dark matter

Issue Seven, Jan 2012
SF, Fantasy & Art
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Neil Gaiman looking longingly up at the gutter at his Melbourne appearance, December 16, 2011, photo by Nalini Haynes

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Volunteers' photos are courtesy of the volunteers;
Images attributed where known otherwise usually Nalini Haynes.

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 and on Twitter @DarkMatterzine. 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.

Editorial

Dear Reader,

Well, I've finally managed to get DMF issue 7 out the door. It's been delayed because of tradie dramas before Christmas, followed by Christmas and then two weeks of the flu for me. C'est la vie. I hope you enjoy the issue.

Don't just read DMF's contents page, flick through this enormous tome for items of interest. While you may not have heard of Rob Lloyd, if you are a Doctor Who fan you will enjoy Rob's interview where he talks about his stage play *Who, Me* and gets his geek on. Tansy Rayner Roberts talks about writing, feminism, sex scenes and more. John Richards talks about making *Outland*, the gay Australian *Big Bang Theory*. These are only three examples of the gems waiting to be unearthed in this tome. So, dear Reader, I encourage you to explore these pages carefully.

I'd like to thank all contributors to this issue: C. J. Daugherty, whose 'guest blog' is a DMF exclusive, the reviewers, those who have written letters of comment, the artists who share their work, those who have graciously consented to be interviewed and who have edited the transcripts. (There's nothing quite like getting approval, especially when I can't quite make out that phrase!)

Trent Jamieson and I chatted recently; that interview will be in issue 8. A few other authors have already consented to interviews, so Trent will be first in what is shaping up to be another incredible line-up of interviews. Thanks to all!

Next I have to thank my extremely forebearing husband who has come home from work to cook dinner while I've been frantically putting DMF together. He is also DMF's proofreader: if there are any errors, it is only because I haven't given him enough time to proof read everything.

I'd like to thank Bill Burns of Efanzines, the National Library Archives and the State Library of Victoria for making DMF available to the public for those who choose not to subscribe.

Finally I'd like to thank the nine people who wrote letters of support for Dark Matter. I applied for the Masters of Creative Writing,

Editing and Publishing but I was rejected on the basis that I did not have a documented history in writing, editing or publishing. Nine people came forward to support my efforts in Dark Matter: Isobelle Carmody, Rowena Cory Daniells, David Freer, Jack Dann, Meg Mundell, Bruce Mutard, Avi Bernshaw, Neville Howard and Jonathan Cowie.

Sometimes it feels like Dark Matter serves no purpose because there are so many other people out there podcasting, creating zines, blogging, interviewing... After reading these letters of support I feel so honoured and humbled and appreciated. On 1 February I received another email from the University of Melbourne: apparently they are in the process of reviewing my application a third time and I will hear back shortly. If my application is rejected a third time, I will continue with DMF and look elsewhere for means to increase my skills for creating DMF. No matter what the outcome, the process - asking for and receiving the letters of support - has been incredibly encouraging and inspiring. I cannot thank those people enough.

This is the first year that Dark Matter fanzine is eligible for nomination for a Hugo Award and I'd appreciate it if you'd **consider nominating DMF for a Hugo** - you have the option of nominating five publications. Winning isn't necessary,
nomination for the short-list would be awesome!

DMF and most of its contributors are also eligible for Chronos Awards and Ditmar Awards as well. To see a list of eligibles for the Chronos Awards, go to http://confound.wikispot.org/2012_Chronos_Award_Eligibles and for the Ditmars go to http://wiki.sf.org.au/2012_Ditmar_eligibility_list. Please note that these lists of eligibles are not exhaustive. It is possible to purchase a voting membership for the Chronos Awards for $5. I haven't gone digging yet to determine the cost of voting memberships for the Ditmars. Both voting memberships are included with a membership for Continuum 8, to be held in Melbourne in June 2012. CYA there!

Read on, McDuff!

Nalini

Competition Winners

Passion - autographed copy

Random House has kindly donated an autographed copy of *Passion* by Lauren Kate, the third book in her *Fallen* series. Dark Matter fanzine congratulates Annerliegh Pappos, winner of *Passion*.

Ambassador's Mission - autographed copy

Trudi Canavan has kindly donated an autographed copy of *Ambassador's mission*, the first book in her latest trilogy. Dark Matter fanzine congratulates Andy Calloway, winner of *Ambassador's Mission*.

Blood Song - autographed copy

Rhiannon Hart has kindly donated an autographed copy of *Blood Song*, the first book in her trilogy. Dark Matter fanzine congratulates Jennifer Runge, winner of *Blood Song*.

News and Articles

Iron Sky Premieres in Berlin Film Festival

The Finnish scifi epoch enters the fray in Berlinale's Special Panorama category

Finland's biggest film production to date is finally finished. Iron Sky, a spectacle about the invasion of the dastardly Nazis from the Dark Side of the Moon, is complete. The dark scifi comedy will have its world premiere this February in Berlin's film festival Berlinale, in the Special Panorama category, which screens only films that push the envelope with unique vision.

"I am extremely pleased to have Iron Sky in the official selection of Berlinale, especially in the Special Panorama category! We've always stated that Iron Sky is clearly cut out for the big screen, and now we have some serious weight to back up our claims. I'm certain that this is great news to all our fans, as this will definitely speed up our distribution negotiations with remaining territories." producer Tero Kaukomaa beams.

"It is simply mind-blowing that we get to have the world premier of Iron Sky in Berlin, of all places! I sincerely hope that the movie's antifascist message will resound in the audience and open us doors for international success. I can barely put to words how very proud and happy I am for Iron Sky and its whole crew," director Timo Vuorensola concludes.

Iron Sky is a dark scifi comedy with an alternate take on history. Instead of flat out losing the war, a secret Nazi space program in Antarctica evaded the collapse of the Reich by fleeing to the dark side of the Moon. During these 70 years of utter secrecy,

the Nazis have constructed a massive armada of flying saucers, and are now poised to attack the unsuspecting Earth. The time of the triumphant return of the Fourth Reich is at hand!

With a formidable ten million dollar budget, Iron Sky is also by far the biggest movie made in Finnish film history. The distribution rights have already been sold to over 20 territories, with ongoing negotiations to conquer regions like North America, Russia and India. Iron Sky has already spawned several spinoff projects, including a board game and a video game.

Iron Sky is directed by Timo Vuorensola, written by Vuorensola and Michael Kalesniko based on the original story by Johanna Sinisalo, and starring acclaimed actors Christopher Kirby, Julia Dietze, Götz Otto, Peta Sergeant, Udo Kier and Stephanie Paul.

Iron Sky is produced by Blind Spot Pictures (Finland) and co-produced by 27 Films Production (Germany) and New Holland Pictures (Australia). The world sales are handled by Stealth Media Group.

All Star Comics' first birthday

Melbourne's newest comic book store, All Star Comics, has become an established part of the comic book community in Melbourne. They are known for their friendly, helpful service and their events, such as the Gestalt Comics Launch reported on in the previous issue of DMF. Trev Wood, a local comic book guy, drew this image of Mitch and Troy, the All Stars guys, for their birthday.

Trev Wood can be found at www.sawbonesonline.com.

All Star Comics can be found online at
http://ascmelbourne.blogspot.com
http://facebook.com/ascmelbourne
http://twitter.com/ascmelbourne

Chicon and Hugo Awards

Monday, January 23, 2012

Chicago, Illinois, USA - Chicon 7, the 70th World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon), today issued a reminder that the deadline is fast approaching to gain the right to nominate for the 2012 Hugo Awards and John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer.

To be entitled to submit a nomination ballot you must join Chicon 7 or LoneStarCon 3 (the 2013 Worldcon) as a Supporting, Attending, or Young Adult member by January 31, 2012, or have been a Supporting or Attending member of Renovation, the 2011 Worldcon. Nomination ballots must be received by Sunday, March 11, 2012, 23:59 PDT.

After the finalists are announced, all Supporting, Attending, and Young Adult members of Chicon 7 (including all members who join prior to the closing date of the final ballot) will be invited to submit ballots to select the Hugo winners. Chicon 7 members will also be eligible to nominate for the 2013 Hugo Awards to be hosted next year by LoneStarCon 3, the 71st Worldcon, in San Antonio, Texas.

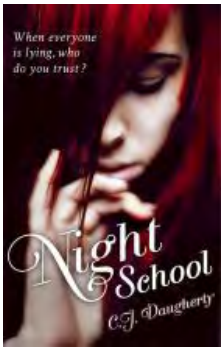
The Hugo Awards are the premier award in the science fiction genre, honoring literature, art, and media as well as the genre's fans. The Hugo Awards were first presented at the 1953 World Science Fiction Convention in Philadelphia (Philcon II), and they have continued to honor science fiction and fantasy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

In addition to the fifteen existing award categories, Chicon 7 has also exercised its right to create an additional, one-time Hugo Award. Chicon 7 will therefore be presenting the first ever Hugo for "Best Fancast" to recognize the wide variety of high quality, non-professional audio- and video-casts which are now being produced.

More information about the Hugo Awards, including details about how to submit a nominating ballot, is available from www.chicon.org/hugo-awards.php. For additional information, contact us at hugoadmin@chicon.org.

Keeping up the pace in Night School

C J Daugherty blogs about Night School: a DMF exclusive



Before I wrote Night School, I read a huge stack of books in the young adult thriller/paranormal genre. At the time I was mostly just looking for escape. But almost instantly I began admiring the techniques used by the best writers. The adrenaline rush of the Vampire Academy books, for example. The steady build-up of tension in I am Number Four. And the fast-slow-fast pace of The Hunger Games series.

By the time I'd made my way through the books, I felt as if I'd just had a masterclass in pace. I understood the attraction of all those novels completely. They're just flat-out exciting. It was addictive. Suddenly, I wanted to write something exciting, too.

I started *Night School* with a chase scene. I don't know if I'd get away with that in adult fiction – at that moment, you don't even know the people running. But in YA it's Ok. Your readers are willing to run along with you – excited to find out why you're in such a hurry and dying to know where you're going.

Once I'd written that scene, I knew I needed to keep my characters on their toes. Yet, I also wanted to give people a little time to get to know the school, and the students and teachers who live there. So I took the time to build that world, and to introduce you to Allie, Carter, Sylvain, and Jo before I began really messing up their lives.

In the first draft *Night School* had several huge fight scenes. These were unbelievably fun to write, but didn't make it to the final version because I just didn't think they really worked. I didn't really believe that these characters would get in those situations. But that experience of writing scenes in which characters fight with swords and knives was so incredibly AWESOME that I definitely want to do it again sometime.

Maybe I'll write a swashbuckler. How about teenage pirates? How fun would THAT be?

Night School is published by Atom, $17.99.

See C. J. Daugherty's website including her blog at http://www.cjdaugherty.com/

Aurealis Awards media release

Media release

Bumper line up of supporters for the 2011 Aurealis Awards

SpecFaction NSW Inc, organiser of the Aurealis Awards, is delighted to announce an impressive line up of sponsors for the 2011 Awards to be presented on 12 May, 2012 in Sydney.

Awards Co-convenor Susan Wardle said, "The Aurealis Awards are Australia's premier awards for Speculative Fiction. SpecFaction is a not for profit organisation and all our members are volunteers. Without the support of sponsors, we could not hope to host the awards."

HarperVoyager will be a Silver Sponsor of the awards.

Stephanie Smith, Associate Publisher of HarperVoyager, said "HarperVoyager is delighted to sponsor the Aurealis Awards again this year. The awards are highly regarded within the speculative fiction genre in Australia. Many Voyager authors have won, or been shortlisted for, the Aurealis Awards over the past 15 years, including such bestselling authors as Sara Douglass, Glenda Larke, Jennifer Fallon and Kylie Chan. Voyager's enthusiasm for the genre and our commitment to seeing it grow and expand is as strong as ever."

Both Cosmos Magazine and Galaxy Bookshop will also come on board to help stage the awards. Cosmos Magazine as a media sponsor and Galaxy Bookshop as a supporter.

The Aurealis Awards, Australia's premier awards for genre fiction, are for works of speculative fiction written by an Australian citizen, or permanent resident, and published for the first time between 1 January 2011 and 31 December 2011.

