Contents: Issue 6

Cover: Wolverine by JKB Fletcher
Donations
Via Paypal
About Dark Matter

Competitions
Winners
Competition terms and conditions
Ambassador’s Mission - autographed copy
Blood Song - autographed copy
Passion - autographed copy
The Creature Court Fashion Challenge Contest

Christmas Parade
Visionary Project
Convention/Expo reports
Tights and Tiaras: Female Superheroes and Media Cultures
#thevenue
#thefood
#thesessions
#karenhealy
#fairytaleheroineorfablesuperspy
#princecharmingbydaysuperheroinebynight
#supermom
#wonderwomanworepants
#wonderwomanforaday
#mywonderwoman
#motivationtofight
#thefemalesuperhero
#dinner
#xenaandbuffy
#thestakeisnotthepower
#buffythetransmediahero
#artistandauthors
#biggernakedbreasts
#sistersaredoingit
#sugarandspice
#jeangreyasphoenix
#nakedmystique
#theend
Armageddon Expo 2011
#thelonegunmen

#thevenue
#thefood
#thesessions
#karenhealy
#fairytaleheroineorfablesuperspy
#princecharmingbydaysuperheroinebynight
#supermom
#wonderwomanworepants
#wonderwomanforaday
#mywonderwoman
#motivationtofight
#thefemalesuperhero
#dinner
#xenaandbuffy
#thestakeisnotthepower
#buffythetransmediahero
#artistandauthors
#biggernakedbreasts
#sistersaredoingit
#sugarandspice
#jeangreyasphoenix
#nakedmystique
#theend
Armageddon Expo 2011
#thelonegunmen
#doctorwho 3
#cyberangel 3
#bestlaidplans 3
#theguild 4
#sylvestermccoy 6
#wrapup 7
Timeline Festival 40
Melbourne Zombie Shuffle 46

**White Noise** 51

Success without honour 51
New Directions 52

**Interviews** 54

Troopertrek 2011 54
#update 58
#links 58

Sandeep Parikh and Jeff Lewis @ Armageddon 59
#Effinfunny 60
#5minutecomedyhour 61
#theguild 63
#stanlee 67
#neilgaiman 68
#eringray 69
#zabooandcodex 70
#theguildcomics 72
#thefuture 73

JKB Fletcher talks to Dark Matter 77
#inthebeginning 78
#sandiegoagain? 84
#artquestionsculture 85
#thefuture 88
#graffitiart 89

Rowena Cory Daniells talks to Dark Matter 91
#dayjob 91
#booktrailer 92
#coverart 93
#booktrailers 95
#brisbanesupanova 98
#thefuture 98
#writersontherise 100
#creativejourney 102
#selfdiscipline 104
#workliferelationship 105
#selfpublishing 106
#writingforchildren 107
#booksRCDwrote 108
#worldbuilding 109
#research 112
#thefutureofpublishing 113
#thefuture 114
Marianne de Pierres talks to Dark Matter 116
  #becomingawriter 116
  #authoreditorrelationship 117
  #journeyintopublication 119
  #writersgroups 119
  #criticism 122
  #winningawards 124
  #publishednovels 124
  #comicbook 125
  #roleplayinggame 130
  #YAbooks 130
  #SheKilda 131
  #worksinprogress 131
Ian Irvine talks to Dark Matter 133
  #thejourney 133
  #editing 135
  #worldbuilding 138
  #plotting 139
  #characters 140
  #otherbooks 142
  #typecasting 144
  #planningfuturenovels 146
  #booktrailers 146
  #dayjob 147
  #novelinfluences 148
  #relationshipwithfans 149
  #thefuture 150
Richard Fairgray @ Armageddon 153
Marta Tesoro’s Fishbones 156

**Book Reviews** 157
Archangel’s Blade 157
Avenger’s Angel 159
The House Of The Wind 161
Angel Arias 163
The People Next Door 164
Bitten 166
Shipbreaker 168
The Rare: Books One and Two 169
The Revisionists 171
The Steel Remains 173
Cold Commands 173
Emperors of Dreams: Some Notes on Weird Poetry 176
The Enterprise of Death 178
The Broken Ones 179
Theodore Boone: The Abduction 180
Path of the Stray 181
Side Jobs 184
Liesl & Po 186
Black Rain 187
Poirot and the Doctor 188
They Trade in Eyes 189

**Comic Books & Graphic Novels** 190
Becoming 190

**Screen Stuff** 192
The Haunters 192
Freedom 194

**Dark Matter Volunteers** 195
Credits for Dark Matter

Editor:
Nalini Haynes

Proof reading:
Edward Haynes

Contributors:
Chris Hayes-Kossman
Elyse Taylor
Jade Hounsell
James Wallis
Lloyd Penney
Nalini Haynes
Rebecca Muir
Steve Cameron

Cover Art & Design:
Wolverine by JKB Fletcher

Art:
Ian Gunn’s Silly Illoes used with permission of Krin Pender-Gunn
Images attributed where known
Marta Tesoro: Fishbones

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

Donations

To date Dark Matter Fanzine (DMF) has been running off our household expenses, while DMF expenses continue to grow. A post box, mailing books to reviewers, mailing out prizes to winners, attending conventions to report, purchase of a dictaphone for interviews and so on... All these things cost money. DMF would appreciate any donations, no matter how big or small, to enable DMF to continue running.

Via Paypal

DMF has a paypal account, so donors with a paypal account can use the send money option in paypal addressing the money to DMF’s email address darkmatterfanzine@gmail.com, marked as a ‘gift’ under personal.

DMF wishes to thank its donor.
No, that is not a typo.
About Dark Matter

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

For your free subscription to Dark Matter, e-mail darkmatterfanzine@gmail.com with the word ‘subscribe’ in the subject field. E-mail addresses will be considered confidential and will not be used for any purpose other than distribution. Dark Matter is available online at the Australian National Library Archives http://nla.gov.au/nla.arc-123161 and at www.efanzines.com/DarkMatter/index.htm. The State Library of Victoria also makes Dark Matter available in paper format.

Follow Dark Matter on Facebook at www.facebook.com/darkmatterfanzine. Snail Mail to Dark Matter, PO Box 144, Lynbrook, Victoria, Australia 3975.

Copyright belongs to contributors and reverts to contributors on publication. Photos, images and text from other sources are used on what I understand to be fair usage within the laws of copyright. This is my intent; any issues or concerns should be directed to the editor at darkmatterfanzine@gmail.com.

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 all reviews are graded, 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.
Competitions

Winners

The winners of the copies of *Daughter of Smoke and Bone* were Jeremy Hamilton and Peter Marz. Congratulations!

Thanks to Hodder for the free books.

**Competition terms and conditions**

The same terms and conditions apply to each of the following items that have been donated to be given away:

Entries must be sent via email with one and only one book title in the subject field.
Entries close on 31 December 2011.
Each email will be assigned a number in a list.
A random number generator will be used to select winners.
Numbers will be assigned to entrants based on the order of receiving their emails.
One entry per person; if more than one entry per person is received, only the first entry will be eligible.
No correspondence will be entered into.
The winner will be notified via email; within seven days of the email being sent, the winner must provide a postal address.
Postal address must be in Australia or New Zealand.
Failure to provide a postal address will result in a new winner being selected by the above method.
Email addresses and postal addresses will only be used for the purpose of this competition.
Subscription requests need to be sent separately to enable email subscription.
This competition has been organised in good faith, and will be managed to the best of my ability, however in the event of difficulty, no responsibility is taken.
Ambassador’s Mission - autographed copy

Trudi Canavan has kindly donated an autographed copy of *Ambassador’s mission*, the first book in her latest trilogy. To enter the competition, email darkmatterfanzine@gmail.com with the subject ‘Ambassador’s Mission’. Please read the section *Competition terms and conditions*.

Blood Song - autographed copy

Rhiannon Hart has kindly donated an autographed copy of *Blood Song*, the first book in her trilogy. To enter the competition, email darkmatterfanzine@gmail.com with the subject ‘Blood Song’. Please read the section *Competition terms and conditions*.

Passion - autographed copy

Random House has kindly donated an autographed copy of *Passion* by Lauren Kate, the third book in her *Fallen* series. To enter the competition, email darkmatterfanzine@gmail.com with the subject ‘Passion’. Please read the section *Competition terms and conditions*. 
Tansy Rayner Roberts, author of the Creature Court trilogy, is offering to hand write sneak peeks of Book 3 ahead of its February release on postcards for everyone who enters: Design or describe an outfit for one of the characters of the Creature Court novels to wear.

It can be in any medium, though mostly the entries so far are in text or images. No one has yet sculpted an outfit out of pasta but there’s still TIME. You can send your entry to creaturecourt@gmail.com [email links DO NOT work, sorry, you will need to copy and paste] (with a postal address for Tansy to send the postcard to) and Tansy will post it with the others on her blog, tansyrr.com. [URL links should work.]

You can take the challenge as seriously or as flippantly as you choose. Tansy looks forward to seeing your entries. Competition is open until 15th December or until she runs out of postcards, whichever comes first!
Twas in Knightfall before Xmas,
And all through the Garrison
There were few who could troop
Despite Fish’s harrasin’.

The weather was bleak
And the rain sheeted down.
But we knew armour floats
So at least we won’t drown!

So we donned our white armour,
We tightened our kits.
Then we marched out to glory,
And to go do our bit.

For we trooped for the kiddies,
In the bleak pouring rain...
Though quite often sidestepping
All the lakes ‘round the drains.

In a sea of umbrellas
In the mist of festive cheer
We strode forth for the Empire
And cried “Christmas is here!”
After several damp hours
And many photos taken
We called it a day
Our task unforsaken.

For no rain, nor snow,
Nor gloom of night,
Can keep a Knightfaller
From fighting the fight.

And Christmas was saved
From soggy disaster
By the Emperor’s finest...
With waterproof blasters.

Photos courtesy of James Wallis
Visionary Project

Vision Machine is a kind of ‘open source’ comic book project by Greg Pak, R. B. Silva, DYM, Java Tartaglia and Charles Pritchett. The comic book itself features a story exploring the future of media, mostly relating to the internet and current moves to censorship and control, including companies claiming copyright over individuals’ work through the unread fine print in the terms and conditions. With the push from companies like Sony who seems to be trying to hold ISPs accountable for the actions of their clients, and the US government seeking to lock down the internet and Australia periodically visiting the government imposed netnanny regime, the themes of this comic are extremely relevant to us today.

Vision Machine goes beyond this. This project is effectively open source, with not only the PDF available for free download (http://www.gregpak.com/vision_machine/), but paper copies are free for interested people. The idea is to invite people to contribute, to grow this project and explore these issues. The conditions seem fairly simple: primarily, give credit to the people whose work you’re building on, and keep your part of this project ‘open source’ (not copyrighted) too.

I think this is a visionary project, and I’d like to see it grow. Write in with URLs and stories relating to this project. I’ll publish what I can to follow this project.
Tights and Tiaras: Female Superheroes and Media Cultures was a conference held at Monash University on 12 to 13 August 2011. I heard about it a few days before, so I changed my plans to attend.

#thevenue

Held at the Japanese Studies Centre at Clayton campus, the venue seemed particularly appropriate to explore comics and manga. Unfortunately there was a problem with heating, so I spent the first day freezing. The second day there was even less heating, but I was wearing my warmest woollen jumper, that is so warm it’s practically viable for Arctic conditions. My hands and feet were still iceblocks.

I loved the hints of traditional Japanese architecture in the building and gardens. The size was suitable and yet a bit sad – I would have thought a conference like this could have appealed to a much larger audience here in Melbourne, therefore requiring a much larger venue. From comments I’ve heard from a number of people, this convention could have been much larger but people just didn’t hear about it. I hope future conventions or conferences run by Monash grow in visibility and attendance in the future – I’ll definitely give them a plug if I hear about them in time.

#thefood

It seems that most SF/Fantasy conventions don’t cater. Monash University caters. Last year I attended the Utopia, Dystopia and Catastrophe convention at Monash, which ran for 3 days, fully catered for morning and afternoon tea and lunch, including wine for book launches and drinks ’n’ nibbles for closing (see DM issue 1 for a review). Tights didn’t cater quite so lavishly, but there was quite a lot of ‘bang’ for your buck, with lunch, morning and afternoon tea catered. There was an optional dinner on the Friday night as
well, which was a good ice-breaker.

#thesessions
There were 2 days of single streamed sessions. This, to me, was a good thing. There was no agonising over which session to attend or miss. I just walked in, sat down and soaked it all up. And I learnt more about the history of comics, cartoons and media than I expected; so much so that I now have an idea of the extent of my ignorance. Ah well, time will heal even my inadequate knowledge of these matters, especially if I manage to keep hearing about these Monash conferences in the nick of time.

The following are rewrites of some of my notes, not a rewrite of a recording. Below are only snippets of talks intended to give an indicator of the flavour of a presentation; at no time have I tried to recreate the entire talk. If I have misinterpreted or misrepresented a speaker, my apologies. Please let me know.

#karenhealy
Karen Healy worked with the title Pedestals and Poles: good girls, bad girls and women in comics. Karen bemoaned DC Comic’s recent significant reduction of the number of women working in comics. 5% to 10% of comic fans are female but they tend to ‘shop and grab’ rather than linger in the comic stores. 92% of comic fans are supposed to be male, with an average age of 29. Karen questions whether objectification of women and violence are off-putting to women.

Karen recited a letter to Dan Didio: ‘Sluts, Victims and bitches. What those numbers seem to mean to you.’ Sluts are interpretations of female characters as sex objects, sexually enticing and available. This dominant sexual stereotype of women as sluts is demeaning as these characters are less heroic, less powerful, less able to be taken seriously as the men. Karen showed us images of men put in the same pose as the soft porn images of women appearing on comic covers – it was quite amusing. Karen compared depictions of deaths of women in comics, which are sexualised representations of violence, as opposed to the men who die in macho and non-
sexualised scenarios. Stephanie Brown was used as a primary example; the audience had been tricked into believing she would become the next Robin, before she was brutally and sexually murdered.


#fairytaledarkmatter

Rebecca-Anne Do Rozario and Zachary Kendall presented this session, asking, ‘Does princess culture ally with the superhero genre?’ To which they replied with a definitive yes. Peter Coogan’s definition of the superhero genre requires a mission, power and identity that incorporates a codename, costume and chevron. The speakers affirmed that princesses have power with costume and fashion adding more power. Examples were used of early evolutions of fairy tales and the more recent Fables series, including From Fabletown with love and Fables: Fairest.

#princecharmingbydaysuperheroinebynight

Catherine Baily addressed this topic, discussing the defiance of gender binaries in Sailor Moon and Revolutionary Girl Utena. Utena’s story is a subverted fairy tale, subverting cultural convention by dressing in a masculine-type uniform, competing athletically and having magical powers with phallic symbolism. The US translation of Sailor Moon required changes to the story; the girl couple ceased to be lesbians and became cousins living together instead. The US picked up the series before the really gender bending characters were brought in. It is unknown if the next release of the series will restore the original character relationships.

#supermom

Michelle De Stefani discussed Family Ties, Who’s the Boss and The Cosby Show, comparing these stories with many more recent
superhero shows where the superheroine either gives up the child for the career, gives up her career, the child is at risk or the feminine figure is monstrous. Media currently depicts the full-time working mum as selfish, while the ‘good’ (stay at home) mother is evil in disguise. The current ‘good’ mothers are domestic goddesses, flexishift soccer mums, Alpha mums or yummy mummies. 21st century alternatives are the warrior mum or the pregnant assassin. The secret life of supermom requires that she gives up all self-time and activities in favour of devoting her entire self to parenting and working.

#wonderwomanworepants
Ann Matsuuchi questioned the origins of Wonder Woman, who was invented by William Moulten Marsden, the creator of the lie detector, and his two co-wives; Wonder Woman originally challenged sexism. When US comics started, they included a female audience much more so than today, so Wonder Woman was an answer to Superman. (Sadly my notes for this lecture don’t translate into a cohesive argument, so if I try to say much more I run the risk of putting words into the speaker’s mouth.)

#wonderwomanforaday
Matt Yockey talked about a charity day by Excalibur books meant to show compassion for domestic violence victims with a goal of moral regeneration. Wonder woman is defined by voluntary submission to her mother and the state, reconciling state and individuals, while representing love and equality for everyone. The idea of the charity day was that comic book fans can change the world. DC Comics objected to Wonder woman day because they didn’t want Wonder woman associated with domestic violence even in this positive light. Therefore, Wonder woman day ended in 2010; it is now called The Women of Wonder day.

#mywonderwoman
Andrew Freidenthal identified Wonder Woman as a feminist icon,
superheroes as a commodity and a true political icon. Steinem treated Wonder Woman as a commodity for the feminist movement. Collective memory and pop culture are inexplicably linked. Personal and collective memory are replaced by a collective history that consists of films, events etc. Wonder Woman is the first superhero expressed in a purely political utopian society.

Wonder Woman changed over time. In 1972, Miz Magazine had a cover depicting Wonder Woman running for president in 1000 years.

Wonder Woman’s powers were important to the character, but DC Comics took her powers away. Previously, Wonder Woman was as powerful as Superman, a utopian view of this empowered woman. Freidenthal asked if Wonder Woman was diminished by the sexist movie and TV show. The debate focuses on her appearance rather than her abilities. Character versus image.

#motivationtofight

Jane Felstead discussed Maneaters and fandancers: exploring representations and personal motivations of female characters in Mortal Kombat. Jane introduced some background first – 42% of gamers are female, but this includes casual players; most high violence games are male dominated. Texas had a gamers conference and banned women in order to combat misogyny. Lara Croft was created as a sex object.

Instead of creating two individual female characters for Mortal Kombat 2, the creators made one a clone of the other. Over time these characters have had their clothing reduced to hyper sexualise them. Earlier they were based on real people but no longer.

Kitana, the original and ‘good’ character, hides behind her fan and giggles girlishly when she wins a fight. She is fighting for the soul of her boyfriend. While male characters fight for honour, fame etc, female characters fight for familial motivations such as love. Mileena is a clone of Kitana, created by a sorcerer to steal Kitana’s
Dark Matter

throne. Mileena is the monstrous feminine in expression and costume. She has two finishing moves in a fight – ‘be mine’ and ‘man eater’ where she rubs her semi-naked body with blood if she wins. Mileena was the first female character from a game to appear in Playboy.

In games there is not much between the princess and the monster in terms of choice of characters. Male characters don’t rub blood on their bodies if they win. While the male characters haven’t changed much over the years, Mileena and Kitana have become much more sexual and wear less clothing.

#thefemalesuperhero

Kevin Patrick has been researching the history of comics, with a special focus on Moira Bertrand. At age 14 Bertrand began being published in 1945. The central character was Jo, a curvaceous Broadway dancer with a magic cape, portrayed as American and placed alongside US military troops. These comics aspired to present themselves as US comics when they were first published because Australian comics had an austere image and were less popular. While Bertrand was very popular early on, her work petered out in the late 1960s with the advent of TV. Bertrand went into commercial illustration, portraiture and commercial design.

Kevin has been researching Bertrand and trying to access either original or copies of Bertrand’s work. If you can help, please contact Dark Matter and your information will be passed on to Kevin.

#dinner

There was a conference dinner on the first evening, with good food and good company. For me this really broke the ice and helped me enjoy day two much more. Well, to be honest, I was going to love day two anyway, with all the discussion of Buffy, art, local authors speaking and more. Don’t mistake the brevity of my notes for lack of enjoyment: I enjoyed it too much to take many notes, and now I can’t remember exactly what was discussed. It’s also easier to take notes if I’m either learning something or in disagreement; when I’m in complete agreement, it seems too obvious to take notes. It was stimulating and inspiring, however,
and it added more material to my ‘must read’ list.

**#xenaandbuffy**

Hayley Ricketson and Ted Janet explored Buffy and Xena with reference to a number of other papers including *Sex and the Slayer: a gender study of Buffy*, *Undead TV* by Elana Levin, *From girl to goddess* and *A hero’s journey* by Campbell. They discussed the impact of ensemble casts enabling incorporation of female characters and ‘new men’ evolving to love and respect strong women. Male villains try to kill Xena and Buffy for glory in war, but try to be with them in love. This dichotomy doesn’t happen for male superheroes.

**#thestakeisnotthepower**

Alexandra Heatwole looked at how the feminine connection with family connects Buffy to life and love, as a personal strength. Kendra and Faith didn’t have these connections, which was their weakness. This was epitomised in ‘Super Buffy’ in *Primeval* (Season 4, episode 21, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primeval_(Buffy_the_Vampire_Slayer)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primeval_(Buffy_the_Vampire_Slayer)) is made up of all the Scoobies (Buffy’s ‘gang’). It was together that they triumphed over Frankenstein’s monster, as alone even Buffy could not prevail.

Alexandra also referred to Christina Lucia Stasia’s *Wham, bam, thank you ma’am: the new public/private female action hero* and Mary Jane Haley’s feminist sociology works.

**#buffythetransmediahero**

Emma Bedows discussed this topic, lauding Buffy as an ideal transmedia hero whose story has expanded through movies, TV,

Each platform has its unique identity: Podomore has an online reading experience, whereas the TV to Comic dynamic features design synergies, superhero archetypes alongside character and story world continuity. Market synergies were discussed, including the single author model, genre and reception. The final point regarding TV to comic conversion was flow as a central requirement of compatibility.

Replication of tone was discussed. Emma mentioned that there has been little research of semiotic flow in transmedia formats, but expanded upon recurring motifs such as Buffy’s blonde hair, Joss saying Buffy should look like Buffy in the comics, not necessarily like Sarah Michelle Gellar; Mr Pointy (the stake) and Willow’s crooked smile. The TV version has been replicated through flow into the comic series. Emma discussed the significance of tone in semiotic transcendence and the role of discursive practices: space versus flow.

#artistandauthors

The next event for the day was a panel with artist JKB Fletcher, the artist who does the Dirty Faces and Superheroes projects (interviewed in this issue of DMF), Alison Goodman and Karen Healey. I was under the misapprehension that Alison and Karen were overseas authors, so I was pleased to learn they are locals. However, I haven’t read their works yet, but they’re on my ‘must read’ list (and ‘must interview’ if they will agree).

Fletch talked about his work and his upcoming exhibition that were advertised in DMF issue 5 and on DMF’s facebook page.

Karen had a reaction against urban fantasy and paranormal romances, plus she wanted to see her world in a book. Hence Karen wrote a novel (or novels) set in New Zealand. For readers from the northern hemisphere, this would have the impact of an alien world that is well-realised because it is the author’s world.

Alison Goodman had a reaction against YA (young adult) science
fiction, hence *Singing the Dogstar Blues*. Eon, one of Alison’s characters, is a young woman disguised as a male to get power in court.

Karen and Alison’s talks both inspired me to read their works. Now I just need to have their books sitting on my desk waving at me, and I’d read them in record time. I thoroughly enjoy a good YA book, especially one that stands out among the crowd.

**#biggernakedbreasts**

Julie-Ann Naumovska presented a discussion titled: *We have bigger naked breasts to worry about: girl power in the Charmed universe*, for which I had no basis even from which to take notes. Not having seen the TV show, I had pre-judged it and written it off, only to be curious late in the series. By then I had missed out on the early seasons and hubby was definitely not interested, so the entire series passed me by. This being the case, I put down pen and paper and didn’t even try to take notes. Julie-Ann’s talk was quite an eye-opener as she explored feminism versus sexualisation of the characters, alongside their relationships with men. Issues of reproduction, motherhood and external pressures on intimate relationships were also covered. The finale and the fate of the sisters were explored in detail. Someone lend me the DVDs? Please? I want to watch it now…

**#sistersaredoingit**

Deb Waterhouse-Watson discussed *Tin Man*, the updated-come-sequel to *The Wizard of Oz*. Deb compared Dorothy in the original (weak, passive, pleasing, domestic, house-bound whose quest was going home) to DG in *Tin Man* (an active agent, fearless, rescuer/saviour, mechanically minded, transgressive, whose quest was coming home). Dorothy’s power comes from the shoes that she stole from another woman. She kills the witches with symbols
Dark Matter

of domesticity – the house and water. DG’s power came from something her mother gave her, power from touch: the female body is a source of power, countering the female body as corrupt and polluted.

The villain in Tin Man was a man-eater who sucks the essence from a male and looks like she’s having an orgasm while she’s doing it. ‘The boobs of power’: winged monkeys fly out of her boobs. The villain was possessed as a child by another witch, which solves the problem to some extent.

The performative nature of heteronormativity was discussed – The Wizard of Oz film was used subversively by the gay community. Prior to the movie, Dorothy was usually played by a man, so does this make her a male hero in drag? Deb referred to Lissa Paul and Anna E Altman (‘Welding brass tits on armour’).

#sugarandspice

Evie Kendal discussed the Power Puff girls. I vaguely remember the Power Puff girls, but I don’t recall ever sitting down to watch it with my children. This presentation blew my mind, and as such I spent more time listening than taking notes. Evie talked about presentations of femininity versus masculinity, including the power of the three heroines, their relationship to their father/creator (to whom the girls attribute the role of father and mother), their relationship with other boys, adults and empowering of kindergarten-aged girls. Ms Cerebellum is the girl’s role model; she’s smart but also has an hourglass figure, wears high heels with a suit and the audience never sees her face.

#jeangreyasphoenix

Lenise Prater compared the earlier X-men comics, Dark Phoenix
saga comics, and the movies. In the earlier comics, Phoenix had power and control, which have gendered implications. According to Lenise, the Dark Phoenix saga presented Phoenix as wonderfully ambiguous, both part and not part of Jean. Jean is described as reborn as Phoenix who sides with good and saves the entire universe. Professor Xavier lost control, allowing his id to attack the X-men. There is a parallel development between Phoenix and Xavier, culminating in Xavier battling Phoenix (an alien) and sealing her off inside Jean’s mind with Jean’s help, this latter point being crucial.

The movies in comparison show Phoenix as a woman’s loss of control, inherent to her powers, and the responsibility is hers. In contrast, male loss of control is always represented as the result of villainous attacks. Rogue was also discussed in this context; in the comics Rogue has compensatory powers for her isolation, but not in the movies.

Thus the movies appear to buy into the whore and Madonna dichotomy regarding power and female sexuality. Rogue and Jean hurt those close to them, showing female sexuality as dangerous. This is also the case in some of the comics where Phoenix usurps phallic power and Dark Phoenix eats her son.

#nakedmystique

Ross Murray discussed Mystique at length, mostly covering the comics but also with reference to the movies. Mystique first appeared in Marvel comics in 1978. She’s had a long, varied history in that time, but one thing appears consistent: her superpower mimics clothing so she doesn’t wear actual clothes. Ross talked about Mystique’s relationships, that reveal Mystique’s lovers are usually female. There was a story sequence where the woman Mystique loved grew old while Mystique stayed young. This was another session where I knew very little about the topic, so I took fewer notes in order to focus on the presentation and the images. I
was left with the impression that, although I tend not to appreciate superhero comics, I would love to read some of the Mystique sequences in comics to see her development.

#theend

Tights and Tiaras was a fantastic couple of days, sitting and listening to the academic viewpoint of pop culture icons. If I hear of any further conventions run by Monash University, or other local universities, I will definitely attend if at all possible. This was a really enriching experience. My only disappointment was that I did not have sufficient background knowledge to fully appreciate some of the presentations.
Armageddon Expo 2011

The Melbourne Exhibition Centre was very busy today, 22 October, with a few expos running. One of them, the only one of interest to me, was Armageddon. Armageddon is a geek fest, featuring science fiction, fantasy, comic books, anime and even some wrestling.

I was supposed to pick up my press pass between 9 and 9:30 am, so it was an early start. I was surprised to see the queue winding its way through the foyer and up the street at about 9:15 am. On my way in, I saw familiar faces such as PJ, Starwalking Director, whose friendly banter entertained. He pointed me in the right direction to eventually locate the office and some of the people working behind the scenes to make this expo a success. Armed with my pass, I set out to enjoy the day.

My first foray was in the doors and straight ahead. This turned out to be an epic adventure. You know how, in Snakes and Ladders or the Lost Woods, you keep getting sent back? Well, after several attempts I still hadn’t made it to the end of this avenue of stalls by the end of the day. There was just so much to see and so many people to talk to. Some of the people I chatted with included Sue Ann Barber from Brickvention (the Lego convention), Colin Wilson (comic book artist), Ian Irvine (author of fantasy doorstops), Bruce Mutard (comic book author and artist), Avi Bernshaw of tentacle fame, Phil from Swordcraft, people from Critical Hit (all in costume), All Star Comics, Black House and its publications, Classic Comics, Silver K Gallery, Black Bullet Collectables, Brickvention, Welcome to the Cosmos and many, many more.

I took some photos of this guy dressed as Cobra Commander who came over to talk to me. He said I knew him... and when he
took his helmet off, I really did know him! He was Ben Grimshaw. He was with Harley Quinn (Marta Tesoro, the artist who drew Dangerous Penguins from issue 5) and Rogue (Adele K. Thomas). They were also with Daniel, dressed up as the Doctor, who is apparently also in animation. So that was a group of 4 artists/animators who all knew each other, roaming Armageddon as a group.

#thelonegunmen

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away – oops, wrong channel. While Mulder and Scully were finding conspiracies and aliens, they met a crowd of usual suspects. These characters were Byers (Bruce Harwood), Langly (Dean Haglund) and Frohike (Tom Braidwood), who appeared in about 35 episodes of The X Files and got their own spin-off series called The Lone Gunmen. The title of the series is a reference to the conspiracy theories around the assassination of JFK. Today the lone gunmen appeared together on stage for the first time in 10 years, assuring us that they looked just the same as ever. Except Bruce wasn’t wearing a tie because he hates ties, they give him a rash around his neck. Bruce’s beard also disappeared, as did much of Dean’s hair. The guys have a good rapport, as is shown in the photos where they chat and later on Dean’s ‘one man show’ becomes significantly more than one man as the rest of the lone gunmen joined him on stage.

The lone gunmen began by asking themselves what advice they’d give to their characters. If you’ve seen The Lone Gunmen, you will remember that Langly had long hair. Dean said he’d tell Langly to use conditioner to handle the split ends, even maybe a leave in conditioner, which is also advice he gives
to himself these days, even with his much shorter hair. This led in to Dean explaining that there are Langly hair cards for sale, with some of his hair in them. Bruce and Tom jumped on that, asking why and how. Dean said his hair was sitting in the closet. Well, that was an opening for the others; you’d think that they were the comedians and Dean was the straight man. Bruce and Tom challenged Dean to explain why his hair was in the closet. Dean embarked on the epic story of how he was in a movie, Spectre, with Marina Sirtis (Troy from Star Trek). He was asked if he’d cut his hair to get the role, so he agreed. When a fellow comedian heard Dean was about to cut his hair, Dean was challenged to have his initial hair cut at a comedy performance. This friend would listen to Dean’s monologue, and every time he said something that was a clique or not funny, this guy would come in and cut off a hank of hair. So Dean would say something about men being like dogs and women being like cats and this guy would cut off a huge hank of hair. At the end of the night all Dean’s locks were shorn, collected and presented to him. He thought he’d donate them to a wig-making charity but then he was told that the hair had to be all brushed the same way and cut the same length. So, he said, he put his hair in a closet.

Bruce and Tom challenged Dean that this was creepy. Dean explained that, rather than leave it on the dining table, he put it in the closet. Bruce pointed out that he shaved and threw the hair out. About then Dean gave up and admitted that yes, it was creepy. But it meant that when someone heard about the haircut and approached Dean with a proposal for the Langly hair cards, the hair was there in his closet waiting to be put to use.

