an award winning artist, receiving many nominations and awards. The awards Ian won include best fan artist Ditmar (1989, 1990, 1995, 1997, 1999), best fan writer Ditmar (1990), ASFMA best media fanartist (1991, 1996), ASFMA best media writer (1996), FAAN award for best fan artist (1996) and the best fanartist Hugo in 1999.

Dark Matter is privileged to be allowed to use Ian's work, thanks to K'Rin Pender-Gunn, Ian's wife. To find out more about Ian's life and work, go to http://members.optusnet.com.au/kringunny/ianbio.htm.

Jade Hounsell

Well, what can I say but NERRRRD!!! I have to say I'm most happy when gaming, reading, watching sci-fi or at a convention, but I am absolutely in my bliss zone when cosplaying. I am late to the wonderful world of cosplay, only being introduced in the last few years by my younger sister, but feel freer in a costume then I do in "real life". I excelled in the English side of things in school, but decided to let my parents and teachers down by not following their intended university path and instead went straight to work in the automotive industry, where I still work to this day. Throw in my rambunctious husky and water loving feline and bam there you have my life in a nutshell.

Nalini Haynes

Nalini's first memories of SF are at the age of 3, hiding behind her uncle's chair terrified but unable to take her eyes of the TV while Dr Who was playing. By the time Nalini was about 10 her mother gave Nalini her adult SF books to read to keep Nalini quiet. Nothing much has changed since then, except gaining a few kilos and a few wrinkles.

To be fair to the subjects of her reviews, it should be noted that when Nalini first watched Gattaca she expected the suicide at the end for at least three-quarters of the movie. After watching Matrix 2 she predicted all the key points of Matrix 3. So when Nalini says something is predictable...

Steve Cameron

Steve Cameron is a writer of speculative fiction. Born in Scotland, he was raised in Australia before residing in Japan for six years. He has worked as a police officer, an English Language instructor, a software developer, a charity store manager and currently teaches English and Drama in a Secondary College. Steve is also an amateur astronomer and musician. He resides in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. His latest published fiction can be found in Tasmaniac Publications Festive Fear: Global Edition.