Over 800 entries were received this year, a record number, indicating both the strength of the speculative fiction genre in Australia, as well as the respect the Awards garners. Finalists will be announced in late March 2012 and winners will receive their awards at a gala evening ceremony held in Sydney at The Independent Theatre on Saturday the 12th of May, 2012.

All entries are read by independent panels of judges. As with past

awards, sponsorship arrangements do not influence the judging process.

For more information on the Aurealis Awards, visit www.aurealisawards.com or to book a ticket to the awards night www.trybooking.com/18485.

Concatenation Update

This is an update from Concatention, a highly respected science and science fiction website in the UK.

Greetings

Just a line to say that our new 'Futures' story is now up in time for Christmas. And our What's New page (with the link to the new story) also has our traditional Christmas message to our regulars (together with a pic - rare for our site) and just a hint that 2012 sees our 25th anniversary!

http://www.concatenation.org/whatsnew.html

Spreading the word on your site/blog with link or letting your country's SF news site/blog know would be chunky and appreciated. :-)

And this week we are compiling news for the Spring issue up in the New Year.

All the very best for Christmas and the New Year.

With regards,
Jonathan

Science Fact & Science Fiction Concatenation
www.concatenation.org
15 December 2011

Don't Mess with Firefly

The first I heard of this story was when a professor of English at a college in the US had come under fire for putting a quote outside his office. The quote was from the pilot episode of Firefly where Mal Reynolds tells Simon Tan that Mal will only ever kill Simon if he's armed and facing Mal. What was said doesn't appear unreasonable to me even if someone is ignorant of the significance of the quote - my understanding is that citizens of the US are permitted to defend themselves. Anyway, not only was the quote removed but the professor was given a warning. In response the professor put up an anti-fascism poster, which was taken down and further threats or warnings were given.

You don't mess with Firefly.

Word got out.

This new video on YouTube recounts the campaign for free speech, partially motivated by love of Firefly and knowledge of how ridiculous the position of Campus authorities was. Even more so when you consider that this censoring of free speech could detrimentally impact the professor's ability to teach.

Neil Gaiman got involved, among others.

Watch the video: it was a victory for free speech and Firefly fans everywhere. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iAOtkpFGhc

Terry Pratchett in Melbourne

Sir Terry Prachett visited Melbourne early in 2011 and spoke as part of a series of author talks run by The Wheeler Centre. A video of his appearance is available for viewing online or downloading as audio or video at this link.

http://wheelercentre.com/videos/video/sir-terry-pratchett-imagination-not-intelligence-made-us-human/

Neil Gaiman and Amanda Palmer in Melbourne

On 16 December 2011, Neil Gaiman appeared at the Anaethium Theatre in Melbourne as part of a series of author talks run by The Wheeler Centre. This talk was recorded and is avaible for viewing online or downloading as audio and/or video.

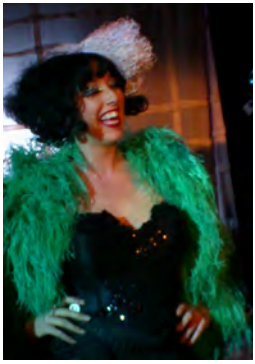
Ninja gigs

Amanda Palmer sang the Ukele Anthem at the Anaethium Theatre event during the interval http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wzzLAzQx8g

Shortly after this event, there was a ninja event in Melbourne http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2z3372mv-uo. Sadly I didn't get to that as, by the time I heard about it, I would have only had an hour or so to get into the city catching a train. Bloody Metro.

31 December 2011, New Year Eve Trash Masquerade

The New Year's Eve masquerade featured cabaret style entertainment, full on for nearly 6 hours. It wasn't over-crowded, which was my biggest concern. The sound needed work, but that's a venue issue. The show was definitely MA rated, some of the humour not entirely tasteful, but overall a really good evening. I think Amanda and Neil performed for about 2 hours out of the 6.



Meow Meow

Neil read his Megafauna Australia Day poem with shadow puppets including drop bears and the like: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsUJIYRZghc.

Amanda performed songs from the Dresden Dolls and Amanda's personal repertoire. Amanda turned Friday, an iconic song from 2011, into a much more political, powerful song http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnCwypBLSFo&feature=related.

Other performers included the Jane Austen Argument, the Bedroom Philosopher, Meow Meow and more. I've never been to an event

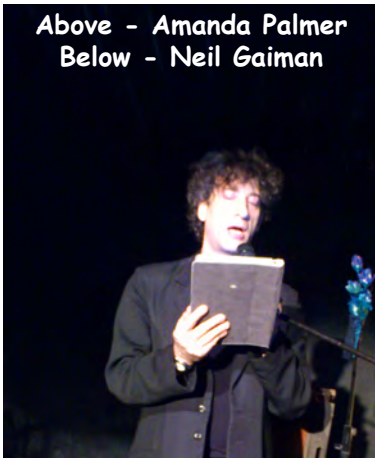
like it, although Higher Ground in Adelaide aspired to that kind of quality entertainment, it never quite got there.

The Bedroom Philosopher sang, among other things, *Northcote (so hungover):* the YouTube comments version. I can't find the NYE version on YouTube but here's the original clip http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxZiae16Ry8 and here's the YouTube Comments version, like the version played on the night http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLnZH-8wrTM.

I don't think I need to say anything about Meow Meow, the Australian comic cabaret artist who won the Edinburgh Festival. Meow Meow was in fine form, although I have to say that her singing was fantastic, and I would have liked to hear her sing without the comedic interruptions.

Neil Gaiman wished everyone a happy New Year before the night was out: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hG3yCmJphnE.

Tuesday 3 January 2012



Above - Amanda Palmer
Below - Neil Gaiman

The Jane Austen Argument performed at the Evelyn Hotel to raise money for their tour with the Dresden Dolls. Amanda Palmer put in a guest appearance, passing around a hat - well, a box really - to raise money to replace Tom's ukele after she broke it, and to help raise money for the tour. This was a more laid back event that the NYE party, in a smaller, more informal venue with people just chilling. Here the JAA play my favourite song of theirs, The End of the World http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbT1MOGsJwU. The sound picks up someone's breathing I think, but you can get a feel for the song.

Sunday 8 January 2012

The Dresden Dolls played live in Melbourne, fronted by The Bedroom Philospher's full group and The Jane Austen Argument. This was a great concert in an interesting venue, and the first ever real concert DMF's minion has ever attended. I'll educate him yet!

The Dresden Dolls at the Forum in Melbourne courtesy of this link http://laserscrewdriver.tumblr.com/post/15610521401

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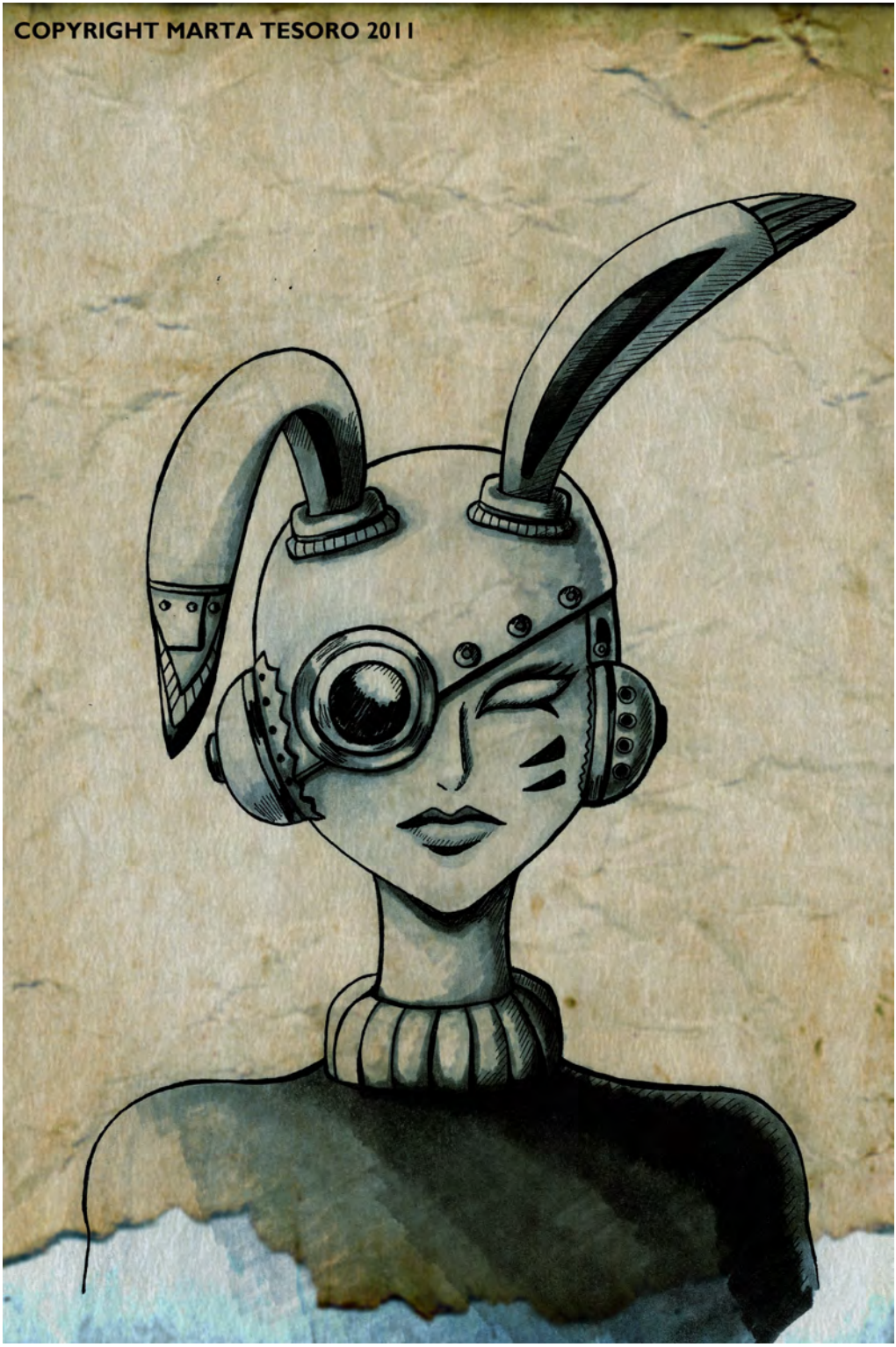


Oz Comic-Con

Australia is about to see the birth of a new pop culture expo called Oz Comic-Con. The Hub Productions (http://www.thehubproductions.com/) is apparently the company behind Oz Comic-Con.

A press release was sent to the South Australian minister and board for tourism, who made a number of assumptions before releasing their own press releases claiming that the US and/or UK based Comic-Con extending their presence to Australia (a related article is here http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/comic-con-comes-to-south-australia-in-2012/story-e6frea6u-1226224767104). Mark Serrels reported on the resulting scandal here http://www.gizmodo.com.au/2012/01/the-great-oz-comic-con/. In order to clarify the situation, Oz Comic-Con then made its own press release http://034b57f.netsolhost.com/press.aspx.

In response to the allegations that Oz Comic-con won't issue refunds if guests cancel, Oz Comic-Con said, 'if a ticket is guest-specific (so dinner, meet & greet, Excelsior!), yes, a cancellation means a refund.' (21/01/2012 on facebook.) My interpretation of this is that if you buy a platinum ticket to see Stan Lee and he cancels, you don't get a refund. If you buy an Excelsior! ticket (a special Stan Lee ticket) to see Stan Lee and he cancels, you get a refund. So it's about your priorites: are you going for just one guest or for several? If one person cancels are you going to be bitterly disappointed and not want to go, or are the other guests enough to keep you happy? Consider this before you purchase your ticket.

Many fans don't care who runs the convention because they just want a comic convention. Some arguments have arisen over whether this is a comic book convention or 'just' another pop culture convention; many fans don't really care as long as it features people they are interested in.

My personal position is that if I receive a media pass I will report on the convention and the specific events I attend in the following issue of Dark Matter. The same goes for every other professional and fan-run event that I attend. One of the advantages of being independent is the opportunity to attend and report on all events without fear of offending a competing sponsor.

J. Michael Straczynski as spruiker

J. Michael Straczynski, beloved creator of Babylon 5, Crusade, writer for countless other TV series, comics, etcetera, is spruiking Patricia Tallman's facebook stage in his own inimitable style. Pat Tallman played Lyta Alexander, the redheaded telepath from Babylon 5, among many other roles. For more on Pat, go to IMDB's page here http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0848191/.