Bruce (or was it Dean having his revenge?) talked about how Tom was the assistant director and yet was cast in the role of Frohike, and how that was weird. Dean said he went to audition after audition for his part, where he was called back to pretend to talk into a phone with other Byers while directors talked through the auditions. When Dean was finally given the part, he showed up and said, ‘Who are you?’ to Bruce, to find out that he was Byers. Bruce auditioned once and got the part. Then they found out that the assistant director was given the role of Frohike.
Well, this sounds dodgy. Did I ever mention the time I applied for a job and wowed the selection panel only to find out later that someone on the selection panel got the job? I digress. Apparently Chris Carter and others attended audition after audition for the role of Frohike to no avail. Oh, yes, and originally the name was Frohike, as in forward walk through the bush. Ugh. Tom apparently didn’t know this and he pronounced the name ‘Fro-hicky’, which sounds so appropriate. It stuck. Anyway, Chris et al were attending auditions without success. Someone said they needed a person who was really sleazy. Chris knew Tom’s background was in theatre and Tom was already working for the team. Chris suggested Tom, then the group reviewing the auditions walked past the bathrooms just as Tom walked out. Uh huh. Yup. Tom got the part.

Tango de los Pistoleros was a story about the tango, so naturally the lone gunmen needed dance lessons. Dean was the only one with a dance background but apparently even he didn’t know how to dance the tango. From their banter, it sounded like Dean wanted to learn – but when the woman teaching them the tango realised that Dean didn’t get any screen time dancing the tango, she dropped him like a hot rock, refusing to teach him any more. Bruce and Tom went on with their lessons as they did get screen time dancing the tango, although they said what they learnt is that the women dance around the men, while the men stand still, looking as if they’re smouldering with sexuality and passion. Exactly how well did those dancing lessons go for the guys?

Apparently a lot of the aliens in The X Files were little girls from a ballet school. Initially they were boys, but they learnt that boys tended to play violently, punching and fighting each other as aliens, tearing the latex masks. So The X Files team switched to girls, finding that they were much easier on the masks. The Lone Gunmen urged everyone attending to take home that piece of information as a learning point, even if they forgot everything else. Because, of course, that is the most vital, relevant piece of information they imparted during the panel.

Originally the lone gunmen appeared as a one-off in The X Files, but their appearance sparked a huge jump in talk in conspiracy theorists’ forums, where they believed The X Files’ writers were
watching them. Which they were. A symbiotic relationship developed. For the first several episodes, Langly’s glasses are different. There was a big bag of glasses to choose from, so Dean would grab a pair. At the end of the episode he’d chuck them back in. Next time, the prop guy would ask what pair he wore last time, but Dean couldn’t remember. Eventually, even though there was no actual plan to bring them back again, the prop guy put Dean’s glasses aside for his return.

In Planet of the Frohikes, the team investigate intelligent chimps being kept as slave labour. In the TV series, it really looked like those chimps were well trained and were working away at the keyboards. Apparently the chimps were actually pulling the keys off the keyboards and eating them. The actors weren’t allowed to interact with the chimps much because if they bonded with the chimps then the chimps wouldn’t listen to the trainer, they’d only listen to the actor. Usually the actors weren’t allowed to even look the chimps in the eye, so on one occasion when filming, Frohike was supposed to look the chimp in the eye but didn’t. The chimp grabbed his face and turned Frohike to look at him. That chimp knew the cues even if Tom forgot!

Apparently Gillian Anderson (Scully) is about the same height as Tom. The reason Gillian seems taller on TV is that the taller actors would have to bend over to do shots with her; Dean complained of a bad back. There were also times when they put Gillian on a block. Tom claimed that he’d do stand-ins for Gillian at times.

[spoiler alert] In the final episode of The Lone Gunmen, the guys caught a disease and were quarantined by the Centre for Disease control. The actors wanted to go out with a bang, in fire or an explosion. They were disappointed that their final scene was them clustered around a window looking out with a fade to white. They at least wanted explosions of bodily fluid, blood splatters on the window, but no. Later the funeral is shown, with three coffins. When someone dies of an infectious disease, not only are they buried in hermetically sealed coffins but the coffin is tailored to that person’s body size. The three coffins shown were of the same size. As the trio pointed out, there was one of their number who is significantly shorter than the other two, so maybe the lone gunmen
escaped and were living out there somewhere. Then someone remembered how, for *The Usual Suspects*, there was an image of a line up showing David Duchovny and the three lone gunmen side by side, with a 6 foot line marker indicating all three of them were six feet tall. So maybe that’s the answer – maybe Frohike was really 6 feet tall after all!

Later that afternoon, Dean Haglund’s ‘one man show’ turned into a larger show with the addition of one person doing sound effects to Dean’s impromptu theatre adventure that evolved into an episode of The Lone Gunmen when Tom and Bruce walked on stage. The three of them proceeded to the centre for baldness control where they discovered a government conspiracy. Two volunteers from the audience then gave random words to help with the dialogue as the story progressed. Early on, members of the audience wrote random sentences on pieces of paper. Late in the show these pieces of paper were put on the stage floor, picked up and read out loud by the three who worked them into their dialogue with hilarious consequences. Dean also donned a paper suit so a member of the audience could be his arms while he continued in this role. Dean looked to his arms for guidance with his dialogue. At the end of the show the audience was told the show would be burnt to DVD and would be available for purchase the next day.

#doctorwho

Rob Lloyd did a one man show called *Who, me*, which was partly fictional trial of the doctor and partly autobiographical. As Rob took some pains to point out, he looks somewhat like David Tennant, however he augments this natural similarity with facial expressions like The Eyebrow so that, at times, he is indistinguishable from the real thing.

The premise of the show was that Doctor Who had been put on trial for ruining Rob’s life. If found guilty the Doctor would be erased from history. Rob embarked on a humorous retelling of his life and journey into fandom, mixed with courtroom scenes where Rob played every role. His malleable face, physical humour and verbal skills differentiated every role so there was no confusion – until he imitated a pirate in order to distinguish between ‘lawyer Rob’
and ‘witness Rob’. The prosecutor (Rob – this was a one man show!) instructed Rob to cease and desist with the pirate voice…I’m wondering what he’s like on Talk Like a Pirate Day. His face even changed into a creepy pirate-like character worthy of casting in Treasure Island.

Rob is a fan boy and has been a fan of Doctor Who since 1996. Previously a Star Wars fan, then a Sherlock Holmes fan, Rob grew up a drama geek in the bush (rural New South Wales). After moving to the ‘big smoke’, Wagga Wagga (still rural NSW but a larger town), Rob studied drama at university. Rob first engaged with Doctor Who because he had a close personal friend who was a long time fan. A few weeks after being introduced to Doctor Who, his friend was saddened, and told Rob that Jon Pertwee had died. Rob said, ‘Who?’ After being shown some of the third doctor, starring Jon Pertwee who was a comedian playing it straight (Worzel Gummidge anyone?), Rob found his doctor.

This performance is not one that can be effectively described in a few short pages. Rob shared his experiences of fandom, including the fan-based hierarchy. His description of a social event, with the Star Wars and Star Trek fans in the inner circle, hating each other but ending up making out in the hallway, was hilarious. I have encouraged Rob to make the DVD of his performance available for purchase. Hopefully he’ll pass on the purchase details soon, so that DMF can make them available to readers.

For the rest of the day I cruised around, chatting to people, taking photos and trying to line up interviews. I wasn’t sure if media passes covered getting into VIP events; hopefully next year I’ll be able to report on the difference that those silver and gold passes buys.

‘The bastards made me cry [when they gave me this]’ – Rob Lloyd
#cyberangel

One of the most memorable people I met that afternoon was Shin Kou Sabre, the Cyber Angel cosplayer who featured on the cover of the MX newspaper the previous day. In a later issue of DMF, I hope to feature an interview with Shin Kou and her supportive partner who are developing an anime based on the character Cyber Angel. Shin Kou needed assistance to walk up the stairs and make sure she didn’t fall, and then she got to the door of the hall for the costume parade. There was no way she could get through the door fully assembled, so they removed the wings (pass the screwdriver, thanks!) and reassembled on the other side. Sadly Shin Kou could not participate in the cosplay competition because the rules specify that costumes must be based on existing characters, and the anime is not yet running. Hopefully in the next year or two Cyber Angel will be a fully-formed anime instead of in development, and then Shin Kou can compete.

#bestlaidplans

Sunday proved that the best laid plans of mice and men go awry. On Saturday night I went through the program, laying out my plans for the next day. However, instead of attending the Nicholas Brandon (Xander from Buffy) panel, I interviewed Sandeep Parikh and Jeff Lewis from The Guild, Legend of Neil and Effinfunny. They were really surprised at how much research I’d done – possibly a reflection that they didn’t think a media-type of my age and sex would be a fan. It went so well that, during The Guild panel – oops, I get ahead of myself here.

While we were at the celebrity booth section of the hall, we saw The Lone Gunmen and took the opportunity to purchase the DVD of their performance the previous day, which they autographed. We also purchased Dean’s DVD The Truth is Out There. They’re a great bunch of guys, so we chatted for a few minutes, taking advantage of a lull in the queue. I gave Dean my business card.
Dean made my day when he looked at the card and genuinely said he had heard of Dark Matter. He even asked Bruce where he’d heard of it from, and Bruce had heard of it too. Sadly Tom didn’t seem to have heard of it, but from then on, my brag is that two out of three Lone Gunmen have heard of Dark Matter!

Murphy’s Law dictates that panels don’t start and end at the convenience of attendees, and I felt self-conscious about walking into a panel late. I think next year I’ll be a bit more forward, just taking care to be stealthy. But anyway, between the aforementioned conversations, talking to people like the *Welcome to the Cosmos* guys and Terencio, Quiz Master Extraordinaire (from the Melbourne Science Fiction Club), having lunch and not being sure about the rules around attending the Stargate panels, the next panel we attended was The Guild.

#theguild

Jeff Lewis and Sandeep Parikh are comedians whose beginning was in stand-up comedy. They began the panel after playing around the dalek with Jeff sitting with Sandeep’s head in his lap. They discussed how warm Jeff’s groin was, and how Sandeep found that somewhat off-putting.

Sandeep talked about Stan Lee, and what a prima donna he was during his time in *The Guild*. He really hammed it up, but then made absolutely sure that everyone knew he was joking and that no prima donnas were involved in *The Guild*.

One thing led to another, and before I knew it, Sandeep was sitting on Edward’s (my husband’s) lap, with his legs across my lap. I was so surprised! Later Edward said he had to stop himself from
bouncing Sandeep up and down, to which I replied that he should have – Sandeep would have loved that. Much later I realised I could have got an amazing close up, but the spontaneity threw me – I’m still getting the hang of this whole media thing. I kept patting Sandeep’s leg as if he was my son – well, Sandeep is cute and little. I swear, the reason he has that facial hair is because he’d get carded everywhere he went if he was clean shaven. Sandeep said that Edward’s groin was ice-cold, much more appealing than Jeff’s.

The banter between Sandeep and Jeff was terrific. They kept slipping into and out of their Zaboo and Vork characters. The best clue that Jeff was now out of character was the twinkle in his eye and the smile – a real contrast with Vork’s usual flat affect or angry demeanour. Sandeep and Jeff discussed everything from how it’s a bit worrying that Zaboo learns about how to be a man from Vork, but hey, you get it where you can, to how Sandeep started in comedy. Apparently Sandeep was the only ‘brown boy’ in his area growing up, so he was a target. Sandeep was told that he was the colour of shit, so his dad said to say that the boys calling him that were the undies that were shat in. Sandeep did, and learnt to run away really quickly. It appears he became the class clown, which led to a life in comedy.

Fans wanted to know if The Guild was doing another musical number this year. Previously Sandeep had told Dark Matter that they were hoping to do something this year, but during the panel he asked Edward if they were doing something. Edward, half-hopeful and possibly half-forgetting exactly what had been said, replied ‘Yes!’ Sandeep looked a tiny bit disconcerted – I’m wondering if their ‘special’ this year will be more along the lines of the previous Christmas special instead of another musical number.

Someone asked why Jeff wasn’t in Legend of Neil, to which Sandeep pointed out that Jeff is in Legend, but Sandeep isn’t in the Jeff Lewis 5 minute comedy hour, and Sandeep is just gutted. He’s devastated. And he’s not letting Jeff forget it. Then they pointed out that Jeff cameos as a guy pulling in for gas at the station in Legend. A brief mention was made of the fact that Jeff has written a cameo for Sandeep in the first episode of the next
season of the 5 minute comedy hour. (If you haven’t seen the 5 minute comedy hour, then at the very least you need to see Tag. Go on, it will only take 5 minutes of your life. Actually, only 4 minutes 32 seconds. www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0VOVuxiahk)

Much of what was discussed in the interview was discussed in the panel, but from different perspectives or with different information. It would have been great to get a DVD of the panel, both for the information and the comedy.

#sylvestermccoy

Next up we queued for what we thought was the Stargate panel, but the minion looked at the timetable cross-eyed or something because it was a Dr Who session with Leonard McCoy – oops, Sylvester McCoy. I was torn because I had planned to see one of the Stargate/Sanctuary panels, but once Sylvester started, I was hooked. He was so entertaining!

Sylvester started by telling stories about his time as the doctor, especially focusing on the pyrotechnic guys at the BBC. The most memorable story was how, on a particular anniversary that triggered concerns about the IRA potentially bombing England, the pyrotechnic guys got slightly carried away. The bangs were rather exuberant, to say the least. Explosions for the Dr Who set were reported on the news as an IRA attack. Ambulances came screaming to the scene. An ambo (paramedic driving an ambulance) screeched to a halt on the street, with smoke billowing everywhere, obscuring his vision. Then the ambo’s mouth dropped open, as three daleks emerged from the smoke and confusion. Sylvester said they may have been Irish daleks, he’s not sure.

Another time the pyrotechnic guys were overly enthusiastic, Sylvester was walking through the set being filmed, and his back
felt really hot. He thought he was on fire. It took so much time and effort on a limited budget that they only did one take. Sylvester knew it would be really difficult to set up the scene for a second shoot, so he kept walking, he kept in character, he kept going, with a back that felt like it might be on fire. Apparently all was good and he wasn’t on fire, so Sylvester’s trust in his colleagues and his professionalism paid off. He is worried that the pyrotechnic guys are out to get him though, and he checks everywhere he goes, even under the carpet.

Sylvester’s talk covered his career leading into acting, his love of comedy (that was obvious from his talk), and his acquisition of the stage name Sylvester McCoy. Other topics included the panopticon, including the one Sylvester had as a dressing room for The Movie, and how Paul McCann had the carpet changed. Apparently Sylvester even acted as a bouncer on stage for the Rolling Stones just before they went to the US for that fateful performance.

Someone asked for a photo of Sylvester with Ace, a cosplayer in the audience with all the right badges and gear. This is the best photo I managed to get of Sylvester with the dalek – I tried really hard to get one of the Doctor with the dalek looking over his shoulder in a sinister fashion, but without a pose and flash, this was not going to happen.

I have a confession to make – Sylvester was not one of my favourite doctors, but he certainly won me over with this panel. I would watch his episodes again now, if only I had the DVDs.

#wrapup
The Madman costume competition was awesome with lots of
Dark Matter

fabulous hand made costumes. Winners were selected in a few categories and the overall Australian best costume group is pictured here.

Armageddon was a great experience. This is the third consecutive year I’ve attended. I enjoy it more each year, and every year I leave thinking I’ll do it differently next year to get more out of it. Every year it gets better, which is partly me being more organised and partly Armageddon doing it better too. For example, there was more floor space, with two separate halls for panels instead of having them compete with the noise from the wrestling. I heard a rumour that next year the wrestling will also be out of the hall, so the exhibition hall won’t have that level of noise. These are great improvements, making the experience more enjoyable for all.

Next year apparently I’ll be able to interview people on the Friday, which will be totally awesome (thanks, Locky!) Then during the actual expo I’ll take photos of cosplayers, stalls and special events like this year but hopefully more of them. I’ll get to more panels, both for photos and for reporting. I might try to take notes during panels, but a camera and a notebook are hard to juggle. This year I discovered that Armageddon really does start early, so next year I will try to get there even earlier, read through the program, find out where the rooms are well before scheduled events, and plan my weekend accordingly. Oh, and I will double check when the minion tells me that we’re supposed to be downstairs… mind you, it was a very long queue for an excellent panel.

See you at Armageddon 2012.

To see all DMF’s photos go to
www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.267938793244913.65390.158613584177435&type=1
Armageddon Expo
www.facebook.com/Armageddonexpo?ref=ts
www.armageddonexpo.com
Timeline Festival

Timeline Festival is an annual medieval re-creation festival held at the Old Cheese Factory in Berwick, Melbourne, Australia. Sadly I didn’t hear about this until a few days before, by which time I had other plans for the weekend. Desire and pure stubbornness got me to the 2011 festival for a few hours on the Sunday morning.

There wasn’t any map or showbag on offer; I’m not sure if they’d run out or if they just don’t do that kind of thing. People were friendly and just kind of waved in the general direction of activities. They were welcoming, but as complete newbies a map with some kind of guidelines would have been really appreciated.

On our way in, we came upon some musicians wearing period costume and playing some amazing replica instruments beautifully.

There was a large group of tents over to one side. Because I knew there were people sleeping over somewhere I didn’t go anywhere near this area until practically on my way out the gate - a big mistake. I only got a glimpse of what was in this group, but there were a number of stalls.

The first activity we came across featured a group of medieval warriors standing in different formations while a guy with a ballista (ok, maybe I got the name wrong, it’s been years since I played Age of Empires) shot LARP spears at them. After two days of this,
he still couldn’t actually hit them, so it was obvious that this kind of weapon would only be any good if several were firing into charging hordes.

Next we caught the tail end of some formations, marching and firing of replica weapons and some possibly antique weapons. Fortunately I caught them posing for photos. Next came the mounted unit parading with the USA flag.

A regiment of Scotsmen paraded in uniform. I’m not sure who the guys in green were recreating – no-one tagged the photos on Facebook, so I’ve been left in the dark.

While I missed the jousting proper, and the swordplay with real metal swords, I caught a bit of the riders tilting at the quintains and rings. Sadly I really needed binoculars for this – next year I will be better equipped.
Spectators were largely in costume, from the cute little girls in their sunsmart hats and dresses to the adults wearing anything from peasant garb, frocks, or combat gear.

In lots of fairs and festivals there are special activities for children. The Old Cheese Factory has a wonderful fort-come-castle structure made out of wood, plenty of room to run and play and, most important of all, there was a special roped off area for children with smaller weapons to beat the crap out of each other. Which they did with gusto. It was fun just to stand and watch them, grinning from ear to ear, mostly defending themselves with shields and all hacking away with swords, hammers or daggers. These were the regulation LARP weapons, not the genuine or replica metal kind.

Invitations were extended to adults and children alike to participate in LARP battles with swords, daggers and polearms provided by Swordcraft, a LARP group here in Melbourne. For the uninitiated, LARP stands for Live Action Role Play – or cool games with dress ups. Swordcraft had invited me to attend the Timeline Festival – or I wouldn’t have heard about the festival at all. Therefore I was particularly motivated to watch their scenarios (short battles) and take photos. It was quite entertaining. The Swordcraft group doesn’t usually play with children; I believe their liability insurance requires a minimum age of 16 and players aged 16 to 18 must have parental permission. The Swordcraft games can
be quite strenuous I believe. I am planning to visit one of their regular events, but due to weather and other commitments I haven’t managed it yet. Soon. I digress.

Facebook discussion had made me aware that the Swordcraft scenarios allow for magic users; curious as to how this might work, I spoke to an orc shaman who explained that she has these real-life balls for fireballs. A mage explained that he could cast awesome healing spells but then he could only walk, not run, due to exhaustion after using his magic. This triggered reminiscences about a particular battle where only one magic user was alive on one side, surrounded by her enemy, so she magically shielded herself. Apparently this shield was such that she was permanently invulnerable unless there was someone with a particular class of magic spell at a high enough level to counteract the shield. To their delight, her enemies found one such magic user still alive in their ranks who brought down her magic shield, thus enabling her to be slaughtered, securing victory. These LARP games involving face-to-face interaction between real people leave a much greater emotional resonance on the players: it’s a sport, where the winning ‘football’ team will recount that winning goal for years to come.

Swordcraft split themselves and their Timeline Festival guests into two groups to stage a number of battles. In one a messenger was trying to get through, so his group was to protect him while the
other group had to take him out. In another scenario there were two lines that fought. There were a few other scenarios that I’m a bit vague on, but I got the impression that the battles usually begin with more structure before degenerating into the chaos you would expect in a battle. With the large number of primary school aged (or younger) children eagerly participating, chaos pretty much erupted immediately.

These serious LARP-ers were gorgeous, graciously allowing themselves to be slaughtered by tiny children, staging death scenes worthy of any theatrical production, particularly the farcical, over-acted kind. Grown men, some of whom looked quite muscular, approached battle with caution, fearing to harm the littlies who hurled themselves fearlessly into the fray, hacking and slashing like berserkers, slaughtering their elders. A good time was had by all, including this tyke who slaughtered that bush.

Blacksmithing apparently isn’t as dead an art as I thought, with artisans demonstrating their skills for those who were interested. Maybe next year there will be apprentice blacksmiths – it would be wonderful to see these guys passing on their skills to the next generation. And, I suspect, it would take a long time to pass on their skills too.

In other areas there were groups of stalls including STAB ME dolls (see issue 7 of DMF, the creator has agreed to an interview), hand-made jewellery, wind chimes made of antique house hold silver with beads,
replica swords, LARP weapons, armour, leather bound books to write in, food, sculptures and on and on. I could have spent hours just browsing through all the varied stalls; next year!
We left too early due to a previous commitment, vowing to return next year and set aside the whole weekend. To that end, I’ve ‘liked’ the facebook page and asked to be put on mailing lists.

All links given in good faith and without prejudice (that is, I don’t get cash or benefits from any of them):

Timeline Fair:
www.facebook.com/Timeline.Festival?ref=pb
www.timelinefair.org.au

Swordcraft:
www.facebook.com/pages/Swordcraft/162793363766300?ref=ts
www.facebook.com/Swordcraft?ref=ts
www.facebook.com/groups/swordcraft/?ref=ts

LARP gear:
www.calimacil.com
http://www.esford.com/armourylarp.htm
www.facebook.com/ScienceAndSwords

Jousting people:
www.novahollandiaentertainment.com/
Melbourne Zombie Shuffle

I’m not sure what rock I’ve been hiding under, but this is the first year I’ve heard of zombie shuffles. They seem to be a world-wide phenomenon, with official ‘shuffles’ in Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney, Toronto, New York, Reno, Paris and more.

Actually I think I know why I wasn’t aware of the zombie shuffle - I don’t like most horror (Underworld is about as far as I enjoy ‘horror’), and I really don’t like zombies. Looking at good zombie makeup makes me feel squeamish. So when people have mentioned zombie shuffles, I think it sank in far enough to make sure I wasn’t there. This year, for the sake of DMF, I boldly went where no DMF editor had gone before. When I saw really good zombie makeup and costumes I just reminded myself it wasn’t real, told myself not to focus on the image in front of me but to focus on taking photos instead.

It mostly worked. I didn’t throw up, I managed to eat dinner and I didn’t have any nightmares.

The word on Facebook was to meet by 1pm in a park, then walk through the city. Another page on Facebook gave me the heads up that a group of Swordcraft (LARP players) humans were going to make a valiant stand to defend the City of Melbourne against
the ravening hordes of zombies. This stand was to be on the corner of Bourke and Swanston Streets. Thus my plans for the day were laid.

Travelling in to the city by train, the minion and I spotted a number of zombies shuffling towards the city. In Melbourne Central there were zombies in the toilets and zombies in the food court – the invasion had begun.

I arrived at Carlton Gardens well before 1pm and wandered around for over an hour taking photos. The costumes varied immensely from cute little girls to the grotesque, from Lego men to Minecraft zombies, there was something for everyone. A lot of zombies were the 99%, wanting to #occupybrains.

I’m quite annoyed that I didn’t even see, let alone photograph, some awesome costumes while other photographers took photos in that same park. Sigh. Thank you for sharing your photos on Facebook. Where I’ve used other people’s photos, I’ve given credit. Where the photographer isn’t mentioned, it’s me. Photos are not only in this article but they’re scattered through DMF, especially at the ends of book reviews where there are lovely big white spaces that needed filling in.

Just before 2 pm I took off down the road to hook up with the Swordcraft people to make sure I got good photos of the defence of humanity. I followed some official-looking zombies in reflector jackets carrying sprayers that looked suspiciously like the kind non-green people might use on weeds. Eventually they disappeared and I didn’t see them again, so I’m not sure what they got up to with what I assume was a kind of weapon in the invasion.

I raced down to Flinders Street Station in the hope of meeting
up with the Swordcraft people. When I got there, I couldn’t see any knights or rogues or anyone, but I did see more zombies. I bowled up to a small group of zombies and asked if they had seen the Swordcraft people. Blank looks. Zombies aren’t known for their brains, I guess. I explained that the Swordcraft people are LARP players (Live Action Role Playing people = games with swords and shields) and a human contingent was planned to defend against the zombie invasion. The zombies got very excited, and started yelling about what they’d do to the humans in this war. Realising the Swordcraft people had gone up Swanston Street ahead of me, I took off back the way I came but on the other side of the very busy street. I caught up to them in the nick of time. They had reached the corner of Bourke and Swanston Streets, heading up Swanston. Nooooo!!! The minion pulled out a map, showing the planned route of the zombies, so the humans stayed on that corner, setting up their lines while waiting for the imminent zombie invasion.

Innocent bystanders, attracted by the sight of knights in armour,
were curious, waiting to see what was going to happen. By the time the zombies came into view, there were a number of spectators with cameras out. The zombies lurched and roared into the fray, attacking the humans who defended themselves with shield and sword and spear. The sheer weight of numbers was on the side of the zombies, however, whose fallen also lurched back to their feet after being hacked down. The valiant defenders of humanity were eventually overpowered and, infected with the zombie virus, lurched off down the road.

By this time the shuffle was in full swing, so I stayed where I was, taking photos of as many as possible. This was not a good location for photography: there was too much competition with other photographers stepping in front of my camera. Shoppers, some of whom were irate to the point of abusiveness, were careless of personal space as they shoved their way through solid people instead of walking around. Some were even verbally abusive. I couldn’t help but feel that this was a war between two classes of zombies, those in zombie makeup and those with the alternate virus of rampant consumerism coupled with a complete lack of humour. I found the remainder of the shuffle to be incredibly physically and mentally exhausting, so my plan for next year
is to move further down the road. Later I discovered images on the internet where other groups had set up lines of defence against the zombies that would have been great to capture for DMF. Also, further down Swanston Street there were other locations that looked to have more space and less shoppers, thus being better for photography. Even further down the road, where the shuffle opened up onto the park, looked much more relaxed with more space for photographs. Well, we live and learn, and this was my very first zombie shuffle. Next year I hope everyone will let me know where their lines of defence are, and I’ll visit everyone on my way to the park. Unlike this year when I took my weary and sore body off home as soon as the last wave of zombies passed.

To see all of DMF’s photos, go to [www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.271322379573221.66261.158613584177435&type=3](http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.271322379573221.66261.158613584177435&type=3)

Other photos are on Facebook on pages like this one [www.facebook.com/pages/Melbourne-Zombie-Shuffle-2011-Photos/170384946386357?ref=ts&sk=wall](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Melbourne-Zombie-Shuffle-2011-Photos/170384946386357?ref=ts&sk=wall)

and links or photos are here [www.facebook.com/melbournezombieshuffle?ref=ts](http://www.facebook.com/melbournezombieshuffle?ref=ts)

David Fulmer’s photos are here [www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.300603109969083.90941.100000581900061&type=](http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.300603109969083.90941.100000581900061&type=)
White Noise

White Noise was originally a segment in early issues of DMF, restored here with the intention of collecting a combination of blogs and essays written by Nalini Haynes.

Success without honour

‘Success without honor is an unseasoned dish. It will satisfy your hunger, but it won’t taste good.’ - Joe Paterno, 1973

This is an interesting quote from a disgraced icon of US college sport. I would tend to disagree with this in that there is no satisfaction of hunger to those without honour. I remember many years ago being told that my former step-father was going to ‘have to sell a piece of one of his properties to make ends meet’ during a downturn in the abalone industry. My response? ‘Maybe he should just stop staying in 5 star hotels.’ This is only one example of many that could be cited to show that successful people are often dissatisfied, hence the analogy of success not satisfying their hunger.

On the other hand, success with honour is satisfying and is a dish that tastes good. Some people speak up when others are backstabbed at work, even when that is to their personal detriment. The result? Being able to look at yourself in the mirror, being able to sleep well at night in the long-term (even if the short term is somewhat stressful). Several years ago, someone shared technological information in a workplace that tended to be secretive and competitive. The team of which he was part developed a good working relationship of sharing. Later he stood up for his supervisor who was being used as a scapegoat. He was the next scapegoat, but that was ok - he got another job elsewhere. He offered to stay with that employer but the boss wasn’t interested. He moved on, but stayed in contact with his colleagues at work. They had such a good relationship, they invited him to join them for lunch from time to time. What is this if not success that not only satisfies but also tastes good?

Life is like a roller coaster, with its ups and downs. One of the themes I have found is that you can care for your community
(friends, neighbours, colleagues) and your environment, creating a better world for you to live in. Or you can choose to compete, be divisive, climb the greasy pole over the bent and bloody backs of others. And as they say, the people you meet on your way up the mountain are the same ones you meet on your way back down. Our choices have consequences, both in the short and long term.

How does this relate to science fiction and fantasy and art you ask? I enjoy SF/Fantasy and art that delves into life issues, with choices. The protagonist doesn’t have to be perfect - it’s better if he/she isn’t, but, at least occasionally, makes poor choices, and suffers for those choices. I’m not perfect so I don’t want to read about people who are apparently perfect. I want to be taken on a journey, not just an adventure, but a journey of self-discovery and growth. I want heroes who inspire me and conspire with me to learn and evolve. This makes the most far-flung or far-fetched story real and immediate.

New Directions
November 7 2011
I’m currently doing a short course in writing for the web. I figured that it’s probably time I learnt to write instead of just doing it. All my study and training has not taught me how to use the web or write for it, I’ve just been winging it and hoping for the best.

It’s difficult to know sometimes how good DMF is and if people enjoy reading. From time to time, especially after publishing some issues of DMF, I receive emails from people. Some of these emails have been suggestions for improving DMF (put more pictures in, write about comics/anime/someone’s pet project) to which I have usually replied with asking that person to contribute according to their interests. My response is usually along the lines of ‘Are you volunteering?’ To which they inevitably reply, ‘No, I just think you should include more [insert interest or hobby here]’ So I muddle through, hoping to make an interesting zine and facebook page, not really knowing how things are going, all the while trying to cover a broader range of topics and feeling somewhat inadequate.
I should add here that a few emails are from people who seem to have read every page and are trying to respond to as much of the content as they can. These are great emails from people who are looking to support the SF/Fantasy and zine culture, but the majority of people don’t have the time or energy to sink into epic letter-writing. And it’s the silent majority for whom I’m not sure if I’m hitting the mark. I have plans for the future too, like writing essays instead of just short reviews, but if I do, will they be read? What topics should I attempt? I’m groping in the dark here. (Note: I’m happy to receive ‘post-card’ length emails instead of epic length emails if that helps.)

So anyway, I’m attending this short course on writing for the web. Guess what the homework is? Writing a blog and publishing it. I’m hoping to have a website running soon-ish, so I don’t want to start a blog on a new site somewhere. I want to blog on DMF’s own site when that starts. Until then, I’m sticking with Facebook and Google Plus for blogs, to minimise disruption when I try to centralise.

This blog is an attempt to break the fourth wall (Dr Horrible: Commentary the Musical reference) whilst fulfilling my homework criteria. So. Homework done. And it’s Monday. The class in on Thursday. How awesome is that?

Now I’m going to go and ride the stationary bike in front of the TV. I’ll catch up on some Doctor Who I think. With the 50th anniversary coming soon, I think DMF will need a number of celebratory Doctor Who articles. I’m starting a tad early with the interview with Rob Lloyd; we talk about Rob, acting and Doctor Who, right down to some Doctor Who trivia that I’m sure Whovians will enjoy. I might have even confessed that I had the traditional Doctor Who induction - hiding behind a chair when I was very little. So I’m off to get my fix.
For those who haven’t seen the (viral) media coverage of a stormtrooper walking across Australia to raise money for Starlight, his name is Jacob French. He seems like a shy young man who had an idea, wanted to make people laugh and wanted to do something good. Recently Jacob took a break from his walk across Australia, where he has (at the time of writing this article) got to the border between Western Australia and South Australia. Jacob hitch-hiked with truckies to Melbourne to attend Armageddon, which is where Nalini Haynes of Dark Matter tracked him down, hiding amongst all the other stormtroopers.

You’re walking across Australia – [laughing at Jacob who was playing the pirate, putting his mask over one eye so I could only see the other eye] – how is that going?

Really well. I’ve raised over $30,000 and I’ve only really crossed WA (Western Australia) so I’m only a third of the way and I’m over half the way to the goal I wanted to raise money for, so it’s really fantastic.

I heard that it took you three months to walk as far as you’d planned to walk in six weeks. Are you going to have enough time to get to Sydney still?

I didn’t plan for the number of people who would plan to stop and get photos. The response has been massive. So I’ve sort of
re-budgeted for that, so I’ve allowed myself a bit of extra time each day. And I’m also capable of doing really twice the distance I was able to when I first started.

What is your record for a distance walk in a day?

It stands at 80 kilometres and it took me 18 hours to do.

So you did that marathon that you were talking about doing.

I did, I finally did a big walk and walked all night. 80 K’s.

How did you cope the next day?

I slept for about two days.

So what’s an average day now?

The average day is about 40 kilometres. I do the occasional 50 or 55, and also the occasional 30 km day. I try to keep it around 40 or 45 kilometres a day.

It looks like you’ve been having this amazing journey. There are photos of you being King of the World, and up a tree, and riding a horse and stuff. What’s that been like?

It’s good. It’s what the trek is all about. There is no real massive plan that I have. Any plan that I’ve tried to make has failed anyway. It’s all these little moments that just happened that have made it so fun.

How did you decide that you were going to support Starlight specifically with your journey?

We’d done events for Starlight in the past. We’d gone along to some of their fundraisers, and they were some of the first events that I did when I joined the 501st four years ago. So we’ve been involved with them fairly heavily and had the chance to go up and visit the kids in hospital and cheer them up. So we’ve worked with them before, and I really like and admire their core motto, which is: if you can laugh, you can get through just about
anything. That’s a really big part of what the 501st is. We just like making people laugh and giving people a bit of a chuckle. If you can help people out by doing so, the more the merrier, you know.

What has the support been like? Everyone has been stopping, taking photos and talking. What has that been like for you?

It’s been really crazy. Some days it takes all day just to get anywhere, just because everyone is stopping every five minutes. Which is great, it’s what the trek is all about, but I’m still blown away by it. A lot of people love it, they think it’s really cool.

How many pairs of shoes have you gone through so far?

I’m on my third pair so far. They’re lasting about 600 k’s (kilometres) each pair.

That’s a long walk. Have you got any big events planned? I mean, you’ve been here for Armageddon now. Any big events for the next few months?

None specifically, but I’m going to do what I can. We’d love to
organise some events but it comes back to funding; it’s all self-funded at this point. And time. Where I am at any given time hasn’t been locked in so far. We’ll do the best we can to make events and give people a laugh.

I noticed on your facebook page the other day you were saying you’d really love to get to Melbourne. Did someone come and pick you up and give you a lift?

I ended up getting a lift with a truck driver. So I sort of hitch-hiked my way across to Melbourne. A bit of a first for me, in stormtrooper armour.

Are you going to hitch-hike back?

I’ll probably try and get a bus this time. Go down through Adelaide and get a bus as far as I can west.

Is there anything you’d like to say to the people who have been following you?

Yes. Thanks for following me. It’s been amazing. Like I said, when I started, I never expected any where near this amount of support; it’s been fantastic, so thanks. And comment, let me know what you think, give me ideas or suggestions if you’ve got them because I’d love to hear them.

Before you started out you were in sales. Are you planning to go back to sales or are you planning to do something else when you finish this?

I’d prefer to do something else. It was a good enough job to get me the money for this but it’s not something I’d like to go back to.

Have you thought about working for someone like Starlight or getting on the radio or…

I sort of haven’t thought about it too much. There’s a lot of things I love doing and a few things I’m good at doing, so I’ll see where it takes me.

Well I’ll be really interested in following you and finding out what you’re doing in the future. I’d love to check back with you later.

Thank you.

Thank you!
#update
On 18 November, Jacob French AKA Troopertrek, posted, ‘Alright! The last fortnight has seen some serious km’s covered - this week alone I walked 300km’s bringing me up to just over 2,400km’s covered so far on this trek.’

On 19 November 2011, Karin Feist posted: A whopping $33,898.20, a thank to all who have donated, beeped, posted photo and chatted to the Trooper along his trek. Coming into a little more civilization from now on. On a mission to be home for Christmas.

#links
Follow here: [http://twitter.com/#!/troopertrek](http://twitter.com/#!/troopertrek)
Sandeep Parikh (Zaboo from The Guild) and Jeff Lewis (Vork from The Guild) were at Armageddon in Melbourne recently. Nalini and Edward Haynes from Dark Matter caught up with them briefly before their panel on the Sunday, with the support of Armageddon - thanks Lockie!

Sandeep Parikh and Jeff Lewis @ Armageddon

Nalini - Thank you very much for agreeing to talk to Dark Matter.
Sandeep – Wait, wait, this is Dark Matter? I’m out of here. I’m done. This interview’s over.
Sandeep – You didn’t remember? You ruined the joke.
Jeff – I blew it. I totally blew it.
Sandeep – You’re the worst.
Jeff – How’d I do that? No Dark Matter. I made it very clear.
Sandeep – In our contract.
Jeff – We will do anybody…
Sandeep – It’s too late.
Jeff – Ok.
Sandeep – You did a lot of research.
Nalini – I love you guys.

**#Effingfunny**

Sandeep – For me, *Effingfunny* came first. That was something I did in 2006. A website I created. It showcased stand-up comedians. A lot of them were my friends. A lot of them have become famous. Daniel Tosh, Michael Batts (? Might not be correct, it was hard to hear) and people like that. Maria Bamford, she was already famous. But anyway. I did that as a portal to showcase not only some comedians but some sketch comedy that I wrote and directed myself. *Legend of Neil* is part of that. I shot that in 2007 right around the time that Felicia was writing *The Guild*. Jeff, Felicia and I all did improv (improvisational theatre) at a place called The Empty Stage together. So we were friends before then. So we wrote each other parts into things. I wrote a part for Felicia and then she wrote a part in *The Guild* for me and for Jeff.

Edward – Fantastic.
Nalini – So it all kind of evolved around the same time.
Sandeep – Yeah. It was a really neat time. 2006, 2007, when people were just getting on the YouTube bandwagon. I’d been creating my own shorts for several years before that but the internet wasn’t as powerful as it has become. It was difficult to download video
still. People weren’t offering a lot. It was a painful experience. As the internet grew stronger, it became easier to distribute our own content. So we came in, we’d already been creating stuff, so we had the content that was ready when the distribution was ready for it. So the timing was really wonderful for us.

#5minutecomedyhour

Nalini – Yeah. What about the Jeff Lewis 5 minute Comedy Hour (http://5minutehour.com/about/)?

Jeff – Yes. We had our first season. It took three years in the making. Sean Becker is the director so we had to take breaks between Guild seasons, then he got busy with something and I got busy. So it took a little while, but we finally got our 10 episodes. We had our first season. Then we did something called Kickstarter, which is an online backer program where people donate anything from $1 to $5,000 and they get some kind of reward for doing that. We were able to raise about $27,000, so we’re going to start shooting the second season in November or December. 10 episodes. I’m very excited, Sean’s very excited. We have some time off, so it’ll be good.

Sandeep – I’m going to be in the first episode

Jeff – Yes.

Sandeep – Of the new season.

Jeff – yes.

Sandeep – I’m finally cast in it. Finally.

Jeff – I promised him.

Sandeep – Finally.

Jeff – Yes. Felicia is in one episode, as well as a couple of people like Vince from The Guild, so it’s a family thing.

Nalini – I recognised the family from The Guild.
Jeff – Yes, Vince and his sister Tara, who are hilarious. They play my kids.
Sandeep – A lot of people, the comments are like: I can’t separate – cos, you know, in the show Vince is such a jerk. I remember reading a lot of comments like: I can’t put my headspace around the idea that Vork is Bladezz’s father, you know?
Jeff – It was very hard for people to pull themselves out of it but it’s really funny.
Sandeep – They were great.
Nalini – There is also that guy, I can’t remember his name, Mr Wiggly, Clara’s husband.
Jeff – Brett. Yes, he’s also in Tag, yeah, that first episode.
Sandeep – He’s that guy we did improv with, right?
Jeff – Who?
Sandeep – Brett.
Jeff – Brett Sheridan?
Sandeep – Yeah. Didn’t you guys do improv with him before, at Acmi?
Jeff – Oh yeah, he was at Acmi. That’s another theatre that Felicia and Kim and Kim’s husband Greg and I were all into too. It’s all related.
Nalini – So you were all really active in the scene and then it just kind of evolved. Then you were ready when the internet was ready for you.
Jeff – Yeah. A lot of sketch and improv.
Sandeep – You were writing all the sketches for years
Jeff – Yeah, that’s where a lot of material came from, from Acmi, which I was in for many years, just doing shows every Friday and Saturday night and building up a database of material. Sean just asked me for my material and I had all this backlog of stuff from the theatre I was in.
Nalini – With The Guild, how much do you think people get confused with your characters?
Sandeep – Oh god, I hope not very much.
Jeff – I hope not too. I sort of understand a little bit of it, sort of aspects of him. But people do come to me and say, ‘I did this and this and this in World of Warcraft.’ Very complicated stuff and they really do think that I have these databases and sheets and graphs and charts for World of Warcraft. They tell me all this stuff and I have no idea what they’re talking about.

Sandeep – Yeah. People come and see me and tell me how efficiently they’ve stalked a girl, and then I report them to the police.

Jeff – I do the same thing with my people too.

Sandeep – Why? What they’re doing is not even illegal.

Jeff – It feels illegal. It’s too complicated. But they do confuse it a little, yeah.

#theguild

Nalini – You did that wonderful Christmas special with the indestructible Vork bank and the cologne for men.

Jeff – Yeah, you can’t get it out of that bank at all.

Sandeep – That was directed by Greg Aronowitz and all those props were created by Greg Aronowitz. He’s just an amazing… he’s one of those guys that’s been working in the industry for 20 years, 25 years with the biggest names in the business. Steven Spielberg, George Lucas. He saw what we were doing as the Wild West of film-making. He brought his amazing talents and his incredible team of talented artists kinda down to us. I don’t want to say down – I guess out with us in the wild west.

Jeff – Along with us in the wild west.

Sandeep – Out with us.

Jeff – Alongside us, yep.

Nalini – Out in the frontier.
Sandeep – That’s perfect, yeah. He is just an amazing talent and we’re so grateful to have a guy like that on our side, because the fifth season, you know… And the third season episodes of the Legend of Neil are really epic. You can tell there’s a huge leap in production value and a lot of that has to do with Greg Aronowitz. He’s making props that should cost the entire budget of our show.

[See How to build Codex’s staff at http://barnyardfx.blogspot.com/2010/02/happy-valentines-day-i-know-i-know-so.html]

But he’s doing it out of the love of his heart and wanting to make the best product possible.

Jeff – His compound is like a walk-in history of movies

Sandeep – It’s unbelievable.

Jeff – He has the Back to the Future car, I think. He has a couple of things from Alien.

Sandeep – From Star Wars, he’s got a Jabba the Hutt, an original C3PO… You go to his place… I like to say it’s basically like a film history museum had sex with a mad scientist’s laboratory and spawned this child.

Jeff – Greg has years of McDonalds’ toys. He’s the guy that does all those toys in McDonalds’ kids’ boxes.

Sandeep – He did all the original Star Wars – a lot of the original Star Wars toys. There’s a Star Wars box that has him dressed as a jedi on it, and George Lucas allowed only him as a non-actor to be on the box of a Star Wars original figurine. Pretty Cool.
Jeff – it is.
Nalini – That’s awesome.
Edward – It was amazing to see how you pulled together the previous dance musical routine.
Nalini – Do you wanna date my Avatar (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urNyg1ftMIU) and Game On (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMrN3Rh55uM&feature=fvsr).
Edward – Game On. Is there going to be another one?
Sandeep – I don’t know that we can say yes or no to that question.
Jeff – I hope so.
Sandeep – I would say there will be something. There will be something special for this season. We didn’t get a chance to do a special video beforehand because of the timing of Felicia’s obligations on DragonAge and The Guild.
Jeff – And Eureka.
Sandeep - And being able to shoot it on time. So we just didn’t have time to put – we usually like to launch the new season with a new video, but we are going to do something special pretty soon.
Nalini – What can you tell us about the making of The Guild?
Sandeep – What do you want to know?
Jeff – What would you like to know?
Nalini – I’ve watched the behind the scenes stuff on the DVD – Sandeep – So you already know. Are you quizzing us?
Nalini – My readers won’t necessarily know.
Jeff – I can tell you that we have a really fun time making it. We’re all friends and we work really hard. Every now and then we add a line or two.

Sandeep – And we never wear pants.
Jeff – We never wear pants.
Sandeep - All the pants are digitally produced. They’re CG.
Jeff – No pants were harmed in the making of this video.
Sandeep – We refuse to harm pants.
Jeff – No sweat shops were used. It’s all computer generated.
Sandeep – It’s a lot of fun but it’s a lot of work. It’s not easy working with the budgets that we’re working on. People are putting in the extra effort. The budget that we have is probably comparable to the craft services budget on a feature film. It’s really the combination of a lot of talented people working really hard for very little money to make the show. There are a lot of unsung heroes. Felicia, of course, works incredibly hard and is tremendously talented. But I always like to say that if it isn’t for our Sean Beckers, who’s our director, and Kimi the producer, and Jeff Winkler who came in and produced the last season... and our DP Chris Darnell, and these people that, you know, really – it’s the blood sweat and tears of those guys who work fourteen to eighteen hour days for very little money just because they want to create an amazing product. It takes a village.
Jeff – I think people feel like it’s something special. They feel like it’s not some old thing, it’s something new, it’s exciting and it’s special. People want to be part of it. Especially even down to people who are fans, they want to be extras, they’ll fly in –
Sandeep – Absolutely.
Jeff - From other countries. I mean, it’s unbelievable.
Edward – It’s a community.
Jeff – Yes.
Sandeep – Yeah.
Nalini – Season five of The Guild. You had all those epic cameos. What was that like?
Sandeep – Stan Lee was the biggest jerk I’ve ever met in my entire life. I was kidding. He’s amazing. It hurts me to even make that joke. He was such a sweet guy and he was so grateful to be there. I mean he really was genuinely happy to have been asked I think.

Jeff – He’s used to just one line.

Sandeep – Yeah, that’s what he was saying, ‘I’m only used to doing one line.’ He had like four or five lines. And so he was not having difficulty, but he was saying, ‘I’m just used to one and one. This, I get to do a whole scene!’ He was really excited. Man, I just really -

Jeff – And Nathan Fillion was on too, yeah. I’m a big fan of Firefly. He’s just a big guy.

Sandeep – Literally, he’s a big dude.

Jeff – A big guy, but he’s really nice and normal and just really generous. A regular guy.

Sandeep – Well the thing is, you know, we’re probably going to say the same thing about everybody there, that they were all tremendously nice, but if you think about it no famous person is going to come on the set of something they’re not getting paid anything to do, if they’re not in it because they just want to have
fun. So none of those people could possibly be divas because who would waste their time?
Nalini – They wouldn’t be there.

Sandeep – The divas wouldn’t be there. So really, the three actors I got to work with – well, not all actors. Neil Gaiman is a writer, obviously, amazing writer, and Kevin Sorbo were awesome. It was tremendous to be able to work with those guys.

#neilgaiman


Sandeep – That’s honestly my favourite scene that I’ve Ever. Acted. Period. I had the most fun in front of the camera acting. He was just so great and funny. He was funny.

Nalini – He was pathetic. It was wonderful.

Sandeep – Yeah. He was begging. He just really got into it. We were improvising a lot and he was acting. It was written as a generic role because we didn’t know who we were going to get, right? So it was written as generic comic book guy and we were hoping to get, we were hoping beyond hope to get Neil Gaiman, but we weren’t sure that was going to be possible. It didn’t have any specifics about Sandman or anything like that, so it was really up to Neil to add his own colour to it. We would play off of each other and he was really great about responding to random things that I was throwing at him; he stayed in character. He should consider an acting career.

Nalini – He was awesome.
Edward – Branch out.
Sandeep – Yeah. He was great.
Nalini – And what about you with your –

**#eringray**

Jeff – Oh my god, I got to make out with Erin Gray. Who I grew up watching in *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*. In her tight spandex outfit, when I was growing up, it was the most – it was very hot. We had already known her, but it was great to work with her. She’s awesome and I got to kiss her. She slipped me some tongue. It was pretty fun, it was pretty great.

Sandeep – It was weird when Neil Gaiman slipped me some tongue. And I was like – what? We’re not even in a kissing scene, Neil.

Jeff – And Erin slipped Neil some tongue, yeah.

Sandeep – Well that was weird.

Jeff – They weren’t even in a scene together. It was really weird.

Sandeep – Yeah. A lot of tongue-slipping.

Jeff – A lot of tongue, yeah. I’d say the theme of season five is tongue, yeah.

Sandeep – Tongue, yeah. Absolutely.
Nalini – There was the big lead up to the guild members kissing. How many people thought it was going to be Zaboo and Codex?
Sandeep – You mean ending up together?
Nalini – Yeah.

Sandeep – It’s interesting. I think that, because of a lot of Zaboo’s quirks, there’s a lot of people rooting against it. And there’s a fair amount of people rooting for it. I don’t know if there’s a lot of that in other shows. Where there is genuinely people that are like, ‘Hell no, I never want to see these people together.’ And genuinely people like ‘Oh my god, I hope they get together.’ I mean, like Ross and Rachael on Friends, everybody’s like rooting for that relationship. I think Felicia did a really cool job of crafting a unique relationship. Where we landed I think is really cool. My favourite thing about playing this character is that every season he evolves. I would say out of every other character, Zaboo really grows and changes.
Jeff – And learns.
Sandeep – Yeah, and learns. He learns from everybody. I mean, he learns about being a man from Vork, which is maybe not the best thing he could do.
Jeff – Scary, but it has to happen somewhere.
Sandeep – Yeah, I guess so. It’s cool to see his evolution. And so, when we ended up as just friends I think she did a great job of writing that, so it was really believable so it wasn’t hokey and it felt like a satisfying thing. I am eager to see where it goes from there.
Jeff – And there are people who root for her to be with Wil.
Sandeep – Yeah.
Jeff – There’s that third group that -
Sandeep – Yeah. I think a lot of people are rooting for Felicia to be with Wil Wheaton. Not necessarily Codex to be with Fawkes. A lot of people have this fantasy that they are going to really be together.
Edward – There are a lot of undercurrents going on there.
Jeff – Yeah.
Sandeep – That would be a weird child they would have.
Jeff – That would be a child.
Jeff – Yes. Very.
Nalini – I’m very curious if Codex is pregnant? She was suffering from nausea. There was that lead-in in that previous season where she was talking about the relationship between the female heroine and the male hero, and how…
Jeff – Nobody has ever asked me that. Nobody has ever -
Sandeep – I have never, I have never -
Jeff – Nobody has ever come to that conclusion.
Sandeep - I have never heard this theory.
Jeff – I think I would know that. I think –
Sandeep – I don’t know, who knows, she’s never mentioned that at all.
Jeff – It’s possible that she’s been keeping this from us for years.
Edward – Might be a surprise coming.
Jeff – I don’t know.
Sandeep – Maybe Felicia’s pregnant and she has to write it into the story next year.
Jeff – I know Clara is already.
Sandeep – Yep. Clara’s pregnant. I can’t imagine that she would do two pregnancies.
Jeff – Yeah, a double pregnancy…
Sandeep – It would be funny if all the girls got pregnant.
Jeff – Very funny.
Sandeep – Tink’s pregnant.
Jeff – Yeah. And it was because of all the men. It was all the men’s babies.
Sandeep – And they don’t know which is which.

Jeff – Yeah, yeah.

Sandeep – They’ll wait to see which baby comes out brown, and that will be how they know which one’s mine.

Jeff – And which one comes out really –

Sandeep – Bald.

Jeff – Bald, yeah.

Edward – You’ll have to form a new guild then.

Jeff – All three are Vork’s.

Sandeep – All three are bald. And brown, that’s the weird part. Brown and bald babies, so we still don’t know.

Jeff – And very young. They’re Bladezz. I don’t know. I really don’t know. What does that mean?

Sandeep – All babies are very young.

Jeff – That’s true. And bald.

Nalini – that would definitely give new meaning to Li’l Guildies (http://www.watchtheguild.com/announcing-lil-guildies/).

Sandeep – Yes it would.

Jeff – Yes.

Sandeep – The Next Generation. Also created by Greg Aronowitz.

#theguildcomics

Nalini – How do you feel about the comics? They’re expanding the characters.

Sandeep – We got to write our own comic with Felicia, both of us. I really loved writing a comic. I’ve directed my own show, The Legend of Neil, and writing comics is a lot like directing. You’re mapping out the visuals as well as writing the dialogue, so you have to be very visual. I think that’s why, in Sean Becker’s comic, the Bladezz one, you can tell there’s a lot of cool visual stuff, especially that first page that he does. I’ve never done it before. I haven’t even really read a lot of comics growing up.
I was more of a TV kid, so my introduction to the X-men was the original TV show on Fox when it was on, and Batman the animated series and that is what I watched to get my superhero fix. I didn’t really read comics. My parents were too cheap to buy me comics basically. That’s what it came down to. It was a new challenge for me, and I’m really excited that the Zaboo issue comes out in December. I think we really accomplished something really cool. I think it’s unlike many comics. You can actually play the comic. You’ll understand what that means when you get it. Yeah. It’s pretty nifty.

Jeff – For me, to be able to go to the back story, pre-pilot of The Guild, to show his grandfather, but also to put in little call-backs to things we’ve done through the season. Like a fast food restaurant is something he goes to in season two, I think it’s called Mr Chicken Stuff Junior and Friends, it’s a fast food restaurant they go to. So being able to add in all that stuff is really fun.

Sandeep – Little easter eggs.

Nalini – And it explained all Vork’s obsessions.

Jeff – Yes. With his grandfather.

Edward – And you have a lot of fun.

Jeff – Yeah. It was really fun to do. But hard because I’ve never written something where every panel has to be very specific. It wasn’t like writing any kind of writing – very different. Fun.

#thefuture

Nalini – So what does the future hold for you guys at the moment? You’re waiting to find out if Microsoft is going to continue sponsoring you; what else is happening?

Jeff – As I said, Sean and I are shooting the next season of the Jeff Lewis 5 minute comedy hour. I have a movie that I wrote, called For Christ’s sake, that has a distributor and I’m hoping will come out soon. Maybe in the next few months or so, I don’t know. And just auditioning and writing.

Nalini – So, flat out.

Jeff – What’s that?

Nalini – Flat out.
Jeff – Er, Yes.
Sandeep – What does ‘flat out’ mean?
Nalini – Really, really busy.
Jeff – I thought that’s what you meant, just really going for it.
Nalini – Yeah.
Edward – Just full on, no break.
Sandeep – Got it, yeah. We’re learning all these Australian-isms. Take-away instead of to go.
Jeff – Flat out is like hit the ground running.
Everyone – Yes.
Edward – And non-stop. Full on.
Nalini – So what about you?
Sandeep – Essentially the same. I’m writing another web series. First there was *The Legend of Neil*. We’re printing the DVD for that, which is surprisingly a lot of work. We’re loading it with extras.
Edward – As you should.
Nalini – I’ll put my order in now.
Sandeep – Absolutely loading it up. There’s a full disc of extra content. We’re putting all three seasons on one compilation so there’ll be the one-and-only *Legend of Neil* DVD for the whole thing. We’re putting in so many Easter eggs.
Edward – Is there a release date for that at the moment?
Sandeep – Not at the moment. It’s probably going to be spring, or for you guys, fall of 2012. But I think it’s going to be something special. I’m very excited about that. So that’s been my primary thing. I’m also writing a web series for *My damn channel* (http://www.mydamnchannel.com/) which does stuff with Rob Corddry and David Wayne. They’re a brand new network.
– not brand new, they’ve been around for a couple of years, but they’ve really kind of blown up and I’m really excited to work with those guys. I’m doing a whole new web series based on a whole new superhero world that I’m inventing. That’s all that I can say about it. Then I’m writing a feature film with Tony who does The Legend of Neil as well. We’re putting that together for us to star in, together, hopefully.

Edward – That sounds great.

Sandeep – More and more. And that comic is coming out. So just keep – you know, flat out guys.

Jeff - Flat out.

Sandeep – Flat out.

Nalini – So where do fans go to keep up with you guys? I don’t think Effinfunny (http://effinfunny.com) has been updated recently.

Sandeep – I think it’s funny. We are doing a whole revamp of Effinfunny. We’re entirely remodelling that website. Everybody has sort of become a production company now. That has become my production company. We don’t really do daily stand-up anymore, but we produce series, we produced The Legend of Neil and what will be called Save the Supers on My damn channel. So we’re going to do a revamp of that website and you can follow us on there but I’d probably just wait. Twitter is the best bet, (twitter.com/#!/sandeepparikh) for me, or facebook, I have a fan page. Either of those places I update regularly.

Nalini – What about you, Jeff?

Jeff – Jeff Lewis 5 Minute Comedy Hour has a YouTube channel, and then there’s also 5minutehour.com and Watch the Guild is www.watchtheguild.com and I actually think that’s it.

Nalini – I found out about The Guild because I watched Dr Horrible, and then I watched Commentary the Musical, and Felicia gave The
Guild a plug. What would you say to all those other Dr Horrible fans and all those people who haven’t watched it yet?

Sandeep – Haven’t watched it, well, watch it, goddamn it!

Jeff – It will take you five minutes. It literally won’t take you very long. You’ll love it anyway and you’ll watch it all.

Sandeep – Yeah. Every time we get a chance to boost the show, every time Felicia does another project or one of us does another project, it sucks in a whole new fan base.

Nalini – Yeah!

Jeff – That’s right.

Sandeep – We got a big Dr Horrible bump. I don’t think there’s a lot of people who have watched Dr Horrible who haven’t heard of The Guild, at least. They probably have all given it a shot. We get a lot of fans coming up with their Captain Hammer shirts who have completely come over to our side. We work hand-in-hand, it’s very cool.

Jeff – Funny. Funny stuff.

Sandeep – Yeah.

Nalini – Well, you guys are great and I’ll be really interested in following you in the future.

Sandeep – I agree with you. We are great.

Jeff – We are great. You’re not wrong. Flat out.

Sandeep – Flat out.

Edward – We really like what you’re doing and it’s really nice to meet you both.

Sandeep – Yes, same here. Thanks so much.

Nalini – Thank you. I’ll look forward to your panel this afternoon.

Sandeep – YES.

Jeff – Thank you.
The current artwork is a commission for a band called Artist Proof. They’re performing at the Fringe Festival on the 2nd and 9th of October. It’s called Artist for Artist Proof and they’ve commissioned 4 or 5 artists, myself and Luke Cornish from Metro Gallery and another one of my friends called Rehgan De Mather from my studio to build a creative piece of work either based on their whole message, the artist in particular or a particular song. Mine is about a particular song. There’s this guy (John Galliano) who’s this huge fashion guru, he’s a big deal anyway. He said some racial things, some anti-Semitic things, and it’s basically killed his career. That’s what this piece is about. They want me to literally reference the lyrics. They mention crowns, falling, and blood on the hands. So that is what the work is about. It’s a Wonder Woman figure holding her head in her bloody hands and red paint dribbling from the star on her forehead. Also her hair falling is supposed to be representing the fall from grace. You could read it that way, but at the same time the work needs to be
my work. They were very strict about that, that I could display it with my collection. That was one of the stipulations. Which I think is quite good. It’s certainly going to be interesting to see this, because these guys are going to be literally singing in this room around this artwork. I think there’s time periods devoted to viewing the art work. I believe there’s an artist creating a piece there as well. It seems interesting, yeah. Artists for Artist Proof. There’s a little plug for that.

It’s the first time I’ve painted a female superhero on a female. It’s one of the more intimate pieces. Everything’s out of focus except the eye. I don’t know if it’s supposed to look a bit sympathetic towards him. I think it’s supposed to be like ‘fuck! I totally ballsed up here!’ You know what I mean? For want of a better description.

#inthebeginning

How did you get started? When did you first realise you wanted to be an artist?

There were no defining moments. It was an easy, natural process for me to fall into. I was always relatively capable with a pencil
and paintbrush. It was a little bit easier for me than most of the kids at school. My mum taught us all to respect our talents. My dad had a strict work ethic. It took me a bit of time to catch up to that work ethic; the ‘respect the talents’ I could understand. So it was a natural process for me. I finished school. The next step was college. I was good at painting, so I thought I’d give that a go. I went from there to university and just kept going. It was a natural process. During the times of college and school it seemed like lots of forms and tests, ‘will you qualify for this?’ It seemed like a hard struggle at the time but in hindsight it was quite an easy process.

You said your artwork has evolved over time. There were some rules that were stipulated very early on. With my end of year college show, that’s like a display of work that I’d done over the few years that I’d been there, it was very haphazard. Mismatched. It was a bit of an eyesore. Lot’s going on, all over the place. It could have been 20 different artists’ work all on display. There was no obvious individual creator, or it didn’t appear that there was. It was obvious I’d just had a dabble at everything and not really found anywhere to go. But I had. In that show there was one painting of a couple of skaters out of a magazine I used to buy every now and again. I was into skating at the time. I painted it a couple of weeks before the show. That was when I realised that I’ve got to create paintings that I am interested in outside of art. It was the things I was interested in life and my usual everyday entertainment as opposed to my artwork. I couldn’t create from my passion for artwork, I had to create from my passion for other external sources and express that through my artwork. It became obvious then that artwork was a way for me to visually communicate as opposed to trying to create a thing from studying artwork. So instead of manipulating other people’s creations I’d found a way to express myself through a creation. The work other artists had done became a new way for me to view them or the way they saw the world. It kind of opened up from there. I’d found a way to use it as a visual voice, so from then on I knew I had to paint things I was interested in outside of my interest in artwork.
Then the other stipulation was that I decided to make all paintings the same sized canvas. I’d already decided at this point that I was doing drawing and painting for my degree. All paintings the same size would at least leave some kind of uniformity and that meant I could paint whatever I wanted without worrying about it being a big old mess at the degree show, like it was at college. If you’d seen it you would have thought ‘Poor kid, he’s not going to do anything with this.’