JMS: ALL RIGHT, MARINES, LISTEN UP! WE'RE TAKING THAT HILL! I WANT 3,000 NAMES LIKING THIS PAGE BY TOMORROW! QUESTIONS? www.facebook.com/PatriciaTallmanPage

JMS: THIS UNIT WILL NOT BE DEFEATED! THIS UNIT IS LEAN, MEAN AND OTHERWISE FAIRLY AFFABLE PROVIDED WE HAVE ACCESS TO POTATO CHIPS.

ToyDude: @straczynski SIR! YES SIR! #2149 SIR!

JMS: @ToyDude OUTSTANDING, PRIVATE TOYDUDE! UNFORTUNATE NAME FOR A MARINE, PROBABLY GET YOU INTO LOTS OF FIGHTS, BUT STILL, WELL DONE!

paul_brandon: @straczynski SIR, YES SIR, SIREDLY SIR SIR!

JMS: @paul_brandon NEED TO WORK A LITTLE ON THAT CAFFEINE INTAKE, PRIVATE BRANDON!

JMS: @paul_brandon AND "SIREDLY" ISN'T A WORD! NOW DROP AND GIVE ME TWENTY!

wolfe_masque: @straczynski ~Salutes~ Sir, Yessir! :) Anything for Pat Tallman!

JMS: @wolfe_masque SPOKEN LIKE A TRUE SOLDIER!

JMS: SO IF YOU WAKE 'EM UP, TELL 'EM THE WHITE HOUSE SAID IT WAS OKAY! (this oughta be good for a National Enquirer story or two)

paul_brandon: @straczynski Am I allowed to do them 'girly style'? Am worried what I've signed up to here! :-/

JMS: @paul_brandon PRIVATE BRANDON, IF YOU WANT TO DO YOUR PUSHUPS "GIRLY STYLE" YOU SHOULDA JOINED THE NAVY, SINCE THEY INVENTED IT!

JMS: EVERY MAN WOMAN AND ELF IN THIS UNIT HAS WHITE HOUSE APPROVAL TO CALL ANYONE, ANY TIME, TO GET THEM TO LIKE THIS PAGE. www.facebook.com/PatriciaTallmanPage

paul_brandon: @straczynski If I get 20 people to like Pat's page instead, am I excused? :)

JMS: @paul_brandon "If I get 20 people to like Pat's page am I excused?" YES PRIVATE BRANDONAND IWOULD BE IMPRESSED. DO YOU *KNOW* 20 PEOPLE?

JMS: paul_brandon: @straczynski SIR, AM PRESS GANGING THEM AS I TYPE, SIR!

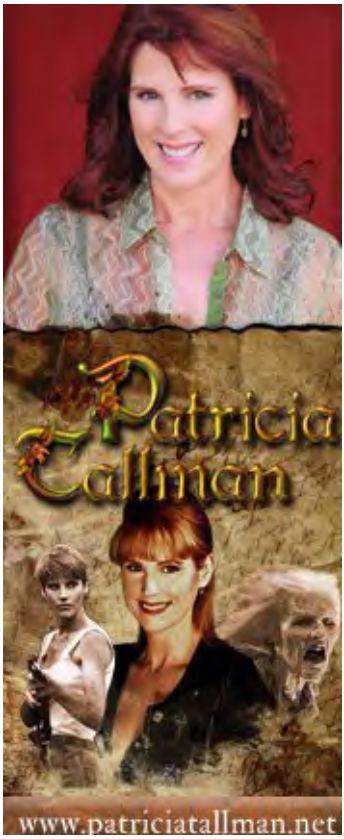
DMF: @straczynski permission to republish in DMF issue 7? (for published issues of DMF go to nla.gov.au/nla.arc-123161 - you will find some JMS love)

JMS: @DarkMatterzine PERMISSION GRANTED, PRIVATE! NOW GET OUT THERE AND DO THAT...FANZINE... WHATEVER...THING IS YOU DO.

BrianCBock: @straczynski Don't drink and Twitter with the fucking caps lock on.

JMS: @BrianCBock MARINES ONLY TALK IN CAPS! YOU WANT ALTERNATE FONTS? YOU WANT 8 PT ITALICIZED HELVETICA? TRY THE AIR FORCE!

BrianCBock: @straczynski Comic sans?



JMS: THIS IS DRILL INSTRUCTOR STRACZYNSKI BACK FROM MANEUVERS AND I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT ONLY 500 OF YOU HAVE REACHED THE TOP OF THE HILL! I WANT ANOTHER FIVE HUNDRED PAIRS OF BOOTS ON TOP OF THAT HILL LIKING THE PAT TALLMAN FAN PAGE BEFORE THE DAY IS OUT OR THERE'S GONNA BE ALL KINDS OF HELL TO PAY!

WHAT KIND OF UNIT IS THIS ANYWAY? I'VE GOT PRIVATE LYNDON BARRY LYNDON,WHO CAN'T TELL IF HE'S COMING OR GOING, PRIVATE ZOLTAR WHOSE MOTHER THOUGHT HE WAS A VENUSIAN MONSTER, AND FRANKLY I'D HAVE TO CONCUR,AND PRIVATE DOWNING WHO THINKS SHE'S A STREEET IN LONDON! YOU ALL NEED TO GET THIS DONE WHETHER I'M HERE OR ON MANEUVERS! I CAN'T HOLD YOUR HAND! DO I *LOOK* LIKE YOUR MOTHER?

WHO THE HELL SAID YES?

Per Jacobsen: So has your account been hacked, or did someone steal your shift button?

JMS: MARINES YELL, PRIVATE PEAR! IT'S WHAT WE DO!

Scott Ellis: This is why you shouldn't take expired medication.

JMS: MARINES LOVE EXPIRED MEDICATION, PRIVATE ELLIS! IT'S WHAT KEEPS US IN THE TRENCHES WHEN EVERYBODY ELSE HAS LEFT! HARD TO RUN AWAY WHEN YOU'RE NOT SURE WHICH WAY IS UP!

TourGuide Ted: Despite being cute and furry I still obeyed orders this morning, Sir!

John Ryan Decker: Sir! Yessir! I mean Nossir! About the handholding Sir! Just gonna start running now Sir...

JMS: OUTSTANDING, MARINES! DIG IN AND KEEP YOUR HEADS DOWN, BRINGIN THE RAIN!

Photo courtesy of Dj ASHBA™

Squishface Studio Opening

by Marta Tesoro

The Squishface Studio Opening was a major success. People came, we socialized, made contacts, people bought stuff and folks seemed to really like the place and the works and many have mentioned that they would like to drop by and see how things are going down the track. It was an amazing day. I've never really had to host an opening and I can't think of better people to have done it with. Everyone at the studio chipped in and cleaned up to make sure that yesterday would be absolutely fantastic. There are currently six of us at the studio: Ben Hutchings, Arran Mckenna, Sarah Howell, David Blumenstein, Sacha Bryning and myself. Then our friends and family brought stuff. My mum brought yummy eclairs, profiteroles and coconut macaroons. Sacha's dad brought us chicken, sausages, chips and an Australia cake. My friend Sarah Dean brought us a Tim tam cake! People chipped in for beers.... everyone was just so awesome and we at the studio are really very happy and pleased for all the support and help.

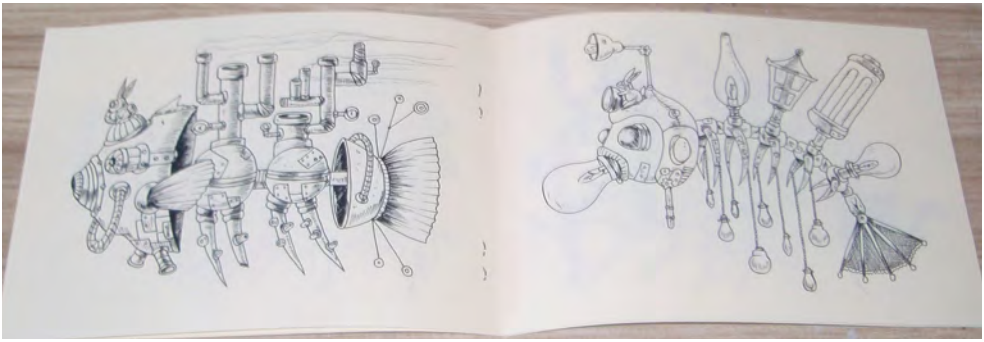
On a personal note, this was the first time I've actually exhibited my work for sale and I am very happy with the feedback and people actually bought stuff! I sold my first print and original painting along with making sales of my very first zine! It make me very happy and gives me the confidence to actually hold a proper exhibition before long and approach galleries

with samples of my work and to bring out a nicer and better zine that isn't rushed and done in 3 days flat and with proper stapling! I am not really used to selling anything that I have actually created on my own accord. When people pay me, it's because I've created or done a job for them...it's a new and wonderful thing for me to discover that people like my personal work enough to pay for it. I would also like to thank Ben Hutchings again for convincing me to make a zine at the last minute. I would not have done it otherwise! And for helping me out with the whole zine process. I found it very confusing at best but we got there in the end.

Thanks again everyone for all your support and for coming to the Opening. Those who couldn't make it, come visit us sometime!

Photos courtesy of Marta Tesoro:
1) Squishface Studios exterior
2) A full house at the opening
3) Some of Marta's work on display
4 & 5) Marta's zine

Marta Tesoro's blog: http://rabbittownanimator.blogspot.com/
Squishface Studio: http://squishfacestudio.com/
David Blumenstein: http://nakedfella.com/blog/
Ben Hutchings: http://hutcho.wordpress.com/
Sarah Howell: http://sarahhowellprojects.com/
Sacha Bryning: http://sachascrawl.blogspot.com/
Arran Mckenna: http://happydancecomics.tumblr.com/



Angry Robot Press Release

Strange Chemistry Announces Two-Book Deal For Gwenda Bond

After the massive news last week about Strange Chemistry's first two authors, we are delighted to add another stellar name to our launch roster!

Strange Chemistry are thrilled to announce the signing of Gwenda Bond, in a two book deal with World English rights concluded between Amanda Rutter and Jennifer Laughran, of the Andrea Brown Literary Agency, Inc. The first book, Blackwood, will be one of the imprint's September 2012 launch titles, with the second following in 2013.

About Blackwood

On Roanoke Island, the legend of the 114 people who mysteriously vanished from the Lost Colony hundreds of years ago is just an outdoor drama for the tourists, a story people tell. But when the island faces the sudden disappearance of 114 people now, an unlikely pair of 17-year-olds may be the only hope of bringing them back.

Miranda, a misfit girl from the island's most infamous family, and Phillips, an exiled teen criminal who hears the voices of the dead, must dodge everyone from federal agents to long-dead alchemists as they work to uncover the secrets of the new Lost Colony. The one thing they can't dodge is each other.

Blackwood is a dark, witty coming of age story that combines America's oldest mystery with a thoroughly contemporary romance.

About Gwenda Bond

Gwenda Bond is a contributing writer for Publishers Weekly, reviews books for the Washington Post and Locus Magazine, and has appeared on NPR's Weekend Edition. She won the 2010 Veritas Media Award from the Romance Writers of America for her article "Romancing the Recession" in PW, and recently guest edited a special YA issue of Subterranean Online featuring work by Kelly Link, Sarah Rees Brennan, Malinda Lo, and others.

Gwenda also holds an MFA in Writing from the Vermont College of Fine Arts' program in writing for children and young adults, and maintains an active online presence. She lives in a hundred-year-old house in Lexington, Kentucky, with her husband, SF author Christopher Rowe, and their menagerie.

Visit Gwenda online at http://gwendabond.typepad.com/

Gwenda says: "Angry Robot has quickly built a reputation as one of the smartest, most innovative imprints publishing speculative fiction. I was instantly intrigued when I saw the news about the launch of their new YA imprint, and I couldn't be happier to become a Strange Chemistry author. I can't wait to work with Amanda and the rest of the Angry Robot team as they continue on the path toward world domination."

Amanda says: "Gwenda is clearly a massive talent and I am absolutely delighted to have signed her in a two book deal. BLACKWOOD is a truly impressive debut novel and I'm absolutely certain it will be a great success."