From there it was relatively straight forward. I’d started to paint flesh of friends and girlfriends and magazines. I’d paint folds of skin and I really enjoyed painting to a technically competent level. I enjoyed pushing my talent for copying as far as I could. And that lead me down the photo-realistic path. I liked taking pictures of flesh because, quite simply, other people liked it and were saying ‘nice work’. I kinda like that feeling, so I explored that avenue a bit more and started painting flesh a bit more. It was easy for people to relate to. I could relate to it. It was easy to build sensuality and intimacy in the painting. I could paint something that was photo-realistic, technically competent and still be very ambiguous and hard to pick out. I like it when it’s not necessarily obvious. When people are kinda like ‘I recognise it, but I don’t’. I quite like that.

That’s how the ‘In the Flesh’ series got started. I got influenced by someone called Marilyn Minter, I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of her work. She does fleshy stuff too, like eyelids and stuff hugely covered in glitter and heavy makeup and there are bubbles, water, mud… it’s sounds crazy but beautiful photo realism painting.

After Marilyn Minter’s influence I started to use props instead of just having the flesh raw. I started to introduce other things onto the flesh like oil, glitter, what have you. I did that for a while. But just before that started I’d been paralleling the flesh, hanging it next to other things that were interesting me. Flesh was like a key to make it relatable to the viewer, anyone could relate to flesh. Then you hang these inanimate objects next to it. I was painting BMXs, toys, dice… it was the toys in particular that I really enjoyed. There were a few levels to it, one was what
these toys represented to the children. That’s what led to the hero face project. I started to see heroes as little teachers or models. That’s when it became fascinating to me. I’d painted toys for a while but soon started to just use the symbols, the logos, the masks and the familiar faces and I started to paint them onto every advert that I’d see, from all these magazines all over the place and it became the ‘hero face project’. It was just a bit of fun. I’d paint up a model, or a famous personality out of a magazine, literally just paint over their face and then stick it in a cheap frame from a $2 shop and hang them up around shopping centres and stuff. There were a few bus stops that were subject to my creativity. I’d get great satisfaction from seeing people sat next to a huge poster I’ve altered, completely oblivious to the fact that Spiderman is washing his hair with shampoo. It’s quite amusing. That’s when the Hero Face project started to kick off.

I was painting them everywhere so it was no surprise when I decided to take the Hero Face project and merge it with the ‘in the flesh’ project. So I started painting the heroes over the top of the models I photographed. I had this personal, sensual, relatable thing with the fleshy paintings. You could say spiritual; it’s a mythology almost. But once I combined the two together, that’s when I started thinking about the archetypes and stuff. You’re playing off the idea of aspiration and improvement and that was quite fun territory to be playing in, particularly because it started off as role models for children, quite innocently. Not that it is contrived or anything. But it started off very simplistic. The Hero Face project initially wasn’t saying this so much but asking ‘were these really the people you want to look up to?’ That was a question you could apply to the work. If I’ve got this model who is dressed up in all these clothes and she looks like this, is that necessarily something to aspire to? Then you put someone we’re told we’re supposed to aspire to, has
got good morals, values, like Spiderman or Superman and you paint a model up in it, then that question is kind of asked twice. Or it could be a joke at the same time. It’s like she’s painted up like Wolverine, that doesn’t make any sense. But you can either make Wolverine seem ridiculous or, from a more philosophical view, you ask ‘Is this someone I can look up to? Is this someone I necessarily want to be like at all? Why the hell does Estee Lauder think I want to be like this person?’ So it was that whole play, then bringing it over to the sensual fleshy paintings. It’s more questions I’m asking. I’m not making statements. It’s really interesting territory to play in. The beautiful thing about it is I don’t necessarily know what’s going on, I’m learning about it just as much as all of you guys who are following this. I’m happy to see where this is taking me.

You’ve come from Scotland and been to San Diego and San Francisco before moving to Australia. How did all this travel happen? That’s a girl you’ve got to blame for that.

But it wasn’t a girl who got you to San Diego was it?

No. I was on exchange at uni. I actually wanted to go to Italy. At the time I was cutting up pornographic magazines and referencing porn and plastic surgery with car design. That was
the area my work was in. My professor was like, ‘you don’t want to go to Italy, you want to go to California. This is where they celebrate this stuff a little more, they seem more open to it than Italy.’ I think it was just a fantasy of an art student to explore that European historical Italian heritage that has a long rich artistic history. But I went to San Diego California on the prof’s advice.

What was interesting about San Diego was that my work got worse. Particularly my painting ability but I think that was because I spent a lot of time enjoying San Diego instead of honing my art. The good news about all that was I met Tianna over there. She came back to the UK with me for about a year. And then we were staying in this place called Arbroath which is a beautiful fishing village down the road from Dundee where I was studying. I needed to finish my studies and get my year over and done with. Get my degree and then I was free to do my thing. So the deal was I’d finish my studies then we’d go to Australia so she could finish her studies. She was well and truly too bored and cold over there. It’s a beautiful village but there really isn’t much to do. The big deal was the comparison. When I came to Melbourne I could really see why she thought Arbroath had nothing. It’s beautiful, it’s quaint, and they’ve got some lovely scenery and fish and chip shops and stuff, but I’ve come to Melbourne and there’s this massive injection of cultures and food and beautiful city that massively supports its arts. I came from a place called Reddich, which is a small working class town south of Birmingham in the Midlands. Dundee looked amazing to me. This was brilliant, why would you want to go anywhere else? Then I came to Melbourne.

So I came over here on Australia Day 2007. I’ve been back home for a few months here and there to visit family and friends. That’s the hardest thing about moving anywhere is leaving family and friends behind. But it’s a beautiful place to live. I’ve been here for four and a half years now, so it had to have been pretty good.

So have you seen much of Australia apart from this little room?
Pretty much from 7 to 7 on a daily basis here. My first solo show here in Australia, at Carbon Black Gallery, was where I showed my ‘In the Flesh’ pieces. In between Carbon Black and my show at a gallery called FortyFive Downstairs, I proposed my idea of my fleshy works going into FortyFive Downstairs. The woman there, Martina Copley, beautiful woman, really good at her job. She’s so much help. Martina says to me ‘It’s great, love your work. It’s brilliant. Looking forward to seeing progress. We’ll put on a show in May of next year.’ So I started creating works but in between I started to combine the fleshy works and the superhero works. And my work’s just changed all of a sudden. Anyway, luckily, she was happy with the new paintings the ‘Dirty Faces’ series. Ever since my show at FortyFive I’ve pretty much been grounded to my studio. My ‘hero face project’ has taken off, and ‘Dirty Faces’ has gone crazy. I’m here from 7 till 7.

Before then I got to see a bit more of Australia. Me and my girlfriend did a drive up the east coast of Australia from Melbourne to Cape Tribulation, past Cairns. That was fantastic. I definitely recommend it to everyone.

#sandiegoagain?

You went to San Diego before you started your superhero project. Have you thought about going back to ComiCon with your superhero project?

I’ve wondered about how well my work fits into that scene. I could see it being perceived as not staying true to the original characters. Not canon.

Canon? Is that the term?
That’s the term!
I’d like to, I’d like to see how it works with the faithfuls, the real
experts in the area. It’s funny, I was listening to ‘the Partially Examined Life’. It’s this 3 university lecturers getting together once every month on Skype just talking about a particular reading. One of the guys was talking about heroes. He was saying it’s quite interesting in how it’s developed. He’s only just started reading comics and he’s in his early 40s. He’s tracked it back and he’s started reading the first DC comics back in the 40s and Marvel in the 60s. These things were literally written for children. The influences are from philosophical backgrounds but the actual writing and publication is for children. But nowadays you have The Watchmen. I’ve got this 4 hour edition. It’s cracking. I really enjoyed that actually. There’s some really hardcore philosophical writers, really good at their craft, putting into this work. It’s funny where it’s come from and developed into this. I think it might be because these people have grown up with it and brought their heroes with them. You justify it and make it relate to yourself. That’s what’s great about any archetypal symbol like a hero. You can literally adapt it. That’s why it works so well with the flesh and the posters and stuff. Like rose-tinted glasses in the sense that you can put them on and change the mood. I’m saying yes, I would like to give it a go and see how it works over there.

The different reactions would be interesting.

Absolutely, yes. I’ve had reactions to the work. I think I mentioned in the lecture about the rampant feminist who smashed my work?

I don’t think I remember that.

Back in university there was a project I did on that car design, plastic surgery and pornography intermingling. There were some collages of what looked like females having sexual intercourse with cars. It sounds very crude.

And yet what do car magazines and porno magazines do?

Exactly. That was the kind of avenue I was exploiting I suppose. It was quite interesting how well these things fit together. There was a car interior and this woman straddling over this work
perfectly. It was a nice composition, like they were made for each other. It was quite interesting. There were a few raised eyebrows. One of the days was a workshop, we had to put together a frame. You had to bring work on paper, and I didn’t have anything other than these collages. It was on my desk. I came in the next day and somebody smashed it on the floor. So someone was disgusted by it. Which is quite ironic considering it was a statement about what they were probably fighting for. It was a good lesson in how thought provoking and how strong an impact this can have on people. It was a good lesson to learn.

It would be really interesting to see how the hard core comic book fans would react to the paintings or posters. So far I’ve been pleased with the fact that it’s not been used as a kiddie avenue. Obviously there are some very strong psychological issues in the work that really gets some nice messages across. One of the reasons I enjoyed The Watchmen are there are some really interesting philosophies on morality, how somebody can connect with day to day life if they were such an individual or felt they had such a responsibility. I quite like that. I get the impression you didn’t really enjoy The Watchmen?

I found The Watchmen was really violent and really heavy but then I look at the depth as well. It was, it was quite a trawl to get through. I quite like that heavy, dark, when a film kinda leaves me exhausted. I enjoy the effort.

It’s rewarding. Rather than all these Hollywood movies that are all just the same.

I’m very much for the psychological struggle and battle. I think a superhero is just an amplification of somebody who feels
they’ve got a responsibility to do a particular thing. It amplifies that issue in life, and the way that the different heroes respond to it. I see Spiderman as he’s got a job that he doesn’t really want to do, you know? Hence his slogan: ‘Great power, great responsibility.’ Then there’s the archetype of the Seer. Eastern traditions might call it a Reeshi, who can predict or see how things might be. They can see the rhythms, the dance, and how it might all turn out. That is how I see Dr Manhattan. He just kinda took a back seat. If you can see how it would all work out, I can see how you could get detached. If you can see so openly, then why would you even bother participating?

Getting too bombarded with the possibilities.

Yeah. He kind of detached. He just wanted to watch. That’s like the great Seers. You’ve obviously got the redeemer in Superman, the Jesus Christ figure. That’s what he represents. He comes from a higher place, no parents ect... It seems that it’s just the same story told over and over again, you just change the name of the character. And Batman. I’m sure it’s not healthy but he’s driven by this unanswered, unsatisfied need for revenge on his parents’ death. He’s just living off revenge and that’s really unhealthy shit, you can’t keep living like that or you might end up dressing in leather and a cape if you’re not careful.

Being a millionaire helps.

Or a billionaire, they moved him up a notch now I think. Billionaire Bruce Wayne. So that psychological issue provides a lot of ground for me. Regarding my work, even particular posters have particular heroes now. They’ve got to best represent their hero or particular struggle. With the Hero Face project, I’ll paint a particular model to represent a particular thing. But the oil painting, I’ve got to have a model who works best with the Hero Face project. So I’ll look through a magazine and find a model who will best represent Wolverine. Wolverine is lonely, can’t fit anywhere. He’s a bit of a sulky kid, he’s got a bit of that attitude. The rest of the time he’s just a badass. I find a model that best represents those images I’ve found in mags. So
the media itself is in charge of the models, the poses, the main piece of it.

#thefuture

Where do you think you’re going from here?

That’s a good question. The Gallery keeps asking me that. I’m very interested in a cross-culture thing. I’ve noticed that even though Western cultures have been powerhouses in terms of superheroes, but there are superheroes all over the world in different cultures, so I’ve been doing a bit of research into that. Also the tradition of painting on the skin in other cultures, whether it’s Henna, Maori, Aborigines, Native American, there’s a rich history. There are a few exceptions where it’s completely not allowed, it’s against the rules to be painted on the skin. I’m thinking about introducing this into the work. My last Captain America was an Indian. I think it worked really well, I liked that intermingling of the cultures.

That says more, doesn’t it? Is there a chance we’re going to see a Monkey or a Pigsy?

I don’t know, I’ll keep you posted. I think it’s important that it represents people as opposed to a particular nation or culture. I think it’s people.

Do you think you’d reverse it? Maybe do a geisha on a male or something like that?

I’ve tried painting the males as heroes. With the Flesh project I painted a few males. It worked in the flesh, it was fine because it was just flesh, different lines. But when I started painting heroes on them, it ended up looking like a cross-dressing thing. Even though it looked interesting, it wasn’t what I was looking for.

It goes to a different place.

Altogether. Completely, yeah. So I ended up doing the women because that ended up best representing people. If I could find something that worked, if I could find a cultural reference and it worked on a fella, I’d try it. But most of the time it just ends up looking like a transvestite-y type thing or like I’m trying to recreate that particular hero, which isn’t quite what I’m looking
for.

I’m happy with the way things are going. The Hero Face project is on the back burner because of all the oil paintings, so I’m looking forward to getting back to this. But at the minute I’m just painting hardcore and seeing where it’s going.

#graffitiasart

This Hero Face project – is that like street art?

Yes, it is. That’s the best way to describe it. It’s art on the streets. My favourite thing about it is the interaction with the local community. It’s a bit of a cry for attention I guess. But that’s one of the prerequisites for any art. But it’s the way you participate that’s really interesting. You are interacting with your city by creating visual stimulus. Even if just one or two people stop and have a look and notice, then move on. It’s kind of cool. There’s something really nice about that. It’s not in a gallery so it’s not expected. You kind of create a visual space for somebody without it being expected. At the same time it’s one of the oldest traditions in the book. Cavemen painting on cave walls is where it all kicks off. It’s just about decorating your space. If you’re a visual creator it’s only natural you’re going to want to decorate your space.

Banksy takes photos of his work. Have you taken photos of anyone interacting with your work?

Yeah. With the Hero Face project, the stuff goes into frames in shopping centres and they literally last hours. With the exception of one or two that have lasted a few months, because they think they’re part of the decoration of the shop, so it just sits there, minding its own business, which is kinda nice. But usually they last just a few hours, so I literally take pictures of everything in every situation, so I have a record. There is some ownership there. You’re still attached to the work, cos it’s your creation. Sometimes you’re reluctant. You’ve even got favourite pieces and you put it up on the wall and it’s a bit of a shame that this is going. I do it with my paintings as well, I hang them in the gallery and secretly I’m hoping nobody buys it so I get it back. That kind of stuff is weird. It only happens with a few pieces.
Most of the time I’m happy for everything to just go. They go up on the streets, they’re free for whoever to take. They’re kind of like gifts. I know they’re not going to be there permanently. So taking pictures is a way of keeping hold of them. It’s important I think to keep a record of them.

Absolutely. Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.

My pleasure.

Website: www.jkbfletcher.com
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=515028212
G+: https://plus.google.com/105913230782903392630/posts
Twitter: http://twitter.com/#!/JKBFletcher
Rowena Cory Daniells talks to Dark Matter

Recently Rowena was in Melbourne for the Sisters in Crime convention. Just after flying in, Rowena met with Nalini Haynes of Dark Matter to talk about Rowena’s novels, writing, making book trailers and much more.

#dayjob

I hear you work at Quantum College? Don’t tell me you know somebody? No, I’ve been doing my research. What do you teach, because you’re a writer and you’re teaching at this, um…

It’s games development, multimedia and 3D animation at the college. I teach one subject which is character, narrative and how to write a film treatment. And the next subject is writing a short film script, storyboards and animatic, which is where you take the storyboards to the next stage without actually going to a full animation.

So you’re not actually an IT person, you’re about the story.

Yes. Because game designers need to know how to create a good story, it helps with immersion.

It really does.

Yeah. The commitment to the characters and the story and the gameplay.

I play World of Warcraft. I have no commitment to my characters. [laughter]

Plus 3D animators need to know how to create a good story because they’re animators. And the multimedia people also need to know how to create a flowing narrative, even if they’re designing a web page. It’s what attracts people in, where they go, how you guide them through. It’s a bit of a long stretch, but
Dark Matter

it is good for them. People have said to me they have discovered such a love of storytelling through the subjects that I teach. Or they have discovered they’re passionate about film and the way you tell a story through the unfolding images of film. I’m passionate about it. They often say to me it’d be really nice if this (King Rolen’s Kin) got made into a film. My absolute hero to make my books into film would be Alan Ball who does Trueblood and Six Feet Under. He’s brilliant. Dream away.

#booktrailer

Well, stranger things have happened. You’ve already created a trailer for your book. Or you and your husband have created a trailer for King Rolen’s Kin.

Yes. There is a page on my website with the trailer, with some comments from him about how he made it.

I don’t think I looked at the making of, but I did look at the actual trailer itself.

It’s really good. I am so lucky. I sent the trailer to my publishers. They got back to me and said, ‘Honestly, it’s one of the best we’ve seen.’ So that’s high praise. That’s Solaris in the UK. They’re with Rebellion, the games company. My husband is this darling man who has dedicated himself to going out to work in the public service for the last 30 years, supporting our family. He has now retired and can do what his passion is, which is 3D animation computer graphics. He’s doing book trailers for mainly my writing friends at the moment. The idea is that if enough people see them, they’ll come to him and he can do it full time. (Trent Jamieson’s trailer.)

We’ve just completed a trailer for Marianne de Pierre’s new YA book, Angel Arias. So there we were, we’ve knocked out a wall between the kitchen and this pokey little room that was in the middle. We’ve got this big blue screen up. He built a dolly which you sit the camera on to do zoom shots. We’ve got our kids and their boyfriends and girlfriends dressed up. This particular one was with a steam punk theme, so they’re wearing top hats and
an old microscope that belonged to my grandfather. They’re lighting candles against the blue screen and he’s filming it. Then he takes the background out, he finds images and he puts them in front of it. He has so much fun.

It sounds like a dream come true.

Yes. When you can follow your passion, you’re really lucky.

Definitely. Or in this case it sounds like good planning, because he’s retired.

Well, he has retired, but then they invited him back to work for a 3 month contract because he’s specialised in what he can do. So he’s been back at work for 3 months. Then they said, ‘Can you stay an extra 3 months?’ And he said, ‘Yeeees.’ Then they said, ‘Maybe you can stay on a couple of days a week?’ So who knows what is going to happen. But yes, the idea is that he can work on the things he loves to do. It’s really lucky for me because with The Price of Fame coming out in March next year, I want a really cool trailer for this. There’s a ghost in it, it’s very gritty and set in Melbourne. It follows through timelines. With The Outcast Chronicles, a completely different feel. It’s very exotic, Byzantium, treachery, love… Again he has all these ideas he wants to film.

That’s my daughter on book one. On book two that’s my son and his girlfriend. My other son posed for book three, although it doesn’t look much like him. So we can take the kids and film
them doing something, then we can stop it and do something different inside the cover.

It's wonderfully personal and the images look professional.

We didn't do the covers although we both have a background in doing covers and illustrating them.

Yes, I want to ask you about that later.

With the *King Rolen's Kin* covers, the publisher asked if I had any thoughts on the covers. So I went away, I researched all the latest covers. I chose the ones I liked and said this is the kind of look I'd like to have. Then I created what I call a 'resonance file' for the artist. Because I have a background in illustration, I tend to be very visual. So I collect images. *King Rolen's Kin* was based around medieval Russia, so there were beautiful ornate buildings, the peasants' buildings were works of art as well. Not a single nail, all dovetailed together. I collected all of that. And beautiful snowy landscapes. I also collected images of what the costumes would have looked like, the way people dressed, and I wrote a description of the personality of the characters. When the artist produced the first cover, the guy is standing there and it's all moody with a snowy background and everything – Yes, that's part of the trailer isn't it?

Yes it is. So he produced that. Then we said, 'Do you mind if we use your artwork for the trailer?' And the publishers agreed. So he supplied the artwork. Darryl did a 3D world for it, with snow in the background, the buildings, wolves going by. Then we took the actual drawing of him, and we 2D animated it with the wind blowing his hair. Then you have the pullout shot, then it is on the cover. With the second book cover we got my daughter and shot her against the blue screen and sent the artist, Clint Langley, a pile of photographs. He chose the one he liked best, so we sent that one over at 300dpi (dots per inch, a resolution so the image wouldn't be pixelated). And he painted from that to create the covers. So when it came to The Outcast Chronicles' covers, we set up the photo shoot, I called my son and told him to bring his weapons over. He came over with his swords and his axes and things. We dressed them up against backgrounds,
lit them and photographed them. Clint chose the ones that most appealed to him and he painted from them.
So he’s actually painting not just doing photoshop?
I have not asked him that question directly. Looking at it I would say that he might do what my husband often does, which is take the artwork and put a layer over it which is slightly translucent and you paint, working with what’s in the background but you give it a painterly feel. So I’m not altogether sure what he’s doing. But you can tell he’s painted all the ornate costumes and setting.
And secondly, your son has weapons.
Yes. He has been into martial arts and medieval re-enactments as you do, so of course he has weapons.
Are these like real weapons or are they the foam LARPy weapons?
No, they’re the real weapons. Which means they get wrapped up in a blanket and hidden so the rest of my teenage sons don’t decide to, ‘Oh let’s take the sword out into the backyard and chase the cat with it’ or something. [Laughter]

#booktrailers
Yes, I had teenage brothers like that. They’re dangerous. You said R&D studios –
Yes, Rowena and Daryl or Research and Development, whatever you like.
I noticed the pun there, I quite liked that. So R&D studios came about because Daryl retired. Were there any other reasons?
He’s been doing it for a long time. He’s done covers for Eidolon, he’s done covers for Aurealis. Internal illustrations for different magazines.
Aurealis is an Australian magazine –
Eidolon was also an Australian science fiction magazine. For about 15 years he’s been doing little bits here and there.
So this has been a passion of his.
Forever. Oh yes. He comes from a background of in the late 70s and early 80s he was part of the comic scene here in Melbourne.
And of course comics are only one step away from animation and film because it’s like storyboards.
But he stuck with the day job in the public service.
Well, we did have 6 kids.
Unfortunately bills need to be paid.
Yes, and mortgages need to be met.
So now he’s reaping the benefits of all his hard work.
Yes, and we have all these kids we can dress up. [Laughter]
A very distinct advantage. I’m doing an editing course at the Victorian Writers’ Centre. This week I was discussing book trailers with someone else who didn’t think a trailer would encourage her to buy a book. I’m aware that book trailers are something that is coming in more and more.
How old is that person?
Younger than me.
Right, well, I’ve been doing a bit of research. Generally speaking, the younger a person is, the more they like book trailers because of playing computer games and seeing movies and growing up on TV. Whether it encourages people to buy books or not, I don’t know. But what it does is, take the Rolen’s Kin trailer, gives you a real feel for the world. Look at that and think, ‘Mm, I could get into a book with that feel, yes!’ So the ideal book trailer doesn’t have a whole blurb on it which tells you the story. It has a teaser and the resonance and feel of the world.
So you say, ‘Oh yes, I like fantasy, I like this kind of political intrigue… that is going to grab me.’ And you don’t have any of the spoilers that might be in the blurb. It seems like the younger you are, the more book trailers might appeal. Is there much demand for them?
More and more. When my first trilogy came out, The Last T’En, we did a book trailer in 2002 for that and there was nowhere to show it. We were ahead of the curve basically.
You were ahead of the times.
Yeah. We were doing book trailers back then.
Was this you and your husband?
Yeah. It was really nice too. Considering the technology we had available, we did quite a good job. I think it’s still up on my website rather than my blog (Just checked, it isn’t there). I have the blog that has the pages behind it, plus I have the website. I’m trying to work out whether I need to maintain two or whether I’ll just combine them. I guess a lot of people are in that position. Because, you see, I had a website even before my publishers were doing that. The first book came out in 1999. [Laughing] And people say our generation is behind the times! That’s awesome!

When you have kids and a husband who loves toys, technology toys…

IT.

IT, yeah, and a husband who will go out and buy himself his own dolly so he can do dolly-zooms …

That’s someone who is passionate about what he is doing. That is awesome. You were way ahead of the times. Everyone else had to catch up to what you were doing. How did that work for you?

It meant that, other than putting the book trailer up on my website, there wasn’t really any way of showing it at the time. By the time I got back into publishing with my new trilogy, people were doing book trailers, there’s YouTube, there’s video, you can show them on Facebook, you can show them on your blog. There are all these venues.

What concerns me about book trailers is that I found your trailer because I was researching you. Another book trailer I’ve seen recently that was professionally produced was Daughter of Smoke and Bone, but I saw that because I was researching that book. How do people hear about them to see them without actually following a particular author?

There are book trailer competitions.

Really? Professional or for fans?

I think a lot of authors are doing their own book trailers, or they’re hiring someone to do them. The publishers are getting book trailers produced. And the book trailer competitions – I’ll send you the link. (The New Covey Awards). Say I go to Supanova,
(I tried to do this last time but it was too complicated), I could bring along a laptop or computer screen and I could run the book trailer from that. If I run a workshop, I run the book trailer. If Marianne and I do a talk, which we do at Supanova, I create looping presentation which has our book covers and our book trailers. So while we’re talking, it’s playing behind us, because people are visual. This gives them something to look at while we’re talking.

#brisbanesupanova

So are you going to be doing that at Brisbane Supanova?

I don’t know if they want us to talk or not but, being a girly swat, I have something prepared which I can pull up and use.

I must admit I’m tempted to go. The accommodation is the killer, but I’m tempted to go.

You’re based in Melbourne?

Yes, I live here. The reason I’m particularly tempted to go to Brisbane is Brisbane Supanova gets more people and a higher percentage of costumes.

It does, and the costumes are brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. April of this year it was 25,000 or 26,000 in Brisbane.

It was. And I think 18,000 for Melbourne with a lower percentage of costumes.

Yes. And getting around in Brisbane from Dymocks bookstore across to where we were supposed to be in the panel it was so packed, and the floorspace... you wouldn’t want to be claustrophobic. So, anyway, I’m looking forward to it. It’s going to be lots of fun.

#thejourney

It sounds it. On the Supanova website it says you moved to Melbourne in 1976 with Paul Collins and set up a small press publishing house. What brought you to that phase in your life?

I was 18. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Doesn’t everything? [laughter]

Yes, especially when you’re 18!
That's awesome.

It was mainly Paul's idea. He wanted to be a published author and I thought, 'Wow that sounds exciting and fun! Sure, let's go to Melbourne.' When I got to Melbourne I got involved in fandom. I thought, 'People I can talk toooo. Aaaah.' Now you've got Supanova, half the TV shows are science fiction or fantasy based, but in that period, growing up in Brisbane... In the 70s...

You had Dr Who.

That was it. And if you had a favourite show, they wouldn't show it, they'd move it around, they'd put the football on...

That is still relevant.

I had never met people I could talk to about things that I was passionate about until I came to Melbourne.

So you're actually from Brisbane and you moved to Melbourne then you moved back to Brisbane.

Yes.

What was fandom like for you apart from being able to talk to people?

It was interesting because everyone was so articulate, they were doing some sort of a degree or they were already through a degree, and it just opened my eyes. We had the bookstore, we would go to conventions. We were small press publishing... Kudos to Paul because he did so much work on that, he applied for grants, he got the money, he was paying advances... What killed it for him in the end was two distribution companies going bust while owing him money. That was the end of it. It's a learning process. Plus it was so much harder to publish in those days. When you had bromide machines and 'cut and paste' meant cut and paste.

I love computers.

So do I. You can do now on a computer things that took hours before. Letraset. I don't suppose you remember if you ever used Letraset? You would buy the Letraset sheets and it would have different sized letters and you would have to rub them through onto the artwork. That was how you created your print.
I’ve never used it but I’ve heard about it. Ow.
So I feel like a dinosaur really. I’ve come from those days to this. We have the technology at home to lay out a book on our home computers. Daryl has turned some of my short stories into eBooks, which I give away on my website. So much freedom. The way publishing is going as an author, I can talk directly to people who have read my books. I get up in the morning, turn on the computer, because I’m addicted to it. I’ll read my emails and check out twitter. I’ll have comments on my blog saying, ‘I’ve just read the three books in three days. When is the next one coming out?’ And that is lovely. Even ten years ago you didn’t get that immediate feedback from readers. Now I can say to them I’m working on the new trilogy for King Rolen’s Kin two.

#writersontherise

Marianne and I started RoR. It began as wRiters on the Road, then we discovered there already was a wRiters on the Road, so one of us said, ‘Oh, wRiters on the Reisling!’ And one of us said no. So then it became wRiters on the Rise. That has been going 10 years now. We started in 2001. What Marianne and I found was there was a lot of support for writers who were just starting out, especially in the short story link. We’d started Vision Writers and
it was terrific, we’d had so much fun with it. But we wanted to take our writing to the next level. So we asked around and we found Margo Lanagan, now a four times World Fantasy winner, Tansy Rayner Roberts who had just won the inaugural George Turner $10,000 fiction prize. Maxine MacArthur, another winner of the George Turner Prize. I think it was just the 5 of us that first time. It was a big commitment. You commit to writing a book then reading everyone else’s book the month beforehand. Writing a report on it. Flying interstate, staying for a weekend. We would do a book in the morning and afternoon every day, and maybe we’d fly in on Friday and do a book on the Friday afternoon. So it’s really intense. 2 ½ to 3 hours on a book and we’d go around and discuss whatever struck us. Whether there were world building flaws, logic flaws, pacing flaws, characterisation flaws… Now it’s eight people, we also have Dirk Flinthart, Richard Harland and Trent Jamieson.
I’ve been offered an interview with Trent.
He’s really good. Richard is also really good.
I’ve already interviewed Richard. I haven’t actually read his work, but he was here for Continuum, so I grabbed him while I could.

We did bring them in because we thought we should have the male point of view. It’s good because if you’ve only got one critique partner and there’s something in the novel they just don’t get, it could be about them. If you’ve got a group of 4 people reading your novel and 3 of them are saying, ‘this really works,’ but one is saying, ‘I don’t think it does,’ then it is probably a quirky thing from that person. You have a consensus of feedback. The short stories Margo has worked on or the novels that we’ve worked on, they mightn’t come out in twelve months. They might come out in 5 years. But they have come out and been published and they’ve done well. It’s this thrill because we love writing for the craft of writing. When we talk about a book, we take it to make it better. It’s that passion. So when one of us wins a World Fantasy Award, it’s like all of us win. Or we’ve been shortlisted for the Aurealis Awards or won Aurealis Awards…
You’ve all contributed.
Yes. It’s that wonderful feeling of sharing the joy.
Share your joys, you double them.
Yes. Or in this case, quadruple them.
Wonderful.

So we’re having another RoR in January in Tasmanian this time. I was trying to get the first book of the new King Rolen’s Kin trilogy finished in time. Now I’ve got to write the novella before I can write the new book, because things have happened in the novella that are included in the new book. Plus I need to get all of that done. We’re renovating. I teach.

No kitchen I hear.

#creativejourney

I’ve actually run away this weekend. I’ve left them with no kitchen that works. They’re doing the washing up in the laundry tub. I know that they will just get takeaway. Every time I go away, they just get takeaway, even if there’s food in the fridge. It will be another week or ten days before the kitchen’s working. But yes. I have to get everything done, be creative and sometimes you need that quiet time for the brain. I was reading that because we have constant stimulus, people are surface living. They’re not living in the internal world of the mind as much as they used to. So getting away and just having a little bit of time is so good for a creative person. I was catching the train this morning to catch the city train to get to the airport. I’ve been travelling since 6 o’clock. I suddenly had this story idea, so I grabbed my itinerary and my pen, and I’m writing on the back of the itinerary. I brought my laptop with me. I intend to write as much as I can this weekend. The temptation is to simply disappear into your books and not be sociable at all. Then it’s physically hard to remember how to be sociable. Because I’ve had a large family and I’m now teaching, it’s been really good for me. Otherwise I’d probably be this absurd, obscure, slightly weird hermit who never comes out of the writing closet.

You feel like you’re getting a good life balance?
I feel like I’m walking a tightrope, but I think it’s been very good
for me as a human being. Plus having a large family and being in a position where I’m teaching and I’m out mixing all the time, gives me a real insight into people.

I can just imagine, seeing a whole classroom full of people, you’d have no lack of characters. You’ve started a national genre award as well as RoR.

I have served 5 years on the Aurealis Awards, so I read horror, fantasy and science fiction. When the awards came to Queensland I was on the management committee and helped structure them and set them up for the first two years. I’ve also been on the National Committee for Romance Writers of Australia. When I first was involved with that and it came to Queensland, I set up Ruby, which is the Romantic book of the year award. So that covered short romances. It also covered mainstream books that had a romantic element in them. By pure co-incidence, my first fantasy trilogy came out, and there was a romance running through it. In the second year of the award, my first book won it. Which was not rigged at all, it was complete coincidence.

But it was lovely.

Yes, it was lovely. It was judged by readers, who had no idea who I was. In fact it was published under a pseudonym, so it was total coincidence.

With regards to the pseudonym, I gather that is less common in Australia than other countries. So why the pseudonym?

Because I was writing primary school readers under Rowena Cory Lindquist, then I wrote this rather hot fantasy novel, very sensual. I thought that does not blend at all, so it came out under Cory Daniells. Cory is my maiden name, and Daniells is my mother’s maiden name. By the time the new trilogy came out I was sick of people saying ‘Hey Cory’, so it became Rowena Cory Daniells. Long story.

You’ve given a lot of support to writers behind the scenes with the genre award, running workshops for writers –

Setting up Vision Writers. I worked on the management committee for the Queensland Writers Centre. I was on the management committee for the Brisbane Writers Festival.
was on the Aurealis Awards. I was on the Romance Writers of Australia national committee, in RoR and in Fantastic Queensland, which was behind Clarion South. And Envision, which ran three years in a row, which was getting a pod of writers with a published author and they’d read their manuscript and help them do rewrites over a week. People came along so fast when a published author can look at what they’ve written and say, ‘No, no, you haven’t got it, this is what you need to do. You need to bring this out more.’ And they say, ‘oh, of course!’

So they get that feedback.

And now I’m teaching writing in the sense that it’s film treatment, script, character, world building, logic, pacing, all of that. So are you asking me if I love it? I love it.

Can you tell me more?

A lot of work and preparation. I think I also have this… I was a big sister. I was the eldest of my family and I looked after people. Plus I’m a busybody and I like to organise things. Obviously having six children wasn’t enough to keep me busy, and writing of course.

What have you learnt along the way?

That I don’t know anywhere near as much as I think I do.

Oh yeah, but we all get to that point.

Yes, we do.

Sometime after you turn 18 you learn that.

#selfdiscipline

Every day I wake up and the first thing I do is look up my emails and twitter. What I find is I follow a lot of political activists and people who are involved in the sciences. I follow those links. I’m always looking for something obscure and interesting about the world and human nature. It’s like I’m hungry for that, and all of it’s trying, as a writer, to make sense of the world.

Is there ever a point where social media becomes Addictive?

Yes. Intrusive. And being used as procrastination.
Well, I do find that I might be writing away and I might get to a scene where it’s not quite working. NO! I WON’T! I will work through this scene!
So you’re very disciplined.
Most of the time. Especially when there’s a deadline. Because when you have 6 children you learn to get stuck into something and just do it. At one point I was writing or illustrating and I’d have a baby and I’d have them plugged on and I’d be typing with one hand, swap over, type with the other hand. Paint with one hand, swap over, paint with the other hand. You’ve just got to keep going to get things done.

#workliferelationship
You’re currently lecturing at Quantum and teaching storytelling. How does this marry with illustrating and writing novels?

It combines the two because it’s script writing and screen writing. So my background as an illustrator and a writer means I think visually. And I’m also passionate about film. The more I learn about it, the more I see in it. So I’ll be watching something and I guess it’s like an architect looking at a building, seeing all the influences from the past in the structure. As a writer I read a book. I see where the author has come from and I see the structure of the book. If I watch a film or TV series, I’m analysing it the whole time for story structure, characterisation, plot, logic, and visually I’m analysing the story flow through the story boards. The way they use sound to bridge from one scene to the next. The way they frame a shot. I appreciate it on all those levels. I really feel lucky that I can do that. Then, just like when you’re reading a book as a writer, the story is so powerful, you forget you’re reading a story. Every now and then you’ll come across a TV series or a movie where you’re swept away. Then you’ll know that the story is really powerful because you forget to analyse it.
That’s not as easy when you’re reviewing, but yes.
When I had my bookshop I would read a book in the morning, a book in the afternoon, and a book after dinner. If I found a book I liked, I would read it the first time to discover it.
second time to find out what really worked. The third time to
find out where the story wasn’t as powerful. If you’re reading it
for the third time, you know what’s coming, you’re analysing it,
involved in it. Obsessive. I can see you thinking that.
No, actually, I was more thinking about the pile of books I have on my
desk and thinking I wish I had more time to do that.
That was before I had kids.

#selfpublishing
I’m in the post-kids phase, so I don’t have that excuse either. I can’t find
your children’s books. Where are they?
Books that I illustrated were in the 80s, there are probably a
few copies in classrooms, but that’s it. They’re out of print. The
books that I wrote in the 90s (mainly) are out of print too. We’re
talking about 1996 for the first children’s book and the last one
was in 2008. They’re all out of print.
Is there any hope of bringing them back? Especially with ePublishing.
I would say that the rights have reverted to me on everything
because once they’re out of print the rights revert. I don’t
know whether I would bother to bring the stories back because
they belong to a place and a time. I’ve moved on. My career
is focused on adult books. If I came up with a story idea I was
really passionate about, a children’s story, I would write it and
it would be fresh and new. I’m happy to let them go, to set them
free and let them go. With regard to the short stories though,
you put your heart and soul into a short story and there is just as
much work as a novel. Then it appears in a small press publishing
thing or a magazine and that’s it. And you think, ‘But I really
liked those characters, that was interesting.’ I was talking to
somebody who said that a lot of authors were getting 3 short
stories and putting them into one eBook to sell it. I thought
I might do that. I have released 2 of my short stories on my
website as giveaways, just to trial it out. It means when I have a
spare moment, creating a Paypal account and converting them
all to eBooks. Like I’ve got the time to do that. But I should. I
really should.
Plus I have the version before it was edited, which means I have to go and find the printed version after it was edited and re-editing. Nowadays you do everything via email with your editor, and you have the second to last version or maybe even the last version on your computer but this was before that. There is quite a bit of work involved.

#writingforchildren

I don’t envy you that. How did you make the leap from writing for children to writing for adults?

Before I was 25 I had written about 10 books. 2 of them were kids’ books and the rest were adult, fantasy, science fiction, SF/mystery, and this one the Price of Fame, I wrote the first draft of that when I was 23. So in a way I wasn’t a children’s book writer. I didn’t bother to send them out because I thought at 25 I didn’t have the life experience to write anything worthwhile. Then I had 6 children in 10 years. Then I took the first version of this when I was 36 and submitted it to the HarperCollins $10,000 fiction prize. It got in the long shortlist. So I figured at 23 I was writing at that level. Then I got back into writing. Because I was surrounded by children I started writing children’s books. A lot of the things the children did I turned into books. Being able to write books that my kids played a role in was fun. They took them into class to show. I even set one of the books in the school where the kids went. It really involved them and was fun for them.

Then I got back into writing what was originally my passion, which was science fiction and fantasy.

Is it easier to write for children or for adults?

A paediatrician and a children’s writer go to a dinner party. The paediatrician says, ‘when I retire, I’m going to write for children.’ The writer says, ‘When I retire, I’m going to be a paediatrician.’ You’d spend 10 years on average, learning the craft of writing before you’d get published. So it’s a long apprenticeship. Writing for children is a very specialised area. Writing for a 5 to 7 year old is different for a 7 to 10 year old, is different for an 8 to 12 year old, is different for an 11 to 14 year old, it’s different for the
boys who might need a ‘high/low’, which is high interest, low reading level. Then of course there’s the cross-over, which is 15 years to adult.

Plus there’s the feel. I was writing in the mid 90s to the mid 2000s. So the feel that I was writing for children was at that point, because my kids were kids at that point. I would read to my kids. I pulled out the Narnia books to read to my kids. They say, ‘Golly gosh Edward...’ I’m thinking, ‘Aaah!’ It’s so... it’s like a piece of history. Books date, especially children’s books because of the feel and the sensibility of the children. And what interests them; it changes so rapidly, especially in the last 50 years, where every child now has an iPod and a mobile phone and a computer in their room and is hooked up to the internet and the whole world. It’s a different world.

Yes. I can’t remember what it was, but recently I was watching something on TV that was made in the 90s –

And someone pulled out a phone and it was a brick!

No, this was set before mobile phones, and I was thinking this story made no sense in our current world because they didn’t have mobile phones.

Yes, and nowadays when you write you have to take into consideration all the technology and how you can be in touch with everybody all the time and how we make decisions differently, how we can access money at any time, we can go to the shops and buy food at 9 o’clock at night. It’s totally different.

Yes, it’s a totally different world to the one I grew up in.

Me too.

**#booksRCDwrote**

Without giving away any huge spoilers, what would you like to tell me about your published books and your upcoming series?

Well, *King Rolen’s Kin* is the fantasy trilogy you reward yourself with after a hard week at work on a Saturday afternoon when you just want to sit down and be swept away.

That’s definitely the feel of the trailer too.
Yes. *The Outcast Chronicles* are a little bit more detailed. It is a prequel to *The Last T’En* trilogy. People are still coming up to me, ten years after publication with their original copies of this trilogy, and getting me to sign them because they are so passionate about it. So the new trilogy is set 600 years before that, but also involves the style of magic I created for that world. People will find it like an intricate Chinese puzzle where, once you get into the world, you have to keep reading to try and follow the characters and find out what happens to them. I think it’s obsessive because for me it’s obsessive writing it. I think people will find it different to *King Rolen’s Kin*.

Am I understanding correctly that they’re set in the same world?

No, KRK and OC are set in different worlds. There was this gap where *The Last T’en* came out in 2002. The editor left, the publishers didn’t publish anymore. So I was orphaned. There was this gap of six to seven years where I was writing and I wasn’t getting published because the agent retired... it was all very complicated. But I just kept on writing. So what I would do is write the first book or two of a series, and then I’d say, ‘Oh, I don’t know if that will sell,’ so I’d put it aside then I’d go and write another one. So I have all these beginnings of series. So I have this backlog of books and series.

And now they’re starting to come out.

Well, the *King Rolen’s Kin* trilogy has come out and *The Outcast Chronicles* us due out in 2012, but now my publishers want a new *King Rolen’s Kin* trilogy that I haven’t started at all. So yes, it’s all very complicated, with me trying to keep track of all these different worlds and characters in my head... but it’s fun. I’m very lucky.

#worldbuilding

It’s good to hear you say that, especially while you’re faced with all this work. How difficult was the world building for *King Rolen’s Kin*?

I am obsessive about world building. It absolutely fascinates me. I don’t have a science degree at all, but I have always been fascinated by aspects of science, particularly sociology and anthropology and linguistics. My problem is not that I don’t do
enough world building but that I will do too much and my RoR colleagues will say to me, ‘Reel it back, Rowena!’ So yes, I love the world building aspects. What you see in the books is just the tip of the iceberg of what I know about the world. For instance in *King Rolen’s Kin*, someone said, ‘What’s this person talking about? They say north is cold and south is cold! What’s wrong with them?’ Don’t you realise this is a world where they’re inhabiting the equator, so north is cold and south is cold. But it’s on an elliptical orbit so that it gets really cold in winter and really hot in summer. That’s all there behind it, I know it and it is there if you read it and look for it, but if you’re in this mindset where you only think of our world, you might have trouble. That was one thing that was interesting about my first trilogy. I set it in the southern hemisphere, and people who read it in the US said it’s really interesting reading about a place where, the further north you go, it’s hot. To them it’s a really unusual idea, but because we’re from the southern hemisphere, we’ve got this mindset where we just accept that you can have north hot, north cold, you can have all your seasons around the wrong way… I think in some ways being Australian and living in the southern hemisphere gives us a more open mind for imagining fantasy worlds or science fiction worlds, because we’re already removed from the northern hemisphere world view.

Yes. In the books I’ve been reading this year, if it’s getting warmer to the south, it is a northern hemisphere book. If it is getting warmer to the north, it is a southern hemisphere book. I can pick that without looking at the author. I think it’s really interesting. I think it’s really good if we can have more flexibility. I like the fact that you stuck the Halcyon abbey on the equator. I thought that was different, that was a first. What made you do that?

I don’t know, I just did it and it felt right.

We watch Marianne de Pierres get out of the car and talk about my upcoming interview with Marianne. ;)

Ok. *King Rolen’s Kin*. It’s not one thing that triggers the creative process, it’s a whole pile of little things. I was reading about medieval Russian society. I was watching a documentary on
what happens when you get a volcano or an impact crater, and you’ll have an atoll effect, with impact lines coming out like the spars that I created in King Rolen’s Kin. You’ll get maybe an island with a lake in the middle of it... I took all of that. Plus I was reading about medieval Japanese history, where because you’ve got the islands and they’re very mountainous and there’s only small areas of arable land, you’ve got this population pressure and a warring society trying to grab that arable land. So all these factors came together. The world just grew as I wrote it, rather than world building beforehand, because I read so much anyway it’s all there in my head. It just comes together as I write it. And if there is something I don’t know I will go and research it. I have a fantasy duology that I’m really passionate about, set in a tropical paradise. At one point this island burns, it’s dawn and the smoke goes up and forms this long trail across the sky. It’s this person’s home but they don’t know that it’s burnt, but as they get closer and closer to the island, they have this horrible feeling that it’s their home that’s burnt. I had to work out how far away you can see smoke. If you’re sitting in a row boat, where is the horizon line? If you’re in a sailboat, in the crow’s nest, how far away is that horizon line? How far will smoke carry? I was doing all this research, including looking at the fires in Victoria from satellite, seeing how far the smoke carries. So in the situation where it’s very specific and I need it to be realistic, then there is quite a lot of research to put it all together to make it work. I’m hoping that duology will find a home. It’s very different from a standard medieval fantasy, and it’s fun to do something where I can get quite off the wall.

Related to that, Kim Stanley Robinson said that sometimes he’ll get really incredibly irate fanmail because he’s made a mistake in the world building and it’s caused a suspension of disbelief. Have you encountered this?

I had somebody email me and say, ‘an orange garnet is called a citrine, and you didn’t call it a citrine.’ I emailed them back and said, ‘If I called it a citrine, people would have had to go and look it up. But if I say an orange garnet, then they can visualise it without looking up.’ There’s a fine line between being too technical and making it accessible. When I write, like in King
Rolen’s Kin, I don’t use too many, say, nautical sailing terms because you’d need a dictionary to work out what I’m talking about.

Like Port and Starboard.

And all the technical terms for the different sails and the ropes, and the bulwarks around the sides and where the water would run off through the holes when the water comes onto the deck. So if you have someone on the ship who doesn’t know about ships and you’re seeing it through their eyes, then they just talk about the little slots on the deck where the water runs off. The reader can visualise it and you don’t have to get too technical. I try to write it so that someone who doesn’t have a deep knowledge of sword fighting, or the sea, or whatever, can access it.

How hard is that?

It means a bit of research and visualising. I went aboard the Endeavour when it was up in Brisbane. I walked around and saw the size of the cabins and how wide they were and how small the bunks were… You immediately get that – my goodness, this ship carried 200 men and they sailed for two years on it…

No cats swinging on that ship.

No, no. So it is nice to be able to do that. If I had a heap of money I’d love to go to Europe and go through all the catacombs in Paris, and… the things I would do! But I can’t do that, so I read a lot of National Geographic and New Scientist, and the internet is wonderful. If I want someone to fire a flintlock pistol, I can go on the internet and see different sorts of pistols. Somebody on one site showed how to load the pistol. They recorded the process it goes through as it fires, how much of a puff of smoke you get, the sound that it makes… Incredible detail. I don’t have to go to a museum and ask them to load a pistol for me; I can go on the internet and I can see it.

#research

Do you do a lot of research?

I do because I’m obsessive and I’m fascinated by everything. Ninety per cent of it I just research because it’s interesting and I
can’t stand being bored. I’ll buy myself a New Scientist to read on the train going home. I’m like the nerd in those TV shows. There was an episode of Buffy where they open up the nerd’s locker and find a copy of New Scientist and Willow goes, ‘Oh, one I haven’t read.’ That’s me.

Living in Brisbane, how do you connect with the snow and ice in King Rolen’s Kin?

To me it’s amazingly exotic, snow and ice. I’ve only had one experience and that was when I was eleven. My family came to Canberra and it snowed. When I was eight or nine I picked up a Reader’s Digest. There was this first account story of this family, a father and two children who had been caught out in the Rocky Mountains during a snow storm and he built a cave for them. He put his body across the only gap. The two children survived but he died.

So this is where all your detailed snow caves come from.

They’re real things and I’ve researched them, but I never forgot that story about the father. Everything when you’re a creative person, everything you see and hear, goes inside and bubbles up later. You don’t even realise where it comes from at the time. It’s like when you’re writing and the characters take over and they’re doing things and saying things to people that are new or unexpected.

Do you often have that experience with your characters?

Yes. What? Your best friend committed suicide? I didn’t know that.

#thefutureofpublishing

How do you see the publishing industry in the future?

It’s fascinating isn’t it, what’s happening right now? I have writing colleagues based in the US and UK and they’ve been talking about eBooks and ePublishing for several years. We’re only seeing the effects of it now in Australia. I catch the train to work; there’s still a lot of people reading real books, but there are also a lot of people reading on their iPhone and Kindle. I say to people, ‘How do you like your Kindle?’ and they say they love
it because they can get a hundred books on their kindle and if they finish it, it doesn’t matter because there’s another book they can read. It’s not heavy, it’s good for travelling. The other side to that is that I’ve got the rights back for my first trilogy. I can release it as an eBook because it was never released as an eBook before. I can take a trilogy which I’ve written which doesn’t have a home, I could pay to have it professionally edited. I could release it as an eBook myself. Authors are doing more and more of that. They’re making their backlist work for them. If they have the readers and they’re looking for more books. It gives a novel so much more freedom. There’s also the professional aspect. If you’re published through a mainstream publisher, you get 10%. If you self-publish you get 90%. You might not make as many sales, but if you make 90% of the sales, you’re ahead. There’s this tipping point. Previously the only way to get published was to go through a mainstream publisher. Now authors have a lot more freedom in making career decisions. Having said that, I’m really happy with my publisher, Solaris. They’ve done beautiful covers for me, other than the fact that it’s not getting much distribution in Australia, they distribute in the US and UK. I’m really happy with them. I appreciate what they’ve done.

#thefuture

What are your plans for future novels?

I will probably work for a bit longer because we’ve done all this renovation and we have to pay it off. But in the near future, in the next couple of years, I would like to retire and write full-time and do the creative stuff with my husband like the book trailers. Basically I just want to write and people to read what I write and to be as passionate about it as I am. You never know how long you’ve got. One of my grandmothers died at 104. I could have another fifty years of writing. Or I could get knocked down by a car tomorrow. I have all these books on my hard drive that I haven’t polished and I have all these ideas for books I haven’t written, and I just have to do it.

Not enough hours in the day.

Not enough hours in the day, no. But I also need to get out of the
house and talk to people and come to conventions and spend time with my children and my long suffering husband. No, not enough hours in the day. If I didn’t have to sleep it would be good.

I don’t think you’re in too much danger of getting too much sleep this weekend.

No.

What are you hoping to get out of this weekend?

I want to attend the panels, meet everybody, buy heaps of books, go home, totally immerse myself in the books, the people, the world…. Because I know the science fiction and fantasy world quite well. I know the romance world quite well. I want to know the crime writing world and the whole subculture. It has a different flavour. It will be really good for me.

I look forward to seeing what you’re going to produce after this conference.

Thank you Nalini. Thanks for interviewing me!

Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.
Marianne de Pierres talks to Dark Matter

Marianne de Pierres came to Melbourne recently to participate in the Sisters in Crime writers’ convention. While she was here, she spoke to Nalini Haynes from Dark Matter.

#becomingawriter

You started writing at a young age, what inspired you?

I did start writing young, but then I had a very, very long break. I started writing at 8 or 10, inspired purely by reading and thinking I wanted to write a story like that. Then I fiddled around for a few years up until I was in my late teens. Then I had a really long break of 10 or 15 years. I was studying but not doing creative writing; certainly not writing full blown stories. I really didn’t start writing properly until I was in my thirties.

What were you studying?

I started off doing social work. I got about three-quarters of the way through that and decided I didn’t want to finish it, so I switched across and did a film and television degree. Then I started doing a bit of post-graduate literature units. Back in the days of free education.

Ah yes, before HECS fees.

Yes. Even when I was living away from the city I was doing a bit of external studies.

You were still in the story-telling medium to some extent.

I guess so. I never stopped reading even though I stopped trying to write for a while. But you also have to understand that I had little children as well. It wasn’t until Jules (my youngest) was about 3 or 4, and I hit 34 that I started to think if I’m going to do this, I need to start. I still wrote with little children but not
when they were babies.
That’s a pretty demanding time, when they’re babies. When you were reading, what were you reading?
I’ve been through so many phases over the years. I used to love historical fiction. I probably started off reading… I read a lot of ‘Boy’s Own’ adventure stories when I was young; my dad had a huge collection. He also had Ian Fleming and Victor Appleton’s Tom Swift and all the Zane Grey cowboy novels. Then I moved on to Literary Fiction and I was reading literary fiction way too precociously. I was reading D. H. Lawrence at a very young age and I don’t think I understood it at all.
Maybe that’s a good thing. [laughing]
Yeah. Then I moved on to some of the risqué trashy stuff like Arthur Haley. Then into historical fiction. After that, I discovered some of the more contemporary stuff like Carlos Castaneda and eventually, I found my way to science fiction and fantasy. I think I started with fantasy. I read all of David Eddings, Raymond Feist; all of that sort of thing. I read myself almost out of fantasy. At the tail end of that I shifted into science fiction and never looked back. Interspersed with that was always a bit of crime always, along the way. I’ve ridden these waves of types of books I guess.
So that helps explain where your writing is coming from.
I guess, yeah.

#authoreditorrelationship
Your bio on your website mentions you started writing an Enid Blyton rip off when you were eight. Your sister made word substitutions all the way through. What was it like having such an autocratic editor at such a young age?
She wouldn’t actually tell me what she was doing, she’d just type whatever sounded better to her. Then I’d read it back and I’d get really, really cross with her. She thought it was all a great joke. But looking back on it, it was my first editorial experience.
How is your work edited these days?
Not on an old typewriter, that’s for sure. With track changes.
I’ve been really fortunate. My experiences with editors have been, by and large, incredibly positive. I’ve learnt something from every editor I’ve ever worked with. I’ve learnt a lot from some of them. I was talking about this the other day. Someone asked me how I cope with the editorial process, and I said I would not cope without the editorial process now. I would be frightened that I hadn’t been through that rigorous process and know that it’s going to produce something better. I would have to find that kind of feedback from somewhere.

How important is your relationship with your editor?

Extremely. It’s business, especially with the big publishing houses. You don’t try and bug them too much. But it’s an exchange. I think if you’re in a position as writer where you’re working with an editor who is very autocratic, then that’s not a good, healthy relationship and they’re probably not a good editor. With good editors, it’s a dialogue. There are some things that occasionally you stand firm on and don’t want to change but generally they ask you questions. They say, ‘Why is that like that?’ And that is what really brings the story together. It’s them asking pertinent questions about what you’ve written. It’s not really them directing to remove that, or add that, or shift that, it’s making you think about your text with greater clarity. It’s also really good when they point out pacing - a passage might be a bit slow. It’s very hard to gauge those things yourself without that feedback.

I was just talking to Rowena Cory Daniells, and she was talking about possibly self-publishing some of her previously unpublished works. She said if she does that then she would source an editor from somewhere so she could still go through that process. Would you?

Yep. Same thing. I’m not planning on self-publishing any early work at this stage, but if I did, I would absolutely do that. Not only would I look for someone to do a structural edit, but I’d look for someone to do a copy edit as well.

Would they be two different people?

Possibly. It just depends on who was around. Just because you can put something up there (online), doesn’t mean you should
put up something that is inferior. It’s doing you a disservice and a disservice to the reader.

#journeyintopublication
You studied writing at uni but you didn’t start writing science fiction until after your third son was 3 or 4. Did you study writing as an adult or did it take a while to come to this place?

I didn’t ever really study writing. I did a couple of creative writing units at uni and I did some community courses in writing; they were fantastic. They gave me some of the practical nuts and bolts that I really needed to get going. Other courses were through open learning, TAFE and people’s back room workshops. I didn’t say, ‘I’m going to be a writer, so now I’m going to go and do a writing course.’ It was a process that evolved over time. I was picking up more and more as I went, then I began to more actively seek them out. After I had been writing for a few years and hadn’t published a novel, I did enrol in a postgraduate course in the University of Queensland and I did the Arts: Writing, Editing and Publishing degree at UQ. That really helped me. It took my finished product to a new level. I learnt a lot more about polish, editing and presentation. So overall, it was a combination of seeking professional development, letting enough time pass, and becoming a more critical reader that got me going. Because you do have to be a critical reader, and that’s really hard when you start out because you just want to read for enjoyment. Then it becomes hard to read for enjoyment because you’re critically reading all the time, and you’ve got to remember to turn it off sometimes.

#writersgroups
I know a lot about reading with a critical emphasis at the moment, and I’d really like to switch that off more often. How did your involvement in writers’ groups begin?

I was an isolated mother living on Stradbroke Island when I started writing seriously and I was desperate for contact with people in that world and I was seeking knowledge. Because the Queensland Writers’ Centre was the only resource I knew of, I joined them, which was a great move. Rowena may have
told you, I saw an advertisement in their newsletter saying anyone who wants to start a science fiction and fantasy writers’ group, come here at this time on this day. I made the big trek over, which was about a 2 ½ hour trek for me to get there. That was how my first writers’ group involvement started, and that writers’ group is still going now, 16 years later. That’s the Vision Writers’ Group. Rowena and I don’t physically attend anymore, but they’ve migrated to an electronic list. We’re still part of the list, which is great.

That was my first real foray into writers’ groups and it evolved. What happens is, if you get a lot of people, you can only cover so much in a short amount of time. It got to the stage where I was seeking more. Rowena and I were talking about finding a situation for ourselves where we could get our novels critiqued. That’s how we developed the RoR writers’ group. It was trying to move forward all the time, keep plugging away at the next thing. We’d ask … what’s the next professional development thing we can do for ourselves?

wRiters on the Rise started off as wRiters on the Road but we found out there was a group already that was called wRiters on the Road. We tried to think of something else. The first thing we came up with was wRiters on the Riesling, as we were all on the riesling in those days. In the end we changed it to wRiters on the Rise, which I don’t like as much. I prefer wRiters on the Road, but anyway… It was Rowena and my attempt to further our professional development. We started out by brainstorming who might be interested in joining us. It was a fair commitment. At that stage it was planned to be once a year and you had to bring a novel. So we knew it had to be somebody who was actually writing novels for a start and finishing them. We looked for people who were about the same stage in their career as we were; which was emerging … basically. We started off approaching people. A few turned us down. A few said yes. Margo Lanagan came on board, Tansy Rayner Roberts, Maxine McArthur. I think that was our first ever workshop. Gradually we grew until we’re about eight now. We’ll probably stay at about that number because otherwise we’d need 2 weeks to do all the critiquing. As it is, we can do
eight people in four days comfortably and that’s usually enough brain fry. So we get together once a year or every eighteen months. We all bring novels. We read the novels ahead of time, so you have to read seven other novels. Then we spend an intense four days workshopping, and it’s hugely productive. They’re all good, sharp, critical minds. They know their genre very well. You always come away tired but very highly motivated.

Unfortunately over the last couple of years it’s gotten harder to get together. We’ve had quite a high success rate. Most of us are published now. Other things intervene, like deadlines. When we set the workshops some people might not be able to make it because life gets in the way of something like that. But essentially it’s a very important part of our writing life.

How has that process been for you?

From the time we had the first workshop to the time we had the second workshop, I think my writing improved exponentially just from the feedback I got on the first weekend. Not only the feedback I got on my novel, but what I learnt from workshopping the other novels. I don’t think I would have got that professional development at that speed without that experience.

Wow. Would you encourage other aspiring writers to start their own writers’ groups?

Absolutely. We actually have inspired a few people. There’s another group that meet out of Brisbane. There’re also various groups I know of around the country that meet. It’s a fair commitment for us because we’re all from different states. It means an air fare and accommodation. It’s a financial outlay as well. That might not work for everybody. If you have people close by and you can get away for a weekend in your own hometown, that would be just as great. I think for us this was necessary because we were writing genre. There weren’t enough of us in one place so we had to cluster from all parts of Australia to get people who were writing that genre. I would highly recommend it. It doesn’t have to be a group, it could be a critiquing partner. There is something about getting away from your normal environment. You get that hothouse of critiquing
that really gets the creative juices going.

Is it ever difficult to hear the criticism?

Yes. I should qualify that. Some things. You might go into a workshop knowing your dialogue’s a bit shaky or that character’s a bit weak, so you’re prepared that they’re going to go for it. But other things might come up that you think are working really well and it can be hard to hear the things you think are going ok get criticised. We try and make ourselves productive but we also don’t mince words either. It can be brutal but at the same time it manages to be inspiring. It’s an interesting thing.

And you’re still going, so it obviously hasn’t been destructive.

No, oh no. Not in any way at all. The only thing that stops me, and I do miss the occasional workshop, is life intervening. And you get to read early drafts of manuscripts that later go on to become books, it’s quite neat. You get a sense of ownership with those writers and their early work. That’s pretty neat too.

Rowena made a comment about ‘us’, ‘we’, winning an award. As in ‘we’, your group.

Yes. Very much. When Margo won the World Fantasy award for Singing My Sister Down, from the collection Black Juice, we felt like it was a part of us as well. We acknowledge we didn’t write it, but we were there at the beginning and we workshoped that with her. And we said then that this was going to win a World Fantasy Award, which it did.

And you were right!

We were right. It’s like anything you invest in. That’s the whole point.

#criticism

What makes the difference between criticism being brutal but constructive and destructive?

Obviously there are two things. How it’s delivered in terms of you have to be able to back up what you are saying. If you can give good reason for why you think, ‘Look, I’m sorry, but that chapter just doesn’t work,’ if you can deliver on why then it becomes a constructive exercise. Also if you can offer suggestions on
what might make that better or how you can find a way around that or something, then it’s only going to be a positive thing. It might smart at the time, but once you go away and think about it… Anybody who truly wants to be a writer and improve will go away, get over their huff and start thinking through what was said to them and then use it. Sometimes you might decide not to use it. You might acknowledge that it’s right, but you want it to be that way. That’s your choice.