Check out the full news announcement on http://strangechemistrybooks.com for more details, folks. Gwenda can be also found on Twitter (@Gwenda), so do say hello and join us in welcoming her to Strange Chemistry!

Until Next Time,

The Angry Robot Team

Home Cooked Comics Festival

Saturday 28 January at Batman's Park (Queue Batman theme music) was the site of a casual yet enjoyable comics festival. We decided to go a little late as our car doesn't have air conditioning, so it was a long, hot drive in the slightly cooler mid-afternoon instead of the stinking hot early afternoon. When we arrived, we cruised around quickly then found drinks and sat in the shade to recover from the car trip. A stage was set up, with a band playing, creating a pleasant atmosphere for people to relax. Stalls sold food and drink in addition to publishers and retailers selling comics. A workshop nestled within a grove of trees helped people develop comic book characters while another workshop taught people how to move and fight, presumably to help them draw action better.

It's amazing who you run into at festivals like this; Richard Morden made a bee-line for us, sitting down to say hello. I was startled by this complete stranger bowling up to say hello until he spoke. Having shaved off his beard and concealed his normal glasses in his backpack, Richard was completely unrecognisable, but his voice is very distinctive. Richard is a published author and illustrator who received honours for a prestigious children's book award a few years back; he's thinking about exploring epublishing, so we chatted about the success of Rachel Yu. (Rachel's website is here http://www.rachelbookcorner.com/ and here are articles about her comic and her success http://www.comicsbeat.com/2011/12/27/sales-charts-unboxing-day-2011-and-a-surprising-discovery/ and http://geek-news.mtv.com/2012/01/23/meet-the-sixteen-year-old-girl-whose-comic-out-sold-watchmen-interview/.)

After we chatted for a while and stood up to do the rounds, who else should wander over but Tom Taylor, Melbourne's own Star Wars comics author. Tom had Connor, his very cute son, with him. Apparently Connor made Tom go down the slide. Sure, Tom, sure… it wasn't the big kid in you *at all*, was it Tom? Connor had a good time and, like all toddlers, needed to go home before he was

exhausted, so the four of us parted ways.

Edward and I intended to walk around the stalls properly at this stage, but a comic book quiz starring some local comic makers, sponsored and judged by Allen & Unwin Publishers, started up, so our walk was more a short stagger before collapsing on the grass again. Official quiz contestants were Michael Camillieri, Sarah Howell and Bruce Mutard. The MC was Bernard Caleo, co-hostess and prize-giver was Elise Jones. The scorekeeper was Mandy Ord. There were piles of books on the table in front of the contestants; I'm not sure how the contest really worked except it seemed some questions were only for the official contestants and some were for the crowd. I think the winner of the official contestants was supposed to win the books left at the end, but I'm pretty sure Bernard said they'd be donated to the Squishface library after Sarah declined the huge pile.

It was interesting to hear the questions, most of which I didn't have a clue about. I thought the question to which 'Neil Gaiman' was the answer would have been answered more quickly. I guess those present weren't trivia buffs. I knew the answer to a couple of questions but I was too self-conscious to answer until the quizmaster asked someone to sing the theme to Felix the Cat and I started a duet with another woman. I completely lost the plot, words, tune and all, when a microphone was shoved in my face. Not my proudest moment. Funnily enough, I'm comfortable with public speaking, as anyone who attended THAT Continuum 7 panel can attest; I'm just lousy when it comes to public singing.

After much prompting I won a copy of Nicki Greenbergh's The Great Gatsby, which is, of course, a comic book.

A number of prizes were claimed by primary-school aged boys: clearly through their knowledge of the comic book scene and reading of the books, not through bias of the quizmaster. I'm guessing that at least one of these knowledgeable youngsters was the son of the quizmaster because he was somewhat embarrassed, but with no-one else clamouring to answer the questions it was fair play to the kids.

Next up on the stage was another band, so Edward and I continued perusing the stalls in more detail. There was a comic drawn on a blackboard; the varying styles made it look as though festival attendees were invited to contribute a panel until it was full. Slow Glass Books was there, selling a range of comic books in either trade or graphic novel form, most of which I'd never seen before. Bruce Mutard joined Justin at the Slow Glass stand to autograph his comic books that were prominently displayed… which reminded me, I have some of Bruce's work and I haven't asked him to autograph it yet. Slack.

We purchased a barbequed sausage with onion each from the stall raising money to send the queer roller derby team somewhere – good luck, where ever it is that you're going – and sat down again to enjoy.

There were a small number of people who wore costumes. Instead of a straight parade, they danced around the park.

The Home Cooked Comics Festival was a small but enjoyable event. I suspect the heat kept a lot of people away, but by the time we arrived (around 5 pm) the heat in the park was not unpleasant, particularly in the shade. It was just the drive in the car that was unbearable. It appears that the City of Darebin - a council area within the greater metropolis of Melbourne - supported this festival as did Allen & Unwin, publishers. Well done, I say, congratulations to all for organising an enjoyable event and promoting the local comics scene. If this festival continues as an annual event, I am sure it will grow; I just hope it keeps that laid-back family-friendly atmosphere.

conSENSUAL: Australia's first Yaoi and Yuri convention

By Nalini Haynes and Egofreaky

conSENSUAL was held on the first weekend of November last year, the same weekend as at least four other events I had planned. Although I was fully booked, this seemed like an important inaugural event that I should attend, so I shuffled things around and went for a few hours on Saturday afternoon.

Held at The Bayview Eden Melbourne, the venue was spacious, well laid-out if lacking in sign-posting and air-conditioned with disability access although held on the first floor. (There were elevators: no back-doors or freight elevators at this venue!)

conSENSUAL is an anime convention with a focus on Yaoi, Yuri, Hentai - basically anime (cartoons) with a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transsexual (LGBT) focus. Apparently these anime can vary in ratings from PG to R; at conSENSUAL, the lower-rated anime were screened during the day and the higher-level anime after 6pm. The 'about' page of conSENSUAL's website explains what conSENSUAL is and why there was a felt need for this kind of convention.

conSENSUAL: Australia's first YAOI & Yuri convention
For those aged 18 and over

November 4th-6th, at the Eden: Bayview

Anime, Manga and PopCulture conventions are generally fairly open minded spaces. We get away with a lot of stuff that one wouldn't normally expect to get away with anywhere else outside of a MardiGras parade. Yet, there's this insistence that the events have to be family friendly.

The problem is that the conventions are family friendly, but it's being used as a euphemism in this context. Where "family friendly" should mean everyone's having a good time and no one's freaking out, what it tends to mean at the events is "don't scare the close-minded people that brought their kids because they're our cash cow". So whilst you can dress as PowerSkank™

from one of the latest superhero comics, and you can probably get away with some pretty revealing Cosplay from something like Gurren Lagann, the moment there's even an inkling of homoeroticism, you have to pack it away.

No "Will glomp for cookies". No "Will Yuri for YAOI".

No "Will YAOI for wrestling lessons". No "I <3 Man i fest".

Actually, you get away with that last one.

But no more will the YAOI & Yuri fanboys and girls be cast aside!

Now we have our own event, where we can watch as much mano-e-mano anime, read the gayest manga, and generally make the kind of comments that would have your 3rd grade religious school teacher rolling in her grave (if she's dead yet). We have an adults only anime con, and it's for those out there who like their GBLT on black bread with a bit of mayo on the sides.

conSENSUAL will have the kinds of panels you want to attend, the kind of screenings you've wanted to watch but have been too afraid to ask for recommendations, and have the kinds of traders that other cons wouldn't even think about letting trade. Capping it off will be activity ideas ganked from other cons: Crossplay Competitions, Nightclubs, Slave Auctions and more!

As fans may be aware, there has been some extremely bad conduct at conventions over the years, even the family-friendly conventions. conSENSUAL did not aim to be family-friendly: all participants were required to be 18 or over due to the nature of the event. However, the organising committee took into account the risks concerning a convention of this nature, and posted this code of conduct on their website:

conSENSUAL believes that there's a lot of diversity in fandom, and it doesn't matter who you are, you're welcome to whatever it is that you like (so long as it's legal). As such, we welcome all fans of YAOI, Yuri, and the general GBLT and otaku scenes provided you're old enough to get in. And we expect our attendees to behave in the same way. Everyone that comes to conSENSUAL has come to have a good time, do things and be

part of events that'd never get a chance of running at a "family friendly" convention, hang out with friends and make new ones, and general enjoy their particular sub-micro-para-niche within otaku fandom. Everyone.

To paraphrase Uncle Ben, with great entertainment comes great responsibility.

So in order to achieve that, in an ironic twist, we have to be pretty intolerant of anyone that tries to bring the good times to a halt.

Due to my other commitments I didn't have time to partake of many activities at conSENSUAL. I cruised past the large viewing rooms where anime was constantly being shown and I visited the trading room and chatted to the traders and con participants. There were frequent roars next door to the trade room as a Yaori vs. Yuki debate took place: upon entering the room I found it full of people, mostly in costumes, sitting at tables. There was a quiz competition. Obviously the participants were relaxed, enjoying themselves and their friendly rivalry (they had broken up into teams). After this event I attended an anime drawing event where a quiet, self-conscious tutor discussed the basics of anime drawing. I say quiet and self-conscious because he became embarrassed when a few people asked for instructions on making their artwork anatomically correct. He made drawing anime appear almost effortless, an impressive feat.

Pantsless Twister, Terrified Heterosexuals, Birthday Shibari & Pool Parties

November 5th, 2011 Egofreaky

The first day of conSENSUAL went swimmingly! Literally, in fact, as the day concluded with a pool party.

Before that was some amazing rope work, including a fine young lass who'd literally turned 18 today, a bizarre game show courtesy of Anime Ball Z that involved "cock jousting on tentacles"

We'll be getting photos up when we can, but by all reports people had an excellent time.

A number of SNAFUs with screenings (i.e. the player only playing

the German subtitle track…aber die Partei Jungs sind heiß), and a few events being shuffled due to others being way more popular than we expected, but it's all a learning experience for the first yaoi & yuri convention Australia's ever had, and we've shuffled the timetable for tomorrow to avoid these kinds of clashes, so please ignore the one here on the website and pick up the amended sheet from registration.

Highlights for tomorrow include a talk on sex & politics in Australia by head of the Australian Sex Party, Fiona Patten, a human auction, the legal issues revolving around yaoi in Australia, an introduction to Ero-Guro manga and a closing ceremony with a performance by the amazingly talented Elodie Adams.

Lastly, some sad news with the after party: We didn't get the numbers for Abode, so we'll be going to e55 instead. It's located at 55 Elizabeth.st, Melbourne.

I really wanted to attend a couple of things on Sunday, but in the end my two commitments on Sunday – which included attending the Timeline festival reported on previously – took up so much time that, with travel as well, coming back into the city was not feasible. However, Egofreaky blogged again:

ARGH! MY HANGOVER!

November 8th, 2011 Egofreaky

Day 2 of the con went great!

The legal panel and guest lecture from Fiona Patten were amazing, and filled our panels room to its maximum capacity. Definitely have to ensure they're in a theatre next year. Speaking of, random games of pantsless twister broke out every time the main events theatre wasn't in use, so we may have to see what we can do about getting free Twister mats from a toy company.

The closing ceremony, with Elodie Adams performing and doing a cover of Placebo though, that was just amazing, wasn't it?

And then the after party! So good… but perhaps a bit less to drink next time. Or at least try to get some free ones >_>

Sadly, that's a wrap for this year folks. We'll be having an AGM in

about a month's time, using the feedback we got from this year's event. Information will be posted here and on conSENSUAL's Facebook if you'd like to know how to get involved for 2012.

conSENSUAL's website: http://consensual.net.au/

Egofreaky, aka Avi Bernshaw, is the Bernard of *Of Science & Swords* (a SF/Fantasy/Vampire porn bookshop that also sells pop culture tees and LARP weaponry *and* cohabits with *Critical Hit*, a gaming store. Located in the Melbourne CBD.) Contact OS&S on facebook here www.facebook.com/scienceandswords

Feature Review

Fallen angels in paranormal romance

by Evie Kendall

To say that fallen angels are the new vampires would be slightly misleading, as many authors within this trend are simply incorporating these supernatural creatures into their current paranormal series. Take for example J. R. Ward's *Fallen Angels* series, a spin-off from the *Black Dagger Brotherhood*, or the sudden introduction of fallen angels into Kerrelyn Sparks' *Love At Stake* series at book ten. However, there are also paranormal series in which fallen angels feature as the primary otherworldly beings, and the surge of interest in these characters is particularly evident in young adult paranormal romance. This review will focus on one such series, Lauren Kate's *Fallen* novels, paying particular attention to the newest instalment *Fallen in Love*, a series of short stories set within the *Fallen* fictional world.