I think destructive is when people are negative and aren’t able to back it up with any decent reasons. You have to be careful in writers’ groups; because it’s so subjective in terms of what you like and don’t like as a reader. You always have your favourites. We probably all have our favourites within the group. I like his or her work better than his. There are things you have to watch out for.

Yes, that’s one of the challenges of reviewing a book.

Again, I don’t review books that I hate. I try not to review a book I wouldn’t read for pleasure. Otherwise you feel like you’re being brutal or it’s a lie. One of the two.

Yeah. That’s one of the reasons I try to have a few different reviewers. Hopefully, with more reviewers, someone will like a particular author or sub-genre.

I’ll get a book from a publisher and I might circulate it through three or four reviewers before one of them feels positive enough to write a review. If they all came back and said no, then we wouldn’t review it. But two or three will say, ‘Aaah, it’s not really my book,’ so it will go on to the next person until we find someone who wants to read it.
#winningawards
You’ve been shortlisted for the Aurealis Award several times and the Ditmar Award once. Last year you won the Aurealis Award. Plus in 2009 you won Davitt Award for best crime novel. How do you think being short listed and winning has impacted upon your writing career?

I really don’t know. It’s nice for your ego. In terms of impacting on my career, I couldn’t say. I think perhaps it just means that more people get to hear your name in the industry. Both those awards are fairly new; they’ve both happened in the last few years. They may, in time, provide me with opportunities that wouldn’t have come my way in the normal course of things, but it’s a bit early to say. If I’d won an Academy Award I might be able to tell you straight away! I think it’s really just exposure of your name.

#publishednovels
Without huge spoilers, what can you tell me about your different novel series?

I’ve written two adult science fiction series. One is a traditional space opera, four book series, The Sentients of Orion. The Parrish Plessis series is a kick-ass action-adventure, post-cyber-punk, post-apocalyptic story. The Tara Sharp crime novels I write under Marianne Delacourt are literally humorous crime in the mould of Janet Evanovich’s Stephanie Plum. My teen fantasy series The Night Creatures series is dark fantasy with a subtle science fictional subtext.

I have a guilty confession to make. I’ve read Janet Evanovich.

I love Janet Evanovich, that’s why I wrote them. Have you seen the trailer for the movie?

No, I haven’t, but I will be watching the movie.

Oh, me too.
We'll see. I'm sure it'll be fun. As long as they've got a decent director. I’m looking forward to it.
Why have you written so many different genres?
Probably as you said earlier, because I’ve read so many different genres. I don’t feel bound or restricted. Because my reading tastes have been so eclectic over the years, I still have that primary desire from when I was eight years old, ‘I read that, I liked it. Gee, I want to write something like it.’ Essentially I’m just a fan of reading. So I get an idea and I’m off. I still enjoy it. I still read broadly, although not literary fiction these days. So I don’t feel bound or restricted. I’ve been lucky in that publishers have given me the opportunity to publish in different genres. It can be hard to break the mould sometimes. Writing a novel is such an emotional investment. If you are not excited about it when you start it, you will never finish it. I go where the excitement leads. One year it might be a science fiction novel and one year it might be a crime story.
Do you think there’s a unifying flavour that is Marianne de Pierres?
Probably stylistically. People say they can pick my writing. I guess you’d have to talk to them. I don’t know. The humorous crime is quite light, whereas the science fiction, some of it, is very heavy. In terms of themes, a few recurrent themes crop up. One of them is women’s empowerment - a big one for me. If you ask me, the one thing that I have in common across all my writing is that I’m not a predictable writer. You can generally never predict where my stories will go. Maybe less so with the Tara Sharp novels, but with everything else people generally can’t work out where I’m taking them.

#comicbook
This diversity, does that explain Peacemaker?
Yep. That started as a novel, an urban fantasy novel that was marrying together my love of Westerns as a young kid and fantasy and science fiction. I guess it’s three areas of reading passion. As I started writing it, I wrote about a hundred pages of the novel. I was too busy to write the novel, I had to put it away.
But it started growing pictures. The pictures got more and more vivid in my mind. I get very, very excited about putting words and pictures together, which is why I really enjoyed writing for children. I didn’t mention that - I did write for children when I started. I published a few children’s stories.

What are the children’s stories? I don’t remember seeing anything about them.

There’s nothing on the website anymore. I used to keep webpages of my children’s stuff, but it was mainly in the children’s education market. The sort of stuff you’d see in children’s classrooms, early readers and things like that. I just didn’t see any point in keeping a webpage of them because you can’t buy them anymore. You’d only buy them through schools. But that was my first experience of pictures and words together. It was something I really wanted to revisit. With Peacemaker, I started writing the novel and I suddenly thought I really want to have a go at this. So I’ve gone in, very much with eyes open that I know nothing about what I’m doing. Fortunately I’ve got a really nice illustrator.

And experienced. She’s won awards.

Yeah, and she drew, inked and coloured the first issue. That’s a lot of work. They’re all different skills, and I think she’s done a fantastic job. I was lucky that she was able to do all of those things.

And that she had the time.

Well, she got paid :), but yeah. Brigitte’s been great. I’ll get back to you about the future of Peacemakerc at.

Issue two is already written. It’s twice as long as issue one, which was really only a taster.

Since reading Peacemaker I read another preview comic, Orchid, that didn’t introduce the main character.

Oh my god. How annoying.
Yes. So, comparing *Peacemaker* to *Orchid* … in *Peacemaker*, you introduce the male and female leads, there’s obviously going to be conflict there. And a dead body.

Yeah. And a villain already. And you’ve got all these dynamics set up.

**Who’s done *Orchid***?

Dark Horse. It’s not an indy publication. The preview says basically the world’s been polluted, seas have risen, genetic codes have been stuffed up so all these monsters have come out of the sea…

**Is it an electronic version?**

The preview was, but I think it’s coming out in paper too. The preview is freely available, I’ll send you the link (http://www.darkhorse.com/Comics/Previews/16-912?page=0).

That’d be great. That’s interesting. Thanks for the feedback. I really am flying blind here. Brigitte is able to give me some feedback because she’s been in the comic book industry. If I was doing anything too glaringly bad, I’m sure she’d let me know. The reason I’m interested in taking this to a professional comic book publisher is that they’ll be able to help me increase the professionalism of the product. I would take it to the next level.

**How did the *Peacemaker* project start?**

Literally because I was writing the novel. I knew I wasn’t going to have time to finish the novel, but I couldn’t let the story go. In my mind it started turning into a comic instead. Instead of writing the novel, I embarked on the project of finding an illustrator who could work with me on it. That was quite a slow process. I was very lucky. Nicola Scott, who I would have loved to have worked with on it, but has an exclusive contract with DC Comics, recommended Brigitte Sutherland. I approached Brigitte and another girl from Western Australia whose art I really liked. They sent some stuff to me and in the end I decided that Brigitte had the realistic feel that I was looking for, even though the other girl’s work was great, it was more comic. Brigitte had more undertones of realism. So we took it from there. It took a while to get to the point where, yes, Brigitte was going to be the
illustrator. Once we did, we moved along pretty quickly and got the first issue done fairly soon. But Brigitte is based in the UK even though she’s Australian. The time difference can be a real pain when you’re trying to do something quickly.
I suppose it’s made workable by the internet.
It is. It’d be very hard without it. But with the internet, just as I’m going to bed she’s getting up. Nowadays though, I’ve reached the point in my career where, if I want to do something creatively and I can 1) afford it and 2) have the time to do it, I’m going to do it. I’m not going to let the fact that I have no experience stop me.

Good on you. I think Kelley Armstrong was a bit similar. She wrote her graphic novel *Becoming*; it was a fan service. Fans were asking for this particular part of Elena’s story from the adult series. She decided it had too much angst to be a novel, but it could become a comic. Someone wanted to illustrate it for her, so that’s how it happened.
They’re the kind of projects that give you the most pleasure. Straight from the heart.

How different is writing for comics from writing for novels?
It’s so lean. But that doesn’t worry me, I tend to write fairly lean anyway, so it’s not a big stretch for me to make that step. Nicola said to me that a mistake beginner writers make in comics is that they don’t let the pictures tell the story. They try to narrate it. So I try to keep that in mind. The illustration should tell as much of the story as possible, and what it can’t tell is the bit you write. So that’s the biggest difference.

How difficult is that for you when you’re writing it and then getting someone else to illustrate it?
Because you’re picturing it in your own mind and then you give them the bare instructions… I imagine once you’ve worked with an illustrator for a while, you can say, ‘Bright sunny day in the park,’ and know that they’re going to produce exactly what you want. Because you talk… well, we go through character drafts beforehand, what the characters are going to look like. In *Peacemaker* there is this natural park in the middle of the
city, so I sent Brigitte links of pictures of the Pilbara, saying this is the colour of the soil I want. You are constantly referencing back and forth and you build up a sympatico picture.

In terms of character, one of the concerns raised at the Tights and Tiaras conference at Monash University was how the depiction of women in comics is very sexualised. Their figures are unrealistic. Their clothing is, shall we say, less substantial than the males. One of the things I really noticed with Peacemaker is that both the male and female characters were fairly realistic for fit and healthy adults. They were both wearing fairly comparable standard of clothing, neither of them was particularly sexualised. Was this planned?

Yeah. I didn’t want to write superheroes, and I certainly did not want to write about women in bikinis. That was a very conscious decision. I’m telling a story about certain types of characters and that’s how they look. While keeping in mind that I want it to be fairly appealing to the eye, there’s that tinge of realism I want brought to it. I don’t want a stylised superhero. Very conscious. I’m writing for me, and after that I’m writing for people in general. I would hope that the characters are appealing visually to anyone. The sexiest characters are usually the ones with their clothes on.

Yes. I like the kind of Geisha definition of being appealing, it’s what is concealed not what is exposed.

Exactly.

Do you think being a female team working on Peacemaker in a male dominated industry impacts on Peacemaker in any way?

---

*Parrish Plessis bracelet*
I think the biggest impact comes from being an unknown in the comic book industry rather than being a female team. I haven’t even reached the level of whether that would impact. I’m still at the level of nobody’s heard of me and I have no runs on the board. So check back in a few years and I might be able to answer that question better. [laughter]

#roleplayinggame

I’ll be there when you’re launching your comic book! Your Parrish Plessis series has been turned into a role playing game. What is that like?

It was a really interesting experience. I didn’t know a lot about RPGs and it’s an D20 dice game (D20 = 20 sided dice). I don’t know anything about them, so other than support the game people where I could, it was all taken out of my hands. I read through some of the handbook and made sure certain things were correct, but in terms of the game mechanics, that was nothing to do with me. It’s been a great recommendation for the series. It’s given it another life. It’s like having a book made into a movie. The game is a separate text, which is nothing but good as far as I’m concerned.

#YAbooks

Burn Bright and Angel Arias, are both young adult novels. We were talking before the interview about there being so much energy around young adult novels. What has that been like?

Great, great. As we were saying earlier, the book blogging community in YA is just so passionate. It’s very, very rejuvenating and exciting to be in a reading community where they just love books and want to share that love of books. I think as we grow into adults and we get busy, we’re less inclined to get excited about these things, but there’s this whole substructure of young people out there who are celebrating their love of writing. I’ve found that fantastic, I’ve loved that. And I really enjoy writing YA. I will continue writing young adult.
#SheKilda

You’re about to attend SheKilda, a crime writing convention. What do you expect to get out of this weekend?

I’m looking forward to seeing a bunch of friends, and I’m looking forward to making some. Even coming in the car, getting picked up at the airport, I met a lady who is writing for television and researching some interesting cases. Vicki Petritis picked us up, she writes true crime novels. The conversation in the car was all gruesome and grizzly and fascinating.

A great taster for the weekend.

The conventions are about meeting people. I’m really looking forward to some of the panels. The Sisters in Crime are a great bunch. Pro-active, well organised and welcoming.

#worksinprogress

What are you currently working on?

I’m working on a crime novel, Tara Sharp 3. As soon as I put that to bed at the end of this month I will be writing the third in the teen trilogy.

So you haven’t finished the sequel to Angel Arias yet?

Burn Bright is the first one. Angel Arias is the second one. So I haven’t finished the third one yet, no.

Ooooo. So what are your plans for the future apart from writing those two novels?

I have another Tara Sharp novel to write after I’ve finished the teen trilogy. Then I’m going to have a little sit and think about what direction I’m going to take. But definitely my comic will be one of those things. I have a screen play I’m still working on. We’ll see what life brings in twelve months’ time.

With the screen play, do you have a contract?

It’s optioned by a local Australian independent producer. It’s a stand-alone science fiction, so it’s an original idea, it’s not based on a novel. I’ve been having trouble finding time to finish it. It’s half written, so that’s very high on my list of things to do. In about October next year I’ll be doing a whole lot of things
I’ve had on the back burner. We’ll see. I might even have a little holiday.
You might need one, or you might get burnt out. Thank you very much for talking to Dark Matter.
It’s been a pleasure, thank you very much Dark Matter for having me.
You’re very welcome!

For more information, follow these links:
www.mariannedepierres.com
www.mariannedepierres.com/peacemaker/peacemaker-details/
www.burnbright.com.au
www.tarasharp.com

Next issue:
Dark Matter interviews Yunyu, the musician who wrote and performed the music for the Angel Arias book trailer.
Ian Irvine talks to Dark Matter

Before heading south for Armageddon, Ian Irvine talked to Nalini Haynes of Dark Matter about writing, his books and more.

#thejourney

Hello Ian, thank you for agreeing to talk to Dark Matter. How did you come to start writing?

That’s buried in the mists of time, because I’ve been writing for about a quarter of a century. I think I had a frustrated creative urge around about the time I went to uni (where I was studying science). Over the years the urge to write grew and grew until eventually one day I thought, “I’ve got to start today.” That was mid-September, 1987, and the book I started was A Shadow on the Glass, which became my first published book, although it took about 10 years before it was published.

If it took 10 years for it to be published how long did it take you to write it?

Well, I was actually writing the whole The View from the Mirror quartet, which is 800,000 words – four very large books. It only took me three months to write the first draft of A Shadow on the Glass, but I tend to do a lot of drafts. Even now, I would not send anything to my editor until it was fourth or fifth draft, and for A Shadow on the Glass I did 22 drafts. I reckon I spent over 5,000 hours on that book alone – my writing apprenticeship. [http://www.ian-irvine.com/threeworlds.html](http://www.ian-irvine.com/threeworlds.html)

When I began writing in the 80s, there were no Australian publishers accepting fantasy for the adult market. The only
way you could get published here at that time was by writing children’s fantasy. That’s how Isobelle Carmody was published, for instance, with her Obernewtyn series that was written for children. You never saw it on the science fiction and fantasy shelves until around about the year 2000.

You couldn’t get published with science fiction or fantasy in Australia until the early 90s. A few people were published then, eg Martin Middleton, Tony Shillitoe and Shannah Jay (fantasy), Graham Hague (horror), and Sean Williams with SF, but by the mid-90s publishers weren’t doing so well with Aussie authors and were pulling back.

The boom in science fiction and fantasy publishing in Australia began with Sara Douglass’ Battleaxe in 1995. It was so successful that a lot of other speculative fiction writers were published in the next few years. I was one of them; Kate Forsyth was another; also Traci Harding and several others. The situation that prevails now, where it’s relatively easy to get published – in the sense that people get published in Australia every year – was quite different before 1995. It was almost impossible.

A Shadow on the Glass: wasn’t that published in 1998?

Yes. I sent it to publishers overseas between 1989 and 2003. I received encouraging rejections. In 2004 I started sending it to Aussie publishers. Pan Macmillan said that they liked it and agonised, ‘Will we publish it or not?’ They decided not to, which is the worst kind of letter you can get from a publisher. But they suggested I consider getting a professional manuscript reviewer to look at it, and recommended Van Ikin, an English lecturer at the University of WA who was also the science fiction and fantasy reviewer for the Sydney Morning Herald for a couple of decades. I sent it to him in mid-1995 and paid him a very modest fee – a few hundred dollars. Van gave me fantastic advice, which I followed, and that’s what got it over the line.
I’d been sending it out for seven years before it was finally accepted by Penguin in 1996. By then, publishing my work was a big ask, because I’d written the four novels of *The View from the Mirror*. Any publisher had to commit to publishing a quartet and if the first one bombed the others would too. But Penguin took it on, did a great job and gave me a wonderful editor, Kay Ronai.

The four books were published in 1998 and 1999. They were very successful, and almost immediately sold to the UK, US and various translations. But it was a long haul. On the other hand I think it’s not uncommon to writers to take five or 10 years to get published. I can think of quite a few: Cecilia Dart-Thornton worked on her Bitterbynde trilogy for 12 years. Trudi Canavan also worked on her first series for a long time.

Who has encouraged you along the way?

My family are all book readers. They read my books and made kind remarks, though I was aware that writers need professional advice on the manuscript. To my recollection, no one ever tried to discourage me, though it would have made no difference if people had. I’m pretty determined. Every time a publisher rejected my manuscript I sat down, did another three or four drafts and then sent it to someone else.

**#editing**

So far I have interviewed three members of wRiters on the Rise and a few other authors who have beta readers or belong to a writers’ group. Apart from Van Ikin, how do you get feedback and how does your manuscript grow in that sense?

I don’t seek feedback from anyone these days, apart from my editors – I judge the book for myself and, having written so many books, I can tell when the story has a problem, and what to do about it. I don’t send my books out to anybody except a few family members who are interested in reading them in manuscript. Not for the purpose of getting feedback; I to send them out because people want to read them.
I write three or four drafts of a novel (or sometimes five, six or seven) then sent it to my editors for the structural edit – the big picture. My structural edits rarely come up with anything structural, though. Unless the publisher has asked to see the manuscript before I’m ready to give it, I usually have the structural problems sorted out.

I’ll get their comments back and spend another six weeks or so doing another couple of drafts, taking into account all my editors’ suggestions plus all the ideas I’ve had myself in that time. Then I send it off for what is called the line edit or copy edit, where the editor looks at the fine details. Then I get that back and make final changes over a week or two.

I’m currently studying editing so I’m learning about things like structural edits and copy edits, but a number of readers might not be familiar with this concept. What does a structural edit entail?

A structural edit is looks at how the overall story is working: is the plot simple and clear, or are there subplots that end up going nowhere and need to be cut out, etc Are there characters that aren’t really relevant to the story, or characters that are poorly developed, or a number of characters that are too similar? The copy edit looks at details like spelling, grammar and speech. For example, in a page of dialogue, is the dialogue repetitive? Does the main character waffle on or is everything he or she says relevant to the central drama of the story? If a character is using a dialect, is it comprehensible or unintelligible to most readers?

How important is your relationship with your editor?

It’s vital. The relationship with the editor is critical because, for most professional writers, the editor is the only person you ever get detailed, focused feedback from. Even from a writers group, it is rare to get a lot of useful feedback. People might comment on this or that but they rarely see the overall picture. Various people at my publishers will read the book, including the publisher, the editor and people in marketing, but the only person I get feedback from is the actual editor.

I’ve worked with 12 or more editors over the years, because I’ve
worked with five different publishers in Australia alone. Most of my editors have been freelancers. For instance my first editor at Penguin, Kay Ronai, was a former editor and publisher at Penguin who went freelance after she had children. She was a fantastic editor; we worked together on my first seven books before she went on to other things.

I’ve never had an editor who has been autocratic. Usually the editor’s comments are couched as suggestions. All of my editors have been really experienced, and I would agree with 9 out of 10 of their suggestions. Even if I didn’t agree, I would look at the issue or problem they were raising and see why they were raising it, and see if I could rewrite that part of the story so as to address the concern my editor had identified.

Other authors have talked about the editing process being a negotiation process, like ‘I’ll give you this if you let me keep that.’ Has that ever happened with you?

No, it hasn’t. I think there are a number of forces coming to play here. Some authors are very emotionally bound up with the story they’ve written. This is explicable because you might spend years writing a story, thinking about it constantly, obsessing. When you get your editor’s comments back, even though the comments are couched as suggestions and put in a nice way, by the time you get to the end of many pages of comments it can feel like a relentless assault of criticism, and some people deal with criticism better than others.

I’ve never had fights with my editors. There’s certainly been points when my editor has said, ‘I think you should do this’ and I say, ‘I’m sorry but I disagree and these are the reasons why.’ But I’m not emotionally bound up with my writing in that way. A professional editor is wonderful because, as a beginning writer, one of the biggest problems you have is that it’s almost impossible to get useful criticism. You can give the story to your family and friends, and they will mostly be kind about it, but they will never give you a good analytical overview of the story and how it is working.

You need professional criticism, but it is really hard to get. Some
writers’ groups can be really good; others can be negative, ego-driven and destructive.

#worldbuilding

You’re really well-known for your intricate world building. What comes first: the world, the characters or the story?

In the case of my epic fantasies in the Three Worlds series, the eleven books I’m most well-known for, the world came first. That’s partly because I started constructing this world when I was at uni back in the 70s. I was reading Terry Brooks’ The Sword of Shannara, and I was really irritated by the map in the front of the book, which didn’t seem to bear any relationship to the story.

I was doing a Ph.D. in science then, and I felt that I ought to be able to create a better map for a fantasy world. I started drawing the map, then I created the world, and only at that stage did I think about writing a story set in the world. But I didn’t start writing for another 10 years because of children, renovating houses, and working at a demanding consulting job.

I don’t necessarily start out by creating a world, though. Sometimes I start with a character. I’ve written a quartet of children’s fantasy novels about a character called Runcible Jones, who was sent to the worst school in the world. This school is specifically there for children with the gift of magic, and is designed to utterly destroy their ability to do magic. With these books, I began with the character, not the setting.

But to fully answer the question, every book in every series I’ve written has been done differently. Also, every writer is different. What works for me won’t work for someone else. For instance, I like to write my first drafts really quickly, in about six weeks. I was talking to Traci Harding about this; she likes to take about nine months on a first draft, working through it over and over again. When she gets to the end she simply reads the draft through, tidies it up and is finished. Whereas I write a first draft in six weeks, and I do six or eight or even 10 drafts before I am happy with it.

Back to the geography and the maps and world building; I have heard
that some of your maps are the size of a door. Do you enjoy the cartography?

Yes, they are. These days I don’t do them in quite such detail, but I do enjoy the cartography. Sometimes when I’m giving school talks or attending conventions I take one of the maps with me, a map of the continent of Lauralin in my world of Santhenar, which is the main world in The View from the Mirror. It’s the size of a rather wide door. I drew it on drafting film about 30 years ago, and the map probably took me a couple of hundred hours. It was most therapeutic working at my drafting table with this map, hour after hour, day after day. But I wouldn’t do it in such detail these days, because of writing commitments. I simply don’t have time to sit down and spend hundreds of hours on a huge map.

Is there any talk about releasing your maps as posters?

No. Fans have asked from time to time, and I’m going to put up the detailed maps on my website fairly soon. I’ve got a section on maps on my website already; there are about 20 maps up there but they’re mostly small ones. I’m planning to put some of the big ones up soon, as PDFs that fans can get printed for themselves, if they choose to; that’s the best I can do. Realistically, unless my books sold millions and millions, no publisher is going to go to the expense of producing a big map like that for a poster in these troubled times.

No, the global financial crisis and all of that.

#plotting

Apparently Neil Gaiman writes his plots in a linear fashion but Dave McKean writes plot points on notes, puts them on cards, puts them on the floor and arranges them in a really organic way. How do you plan your plots?

I begin with one particular character, usually the hero or heroine, the main viewpoint character, but not always, and I start with the big problem they have to solve. The problem might be that they’re being hunted and have to survive, or they might have a quest they have to achieve. Then I put every conceivable obstacle I can in the way of that character achieving that goal.
For instance, in *Vengeance*, the book which is coming out next week, the story begins with Tali, an 8-year-old slave girl witnessing her mother’s murder. Tali’s family is originally of noble origins but her people have been held slaves underground for hundreds and hundreds of years. When Tali comes of age, she realises that she is also going to be murdered for some reason connected to her family that she doesn’t understand. Now she is hunted, and she has to survive and escape, although no one has ever escaped from the underground realm of Cython.

She has two goals: one is to survive. The other is to gain justice for her murdered mother. The main part of the plot is her trying to escape and gain justice, while the people who are hunting her are closing in. Every single thing in her life as a slave conspires to prevent her from achieving her goal and gaining justice. That’s basically how I plotted that book. [http://www.ian-irvine.com/taintedrealm.html](http://www.ian-irvine.com/taintedrealm.html)

#characters

How do you create the characters?

*Vengeance* is about Tali, a slave, and another child who witnessed the murder – a boy called Rix who is heir to the biggest fortune in the land of Hightspall. The stories of these two characters are intertwined.

Creating Tali’s character – she’s small because the slaves don’t get enough food, but she’s not weak. You can’t create a good story if the character is weak and refuses to grow. A furious anger burns inside of Tali, and sometimes it explodes at the worst time. Though she’s a powerless slave, she also has a great determination to gain justice for her mother – it’s the inciting incident in her life, the incident that crystallises her overriding goal to bring the killers to justice. That’s how I created Tali. I didn’t do a lot more character development than that at first.

As I started writing her character, and her story entwined with Rix’s and with other characters in the story, I went back and developed her a little more. For instance I discovered, in the seventh or eighth draft, that the moment Tali escapes to the world above, she is afflicted by agoraphobia – the fear of open
spaces. She has spent her entire existence in a world of caverns and tunnels where the walls are always close by on either side; the roof is never far above, she can never see more than 100 yards ahead, and suddenly she is out in this vast open landscape. She’s entered the world that her people have yearned for the past thousand years of their slavery, and it’s an incredibly emotional moment; she feels as though she is coming home at last.

But the vast open space is terrifying. She has a paralysing panic attack and doesn’t know how to deal with it. This was an aspect of her character that hadn’t occurred to me when I started developing it. For me, character development is an iterative process: I start with a little bit of detail about a character and then I write the story, then as I need to develop more I do so.

Do you always know where your characters are going or do they take you by surprise sometimes?

Oh, they often do. Sometimes characters simply appear on the page. For instance in my Three Worlds saga, in The Well of Echoes and The Song of the Tears, with Xervish Flydd. He’s a powerful leader, partly a magician, partly a powerful administrator, a dominating figure yet I never planned him. The characters in the first book, Geomancer, were dragged into an interview with Flydd and they were terrified of him. He opened his mouth and spoke, I wrote down what he said and did, and it was perfect. Flydd was a little, wizened, ugly, scarred man who was incredibly powerful and could also be charming as well if he wanted to be. Fans loved him, and yet no effort went into creating him.

Other characters can be a nightmare. In The View from the Mirror I have a character called Maigraith. I struggled and struggled to understand her. At one stage, around the fifth or sixth draft, I still did not know what she was thinking and what motivated her. I had to spend weeks analysing her character and her past, and trying to work out what made her tick, before I really understood her. Sometimes it’s easy, sometimes it’s hard; sometimes you plan it, sometimes you can’t plan it and it simply flows out. It’s a mysterious process.

I must confess I haven’t read all of your books, but don’t you continue
writing about Maigraith? Doesn’t she appear later? 

She first appears in *The View from the Mirror*. She’s also present in the background in *The Well of Echoes*, with a different name. She reappears in Song of the Tears, the trilogy that ends the *Three Worlds* saga, so far. She’s a long-lived character who ends up totally changed as a result of her obsessions.

So you went from struggling to get to know her to having an established relationship with her and she just keeps popping up.

Maigraith was an obsessive character. When I finished writing *The Way between the Worlds*, the last book in *The View from the Mirror*, she was starting to display some disturbing obsessive characteristics. I didn’t know what was going to come of that. When I finished *The View from the Mirror* I didn’t have any immediate intention of writing any more in that series.

When I started writing the next series, *The Well of Echoes*, there was a character in the background called the Numinator, who had some control over the world but never actually appeared. I didn’t know who the Numinator was, and I think I had been writing that series for several years before I realised it was Maigraith in disguise. Her obsession was with her lover Rulke, who was killed at the end of *The View from the Mirror*. He was supposedly the last of a powerful human species called the Charon, and she became totally obsessed with reconstructing the species, because she was pregnant to him.

This obsession grew until it became overwhelming and changed the world, though this idea was very slow to crystallise. Readers often think that you start out with the whole idea of a book in your mind, and you simply write it down and edit it. That’s not always true for me. Sometimes I’ll get a great idea in the fifth or sixth draft of the story. Sometimes I’ll get a great idea, when I’m actually two-thirds of the way through a trilogy, that reshapes the whole story. Writing is a mysterious process.

#otherbooks

What can you tell me about the other series that you’ve written, without giving away huge spoilers?
I’ve written six series. There’s a series of eco-thrillers, set in the future of our world, called *Human Rites*. It begins with *The Last Albatross*. These books are set 20 or 30 or 40 years in our future, in a world dramatically re-shaped by catastrophic climate change. One aspect of this was the melting of the West Antarctic ice cap, the smaller ice cap on Antarctica, which is known to have melted a number of times in the last million years. When it melts it raises sea level by about 6 m and we can immediately see how dramatic an effect that would be.

In Australia, there are around about 700,000 addresses that would be affected by a 1 m sea level rise. So you can imagine 6 m is probably going to affect several million houses and many businesses. Sydney Airport, for starters, and it will flood a lot of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and other coastal towns and cities, and almost the entirety of the Gold Coast.

It would also flood most of Bangladesh, displacing tens of millions of people, plus more in the Nile valley, Thailand, China and many other countries. In the *Human Rites* series the ice cap’s melted, sea level has risen 6 m and you’ve got half a billion refugees, so what effect is that going to have on the world?

We’ve seen in Australia over the last 10 or 15 years, with boat people, how a few thousand people have dramatically affected the political landscape. What are 500 million refugees going to do to the world? They’ve got to go somewhere and the changes they wreak will be profound.

As will the loss of all that infrastructure – all those airports and towns and houses and railway lines and factories and farms below the 6 m level. You can’t build a walls around everything; it’s either got to be moved, or if it can’t be moved, abandoned. The sea level rise causes a massive destruction of physical capital in most countries of the world, and either people become poorer because so much has been lost, or taxes have to be monumentally
high to replace it. The money has to come from somewhere.
I envisaged global recession and huge political changes, though that wasn’t the story, just the setting for my story. The Human Rites books originally came out in the early 2000s and were recently republished by Simon & Schuster, in a nice trade paperback edition, in 2008 and 2010, when I had an opportunity to completely revise and update them. [http://www.ian-irvine.com/humanrites.html](http://www.ian-irvine.com/humanrites.html)

My other series’ are all for children. There’s a quartet of little fantasy novels called The Sorcerer’s Tower which were for middle primary school readers, [http://www.ian-irvine.com/sorcererstower.html](http://www.ian-irvine.com/sorcererstower.html). They’re only 10,000 words each. They were wonderfully illustrated by DM Cornish who wrote the fantasy series Monster Blood Tattoo.

Another, bigger series for children, which I’ve already talked about, is the Runcible Jones quartet, [http://www.ian-irvine.com/runciblejones.html](http://www.ian-irvine.com/runciblejones.html).

My latest series, also a quartet, is called Grim and Grimmer. At the end of each big fantasy series I try to write something different, to freshen and restore and improve my writing. Grim and Grimmer is humorous adventure fantasy for children ages 8 to 14. It was the most fun I’ve ever had writing. The last book came out in June this year. [http://www.ian-irvine.com/grimgrimmer.html](http://www.ian-irvine.com/grimgrimmer.html)

I don’t write short stories, though I have written 2 novellas; the information about them is on my website, [http://www.ian-irvine.com/otherwriting.html](http://www.ian-irvine.com/otherwriting.html).

#typecasting
You put in so much effort into the building the world for The View from the Mirror and then you move on to something different; what is it like to leave a world and to turn around and create something new?

It’s sad in a way; particularly with the world for The View from the Mirror, the first quartet of my Three Worlds series. Partly because
I spent 12 years writing those books and working over and over that world in detail – the societies, the characters, the history and culture and so forth. It was a wrench to leave those worlds, but I don’t want to become typecast.

I know from talking to other writers that you can become so typecast as a writer that your publisher doesn’t want you to write anything else. I first discovered this when I went to a talk by Raymond Feist about the time I was published. It took him years to convince his publisher to do *Faerie Tale*, because it was so different to his other books. Publishers know that if you’re a popular writer, most of your fans want more of the same. Most of my fans want more of the Three Worlds series.

At Aussiecon 3 in 1999, I recall Robert Silverberg saying that when Stephen Donaldson didn’t want to write any more *Thomas Covenant* books, and wrote other fantasy, he lost 75% of his readers. Then, when he didn’t want to write fantasy any more and he started writing science fiction, he lost another 75% of his readers. Then he was down to 1/16th of the readers he had when he was writing the *Thomas Covenant* books. And publishers know that most readers want more of the same; that’s why they don’t want you to write something really different.

On the other hand, it is possible to take readers with you. Robert Jordan’s first *Wheel of Time* book was classic adventure fantasy, whereas the last few books in the series are totally different, more philosophy and intrigue, with much less adventure and derring-do. Because he changed his writing slowly, Jordan was able to take his readers with him. But change your writing dramatically and you’re probably going to lose a lot of your readers.

I wanted to write different kinds of books early on, so I wouldn’t be typecast. Though perhaps if I had written twenty *Three Worlds* books, I would have sold a lot more.

I loved the first *Thomas Covenant* trilogy, even though I found Thomas himself to be an extraordinarily irritating character and I longed to him to suffer a cruel and ironic fate. I got halfway through the second trilogy and I’d had enough. I think that was part of the appeal with Thomas: at the time those books
appeared, in the late 70s, he was a breakthrough hero. Most heroes in epic fantasy back then were much more heroic and more romanticised.

Unlike these days we go from the epic hero to *Sir Apropos of Nothing*. There is a huge gap between the two.

Much fantasy in the 70s was saccharine and in need of renovation.

#planningfuturenovels

With *Vengeance*, do you know how the series is going to progress?

When I’m writing a series, as soon as I’ve done the detailed planning the first book I realise how the series is going to end. So I always have something to aim for, but I rarely know how I’m going to get there. At the moment I’m planning and drafting *Rebellion*, the second book of *The Tainted Realm*, and making notes about the third book, *Justice*. *Rebellion* will be going to the structural edit around the end of February. I won’t do detailed planning for the third book until *Rebellion* is nearly finalised, because as I draft and redraft I constantly get new ideas that will change the direction of the book or give me new options for it. These can change so much as I write and rewrite a book that I wouldn’t want to be constrained in the final book by having planned it too rigidly.

#booktrailers

Book trailers are becoming more common; do you have any book trailers?

I did several, years ago. There are links on my website, http://www.ian-irvine.com/video.html. I haven’t done any for four years. I’m not convinced that they’re much use for book promotion. Good trailers aren’t cheap to do, and it takes a very long time to script the hundred or so words you’ll use. I don’t think many adult people watch book trailers and, unless they are absolutely compelling, I don’t think they convince people to buy the book.

One problem with book trailers is that a lot of people compare them unfavourably with movie or game trailers, forgetting that
the movie has an enormous budget, professional actors and cameraman, and hours of great footage to choose from. Even if you spend thousands of dollars on a book trailer, as I have, you can’t get that professional look. Occasionally a book trailer will go viral and get 20 – 30,000 views on YouTube, but if you look at the stats most trailers are lucky to get 1,000 views. If you get a thousand views and only five people buy the book, it’s a waste of time and money.

#dayjob
Speaking of working: you’ve got day job as a scientist. How do you manage to balance both careers?

It’s not really a day job – I’ve essentially been a full time writer for the past 12 years – but I still have the little consulting company I set up 25 years ago, and I do work in my field of expertise, in what’s laughingly called my free time.

I’m a marine scientist and an expert in the investigation and management of contaminated sediments. It’s a huge environmental problem worldwide. I work from home, so it’s not like having a full-time job working for another employer, working long hours with travel time on top. I couldn’t write the number of books I do if I had a job that was taking me away from writing 60+ hours a week, like most professional jobs would do these days.

How do you think your scientific background has influenced your writing?

Every writer writes out of their own life experience. For example Sara Douglass was a university lecturer in mediaeval history. It coloured what she wrote about, and the kinds of characters and societies she created. Tolkien was a professor of English and a philologist, and he created the languages of Middle Earth before he began to write the stories. In fact, originally when he began to write stories set in Middle Earth, it was as a background for the languages he had created.

As a scientist, I have a lot of knowledge about the physical and biological world we live in. Not only does it affect the way I create my world-building, landscapes, ecosystems and societies
and so forth, but I might be thinking of a magical phenomenon with some kind of scientific imagery that I have seen at some stage in my career. For instance in Chimaera, the final book of the Well of Echoes, one of the magical devices is like a sun trapped in a bottle. The sun image I remembered from astronomy; I imagined this blazing, coruscating sun trapped in an old-style laboratory bell jar, and this image was used on the cover of the English edition. Having a scientific background gives me a slightly different way of looking at the world, which means I write a bit differently than someone whose background is in the arts and history.

#novelinfluences

Is there anything that you particularly do for recreation that might influence your writing? I’m thinking of Joe Abercrombie who plays computer games as well as reading non-fiction. He said that is research: playing Red Dead Redemption was research for writing his next novel.

I read, walk and garden for recreation; and travel, though not as much as I used to. I don’t play computer games, though I used to play Dungeons and Dragons back in the day when you had to make up your own dungeons and map them yourself on graph paper – back in the 70s.

Do you think that influenced your developing the world that The View from the Mirror series is set in?

There would have been some influence, though I didn’t use any of those dungeons or characters in my writing. I think my main influences were the thousands of adventure and fantasy stories I’d read before I began writing, my own life and background, and my interests and fascinations – for instance, volcanoes.

I was recently in New Zealand, checking out the volcanic thermal areas around Rotorua and Lake Taupo in New Zealand. A similar environment occurs in Vengeance. When you arrive in Rotorua, the first thing you notice is the smell – the whole place smells of sulphur, which is seeping out from all the hot springs
around the town. That kind of detail helps to make the setting of a story real.

I don’t read much fantasy these days, partly because I’ve read so much of it in the past, partly because I don’t want to be influenced, and partly because, in common with a lot of other writers, I find it hard to enjoy fiction in the genre I’m writing in. Sometimes I find myself mentally editing the book I’m reading. I read crime, thrillers, romance and a lot of non-fiction; I’m interested in practically everything; history, philosophy, archaeology. Writers need to read as widely as possible, not just in the genre they’re writing in. It is also important to read some bad books. Sometimes you can learn more from the bad books than you do from the good ones.

#relationshipwithfans

You have a great relationship with your fan base built through Facebook and your website. Why do you use both Facebook and an independent website?

Because they have different functions in a writer’s promotional platform. An author’s website is (or should be) the first and most reliable source of info about the author and his books. Mine is here: http://www.ian-irvine.com/. Facebook is less useful for this purpose, but it’s the best way to develop and engage with a community of people who love your books.

I’ve had my website about 10 years. In the early days my site and e-mail were the primary ways of communicating with fans, because ten years ago social media were insignificant. It was only with MySpace in 2003 and 2004, and then Facebook, LinkedIn, etc, that social media began to take off. In the early days, when a book came out, I might get a hundred e-mails in a week or two. Replying to all those e-mails individually – a lot of them were asking the same questions – was an enormous labour and I was always behind. Many writers don’t reply to e-mails from fans. They don’t have the time or they don’t want to. E-mails from fans are great and I love getting them, but it was an enormous amount of labour to reply to them.

Facebook has largely replaced fan email, and is much better. It
allows me to talk to fans of my books about stuff that they’re interested in, and for them to talk to me. My Facebook fan (ie business) page is here: http://www.facebook.com/ianirvine.author, and thousands of fans have joined it. A personal Facebook page isn’t all that useful, but a fan page can be a fantastic way of communicating with fans.

How do you think your relationship with your fan base is affecting your writing?

I don’t think it has a lot of effect on my writing. Fans sometimes ask if I’m planning to write more about a particular aspect of my story world, or an aspect of its history, or a character they love. I note these ideas down and, occasionally, if it suits, I might write more on that aspect. That’s the only way it affects my writing.

A number of authors have their books produced in other media: for example Marianne de Pierres has had one of her books produced as a role-playing game. Kelley Armstrong has produced a comic book as a fan service depicting an early segment of one of the characters’ lives. Have you ever thought about expanding into another medium?

I have thought about it. I think Marianne is both interested and knowledgeable about role-playing games, whereas I’m not, and I think it would be foolish to do it myself. Kelley Armstrong has written graphic novels and I dare say has all the contacts to do such things, and as a hugely bestselling author no doubt gets profitable publication offers all the time. I’ve never even read a graphic novel and probably shouldn’t attempt to write one. However If some publisher wanted to buy the rights to produce a graphic novel of any of my books, I imagine I would say yes. Getting my books out to a new audience would be great, but it’s not something I have any control over.

#thefuture

What does the future holds for you at this point in time?

More books. The last 6 or 7 years have been frantic because I’d overcommitted myself with fascinating book projects that all ended up being done at the same time: the Runcible Jones series, Grim and Grimmer series, The Song of the Tears and The Tainted Realm. I’ve been working on some of these series since late 2004,
and it was too much.

I’ve decided not to work on anything else until The Tainted Realm is finished at the end of 2012. After that I’m going to write a book (or maybe a trilogy) set in the Three Worlds. After that I’ll see. I’ve got lots of book ideas, and I can’t imagine stopping writing. I’m in good health; I would hope that I’ll still writing books in 10 or 15 years time. You can never tell with writing, though; not many writers have a really long career. A 20-year career is exceptional. But as long as my books keep selling and people want more I plan to write more, because I really enjoy every aspect of writing.

Well that’s good to hear. I hear you’re going to Armageddon this weekend.

Yes. I haven’t been to Armageddon before but I’ve been to Supanova so I’ve got a rough idea what it will be like. Unfortunately there won’t be any advance copies of Vengeance there. The first copies have turned up this week. In fact I’ve got one sitting on my desk at this moment. I haven’t even opened the package yet because it came in after you called, so I haven’t even seen the book. I’ll be at Supanova in Brisbane in the first week of November with the books. I’m looking forward to that. I was there in April, and that was terrific.

That sounds very exciting. I’d better let you go so you can open your package. I would imagine seeing your books at the first time would be very exciting.

It is very exciting and even though this is book number 27 it’s a big deal and I’m really looking forward to it. I know that Orbit has done a great job, the typography and the cover look great. All the books I’ve had out in the last three years have been either children’s books or revised editions of my eco-thrillers. This is my first fantasy novel since 2008 and it’s very exciting. Fans of my fantasy novels have had a long wait, for which I must apologise. Well, I’m sure they’ll be really happy.

I think it’s one of my best.

That’s really good to hear. Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.
Well thank you Nalini, it’s been terrific. I hope it all goes well for you.
I’ll see you at Armageddon.
I’ll look forward to it, cheers.

Hello Richard.

Hi. I work for Beyond Reality Media (http://beyondrealitymedia.com/) and run Square Planet Comics.

What can you tell me about them?

Beyond Reality is an online comic website where we publish five different titles, one page each, five days a week. The title that I co-write is called The Inspiration Duncans and it is a really bizarre story about a guy who discovers aliens attached to the back of everyone’s necks that sort of look like weird testicle creatures. I guess the tag line is that the only thing standing between humanity and certain doom is a guy with a bucket on his head for protection. It’s a pretty insane thing.

There’s another comic called The Warden, which is a really interesting take on the superhero genre. Basically the warden is the world’s greatest superhero, but in fact he’s just a prison containing the world’s greatest villain.

Attica is a Greek mythology thing set in the present day where Castor and Pollux have been imprisoned for thousands of years and they’ve come out completely reformed. Gone are their days of raping and pillaging, and they’re relatively friendly to an annoying degree.
We publish Robert Rankin’s comic called *Empires*, which is a thing set in the nineteenth century with monkey butlers and robots and all kinds of steampunk fun. I think it’s basically a way for him to draw his wife in a gas mask a lot.

We are re-publishing all of the *Red Star*, from the beginning, which is Christian Gossett’s book, which has been around for quite a long time.

And at *Square Planet Comics*, our main focus has been publishing *Blastosaurus* ([blastosaurus.com](http://blastosaurus.com)), a story about a dinosaur who fights crime with a gun. Of course, fighting crime isn’t easy if you’re a dinosaur with a gun because a) he doesn’t know how to use it, he’s a dinosaur; b) he can’t go undercover, he can’t fit in a standard police car, he has to wear specially altered pants, so he ends up being relegated to big publicity campaigns like the safe-sex-o-saurus promotion.

To use common terminology, he’s basically disabled in terms of functioning as a normal person, but he’s a dinosaur.

Yes, it turns out his superpower is a disability. But it’s an ongoing series. It started out as a way to subvert that mutant-reptile genre of extreme dinosaurs and terrible thunder lizards and dino-riders and dino-saucers and ninja turtles. Obviously, they have been a huge influence on me. I’m telling it in a much more grown up way I think. It’s a really dense, multi-layered story where there happens to be a dinosaur with a gun in this
world and it’s not that fun. The result is that other cities start introducing other mascots like Rhinofficer, a rhinoceros who wears a policeman’s helmet for some reason. We’ve been doing that for a few years. It was published through an American Original but things went a little bit wrong. I can’t say too much about it, but I own the rights again finally, so I’m publishing it again myself. We’re doing convention specials, and we’ve re-launched the website: blastosaurus.com.

Five days a week we have I fight crime, our comic strip about two guys who work in a comic shop where there are monsters and a bear for some reason. One or two days a week, depending on how quickly we recover from a recent burglary, we’ll be publishing Blastosaurus right from issue one as a full colour comic. We’d like to do it two days a week so we can have seven days of content.

This is my tenth convention of the year so far.

This year?!

It’s a tiring life. I do comics all day long, that’s what I do.

Your team is based all around the world.

Yes. With Beyond Reality Media, Bill Geradts and I, who co-write the Duncan story, and also another story coming up later called The Darwin Fairies. It’s a retelling of the life of Charles Darwin if there were a group of vengeful fairies trying to take him out. We’re both based in New Zealand. Christain Gossett the other writer on Red Star, Warden and Attica, is in LA. Robert Rankin is in England. Our artist, Gonzalo Martinez, our colourist Juan Moraga, are both in Chile. As is Alan Robinson, who’s also in Chile. We have Darick Robertson, who is famous for doing Transmetropolitan and the Boys. He’s the first artist on Attica and later on we have his finishing artist, Richard Clarke, and he did incredible work. But everyone from Blastosaurus.com is New Zealand-based. I draw the comics. My friend Terry and I write the comics together and my wife draws I fight crime. So yeah, it’s this big international thing that thank god skype exists.

Absolutely. It sounds fantastic. You’ve got a whole heap of fans waiting to talk to you. Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.
Marta Tesoro’s Fishbones
I have to say this one threw me a bit, I was expecting another book to be based around Archangel Raphael and Elena, however Nalini has decided that she will do what she did with her Psy-Changling series and expand on other characters found in the previous books. Cannot say that it wasn’t a pleasant surprise though and am now hanging for when she does one on the blue angel Illium.

Anyways, this book is based around the vampire Dmitri, Raphael’s second, and a Guild hunter named Honor. I cannot remember Honor being in the other books, however I could be wrong and may take the time and re-read them just to be sure.

Illium finds a male vampires severed head in the Hudson River as he is passing over one night but instead of passing the case over to the Guild, Dmitri decides to investigate this case himself. The head has a very distinctive tattoo across its cheek and something about it niggles at Dmitri and hints at someone from his past. However Dmitri is unable to decipher the language that the tattoo seems to be in and asks the Guild to send a hunter over that has training in ancient and forgotten languages. Enter Honor.

Honor is a very damaged hunter, she has been living in the Guild since being rescued after being captured by vampires and kept for two months in a basement being feed off and tortured. She has moments of crippling fear that it could happen again, due to her attackers never being found, and this time she wouldn’t have the strength to make it through. Sara, the Guild Director, reminds Honor that she is still an active hunter and that she needs to face...
the world instead of hiding in the institute for the rest of her life. Honor reluctantly agrees and meets Dmitri. Although part of why Honor agrees to go is because she has had a small obsession with Dmitri, ever since she first saw him in a newspaper report, even to the point she kept a scrapbook on him. She has no idea why is feels so drawn to him, she has never met him before and she tries, unsuccessfully, to dismisses all the emotions, dreams and visions he seems to insight in her. For Dmitri’s part, Honor drags up memories from the past that he has tried very hard to forget his whole vampire life.

So begins the start of the passionate push and pull dance that all of Nalini’s characters seem to go through.

As the case goes on it does lead us into Dmitri’s past and gives the reader a very real insight as to why he is the way he is. It also reveals more and more of the horrors that Honor endured in that basement. If you are already a fan of Nalini’s work then this book is sure to please. If you haven’t liked any of her other work, then sorry but you won’t like this one either. I don’t recommend starting the series with this book either, make sure you read the rest of the series first as there are a fair few characters mentioned that may confuse you, although you could manage if you really wanted to, but why not enjoy the journey from the start?
2000 years ago God, or The Old Man as he is referred to, decided that he would reward his four favourite Archangels, Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Azrael for their many years of service and loyalty with the gift of a perfect soul mate, an Archess.

Not everyone was happy with what The Old Man had done and the other Archangels, lead by Samuel, decide to go and demand their own soul mates from The Old Man as well. Fearing for the four Archesses safety The Old Man scattered their souls to the wind and down to Earth out of reach before the four Archangels were able to claim their perfect partners. The Old Man then gave his favorites a choice, they could stay in heaven as Archangels or they could relinquish their powers and go to Earth as immortals and seek them out. All four decided to leave and make the transition to Earth. However upon Earth it was found that not all of their powers had been lost and over time new ones have began to develop, some better and some much worse than those they had had before. Over time the men have taken to living amongst mortals in the hope of finding their mates, although never for too long in one place so as not to arouse suspicion over their never aging. So when the book starts Uriel (the former Angel of Vengeance), is a famous actor known as Christopher Daniels, Michael (the former warrior angel) is a police officer for New York City, Gabriel (the former Messenger Angel) is a firefighter also for NYC and Azrael (the former Angel of Death) is the lead singer in a popular band called the Valley of Shadow. The men have also been assigned a guardian, Max, another immoral whom acts as a father figure, protector, information gather and agent.

This book mostly revolves around Uriel and I’m guessing that there will be four books in the series, one for each Archangel.
Anyways, Uriel has been the main actor in a very popular movie called Comeuppance, which has now been turned into a book. So we start with him, and Max, sitting in a limo waiting to go into a bookstore for a signing. Once in the store Uriel ducks into the women’s bathroom to avoid some avid fans and runs into Ellie, a bookstore employee. As soon as he lays eyes on her Uriel knows that he has found his Archess. Ellie for her part has no idea that she is an Archess, she knows that she has powers, can heal and control the weather for instance, but thinks that she is just a freak of nature because her parents are normal, and moves continually to avoid suspicion. Ellie is very lonely due to her nomadic lifestyle, which she also had through her childhood because her parents know of her powers and shifted around to keep her safe, and as a result she never has made lasting friendships or had a relationship ever.

For her part Ellie is also drawn to Uriel, however due to her cautious nature she fights her feelings for him and avoids him as much as she can. Uriel has to win Ellie over and then explain to her what, and who, she really is but will she believe him?

Now also throw into the mix a secret organization that has been following and trying to capture Ellie for her powers since she was a child and the Archangel Samuel whom has followed the others to Earth in hopes of claiming an Archess as his own and you have a very enjoyable read.

I actually thought that this book would be a fair bit like Nalini Singh’s Guild Hunter series, especially once vampires were mention, however there are enough differences to keep me reading and intrigued. I really enjoyed the twists and turns that the story took, there was nothing too complex to understand or just so unbelievable (besides the fact the book is based on angels…) that it had me scoffing at the absurdity of it. All in all I enjoyed it and am looking forward to the rest of the series.
The House Of The Wind

Author: Titania Hardie
Publisher: Headline
Reviewer: Jade Hounsell

The House of the Wind follows the lives of two women from the same family in two different locations and different eras of time; Madeline is in 2007 San Francisco and Mia in 1347 Tuscany.

Madeline, 24, has just lost her fiancé Christopher in a car accident and she has lost all the joy in her life. Normally a very vibrant, happy and enthusiastic person, Madeline, or Maddie as she is known, is sullen, withdrawn and naturally, depressed. Seeing her granddaughter struggling and unable to move forward, Isabella sends Maddie to Tuscany to heal and maybe learn more of their family’s past there. She hopes that in looking back Maddie will learn to look forward again.

There is also another story intertwined throughout this one involving Maddie’s work as a lawyer for a big firm and their struggle to win a particularly huge and complicated case.

Mia is 14 and lives with her aunt in a villa that tends to the needs of travellers and pilgrims (the villa is located near a holy spot in the mouth of a valley). Mia hasn’t spoken a word since coming to the villa upon the death of her mother when she was around 6 years old, she has no idea who her father is and cannot remember anything from her past. One dark night a young couple appear seeking refuge in the villa, they are reluctant to give even their names to their hosts but due to their caring and giving nature no one questions them too much, respecting their privacy. It seems that the appearance of the couple marks a time of change for Mia as well when the young woman offers to help heal Mia’s voice and to help her to remember her past.

There is also another story running through this one about the
young couple and how and why they came to be seeking refuge that night.

The way the sub stories intertwine is quite beautiful and takes nothing away from main characters’ stories but instead adds an extra element to it.

This one is not my usual genre of book and not one in the fantasy or sci-fi genre either, still saying that, I actually really enjoyed reading this book. It is extremely well written and has an attention to detail that kind of draws you to the different time and place. It makes you feel some of what the characters are feeling and makes you want to continue reading, not just to find out how it all ends but just to take the journey. While what I have told you of the plot doesn’t sound like much it really is a great read and one that I would highly recommend to most readers.
Angel Arias
Author: Marianne de Pierres
Publisher: Random House Australia
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Spoiler for Burn Bright, the first in the series.
Naif, also called Retra, is a teenager who, in the previous book Burn Bright, escaped from her home on the island of Grave to Ixion. Ixion appears to be the ideal world for teenagers; parties, drugs for those who want them and some who don’t, everything given to them including fresh clothes every day. As with everything, there is a price. At the close of Burn Bright, Naif discovered that the teenagers who are ‘withdrawn’ from Ixion society are absorbed by Night Creatures, the monsters who live in the dark on Ixion. The Night Creatures then become Ripers, the senior cast of beings on Ixion.

Naif and some of her friends escaped from Ixion at the close of Burn Bright, leaving to live on Ruzalia’s (the pirate’s) island. Ruzalia helps Naif and Markes return to Grave in an attempt to discover the link between Grave and Ixion. Their illicit journey into Grave reveals more to Grave society than they ever dreamed.

Angel Arias is dystopian science fiction, set on another planet colonised by a number of disparate species. Very much a coming of age story, Angel Arias follows Naif as she grows up and seeks to free her friends. This is Logan’s Run for the 21st century. Highly recommended to fans of young adult and dystopian fiction.
The problem with writing a horror novel and then slapping the words “You will never forget the twist” on the cover is that the novel becomes all about the twist. No matter how believable the characters, or how terrifying the events, if the twist doesn’t live up to expectations then the book has been prematurely torpedoed. Such is the problem with The People Next Door by Christopher Ransom, in that it doesn’t actually have a twist.

The People Next Door is a horror/suspense novel set in quiet American suburbia, and it attempts a more serious and bloody take on the urban fantasy genre. The novel opens with a suspenseful little scene where a young girl, running away from home, thumbs a lift from a petrol station and finds herself trapped by a superlatively creepy father-and-mother duo. That same creepiness vanishes by the time we hit chapter two, and are introduced to our primary cast; a family of generally unlikeable middle class white folk who spend most of their time complaining about each other while remaining oblivious to the threats around them. The father of the family, Andrew, is disturbed by his new neighbours, the titular people next door. They’re all too quiet for their neighbourhood, too withdrawn. They avoid both conversation, and the light. Are they hiding some dark secret? (Yes, of course.) Will there be deaths aplenty and lots of handy exposition? (Yes, of course.)

The murders start early and don’t stop the for length of the book, although the author relies on the old switcheroo far too often. Think that character’s dead? Nope, only a dream. Or a premonition. Or a concussion induced hallucination. The prose is solid but unexciting, and isn’t really enough to keep casual readers hanging on long enough to discover the twist... which, as it turns out, isn’t much of a revelation. The nature of the people next door is revealed around
halfway through the novel, but most regular readers of speculative fiction will be able to guess both the twist and the conclusion of the novel based purely on the blurb.

Can I lay down a spoiler here? Please? Look away if you still have any intention of reading this book. Nuclear vampire zombies. That’s it.

If you’re a gore hound then there might be enough in The People Next Door to keep you hooked, but for me, the end result of all these visions, unlikeable characters and lacklustre plotting is a book that simply isn’t scary. Had I read the opening chapter as a short story, I would have been satisfied. Instead I was forced to hang on through chapters of cludgy prose, waiting for the twist that never came.

Avoid.
I read Bitten after reading Kelley’s graphic novel Becoming and interviewing Kelley. Kelley said that the graphic novel Becoming needed to be read in the context of Bitten and other novels in The Otherworld series.

Elena lost her parents in a car accident when she was young. Growing up in a series of foster homes, Elena experienced sexual abuse. A survivor, Elena worked hard to succeed at school and go to college. When she was in college, Elena met and fell in love with Clayton (Clay), who betrayed her by deliberately biting her to turn her into a werewolf without even telling her he was a werewolf first. Bitten is set 10 years later. Elena has grown up with the pack of werewolves and struggled to come to terms with being a werewolf whilst never forgiving or coming to terms with Clay’s bite. About a year and a half before Bitten, Elena left the Pack and moved back to Toronto, where she had been studying. Elena met and moved in with Philip, a good man who pursued Elena until she made room for him in her life. However, Elena has never confided in Philip.

Jeremy, the Pack Alpha, telephoned Elena summoning her to the Pack. Humans have been killed, so Jeremy wants Elena to fulfil her role of research and ‘handler’ to investigate and deal with the deaths. Philip hears the phone message and encourages Elena to phone and return to visit her family. Eventually Elena returns to the Pack’s home, assists in the investigation and contends with Clay once more.

There are explicit sex scenes in Bitten. Well-written (no puppies sitting up here!) and conflicted. Whilst some may criticise Elena for being unfaithful to Philip, it is common for childhood victims of sexual abuse to have poor boundaries when it comes to physical
contact and sex. This added some degree of realism to the story. According to Kelley, in the next few novels in The Otherworld series Elena goes on to face her issues and to work on her relationship with Clay.

Bitten is an urban fantasy/paranormal romance with flawed central characters who don’t always make the ‘right’ choice. They then have to live with the consequences of their choices. Bitten has more depth and character than novels like Twilight but isn’t as challenging to read as, for example, The Guardian Angel’s Journal or A Song of Ice and Fire. Highly recommended for fans of urban fantasy/paranormal romance.
Shipbreaker

Author: Paolo Bacigalupi
Publisher: Atom
Release date: July 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Nailer, a teenage boy, and his friends work to strip lightweight salvage from shipwrecks for a living. Nailer’s father is a violent drug addict, so he relies more on his friends, especially Pima, and her mother Sadna. Their world is small and impoverished but the strength of friendships and community is strong. A hurricane destroys their village, leaving many survivors and a wrecked clipper ship off the coast that Nailer and Pima discover, along with a survivor who came to be known as Lucky Girl.

Shipbreaker’s world has some similarities to that of Windup Girl in that the level of the oceans has risen, sinking exclusive waterfront estates providing pithy social comment on real estate values and intelligence. However, in Shipbreaker the genetic codes of food have not been destroyed; villagers can harvest their own food when time permits. The primary cause of concern for these impoverished villagers appears to be their lack of money leading to low expectations and short life spans. Nailer’s interaction with the wealthy in Shipbreaker reveals a contrasting world in which the affluent abide. The contrast of the two worlds in Shipbreaker is food for thought in this era, where the gap between the rich and poor is ever-widening.

Shipbreaker is dystopian young adult fiction that will appeal to speculative fiction and dystopian fiction fans of all ages. Highly recommended.
The Rare: Books One and Two

Solace and Grief
The Key to Starveldt
Author: Foz Meadows
Publisher: Ford St
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Solace was born a vampire (not the sparkly kind, I assure you). Because Solace’s parents gave their lives to give her life, Solace grew up in a group home in Sydney, Australia. As she grew older she grew into her vampire-ness (growing up was part of the magic around her unusual heritage). When she turned 17 she ran away from the group home to find a group of friends living in a squat outside of mainstream society. These friends are all Rare, or people who are more than human in their abilities. Manx, Jess, Evan, Electra, Laine, Glide… There are 13 people in this group of friends whose lives revolve around the squat and the Gadfly, a bar where they spend the money Electra finds with her gift to acquire lost things.

Solace’s heritage and history starts to catch up with Solace and her friends. Villains expose themselves. Characters are not who they seem to be, and no-one is black or white, although some characters are blue. This is, in part, a coming of age story where the characters are finding out who they are. This includes sexual experimentation that is part of this growing up process; while not judgemental in any way, The Rare exposes some of the consequences of this kind of experimenting within one’s group of friends. Drug use is also mentioned, including a ‘bad trip’.

Joss Whedon has been criticised for having too large a cast of central characters in some series; the same criticism can be applied to The Rare, with a central group of 8 protagonists being overly large. However, this size group of friends allows for exploration of relationships in different ways that would otherwise be lacking.

In the beginning of Solace and Grief, a great deal of effort goes into exploring Solace’s group home, to the extent that I assumed the novel would revolve around the home and its inhabitants.
While they are relevant to the story, Solace moves on and so does the story. The next portion of the story seems to dwell without direction, which is reflective of the lives of Solace and her friends at the squat. At about page 150 I was thinking that, while this has features of good storytelling, it hadn’t grabbed me. I decided that it was due to lack of conflict. Within a few short pages the conflict really started and the story took off, flying until the end of the second novel, where we have to wait for the next in the series to be released.

The Rare has elements of Neverwhere by Neil Gaiman, His Dark Materials by Philip Pullman, Friends (the TV series) and Buffy. As such, I’d recommend this series for fans of all the above. Although I’d be cautious about giving this series to younger teens, I would highly recommend The Rare for senior high schoolers and older readers as a means of exploring issues while enjoying a good read.
The Revisionists

Author: Thomas Mullen
Publisher: Hodder
Release date: 27 September 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Zed is from the far future and has travelled back to present-day Washington to ensure that disasters take place in this era that facilitate the ‘Perfect Present’ of his time. Zed is effectively a time cop in a story based on the idea of an adjustment bureau as in the Philip K. Dick short story of the same name, similar to the move The Adjustment Bureau.

Leo apparently travelled around the world doing mysterious stuff that he can’t talk about. For most of the novel I was waiting for a reveal or confirmation of who he was, so the less said about Leo the better. Sari is a refugee from Indonesia who fled to Korea only to be brought to the USA as domestic help for a diplomat. The diplomat’s immunity effectively entitles him to treat Sari as a domestic slave and worse. Sari meets Leo on one of her limited forays to purchase food for her employer’s family. Leo speaks her language, Sari is lonely and desperate, so a relationship of sorts develops between Sari and Leo. Tasha is a black woman who lost her brother in the war, so now she’s struggling to find meaning in her life and loss.