The *Fallen* series

The *Fallen* series is essentially the tale of repetitive spontaneous human combustion – of the same human – approximately every seventeen years. The lead characters are Daniel, a fallen angel cursed to forever lose his mortal soulmate, and Lucinda, she who is cursed to "go through puberty a thousand times" before inexplicably bursting into flames. While Daniel is immortal, Lucinda is perpetually re-incarnated after each death, her soul irresistibly pulled to Daniel's until they fall in love, she dies, and the cycle repeats again: an everlasting punishment for them both. How this curse came to be is the central mystery of the series, one that modern-day Luce is determined to understand. As she does not retain the memory of her previous lives, Luce cannot explain the effect Daniel has on her when they meet in Fallen, only knowing that he seems familiar and that she is powerfully drawn to him. Determined to keep her away from him for her protection, Daniel is

at first rude to the newest incarnation of his love, before eventually succumbing to their bond, expecting her to die the moment they first touch, or kiss, or profess their love, as has been the case in all previous cycles. However, it turns out that in this incarnation something has changed, and by the end of the first novel allies and enemies from the war between Heaven and Hell are all trying to piece together what this means for them.

Regarding the series as a whole, after revealing that Daniel is a fallen angel in *Fallen*, the narrative continues with Luce exploring the world of angels, demons and Nephilim in *Torment*, and then embarking on a journey of self-discovery through her previous incarnations in *Passion*. What is most significant about this trajectory is that although the romance between Daniel and Luce is of paramount importance, this fictional world and Luce's current life would still be interesting to read about even if the love story was absent. This is due to the level of detail provided for the world and the characters within it, neither of which are two-dimensional constructs merely propping up a tale of star-crossed lovers. The story contains elements of mystery and thriller that could stand independent of the romance plot. The series follows a fairly regimented chronology for the first two novels, each chapter roughly equating to a day in Luce's life at Sword and Cross reform school (*Fallen*) and Shoreline school for Nephilim (*Torment*). There are no jumps in time until the end of *Torment* when Luce steps through a portal in time and space, setting the scene for the trace back in time depicted in *Passion*. Although this trace goes all the way back to the Fall, readers still have not experienced the quintessential romance novel "love at first sight" moment between Daniel and the original Lucinda, ensuring part of the love story is reserved for the final novel *Rapture*, due for release this year.

Comparing the *Fallen* series to other young adult novels

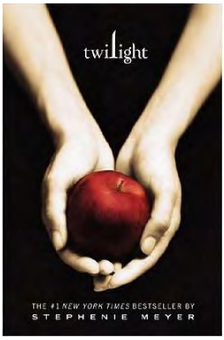
Perhaps the best part of the *Fallen* series is the fact that the mystery is sustained throughout the first three novels. Many young adult series, particularly of the paranormal variety, contain a single "big reveal" when the love interest discovers the object of their affection is a vampire/werewolf/ghost etc. After this point

the obstacles in their relationship are mostly manufactured from external social pressures, and often include some rather implausible misunderstandings between the lead characters. In this way the *Fallen* series really stands out as an exception. Daniel is not unjustified in his belief that he and Lucinda can never stay together – she turns into ash every time they try. Most importantly, three novels in and the reasons behind this are still not fully explained, the reader merely uncovering more pieces of the puzzle alongside Luce. More than anything this serves to engage the reader throughout the entirety of the series, saving some secrets for the end. In my experience many young adult series tend to drag somewhat in the middle, with the first and last novels the only truly adventurous ones. By contrast, Kate's story possesses continual momentum, good plotting and consistently effective narrative pacing. Each book of the *Fallen* series thus far demonstrates that Kate is not afraid to change the status quo. When she promises an apocalyptic battle, she delivers. When characters need to die for the story, she kills them. This is something a lot of young adult authors seem reluctant to do, often gearing up to battles that never amount to anything or that occur mostly off the page, and avoiding the death of significant characters even when this leaves the story unconvincing.

From a pedagogical standpoint the *Fallen* series provides some history education for young readers, and the vocabulary, while mostly accessible, contains some "stretch" words. Compared to many other young adult series the educational element contained in Kate's writing seems more natural and far less condescending to the audience. The historical lessons are vital to the narrative and flow seamlessly into the story, suggesting that while Kate did her research, it was not so she could lecture her young readers. The only teaching parents or guardians may find offensive is the religious education provided for Luce as she develops throughout the story. According to the *Fallen* fictional world the division between good and evil is never simple, and sympathy is evoked and sustained for both the angelic and demonic characters in the series. What is interesting here is the use of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in Luce's classroom, a tale literary scholars often

believe “accidentally” paints a darkly heroic picture of Lucifer, who is ostensibly the villain of the piece. While using the Bible as the source text would not have allowed any ambiguity regarding the state of fallen angels, *Paradise Lost* allows readers to question the definition of good and evil, and whether the punishment described in the Fall was just. As the *Fallen* series continues it becomes clear that while Lucifer is “evil incarnate,” the position of the other celestial beings is cause for debate.

Comparing the *Fallen* series to the *Twilight* Saga



While I loathe the current trend of comparing all young adult fiction to *Harry Potter* or *Twilight*, Kate appears to be seeking comparison to the latter in some of her writing (particularly the mention of Team Miles and Team Daniel t-shirts in *Torment*). There are also definite similarities between Daniel Grigori and Edward Cullen, including that they are both overbearing, overprotective immortals who have fallen in love with mortal women (and yes, they both sparkle too). However, any comparison between the *Fallen* and *Twilight* series is better focused on the differences between their heroines, with Luce Price being far and away an improvement on the insipid Bella Swan. Before continuing any further I would like to stress that this is not intended as a *Twilight*-bashing, I injected Stephenie Meyer’s series straight to the vein like any other addict, however there are some disturbing elements in Bella’s characterisation that make her a far inferior role model for young women than Luce.

Both these seventeen-year-old girls are madly in love with boys who hold some unnatural thrall for them, but while Bella responds to this unthinkingly, Luce questions everything. It is not enough for Daniel to tell her they have always been in love and that their souls are eternally intertwined, she has to understand and experience it herself. She never denies the pull she feels towards Daniel but she critically reflects on their relationship, wondering if it is the right one for both of them given how much suffering it entails. When Daniel is keeping things from her for her own good she questions

whether that is the kind of unequal partnership she wants anything to do with, demanding open communication at every opportunity. If Daniel orders her around without giving a good reason, Luce feels free to ignore him. She also refuses to follow a fairytale blindly, wanting to know not only that Daniel loves her, but why. If only Bella had the same presence of mind she would realise her relationship with Edward was based on his inability to distract himself from a particularly appetising lunch - her. Best of all is the fact that until Luce is convinced Daniel truly loves her and that his choice isn't motivated by the curse and a bond he can't control, she keeps her options open. (And not in a way that abuses a close male friend and requires an awkward fetal-imprinting to resolve a painful love triangle.) Throughout *Passion* Luce also becomes the epitome of the self-made woman, travelling back through her own past hoping to enact changes that will preserve her present and help create a new future. Daniel and her friends try to find her and help, but Luce knows it is something she has to do by herself. She is not running away as an act of teen-rebellion, she is actively shaping her own destiny. Bella, on the other hand, seems too incapacitated by any separation between her and Edward to even contemplate getting out of bed.

In terms of their intelligence, despite repeated claims throughout the *Twilight* series that Bella is smart (after all she reads all those books!) it is clear that Luce is far beyond her. She may not guess everything correctly at first, but Luce asks the right questions (sans annoying whining). Given her level of knowledge at the time she begins to witness the curse in action, it is reasonable for her to believe Daniel is to blame for causing her and her multiple families so much grief, and to question the purity of his motives. Unlike Bella, Luce does not place all other priorities below her romantic feelings. Luce also reads literature, and manages to sound much less pretentious doing so, but while Bella and Edward may be inspired by the works of Shakespeare, there are hints in *Passion* that Lucinda and Daniel inspired Shakespeare. Also, while Bella compares herself to the tragic literary heroines Juliet Capulet and Catherine Earnshaw, Luce compares herself to Jane Eyre and Elizabeth Bennet, swearing that even back in the 19th century

she would never have tolerated being bossed around by Daniel, anymore than Lizzy bows to Darcy's overbearing character. Furthermore, Luce never ceases to seek the truth, unwilling to rely on second-hand information about her past lives, needing to understand who she is and the true foundation of her connection to Daniel. Her scepticism is what allows her to demand proof of their love, unsatisfied with vague explanations and instinctual emotions. When Luce needs time to absorb and process new information she also considers her separation from Daniel quite logically, stating that if they are eternal soulmates then their love can wait while she figures some things out. This is vastly different to Bella's response when Edward abandons her in *New Moon*, which essentially revolves around indulging in reckless behaviour and moping around inconsolably.

Fallen in love: New Tales from the Fallen World

It is also in contrast to the *Twilight* Saga spin-off *The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner* that Kate's *Fallen in Love* collection truly shines. In her introduction to the *Twilight* novella, Meyer claims that the character Bree had a story that demanded telling. However, having read the story I argue that it is entirely superfluous. Since Bella, Edward and Jacob are the only characters that really matter in the series, a story that happens on the periphery, particularly one in which the reader already knows the fate of all the characters, just isn't interesting. Without one of the lead love interests present the fictional world and its characters fail to entice, and this is what distinguishes Kate's storytelling from Meyer's. *Fallen in Love* has not only been released at a more appropriate time to ensure marketability, it also follows characters that are rich enough to warrant their own narratives. A further guarantee of market success for the collection was the inclusion of a sneak preview of *Rapture*, which would usually have appeared at the conclusion of the previous novel.

The first short story in *Fallen in Love* details what happened to Luce's friends Shelby and Miles after they parted ways with Daniel in *Passion*. Reader interest in this side story was piqued when Daniel reflected on the difficult journey the two had ahead of them

if they were to return home to their own time. As Miles formed part of the love triangle present in *Torment*, Shelby is surprised he has relinquished his interest in Luce so quickly after witnessing some of her history with Daniel. She is also surprised to find she is attracted to Miles when they are stranded in Medieval England on Valentine's Day, the place all four short stories in *Fallen in Love* intersect. This first short story is sweet but a little unsatisfying, as Miles' rapid change of heart isn't really convincing. I hope more details about this blossoming relationship are provided in *Rapture* though.

The second short story focuses on the character, Roland Sparks, a demon who travels back to Medieval England to prevent Daniel altering his own past. While the other angels, demons and Nephilim are pursuing Luce, Roland has faith that Luce is fully capable of taking care of herself and figuring out her role in the endgame alone. It is interesting that Roland is the least acquainted with Luce, certainly not one of her closer friends, yet he is the one defending her intelligence and resourcefulness in this story. He also recognises Shelby and Miles' feelings for each other before they do. This story is more interesting than the first because Roland's character so far in the *Fallen* series has remained an enigma. Providing a romantic backstory for him genuinely adds something to the overall narrative, and Kate also uses his physical appearance to interrogate racism over time, in both this tale and throughout *Passion*. Readers discover in this story that Roland was the Angel of Music, and he is given the opportunity to make amends for breaking the heart of his one true love.

The third short story is from the perspective of the fallen angel Arianne, a close friend to both Roland and Luce. This tale explains the mysterious burn marks Luce noticed on Arriane's neck in *Fallen*, the only lasting injury any of the fallen angels displays. While I initially expected a romance between Roland and Arianne, it is actually the demon Tess who is Arianne's girlfriend in this piece. Like the fact Roland is black, Arianne's sexuality is not made a big deal, achieving more through subtlety than it could by focusing obsessively on such details and risking alienating these characters.

The final tale is between Daniel and the Lucinda of the time period merged supernaturally with Luce. All the other stories overlap with this one as each character works to bring the couple together on Valentine's Day. There is more humour in this story than the others, and also the first concrete suggestion that Luce has the potential to choose the side of evil, something that has been hinted at since the beginning of the series. While this tale and the others within *Fallen in Love* are not strictly necessary for understanding the series overall, they are still well worth reading and do add new material.

Technical stuff

Finally, evaluating Kate's writing from a technical perspective, I believe one of the major strengths compared to other young adult and romance series is the use of a third person narrator. This narrator is usually reliable although often restricted by whatever limitations are in place on Luce's own understanding at the point in the story. The privileged position accompanying the common use of dramatic irony in romance is thus denied to Kate's readers – most of the time they know no more about Luce's history than she does. Having just begun the similarly themed *Mercy* series by Melbourne author, Rebecca Lim, I can definitely state I prefer Kate's third person perspective to Lim's first person narrator. However, I would have enjoyed a little more free indirect discourse in the *Fallen* series narrative, particularly as there are hints of the kind of humour Kate could have achieved if this technique was used.

The books themselves are gorgeous, and some believe the influence the *Twilight* covers have had on young adult books, possibly most evident in Kelley Armstrong's *Otherworld* series, is soon to give way to covers more closely resembling Kate's. (Trading apples, ribbons and single flowers for black, flowing lace dresses and stormy skies seems a definite improvement to me!) Like most young adult novels the typeface used in the book is easy to read, with large font and spacing. One of my favourite things about reading a young adult novel is the fact I know I won't have to squint at the text! While there are various typographical

errors present in the copy of *Fallen in Love* I read, I am reserving judgement on that front on account of it being an advanced copy. However, there are a few errors present in the earlier novels that hindered reading flow. I am also hoping that the final printing of *Fallen in Love* contains a table of contents and that the app that is supposed to make the cover "come to life" becomes available for Australian consumers.

Looking forward

Looking forward to the final instalment of the series, readers can expect a full resolution of Daniel and Luce's love story, and explanations pertaining to other aspects of Luce's current incarnation. The series has been so well structured thus far that I do not anticipate any glaring holes to remain at its conclusion. For any that have not yet picked up the series I thoroughly recommend it, however I am almost inclined to suggest waiting until the final book is released such that the whole series can be devoured together. Time travel aside, the narrative flows continuously from book to book making it very easy to read in quick succession. Of course, for those who have already fallen in love with the *Fallen* series there is always the option of re-reading all the earlier novels in preparation for the finale too!

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.

A reviewer on reviewing

Reviewing is a very tricky business. Regarding this furor (http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2011/mar/30/jacqueline-howett-bad-review): Do I criticise spelling and grammar? Occasionally, but never when it's an advance reading copy in which the publisher or author has disclosed that it is an 'uncorrected manuscript proof'. The review at the center of this row is quite positive, saying the book is quite good except for proofing, typo and grammar issues that need to be addressed to help with the reading experience (http://booksandpals.blogspot.com/2011/03/greek-seaman-jacqueline-howett.html). I don't know how much of this issue was dealt with in the 'cleaner' version the author asked the reviewer to read, and how much the author needs an independent editor.

As the author of most of the content of DMF I find it difficult to be the sole editor. I find some of my errors but when I read over work several months down the line I find a lot of room for improvement. It's the whole time/distance from the work issue - when it's too recent, too close, it's harder to edit. For this reason I ask a few trusted people to proof read on my behalf, even offering editorial opinion.

Back to the issue of reviewing - I was sharing earlier today about two issues that have arisen for me as a reviewer. The first issue is to respect the readers even if I don't like the book. For this reason, even if I don't like a book, I ask myself 'am I in the target market for this book?' If I don't like it, the answer is probably no. The second question I ask myself is 'would the target market enjoy this book' and the answer is usually yes to some degree. My goal in writing a review is to help people decide whether they would enjoy the book without giving away too much of the story. I've read reviews where a reviewer has either loved or hated a book, and regardless of the reviewer's opinion, the review has been so well written that

I've been able to tell if I would enjoy the book regardless of how simpatico our tastes are. This is my goal in writing a review.

The other issue of reviewing that has reared its ugly head since I started writing reviews is that authors read my reviews. I hate that. It's fine if I'd give their book 4 or 5 stars, but if I'm only luke-warm and they've spent a year or more of their life working on this book... or if I really don't like it, and I am in a position where I've been given a review copy in order to publish a public review, what then? This is a horrible situation! I try to balance honesty with tact against an awareness of the target market and my perception of whether the target market would enjoy the book. In these situations I will try to offer some positive comments and some criticisms based on either my tastes or observations of the novel, adding a conclusion that gives an indication of who I think would enjoy the novel.

In the past year I can think of two books that I reviewed that I didn't even finish reading, both for different reasons. In both reviews I wrote honestly about why I didn't finish reading the book, giving people with different tastes the opportunity to recognise that here were books that they may enjoy. I also invited other people to submit reviews so that DMF could give a balanced view of the book.

In the only review I have published where I let rip into a novel (that I read in full), I quoted another reviewer who said that novel, The Quantum Thief, would win awards. I felt this gave the review balance, so I could be a bit freer with my criticisms. I also thought that an author who is a physicist should have developed his science significantly better. If it had been a fantasy book based on magic my criticisms would have been different (I don't like limitless magic without consequences either), but I objected to a fantasy/magic based book using 'quantum' as justification for unlimited energy-lossless actions and transformations. I like my SF to be SF and my fantasy to be fantasy. If there is cross-over, the author needs to be very careful about the divide, in my opinion. However, Adam Roberts, famous SF author and the writer of the outstanding review, obviously loved The Quantum Thief. With Roberts' reputation and success supporting The Quantum Thief, I felt that I, as a nobody with an opinion nonetheless, could be specific, detailed and

somewhat vicious (by my standards) in my response. This was before I realised that authors read my reviews... I wonder if I would write a review like that again, or if I would approach it differently. I like to think that I would write the review like that again, simply because I think my criticism had validity AND I gave my annoyance with the book balance by quoting Roberts.

My review style is evolving. I'm still taking into account my degree of enjoyment, whether I'm the target market and whether I believe the target market would enjoy the book. I believe honesty is important in reviews or it defeats the purpose of writing a review. While I'm trying to distance myself from the academic style I learnt over several years of studying, I believe that an academic style benefits reviews although that style of review is not for everyone. Thus I'm hoping to provide a magazine or newspaper style of review as well as a more in-depth analysis to cater to different tastes. The standards to which I aspire are high, and I'm aware that I'm nowhere near my goals yet. It's a work in progress.

Readers can help by reading my work critically and giving feedback, just as I'm giving feedback to others. I ask that you are sensitive in your feedback as I try to be sensitive to others - don't be aggressive and do justify your comments. I'm aware of one or more reviews that claimed that a novel written by an Australian author was 'unAustralian'. No justification was given. This criticism has stuck in my mind because I started reading the book in question without knowing the nationality of the author then I saw something that made me think the author was Australian. At this point I stopped reading to look up the author's details, and I was delighted to discover that I was right, the author was Australian. So I'm wondering why that criticism was made. If you criticise my work, either positively or negatively, please say why. This will help me work through issues and develop my style. Good feedback can be taken on board and explored, even if it doesn't cause an immediate change.

Judging a book by a random page

Publishing agent Kristin describes an evening's entertainment

when some literary friends read a random page of a book aloud and asked if the book should have been published and would an agent have represented the book based on that page (http://pubrants.blogspot.com/2012/01/games-agents-play.html)

The game they played is a good test of writing. Some books grab me on page one, others take a while longer. Even when they've initially captured my interest, many books have passages, pages or even chapters where I start to question why I'm persevering.

This can happen for various reasons: I'm currently reading a good book, a 'new Sherlock Holmes novel', but it doesn't mesh with my memory of Sherlock Holmes in that the opening story should have been wrapped up with a pipe or two then the classic reveal, but no, the story has meandered off to open up another adventure. It's probably going to be all linked together, but this is not how I remember Sherlock Holmes stories. Also, there have been a few discrepancies - I know I'm really pedantic when I pick up on these - where the writing reveals the author's ignorance of the era in which the novel is set. So while this is probably a good novel throughout, it doesn't mesh with my memory of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's style, and I wish people would invent their own stuff rather than recreating someone else's work.

Contrast this with Snuff. I decided to reward all my recent hard work by reading Terry Pratchett's Snuff. So far I would say that this is among his best if not his very best Discworld book to date. Every line is tight, delivered in the style of the best stand-up comedian telling a story. Nothing is wasted. Perhaps Pratchett's affliction has resulted in more care being taken to ensure a quality read because I haven't identified a single sentence that could be cut from the novel so far and I'm over 100 pages in. I am in awe. I'm thinking the only comparable read is Good Omens, co-written with Neil Gaiman and also one of my absolute favourite works.

It's a hard ask to write so tightly throughout an entire book that every page is of such quality that an agent would represent an author based on that individual page. Maintaining that standard takes time and effort and redrafting. But the end result is breath-taking.

Gender imbalance

Gender imbalance has become a considerable concern both in terms of reviewing women authors and reviewers being women. This is my initial response to this issue as an editor of a publication that reviews books.

Jane Sullivan is a published author and long-term writer for The Age, who has written an article on this subject (http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/a-womans-place-20120113-1pyoa.html). Her comments are reasonable in my opinion; when I was at school, the only literature I remember studying that was written by a woman was The Getting of Wisdom, which was written under a male nom de plume. This sends a specific message to girls. While I was a storyteller and even received high distinctions for a fiction story and a science essay on immortality at high school, the thought of becoming an author or entering the publishing industry never crossed my mind. Being a pragmatist as well as a dreamer, and having a desire to afford to eat, the concept of exploring my potential as an author did not enter my mind until I was an adult.

Now, as a reviewer and editor, I have been challenged that DMF and I do not review enough books written by women, with the exception of paranormal romances. There is a market for paranormal romances. I enjoy the occasional romance, but I prefer a novel where romance might be one facet of a much larger story rather than the primary focus. I want more than romance in my regular reading diet. I think there might be a perception that 'women are only interested in romance' factoring into the dismissal of literature written by women, but we're not - our reading tastes are diverse. Without doing a specific count, I think the majority of books DMF receives for review that are not romances are written by men.

So now I'm in the situation where I'm concerned about an imbalance in DMF's presentation of available literature. This has been magnified by becoming aware that authors of whom I've heard good things, like Alison Goodman and Karen Healy, are not US or UK authors but they are Australian. Or, in Karen's case, a Kiwi living in Oz. I was really inspired to read their works after

hearing them speak at a convention in 2011, but I haven't received their books for review. DMF runs at a loss, costing me money, so I'm not in a position where paying money for books to review is a reasonable expense.

There are a couple of things readers could do to help:

1) send key books for review or raise publisher's awareness so they send key books for review (Most of DMF's books come from Hachette, HarperCollins or Random House as they kindly support DMF's efforts - however, I'm not always aware of the books that I should be requesting and sometimes books are not available.)

2) provide reviews that can be published by DMF. Sadly DMF cannot pay you, but DMF will give credit to authors of reviews and provide links to your websites etc. I cannot guarantee that all reviews will be published, but I'm always looking for more reviews and reviewers. Send reviews to darkmatterfanzine@gmail.com

3) donate to DMF via Paypal (see issues 5 and 6 for details) - after I've upgraded from CS3 to a current version of InDesign, I'll be able to think about purchasing a few key books for review.

In response to the above post on Facebook, one reader suggested reviewing library books. My concern here was that the review may be considered to be irrelevant if the book is old enough to have been purchased and processed by a library and have been in the library for long enough that my request had risen to the top of the pile. I posted a poll on facebook, asking 'When are you interested in reading a review of a book?' The largest number of people said that publication date of a book in relation to the review is irrelevant; the next largest group said the review was of concern when he or she is about to purchase or borrow the book (with no indication of when that would be in relation to the publication date). Some people don't read reviews, others are only concerned about whether they trust the reviewer and one person said he'd only be interested in a review in the first few weeks prior to the publication date. On the basis of this poll, DMF may expand reviews to include older publications of interest.

Rise of the new groupthink

In response to this article on groupthink and creativity http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/15/opinion/sunday/the-rise-of-the-new-groupthink.html?_r=1

Creative people need time alone in order to create. There is much to be gained from teamwork as a team can provide the opportunity for one's weaknesses to be balanced by another's strengths or simply providing external feedback. However many teams suffer from groupthink. When I first heard about groupthink the classic example used to illustrate groupthink was Watergate. On a post-election high a group of men got off on their own egos with disastrous results; what they needed was a naysayer, someone with commonsense to ground them in reality. Sadly many teams suffer from this mentality these days, often punishing, excluding or even removing anyone with a differing opinion who could bring balance to the team.