Four very different characters walk in and out of each other’s lives with varying motivations and surprising impacts, much like the Law of Unintended Consequences. At first I thought The Revisionists had missed the potential ramifications of time travel and its consequences, but as the characters’ layers were stripped away, exposing them, their desires and their fears, it became apparent that this was an intelligent time travel story. Possibly the only factor of time travel not explored in this novel is the grandfather paradox. Mullen, as author, appeared to actively avoid engaging in discussions of paradox, focusing instead on themes that are more concrete and relevant to contemporary society.
Themes that I consider to be more concrete and relevant include discussion of diplomatic immunity and abuses of that privileged position; racial conflicts, their obscure origins and self-perpetuation; power corrupting; confidentiality versus accountability; media feeding frenzies and their consequences; and finally an exploration of existential angst alongside a debate over the ‘great man’ versus ‘everyman’ theory regards to change.

The plot was well-paced, with twists and turns that I found myself unable to predict. I devoured this book, relishing it as intelligent science fiction. I definitely give The Revisionists 4 to 4 1/2 out of 5 stars, and highly recommend The Revisionists to fans of SF, thrillers, anyone who enjoyed The Adjustment Bureau (the movie) and to those who enjoy intelligent reads exploring contemporary issues. I would definitely participate in a book club discussion of The Revisionists if I had the opportunity.
The Steel Remains
Cold Commands

Author: Richard Morgan
Publisher:
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

A certain bookshop (who, on Facebook, claims to be a Hal-like self-aware gestalt identity) described *The Steel Remains* and its sequel, *Cold Commands*, as homoerotic porn (meaning the LGBT equivalent of, say, Nalini Singh’s novels). I hadn’t picked up on that element in the promotional material, so once again I found myself reviewing something that I feel woefully inadequately educated to discuss. However, I have read a bit of romance/erotica and I’ve studied sexuality as part of both my degrees. I’ll do my best to provide a balanced discussion of *The Steel Remains*, hopefully enabling people to decide for themselves whether to read the series.

*The Steel Remains* opens with Ringil, an ageing (thirties or forties maybe?) soldier living in a village far from home. Within the first few paragraphs it is established that Ringil is gay, to the point that I felt I was being excessively bludgeoned with this fact. After mulling this over, I decided that establishing this fact so firmly was probably a positive as the reader could not later feel betrayed by the author introducing an alternate lifestyle later. Ringil’s sexuality is not merely a happenstance either; his sexuality, his exploits and his sexual history are focal, overshadowing the fantasy/SF storyline where Ringil is searching for his cousin and the country is being attacked.

Archeth is half human, left behind by her people, caught up in the human court as a matter of survival. There are hints that she is a lesbian. Good at her job, Archeth is advisor to the emperor who plays political and relational games with her.

Egar is clanmaster to the steppe people, screwing any big breasted woman he attracts. Irresponsible, non-traditional, Egar incites rebellion against himself. His previous relationship to Ringil is
established early in reminiscences then takes a backseat while Egar is having sex, angering the shaman who is also having sex…

While I don’t mind a good sex scene, preferably as the climax (pardon the pun) for a romance embedded in a larger science fiction or fantasy story, I’m not a fan of erotica as such. Thus *The Steel Remains* is doubly challenging for me, as sex is mostly either homosexual, heterosexual involving abuse (e.g. the emperor using a concubine in front of Archeth who he believes is a lesbian, or the shaman torturing a whore before being sexually abused himself) or bestiality (the shaman has a wolf, as a man has a woman in bed). The exception to this rule is Egar, who is lustily heterosexual, and yet the scenes where he has sex also include him pitying the woman he is with; there is no love there and very little liking beyond physical attraction.

Character development looked promising and occasionally brilliant by the time I stopped reading. For example, we meet Ringil and, after he’s firmly established as a homosexual in a community that strongly disapproves of his sexual proclivities but admires him as a hero, Ringil walks up a street to deal with a threat followed by the villagers. His internal dialogue leading up to and from the point when all the frightened villagers stop following him, was entertaining, insightful and amusing. Later Ringil’s mother has him dragged out of bed after a debaucherous night, only to send him on a quest. The scene between mother and son felt incredibly real, fraught with history, love and exasperation that both felt for the other. This was an excellent stimulus for Ringil’s acquiescence, setting out on a quest for which he has no real emotional incentive other than love and respect for his mother.

Joe Abercrombie gave a quote for the book stating that *The Steel Remains* is ‘Bold, brutal and making no compromises.’ The descriptions of gore in *The Steel Remains* are probably quite accurate and definitely aren’t pretty. I tend to try to switch off my ‘inner eye’ when reading descriptions of gore; I was surprised that I liked Abercrombie’s *The Heroes* so much, considering the gore and brutality in the story. *The Steel Remains* has descriptions of killing by a finger to the eye that made me want to wash my fingers,
and I was mentally almost begging him to stop the description and move on half way through the paragraph. Ritual torture and executions were described in detail, especially the death of a man Ringil loved as a youth. There was a rape scene that was mercifully brief although bloody and detailed, describing an ‘initiation’ in a men’s college and the consequences for the victim and the victim’s relationship with his brother who walked away knowing the rape was about to occur.

The prose varies in style and quality, from quotes like this: ‘Archeth remembered the long limping columns out of Ennishmin, the desolate tendrils of smoke from the burning settlements they left behind, scrawled on the washed-out winter sky like a writ in accusation.’ At the other end of the spectrum is simplistic prose with excessive use of the word ‘fuck’ and its derivatives. It seemed like everyone spoke and swore in a similar manner, which seemed rather unimaginative considering the varied backgrounds from which they came. At times ‘fuck’ or a derivative is even used in the narration; perhaps a thesaurus might help?

*The Steel Remains* is a book I struggled to get half way through because of the brutality not the sexuality. In the beginning I was concerned about Ringil having sex with ‘boys’ and corrupting the youth of the community; my concern was about power inequity in sexual relationships and how this is portrayed in fiction. By the time I finished reading, at about half way through, my concerns were allayed because *The Steel Remains* is not a work of apologetics for paedophilia. It seemed to me that *The Steel Remains* was exploring the good, the bad and the ugly of homosexuality and some heterosexual relationships.

If you’re into noir, enjoy brutality and gore alongside some unconventional erotica, then *The Steel Remains* is the book for you. *Cold Commands* is the sequel.

DMF is looking for someone who enjoys this type of book to review both.
I’m an English teacher and I’ve been known to teach poetry, both writing and critiquing it. I can’t, however, write the stuff myself. All my attempts end up sounding like “Roses are red/violets are blue/”, which I find frustrating and keeps me in constant awe of those who can write poetry.

Most of us are aware of the canon; everything from Keats and Wordsworth, through to Blake and Nash. Some of us even read (and love) Australian poets, such as the vastly under-rated C.J. Dennis. Almost everyone knows of Poe and Lovecraft. Heck, even my students are aware of the Simpsons references.

But what most of us don’t know, and indeed I wasn’t fully aware of until a year or so ago, is that weird poetry is not only an important genre in its own right, but is alive and well and thriving in this modern age. And, to top it all off, it is very well represented on the worldstage by fabulous Australian poets such as Leigh Blackmore and Kyla Lee Ward.

Charles (Danny) Lovecraft (yes, that is his real name – he once showed me his driver licence to prove it) is the brains and muscle behind P’rea Press, a small independent publisher specialising in weird poetry. He’s no slouch as a poet himself, passionate about the genre and publishes wonderful titles that are respected and collected around the world. Not only does he release works by poets such as Blackmore and Ward, but also collections by international writers like Richard L. Tierney, a Lovecraftian bard of fifty years standing.

So you love Poe’s *The Raven*, or you are deeply into the Cthulu Mythos.... but where does one go from there? An excellent place
to start would be with S.T. Joshi, an internationally renowned critic and editor of weird poetry. Joshi’s excellent *Emperor of Dreams* is a collection of essays that not only discusses the importance of Poe and Lovecraft, but delves into the little known poets that worked alongside, under and afterwards, poets such as George Sterling, Clark Ashton Smith, Samuel Loveman, Donald Wandrei, Frank Belknap Long, Ann Schwader, and Donald Sidney-Fryer. Even our own Blackmore gets a mention.

References on weird poetry are incredibly rare in a world where texts can be found on just about any subject, so this small book is a welcome addition. It’s highly readable, and interesting in its own right. I wasn’t familiar with any of the poems, and knew of only a few of the writers, and yet I loved reading their life stories, and discovering them within the context of the weird poetry family tree.

And as a starting map to strike out on your own? I strongly recommend *Emperor of Dreams*. I’ve made notes on a few writers and poems that I wish to explore. And I can imagine Joshi leaning back in his chair saying, “My work here is done.”

Addendum: I happen to know P’rea Press is always on the lookout for new talent. If you’re a weird poet, contact Lovecraft through the website, [www.preapress.com](http://www.preapress.com). And don’t be afraid to explore their other titles either. Watch out for a forthcoming publication that will feature the work of international poets Sterling, Smith, Tierney, Bruce Boston, Michael Fantina, and Wade German, and Australians Blackmore, Ward, Charles Lovecraft, and Earl Livings.
The Enterprise of Death

Author: Jesse Bullington
Publisher: Orbit
Year: 2011
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

Nobody expected the Spanish Inquisition. But arrive it did, and Renaissance Europe was held in its vice-like grip. Awa, a young African slave to an Egyptian woman. Both are captured, and become unwilling (and on occasions, unwitting) slaves to a necromancer. Attempts to escape are futile, as spells and curses bind her. That is, until the day when he gives her freedom. There is, of course, a catch. He is leaving the physical plane, but will return in ten years to reclaim her, body and soul. Her only chance of redemption may lie in one of his texts he has hidden somewhere in the world, as he cannot take them with him beyond the physical world.

Awa becomes friends with a painter turned mercenary, a lesbian gunsmith turned brothel madam, and a cast of others, living, dead and undead. Together they embark on an adventure, in search of salvation, not only for Awa but the others also.

The blurb on the cover describes this as “Tarantino crossed with Rabelais”, and I must confirm that as being accurate. It’s dark, very dark. Macabre and profane, taboos broken left, right and centre. It’s everything I’m not, as a writer, and I wasn’t sure whether I would like this book or not simply from the blurbs and reviews on the cover.

I loved it.

Yes, it has blood, perversion and cannibalism (and worse), but it’s also very, very funny. Completely tongue in cheek the whole time, with immensely likeable and believable characters (within the realms of fantasy, anyway), it comfortably crosses genres between horror, fantasy, historical fiction, and comedy. I simply couldn’t put this book down.

Bullington is a writer whose work I’ll be actively seeking out. If his previous books are anything like this one, then count me as a major fan.
The Broken Ones

Author: Stephen M. Irwin
Publisher: Hachette
Year: 2011
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

The dead have risen. Not as zombies, but as ghosts. Everyone is haunted by someone, whether it’s a friend, a relative or someone completely unknown to them. And people can only see their ghost as they watch, silently. The world has fallen apart. Suicide figures have risen, as the world struggles to cope in the new world. Crime is out of control, and governments spiral out of control.

Detective Oscar Mariani runs a department that investigates murders and crime that may be caused by the ghosts, people claimed to have been urged by the spectres, or just driven mad from the hauntings. But how do you prove or disprove a crime was caused by the presence of something that no-one else can see?

Trying to make sense of his own ghost, running from his own guilt, bathed in apathy and working in a corrupt environment, he is finally jarred to life after attending the scene of a murder that bears all the markings of a ritualistic serial murder.

But are those in charge of him somehow involved, and will he stay alive long enough to solve the case?

Irwin’s second novel is set in a world rich in detail and apathy. It’s a unique take on a post-apocalyptic world and for the most part it works rather well. A cross-genre novel with elements of thriller, police procedural, horror and supernatural, it certainly has some spooky moments.

The writing is tight, the dialogue solid, and the characters well defined. Irwin hasn’t shied away from setting this in a clearly Australian world, although I suspect that wouldn’t be a hindrance to overseas readers, as the city could be anywhere in the world. Although Irwin is a Brisbane writer, I found myself using Melbourne as the template for the streets and suburbs.

Overall, a solid and engaging book from a writer that is sure to continue to impress.
Theodore Boone: The Abduction

Author: John Grisham
Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton
Year: 2011
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

Theodore Boone is a young teenager. The smart, witty son of a couple of lawyers who would rather hang around the courtrooms than go to school. He’s on firstname terms with not only the judges, but half the legal fraternity in town.

His best friend, April, disappears from her bedroom in the middle of the night and no-one knows what’s happened to her.

Theo decides to utilise his legal knowledge and connections to investigate the missing person. He mobilises his friends and relatives, and before long is on her trail.

Or is he wrong, and the police right?

I started reading John Grisham back in the early 90s when The Firm was released. I read the first half dozen of his books, and enjoyed them, but ultimately found them a little too formulaic for my liking. And now Grisham has turned his hand to young adult fiction. (Apparently he joked that he needed to claw back his number one position from Harry Potter)

As a school teacher, I’m always looking for the type of book that teenagers, particularly reluctant boy readers, will enjoy. I spoke to my librarian about the first book (this is number two in an ongoing series) and she told me that it had appealed to a small number of boys who weren’t interested in reading the regular action books typical of that demographic.

From an adult’s point of view, I found the characters to be slightly lacklustre and underdeveloped, the mystery to not be a mystery at all, and pages of irrelevance and non-sequitur stories. He even goes and becomes involved in another case for a few pages simply to prove that he is capable as a lawyer.

While this book may appeal to certain demographics, I don’t believe it’s a major move forward in the world of YA publishing.
Path of the Stray

Author: Kim Falconer
Publisher: Harper Voyager
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Path of the stray is an epic fantasy story spanning two generations of women in one family. The prologue is not referred to again within this novel, so disregarding that, the story opens with Janis, a techno-witch who believes in the power of thought to control one’s world. Janis works for ASSIST, a scientific organisation whose motives and goals are suspect. Janis meets Luka, a male co-worker, and develops a working relationship that encompasses working for the good of Mother Earth outside of work hours. This working relationship includes working together as parents of Ruby, the child of a one-night stand whose DNA holds a great secret.

In their attempts to recreate wolves from stored DNA, Luka and Janis accidentally create werewolves. The matriarch of the pack is Celia, a wise and gentle leader, but after the loss of one of the pups another wolf, Daos, rebels. The ramifications of the loss of the pup, Raynar, are felt both on Earth and on Gaela, a parallel world accessed through a portal with a sentient guardian. Global politics on both worlds are a crucial element tied to this familial saga.

Path of the stray includes many elements of stories that may be familiar to the reader, all strung together in a fresh, new story. Elements that come to mind include an infinite improbability drive (at which I laughed out loud), a techno-witch is the new technomage (Babylon 5), an uber-powerful computer takes on the role of Gandalf and goes AWOL as in Lord of the Rings, werewolves and a portal between parallel worlds with its own ‘wormhole alien’ as in Deep Space 9. Anne McCaffrey’s Pern books have also heavily influenced Kim’s work. The sacred feminine is the source of conflict on Earth where men seek to scapegoat women for the problems of a dying world and flawed society, but greed and power are the source of conflict on Gaela, a parallel world where women appear
Dark Matter

to rule. Path of the stray stands on its own merit while utilising recognisable themes, tropes and archetypes.

The supernatural appears to be unlimited in this story: it includes positive visualisation as a means of controlling the world, astral travel and chakras as well as what might be more traditional ideas of magic and psychic power in spell-casting, glamours, telekinesis, telepathy, mind-control and brain-wiping.

The science used appears to be feasible in the beginning but rapidly expands to the field of the supernatural, where a sentient computer builds himself a body in a parallel world that world only existing for that purpose. He then brings his body across to Earth, inhabits said body and then goes into another parallel world where he appears to be wirelessly connected to the entire planet.

There were a few glitches in the story. For example, once someone calls a stranger by name, then a few lines later asks who he is. [SPOILER ALERT] The biggest such glitch is late in the story, so don’t read this if you dislike spoilers. Ruby goes to hospital knowing she is going to have her blood tested, then freaks out when it comes to the point of taking blood. At the time this seemed like a huge hole in the story, so much so that I put down the book and worked through the story threads, then I created an alternative storyline that could have had the same outcome, before continuing to read. Quite a bit later it turned out that Ruby had justification for freaking out, but I didn’t get that explanation when I needed it. This, therefore, ceased to be a hole in the plot. [END OF LATE-IN-THE-BOOK SPOILER]

Rowena Cory Daniells said that she used to read books three times: the first for enjoyment, and the second two times to analyse the book. I would love to have that much time to read as reading critically the first time through detracts from enjoyment. I’m constantly analysing, measuring, assessing. This being the case I found two points in Path of the stray that are points of minor concern that should not detract from the enjoyment of readers.

Firstly, when ASSIST (the scientific organisation) decides to choose a scapegoat, management reinvents the idea of witches in order to target women. A gambit like this is much more likely to
be effective if it starts with a specific individual as a scapegoat, then characteristics of the individual are used as determining factors in order to find replacement scapegoats in the future, thus victimisation snowballs. For example, if a particular woman was chosen as a scapegoat and that woman was known to be a witch or wiccan, then when looking for a new scapegoat ASSIST could look for known associates, later typecasting all witches and wiccans as the troublemakers. As Janis was not the initial target due to her usefulness to ASSIST, this is not a plot killer. What I have described could have happened in the background while the reader is focused elsewhere, but this is not made clear.

The second point is that Luka had an incredibly valuable estate: an oasis of power, clean water and thriving plants. In an atmosphere of paranoia and scapegoating I think that it is likely that he would have been under much greater scrutiny and threat than was apparent due to the value of his asset. Again, Kim can justify the time she took to explore these issues as Luka was acknowledged to be valuable to some extent. It just seemed to me that someone higher up the food chain would have seized the asset early on, claiming superior entitlement as occurs in abusive relationships. And yet, if you do too much in the first book, you could cut short the story... this is the problem with reviewing the first book before you've read the trilogy.

Sex is mentioned in *Path of the stray* but descriptions are not explicit; about the most explicit text I recall are references to someone’s hand going into someone else’s pants, or someone straddling her partner while partially dressed before being caught. I think this book is acceptable for teens, but that does depend on the teen and the caregiver.

The issues and themes explored in *Path of the stray* would make excellent copy for book clubs, feminist groups, climate change groups and more. *Path of the stray* is ideal for the reader who can suspend disbelief and just go with the flow, following the twists and turns. Being pedantic about the science detracts from enjoyment of the story. Suspend disbelief and enjoy the ride. I think readers who enjoy Anne McCaffrey and similar fantasy stories with a strong magical component will enjoy *Path of the stray*.
Side Jobs

Author: Jim Butcher
Publisher: Orbit
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Side Jobs is a collection of short stories about Harry Dresden, a wizard who lives in Chicago, working as a detective-come-magical expert. Based around a growing series of novels, these short stories have mostly been written for inclusion in anthologies and magazines when the author was invited to contribute. Each story has a foreword giving context around the writing of the story and placing it within the Harry Dresden timeline.

The very first short story was never published before because it was written while Jim Butcher was developing his writing ability. Although an atrocious story in many ways, I loved reading it because, well, really, because I’m a fan. I could see all the basic elements of the series in this short story that had been taken and refined. This was an exercise in development of skill, which is not something writers often share. Also, this story that was previously unpublished is also canon: other Dresden books refer to some of the events in this story, thus incorporating it into the whole. Let’s just pass over the trolls. And the plot holes. It’s fine.

The other stories vary in tone and content, showing more of favourite side-characters, having some fun, giving Harry a hard time…

One of the issues I have with short stories is that often I’ve finished reading them and felt dissatisfied. By definition, a short story cannot have great character development or world-building – there isn’t the room. My grade six English teacher said that every short story should have a twist at the end. I can still remember a few of the stories we studied, which has deeply impacted my attitude to short stories. In my quest for science fiction reading during high school, I found anthologies including stories that compensated for two dimensional characters by including twisty conclusions
or intelligent exploration of philosophy, ethics or social comment. Later these seemed to disappear from shelves, so the only short stories I seemed to read were the ones in the magazines in doctor’s waiting rooms. Then it got to the point where I couldn’t read these any more.

The short stories in Side jobs may not allow for character development in themselves, but the larger series of novels provides the necessary character development and world-building. This frees these short stories to be anecdotes in a much larger framework. Sometimes there are unforeseen twists, at others Dresden just seems to barrel through the story to the end. Throwing fireballs that do not comply with RPG (role-playing game) rules. Seriously.

I have really enjoyed having Side Jobs sitting on my coffee table, waving at me when I’ve had a spare half hour or so, or as a sorbet between courses of epic fantasy. Side Jobs could be the beginning of me reading more short stories.

Side jobs is highly recommended for fans of the Dresden Files. If you’re not a fan and don’t mind jumping in to a short story anthology without the surrounding character development or background knowledge, then I recommend skipping the first story and reading the rest. You never know, you might find yourself embarking on the longer journey with the Dresden Files.
Liesl & Po

Author: Lauren Oliver
Publisher: Hodder
Release date: 11 October 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Liesl is a little girl locked in an attic room. Po is a ghost who comes to visit her when she stops drawing; he misses her drawings. When Liesl’s father died, his ashes were put in a wooden box. Po helped Liesl escape the attic room, in order to lay Liesl’s father to rest. Will is an orphan adopted by an alchemist in order to be his slave. The alchemist put the most powerful magic in the world in a wooden box to be delivered to the Lady Premiere. There was a mix-up with the boxes.

As is the case with children’s books, too much said here and there is little point reading the novel. The characters are engaging, the plot builds up well to a dramatic climax, all of which are suitable for primary and middle school aged children. Even though there are ghosts, the story is suitable for all except possibly the most sensitive child.

Not quite a picture book, and yet not devoid of art, Liesl and Po includes a series of what I think are either ink paintings or watercolours in grey scale. These are charming, adding life and expression to a number of scenes.

Liesl and Po is a Lemony Snickett-flavoured Cinderella story where Cinders is creative and active in her own story, she just needs a little help from her friends. This is a delightful children’s story, highly recommended for children and those who enjoy good children’s books. I thought Liesl and Po was like fruit cake – fruity, nutty, not too sweet, not too sour and a quite satisfying snack.
Black Rain

Author: Christopher Ruz:
http://www.amazon.com/Black-Rain-ebook/dp/B0067SNCT0

There’s a storm sweeping in, dark enough to swallow the world. Now Liri and her terrified husband are trapped inside their apartment, watching the lights on the hill vanish behind the rain. There’s no power, no phone signal, Liri is sick and the taps are running black...

Is there any way to escape this apocalypse? Or will the end of the world be heralded not by trumpets, but by the drumming of rain?

Reader reviews:
Black Rain is eerie and dim and incites a real feeling of claustrophobia. The room seems to shrink as you read, shadows gathering and the world outside fading into nothing. Just you and the equally freaked out characters riding out the storm... This story has an air of quiet menace that puts me in mind of China Mieville’s apocalyptic short stories. Characters that feel like real people struggling to retain a sense of normalcy in the face of the inhuman, inescapable and inexplicable.
Poirot and the Doctor
Author: Christopher Ruz
http://www.amazon.com/Poirot-and-the-Doctor-ebook/dp/B00681DKMK

Twenty years ago, Harold’s little sister vanished into the decrepit mansion known as the Bonehouse. Now, Harold is a middle-aged Agatha Christie aficionado, still obsessing over what might have been if he’d only been a little braver that day, if he’d only been a little bit more like his childhood hero - the fourth Doctor.

But when Harold meets an out-of-town cosplayer in full Tom Baker kit, he decides to do as the Doctor would have done, and return to the Bonehouse in search of answers. But can one amateur thespian and one drunken science fiction fan really solve this mystery, and put little Elizabeth to rest?

Reader Reviews:
Poirot. The Doctor. Cosplayers, London, realities bleeding into each other, science fiction and mystery fandoms, second chances... Christopher Ruz captures the ‘characters’ of the two perfectly, while they both still remain very human. The short story format is one that I’m a tough sell on, but Poirot and the Doctor is just yet another shining example of how Christopher Ruz keeps hooking me time and time again.
They Trade in Eyes

Author: Christopher Ruz

http://www.amazon.com/They-Trade-In-Eyes-ebook/dp/B0067SN36M

If you want a job in this economy, if you want to be a somebody instead of an anybody, you need new eyes. Schoolgirls and businessmen alike are trading in their old fleshsacks for cobalt plated units with laser-blue irises. Eyes that can interpret petabytes of data at a glance. Eyes that record every moment of your life.

But when eye-swapping - and, in turn, memory-swapping - becomes the new street fad, a black market in second-hand eyes flowers overnight. And when there’s nobody willing to trade in their eyes?

Business is business. Someone has to make a killing.

Reader Reviews:
‘They Trade in Eyes’ had me thinking about it for a week afterwards... every time I put my glasses on. The story urges the imagination to truly explore a reality where bionic eyes are a fashion item, a symbol of status, a means of sharing memories, dreams and lives, while stimulating a sinister black market trade and a degrading and damaging social heirarchy. A dystopian future where nothing is truly private and your soul can easily be stolen... After reading this story for the first time, I walked around doing my daily errands still lost in the world Christopher Ruz had created. It must have been hours before the feeling of limbo started to wear off, but thoughts of a world where eyes are the new currency kept me up long into the night. The characters are so well written, you are immersed in life as they see it; their twisted and dark society becomes yours.
Becoming

Author: Kelley Armstrong
Artist: Angilram
Publisher: Indyplanet.com
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

*Becoming* is a free graphic novel available online at [www.kelleyarmstrong.com/PDFs/Becoming.pdf](http://www.kelleyarmstrong.com/PDFs/Becoming.pdf).

Elena has been bitten by Clay, a werewolf, without even knowing that Clay was a werewolf. *Becoming* opens with Jeremy, the Pack alpha, explaining to Elena that she was bitten and that Clay is a werewolf. Elena goes through the trauma of changing, gradually learning control, but never accepting what was done to her. *Becoming* follows her story, giving the background to the key event, the bite and immediate consequences, that are briefly outlined in *Bitten*, the first *Women of The Otherworld* series.

I read *Becoming* as part of my research for interviewing Kelley (see Dark Matter Issue 5), without having read any of the novels that give *Becoming* context. Without this necessary background, *Becoming* seemed brutal, especially where it revealed the actions to which Elena resorted in order to escape the Pack. Kelley assured me that *Becoming* was written in response to fan requests for her to write Elena’s backstory, so reading *Becoming* on its own is taking it out of its intended context. Once read in context, *Becoming* is still full of angst and drama, but it is softened slightly, knowing the similar histories of Clay and Elena and Clay’s undisputed albeit selfish love of Elena.

The artwork develops throughout the comic as the artist develops her skills and style. The artwork tends towards realistic line drawings filled with colour. The starkness of black blocked-in areas on Elena’s face as she screams against what has been done add to the drama of the story. My personal favourite panel
dark matter

is early on, where Elena is tied to the bed (to protect humans) and surrounded by images reflected in broken pieces of mirror. This is an evocative splash screen.

Becoming is a comic book written and drawn by women for a fan base that has a large proportion of women. While I highly recommend reading this comic and supporting Becoming, it is necessary to read at least Bitten, preferably more of the novel series, in order to place Becoming in an appropriate context.
I love Korean cinema. Their stories are often incomprehensible, their characters sometimes completely unsympathetic, but damn, do they know how to create a spectacle. Oldboy, Shiri, and now Haunters – what’s in the water over there that brings out such dark storylines and such attention to detail? Regardless of whether you enjoy the narrative (I did) or sympathise with the two superpowered main characters (kinda), you’ll leave Haunters feeling like you’ve just been slapped across the face. It’s supercharged, non-stop, sci-fi horror action.

How best to sum it up? Imagine two of the X-Men cast who never got discovered by Doctor Xavier. Instead of becoming heroes (or master villains), they simply carve out their own existence in an otherwise uncaring world – Cho-in uses his mind-controlling ability to become a petty thief, while Kyu-nam earns his crust in an auto-repair shop, consistently surprised at how his injuries always heal so miraculously.

Chance throws Cho-in and Kyu-nam against each other – when Cho-in tries to rob Kyu-nam’s shop, Kyu’s boss ends up dead, and Kyu realises he’s met the embodiment of absolute moral depravity. Kyu, and Kyu alone, is immune to Cho’s mind controlling powers. Thus, he must be the one to stop him.

So begins a superpowered action epic, with Cho throwing everything he can at the near-unstoppable Kyu – which is usually other innocent people. Yep, Cho has no sympathy for bystanders, and frequently uses his mind-control as a weapon of mass destruction.
Kudos to the director, Min-suk Kim, for always keeping this aspect of the film truly horrifying. In a lesser director’s hands, scenes of whole crowds hurling themselves, lemming-like, to their deaths, might become comical. It isn’t. It’s truly disturbing, and no amount of comic relief or high-paced car chase can distract from the rising bodycount. Cho is a truly riveting villain, even if his motives are never really made clear – he makes Magneto and Mr. Glass seem childish by comparison.

When Haunters finished, I felt numb from sensory overload. As I said before, the story isn’t particularly deep. There are no revelations as to the origins of Cho-in’s or Kyu-nam’s powers. Just the forces of darkness clashing with a bumbling, good natured force of light, and all the action and blood that entails.

It won’t change your life, but Haunters is solid as either a superhero film or a dark urban fantasy, and absolutely worth your time.

© 2010 United Pictures & ZIP CINEMA
Freedom

From the creator of AKIRA: Katsuhiro Otomo
Animation Power: Sunrise (Cowboy Bebop, Mobile Suit Gundam)
Distributor: Madman
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Official blurb:
In the year 2041, mankind created their first space colony on the moon. But after a freak cataclysm devastated human civilisation on Earth, the republic of the moon built a domed megalopolis known as Eden. Now in the year 2267, a boy called Takeru spends his time engaging in hover-craft races against rival street gangs, unaware that he is about to embark in the journey of unearthing Eden’s origin.

Review:
This is good, solid dystopian science fiction with added interest in the form of bike racing and other pop culture references. Appealing to a wide range, in my opinion Freedom is suitable for all ages: primary school to young adult and the young at heart.

Freedom is a short series, all on one DVD, with a whole DVD of extras featuring multiple trailers, the advertisement from which the series was born and the development team visiting anime expos in places like the USA. Interviews with the creators talk about how the series was developed and how the team all brought something unique to the table.

Viewers have the choice of subtitles or dubbing for the series, and subtitles for the extras. The subtitles are in white with a black border, so they could have been done better. I prefer yellow subtitles in a clear view font, but these are okay.

© 2006 Freedom Committee
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.”

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.
Ian Gunn 1958-1998


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 NERRRRRD!!! 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.
Rebecca Muir

Rebecca was first introduced to the fantasy genre at about eight, when her mother walked into the room and handed her the box set of the Chronicles of Narnia, saying “This is about to be shown on TV and it’s really good, but you have to read the books first”.

A prolific reader (book-worm genes are strong in her family), she grew up reading a wide range of literature including sci-fi and fantasy, but has really been introduced to the genre properly by her husband Erik. He (horrified that she hadn’t already seen it) made her sit down and watch Star Wars, and has introduced her (and got her hooked) on Star Trek, Stargate and Doctor Who. They have watched Babylon 5, Andromeda, Firefly and some other shows together, as well as reading many sci-fi and fantasy books together (a chapter read aloud at bedtime most nights!) Favourite authors would be too numerous to mention. She has been introduced to Starcraft, again by her husband and his brothers.

Rebecca has a degree in engineering, and works part time from home, allowing her to raise two small children and pass on the book-worm heritage to them.

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.