As a creator working alone, engaging an independent editor or even being part of a group of like-minded but freethinking equals giving one another feedback, can bring a richness and maturity to one's work. wRiters on the Rise is one such group that springs to mind; I have yet to read any of their work I didn't like, and I'm collecting the set - this morning I'm interviewing Trent Jamieson, another author who is a member of RoR. Previously interviewed authors from that 'set' include Marianne de Pierres, Rowena Cory Daniells and Richard Harland. Other members of that set include the award-winning Margo Lanagan; she's next in my sights!

Surrounded by Sherlock

This blog was written in response to this article about the BBC threatening to sue CBS for making a contemporary Sherlock Holmes series http://screenrant.com/bbc-sherlock-cbs-elementary-lawsuit-aco-148206/.

Sherlock to the right of me, Sherlock to the left of me, let slip the dogs of war! Honestly people, why cling to remaking the original? Why

not do something original? In its early seasons, Monk was a great contemporary rendition of Sherlock without claiming to actually be Sherlock. Jonathan Creek was another great contemporary twist on the classic stories, with Creek portrayed as an illusionist whose powers of observation and deduction gave me many happy hours of viewing.

I'm getting fed up with Sherlock remakes and renditions, especially after reading something billed as 'The new Sherlock Holmes novel'. Although others are giving it 4 stars, I shredded the plot and rated it with 2 stars as 'deeply flawed' (see issue 7, to be released soon). As the minion said, if the author had built his own sandbox instead of playing in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's sandbox, I probably would have given it 3 stars, but if you can't write Sherlock REALLY WELL, then you should STAY THE F**K OUT OF IT. Sorry, but I started reading Sherlock in primary school. Although I haven't read the original stories in about 20 years, Sherlock still holds a special place in my heart. If you can't write brilliant detective stories, don't try writing Sherlock.

So why, oh why, can't CBS call it something different? Why claim this as a contemporary Sherlock? Because Sherlock Holmes is fashionable, we're getting all sorts of cheap and expensive knock-offs. My advice: don't try riding on Doyle's coat-tails, do the series and call it something else.

And BBC? Stay away from lawyers. The US has a habit of remaking stories that have very little if no relation to the original material: Greg Rocke's Whiteout, The last several eps of Life on Mars (allegedly a remake) and... [insert list here]. The ones who really lose here are the fans, and the only winners are the lawyers [insert vampire/lawyer joke here]

If both the BBC and CBS series are good, then the fans are winners - they get two series!

I'm so glad to see that I wasn't the only one thinking the Sherlock Holmes is a disappointing fad.To the people who were surprised by the 'twist' at the end of the last BBC series, I ask: did you even read the books? — Jamie Sage

Us and Them

'Us and Them' is written in response to this article: http://www.snopes.com/photos/animals/tigerpig.asp. I recognise there are many layers of other issues involved in the linked article that I'm not addressing.

Many of the world's problems are due to an 'us' and 'them' mentality, whether it's 'us' and 'them' concerning race, religion or disability. Look at what can happen when different species learn to live side by side and even nurture each other. I wonder how many fewer terrorists there would be if, instead of invasion forces, the West put more of a focus on providing food, shelter, hospitals and schools while respecting others. In the UK they're currently looking at legislation to remove support for disabled people, but how many of the politicians and spin doctors who are taking these actions will be personally affected? I suggest none. Also it would be unlikely that those pushing this legislation have close family or friends who will be detrimentally impacted. The spin they're using is dehumanising language that puts the disabled in this 'other' group that is somehow less than human, whose pain and suffering is neither heard nor felt. Tigers and pigs.

Bareback by Kit Whitfield is a powerful novel that used a society of werewolves subjugating non-werewolf 'disabled' children as a vehicle to discuss issues of disability. *Bareback* is a very important book written by a woman author; my concern is that it may be overlooked or forgotten because it was fantasy written by a woman discussing disability: three strikes and you're out. I would love to host a discussion about this book. Let me know if you'd like to join this discussion after reading *Bareback*.

ePublishing: a bubble bound to burst?

This article (http://m.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/jan/30/self-e-publishing-bubble-ewan-morrison?cat=books&type=article) about the epublishing bubble takes a largely pessimistic view, I think the author is also mostly right although he's missed a few points.

On the negative side, the cutting of costs across paper and electronic publishing means that, even in big publishing houses, editing standards have been lowered. I recently started reading an advance reading copy of a book. The entire human race was anatomically incorrect; the author appears to have misinterpreted Wikipedia pics and not gone further afield for research. I've studied a bit of psychology and was forced to memorise all the areas of the brain and their functions, so maybe I'm being pedantic. However, there were significant other problems with the book making me wonder if an editor read it at all or just decided, because it's a previously award-winning author, that the book is fine. For example, girl goes outside and talks to boy in front yard. Then they're in a room with a floor. Then girl goes to front door to go inside to get something, then boy is near a path. There were other issues with inconsistency, including the girl knowing something and then being really upset when she was told the same fact and so forth.

A lot of self-published authors don't have their work edited independently. I can tell you from experience that I cannot fully edit my own work. If I write something for DMF, for the next week or two at least, I'm too close to my own work to pick up on a lot of errors or room for improvement. Leave it a few months or, better still, a year or two, and it's a whole different story: my fingers itch to rewrite significantly. Luckily I have a quite literate partner who proof reads and edits for me, but he has a day job and limited time to contribute; how many self-published authors are in a similar or worse position? Thus literature with a small 'l' declines.

This decline in standards will, in the end, be the long-term source of difficulties for the publishing industry. Prices go up and down, but in the end people will pay for something they desire, whether it is paper or electronic. Books via the publishing industry must

compete with TV, movies and the internet for our time and money. To garner a following, especially if there's a price tag attached, standards must be high.

Ewan Morrison, author of the linked article, completely omits to mention the opportunity epublishing provides to those who seek a voice, an opportunity to be published, who do the work for the love of creation, and do not have expectations of significant financial rewards. Traditional paper publishing is just too damn costly for most potential self-publishers, but epublishing gives everyone an opportunity to create and to be heard.

While I'm sure there are many creators out there who would appreciate financial rewards, many create in the knowledge that they'll probably always need a day job, but they do it for the love of writing or drawing. When interviewing people, I tend to ask about day jobs because it is so common for creators to need a day job. Aspiring creators can learn that holding a day job is not something to be ashamed of, but is almost a badge of honour: 'I created this through determination and sacrifice while working a day job AS WELL!'

Vincent Van Gogh only sold a few paintings while alive, and all or most of them to his brother. Van Gogh did not make a living out of painting. Most artists and writers, even the fairly successful ones, do not make a living out of their art because we live in a culture that, generally, does not value art and culture outside of a rich man's trophy cabinet. So hold your heads up high while keeping your feet on the ground. Value your day job and work your butt off creating, that way you'll be able to eat as well as have the satisfaction of creation.

Interviews

Rhiannon Hart talks to Dark Matter

Just before the start of NaNoWriMo in November 2011, Rhiannon Hart talked to Nalini and Edward Haynes from Dark Matter, with her brother Rory making sound effects in the background and Tivali, a beautiful cat with personality, joining in.

Nalini: Hi Rhiannon. Thanks for agreeing to talk to Dark Matter. The bios on the Internet all mention you making up words to go with stories before you could read. There is a long journey between that point and getting published; how did you get from there to here?

Rhiannon: The making up of words was probably because I have an older brother, Rory, who you've just met. He could read before I could because he's 3 years older than me. We're quite competitive or maybe that's just me, I felt like I should be able to read when he could. I remember staring at these little books like Jeremiah and the Dark Woods, looking at the words and making up what they meant in my head to go with the pictures. When I was in high school I wrote fan fiction which was a lot of fun, like Labyrinth and Xena. I was really popular and cool, as you can probably tell from that. I really loved doing that. I never really thought about being a writer as such until probably the end of my degree, which was a major in psychology. I really loved it, but I couldn't see myself being a psychologist. I was really interested in behavioural neuro-psych, which involved working with a lot of people who'd had strokes and car accidents. It is interesting theoretically but practically I think it would really get to me working with people who'd had that sort of experience. I can't remember why exactly, but I enrolled in RMIT's professional writing and editing course. It was great; I did three years there. I was supposed to finish after two years of a full-time load, so I sent an e-mail through saying I'd like to graduate now. The coordinator came back and said 'you don't have enough points.' There'd

been a misunderstanding with one of the subjects: it was only worth one unit instead of two. So he said I had to do another unit. I looked at the syllabus, and the only thing that was left that looked interesting was writing for young adults. So I enrolled in that begrudgingly and I picked up Vegan Virgin Valentine by an author I used to read as a teenager. I remembered how much I loved young adult fiction when I was a teenager although I hadn't been reading it since high school. I'd been working on various novels throughout the RMIT diploma and none of them had stuck. I'd get to maybe 20,000 words and then just run into a hole and I wouldn't know what to do next. Then I started working on *Blood Song* a couple of weeks into the course. It all came pouring out. Thirty-nine days later I had a first draft and I was just astonished. Basically the story is the same as what you read now, like the sequence of scenes, the way the story goes, nothing has changed there. But still, in the beginning it was a big mess because I wrote from start to finish. By the time I got to the end of the book I knew why she was doing what she was doing and I had to go back and push that into shape to make it fit. My editors really helped with that as well: I had two wonderful editors, one of whom was a specialist fantasy editor, Abigail Nathan at Bothersome Words, and she did an amazing job.

So when I finished the book I edited it for a couple of months. I thought it would suit the American market more than the Australian, because a lot of the stuff I read when I was a teenager came out of America, like Tamora Pierce and Tanith Lee. So I got an agent in the states in New York, Ginger Clark, and she ended up selling it back to Australia. I was really happy actually and it was great to be picked up by Random House Australia, which is such an amazing house and has such a wonderful publisher, Zoe Walton.

Nalini: Who has encouraged you along the way?

Rhiannon: My family has been really supportive; we're all really bookish. My parents always had a lot of books around the house. My mother taught me to read and my dad used to read to me a lot. My brother is very bookish as well. We all read a lot of speculative fiction, lots of sci-fi, fantasy, lots of biography and things like that. And I was always encouraged to go and look words up in the dictionary: they wouldn't just

give the easy answer.

My friends have been really supportive as well, they've been really lovely. I had support from a couple of writers in particular who read my work and gave me lots of encouragement, like Amanda Ashby who wrote *The Zombie Queen of Newbury High* and also her latest one *Fairy Bad Day*. We started e-mailing back and forth and I asked her to read my opening chapters. I know it's a presumptuous thing to ask. But she did and she wrote a recommendation to put on my query letter. She has been really supportive.

Online it's just such a wonderful community, the young adult community in particular. I noticed that as well when I was at RMIT and I was doing novel writing for adults and attending the classes. Everyone was a little bit standoffish and reserved, and everyone took it very seriously. Everyone who writes for teenagers has such a sense of fun and is so much more easy-going and very enthusiastic. I found since I switched to writing for young adults it's been so much more fun.

Nalini: That's good. Who has influenced your writing?

Rhiannon: I've read a lot of Tamora Pierce and Tanith Lee. I really loved Tamora Pierce's *Alana* series of course and the *Immortals Quartet* which is probably my personal favourite. I did base a lot of Rodden, my main character, on Numair from the *Immortals Quartet*. I had him in mind when I was writing Rodden, the physical picture in my mind. His character came out very differently, but he was my inspiration. And I really loved Isobelle Carmody's *Obernewtyn* series.

Nalini: I hear the last one is being released on Monday.

Rhiannon: Last or second last? I think it's split into two in the States and is one here. I need to reread them all and then get that one, so it's going to take me a while. I really loved Vivian Van Velde and Jean M. Auel's The earth children series, Clan of the cave bear and so on. I read a lot of those I was a teenager. And Anne Rice. Since then I've been reading a lot of dystopian fiction, like Aldous Huxley and I looked at Orwell and looked at John Wyndham and people like that. I read mostly speculative fiction.

Nalini: And yet you write fantasy.

Rhiannon: I do. I love *Graceling*, I loved all the Kristen Cashore books. I don't read a lot of fantasy for grown-ups. I guess I have a very low

boredom threshold, I start reading it and… [Rory laughs] I guess I just take a lot of what I loved from when I was reading as a teenager. People like Tamora Pierce are still writing and it's still popular. It's probably after *Graceling* we're going to see a lot more of that sort of thing coming out. I hope so anyway.

Nalini: You have a day job as well as writing: how do you manage both?

Rhiannon: Lots of early mornings. [Laughter] Last year I was getting up at 4:30 to finish book two, *Blood Storm*. Getting up at 4:30 and writing. I probably wasn't the most amazing employee at the time but it was good. I have a job where I can leave work and I can just forget about it. I try and write in the evenings as well and have nice train trips so I try to write on the train as well.

When *Blood Song* was on submission I was falling asleep at parties a lot. It would get to midnight and I would say I was going to check my phone. I would fall asleep on a couch in another room. There's been a bit of that, but not so much this year. I haven't written heaps this year: it's been a lot of publicity work. Also I was travelling for 6 weeks and then I was recovering from travelling, then I was recovering from my release. Now I'm just starting to get back into it and am going into NaNoWriMo for November. I set myself the goal of 50,000 words. I have 10,000 words for a ghost anthology to write. So as long as I get to the end of the month with 50,000 words and a good chunk of Blood Queen, book three, done, I'll be very happy.

When asked how long before the cover of Blood Storm would be ready, Rhiannon replied with an image.

Nalini: You've already written book two?

Rhiannon: Yes, book two's done. I finished last December I think.

Nalini: A year ago?

Rhiannon: Yes. So, this year, as you can see, not a lot of novel writing. I did write 25,000 words of sci-fi earlier in the year and

I've worked out since then how to finish it, but I haven't gone back to finish it yet. Hopefully next year.

Nalini: So there have been a few distractions.

Rhiannon: Yes.

Nalini: You belly dance and sew as hobbies; this is a real contrast.

Rhiannon: Yeah, yeah. The belly dancing is a lot of fun. I did classical ballet when I was a kid and tap and jazz and I loved it. Then I've done nightclub dancing and things like that. But I've been trying to stay in a bit more and still exercise at the same time, so belly dance is a lot of fun. And sewing – oh, sewing has been worse than writing this year. It's been my last priority. I've got to make a few Christmas presents tomorrow but that's about it.

Nalini: What is the publishing process like from your perspective as an author?

Rhiannon: I've had a wonderful publishing experience. You hear horror stories along the line of 'I've got the worst cover and my publisher doesn't listen to me' and stuff like that. Random House have been wonderful and Zoe has been lovely ever since I first talked to her on the phone. They went through the editing process and were making suggestions rather than telling me what to do. Before I signed the contract they did say they wanted a name change, but that was the only thing that they were insistent about. I didn't mind so much and Blood Song was actually my second choice. I'd written a long list of different options and that was right at the top. I am still fond of the title Lharmell, when I chose that I was thinking of Isobel Carmody's *Obernewtyn*, which is a place name with strange spelling. But it worked well with the two other books with *Blood Song, Blood Storm* and *Blood Queen*. The content itself, I feel, is exactly what I wanted it to be.

When the cover arrived I had the most heart pounding moment when I got the e-mail. I was at work and I found myself going bright red and I turned around to everyone and I am like, 'Oh my god, my cover's here!' I hugged everybody. There were two choices but that was the one it had to be. Originally it had Leap, the cat, on the front cover, but he wasn't quite fitting in well. They were sort of looking at each other but their eyes were missing each other. So he was put on the back.

Nalini: I love the cat.

Rhiannon: Isn't he lovely? He was actually inspired by a real cat. My brother was house sitting this Singapura breed of cat. They were thought to have evolved in the sewers in Singapore, which is how the drain cat became involved. In *Blood Song*, I'm not sure if it says that Rodden was from Verapine … that might be in book two. I think it is alluded to. I'm not sure why but I thought yeah, Rodden can come from there too, the same place as Leap. That's how that whole other continent sort of came about, inspired by this cat that my brother was housesitting. A very big personality cat with beautiful big eyes. Very striking.

The whole process has been amazing. Seeing it in bookshops and things like that has been wonderful. All wonderful and glowy and rosy.

Nalini: Were you concerned about the cover being similar to other covers like Passion by Lauren Kate? Were you concerned about it being overlooked?

Rhiannon: No, I wasn't at all. The most important thing to me was the words. I was worried that they would make me change how the story evolved, whereas the cover is a marketing tool. I work in marketing so I know how it's supposed to be something that grabs people straight away. I knew that it was being massaged into a particular look, the appearance of it. There's a whole slew of books with girls in pretty dresses in forests and I haven't read a lot of them. Like *Fire* by Kristen Cashore. That one I have read. My publisher asked me to write a list of the book covers that I really loved. *Fire* was up there and she is in a pretty dress. I haven't read any of Lauren Kate's books. I'm not even sure that the main character ends up in a pretty dress in a forest in Lauren Kate's books, but she does in mine even though it's the wrong colour.

Nalini: The difference is that Lauren Kate's book appeals to fans of *Twilight*, it's marketed that way and she talks about it that way. Your book I think would appeal to those fans but would also have a broader appeal.

Rhiannon: One of the things that I wanted on the cover was a bow and arrow. That was probably more important to me than a pretty dress, but it didn't come out that way.

Nalini: I love that scene where she is shooting and she is getting really tired.

Rhiannon: I was like 'can that be on there please?' It didn't get on there and I didn't mind so much, I think because Griffin got on there. When I saw it I was like: yes! I love the way she is looking over her shoulder. When she is in that place and she is getting burnt and scared—it evokes that. And she sort of does look a lot like I imagined her as well. All the movement in the hair as well. The cover is nice but it was more important to me what's inside.

Nalini: I think the cover is beautiful. I was just thinking that the cover puts your book in a particular category that maybe your book does belong in but I think you have broader appeal.

Rhiannon: I would be interested to see if it does get picked up by other territories what they would put on the cover. Because it is quite an American cover. I'm not sure if I have seen any other Australian covers that look quite so - I don't want to say it's generic as such but I know it has been put into a particular category. I've seen one or two reviewers on Goodreads say that it is un-Australian, the book itself which I think is an interesting thing to say.

Nalini: Why did they say that?

Rhiannon: They don't give reasons. I suspect that maybe it's because it's a little bit frivolous. Compared to a lot of Australian fantasy by Marina Marchetta and Isobel Carmody, for instance. My book, it has its serious moments, but it is quite quick paced and fun.

Nalini: I started reading your book and I couldn't remember where you're from. I got to the point where they're going north and it's getting warmer, so I think the author's Australian. I went frantically looking, and then yep, she is Australian, cool.

Rhiannon: Yes, my dad said that as well. He said you do realise that if it does get published in North America then people will be going, why is it getting warmer when she is going north? Well, I said, they can figure that out. [Laughter]

Nalini: Talking about North and South, I think that because a lot of what I read does come from the northern hemisphere, it gets colder as you go north, warmer as you head South. Even as an Australian reader, because I read so much that comes from the northern hemisphere, this adds to the otherworldliness. Blood song is obviously a story about vampires but they're not sparkly.

Rhiannon: No. I love my monsters. I read a few synopses of books with zombies, like kissable zombies, for example. And I like my monsters to be - well you don't kiss zombies, you run away from them as fast as you can. Double tap. Things like that.

Nalini: I thought the whole point of zombies was to be gross.

Rhiannon: I know. I know. And the point of vampires … All sorts of monsters to me are meant to represent our struggle to retain our humanity. That is the important part to me, so I wanted a character who suspected she might be a monster but she can't tell anyone. They might think she was crazy or she might find that she actually was a monster and then everyone would know. And I wanted her to be going somewhere. She was going somewhere with someone and it was going to be more important to her than the other person. And this horrible thing was going to be creeping up on her, and she was going to put these people in danger. She is going to put her sister Lilith in danger. That was the first stroke of inspiration I had for the story. As soon as I decided that the monsters were going to be scary monsters, what were they going to look like? They are going to have needle teeth and they are going to slither, they're not going to walk. They're going to be ultrafast. They're not going to be able to speak. I'm not sure where the singing came from, but I thought I'd give them something that made them eerie and beautiful while at the same time being horrifying.

Tivali, Rhiannon's cat

Nalini: So your vampires are actually deadly.

Rhiannon: Yeah. Deadly and fast. The weather thing was - I'm not sure where that came from - I was thinking

about climate change. As the series progresses there is going to be more about the weather and a little bit of politics, but it is basically about the monsters.

Nalini: With your main characters, they are struggling with a sense of how much a monster are they.

Rhiannon: The main tension between Zeraphina and Rodden in book 2 is because Rodden has this past, and not a first-hand experience with what he is. He is very reticent about anything physical that is not involved in pursuit of holding onto his humanity. He is very closed down in that respect, whereas Zeraphina has never had a lot of bad experiences so it's hard for her to understand why he is like he is. Zeraphina's main aim for holding onto her humanity is to fight what she is and to pour everything into her struggle against the LharmellianLharmellins. They are both quite closed minded like that, whereas she is a little bit younger and she hasn't really had any bad experiences; she is a bit more open to new things whereas Rodden is more closed down.

Edward: That sounds like a good point of conflict.

Rhiannon: Yes, that is the main source of conflict, which leads naturally into the romantic side. It obviously doesn't work well for any romantic resolution. I do like my long drawn out sexual tension.

Nalini: You can't get it all over and done with in five minutes.

Rhiannon: No, exactly, and even in *Blood Song* originally there was no kiss at all. My agent when she first called me and said she'd like to offer me representation, she said two things. Just cut maybe 1000 words of the beginning and put a kiss in there. I'm like, oh my god that changes everything! Where the hell am I going to put this kiss? She didn't tell me anything about where the kiss should go. I didn't ask at the time and then I got off the phone. Then I am like, right, I've got to find a place to put a kiss. A kiss is a very nice thing of course I was open to putting it in there. I sort of played around; I put it in the scene when near the end where they are going back into the LharmellianLharmellin lair because they have to get a bird to get out of there. And I put it in the scene where they have a fight (spoilers everyone for book one) when he says to her 'you could have told me what you're doing' when she kills an important figure and becomes possessed almost and so he has a go at her for that, and then they kiss. But no, a kiss doesn't work there because that changes things

at the end of the book and if you leave the book when a kiss has just happened, everyone is going to think when you come to book two it will be all lovely and shiny and happy but that is not the case at all. So (spoilers again) I put it in the ballroom scene and then she runs away from him and I thought that almost undoes the resolution that the kiss brings about. I wanted to completely undo it and I didn't want anything to change, so that's why I put it there. It was lovely, the ballroom scene, with a pretty dress, and I do like my pretty dresses. Putting the kiss there then it's almost like this big violin scene.

Nalini: You never mention the word 'vampire'. Why not?

Rhiannon: It's another world. There's no witches, there's no werewolves. There is an alchemist in book 2 but there's no wizards, no magic at all. It's a world governed by physical laws, there is no magic as such. Even the Lharmellins and the powers they have over the weather are very much grounded in the physical environment so there's no religion in all. It's a secular society; no one has gods or goddesses. There's the Lharmellins, the way Rodden speaks of them sometimes and the way they speak to each other … it's a bit like a cult. Like they say 'Praise the blood' and the new initiates are called converts. Those are the only religious overtones the story has. There would obviously be folk tales in the story but the way that I wrote it I did not want there to be a lot of back story like there is in a lot of fantasy novels. I wanted it to be quite tight, quite focused. To have the word 'vampire' in there, if I had just put it in the way the story was I think it would have jarred. I would have had to create a lot of other mythology to go along with that, which I didn't want to do.

Nalini: Isn't there any magic? I had the impression that Zeraphina's country was getting colder because of magic.

Rhiannon: Yeah it is a sort of magic I guess. I guess it's a sort of earthly grounded magic… The Lharmellins can influence the weather patterns and there are psychic overtones. I guess telekinesis and things like that come in to it and influence the physical world in that sense, rather than saying the magic word and a candle bursts into flames. I was very much thinking of the physical reaction when I was planning the supernatural elements of the world.

Nalini: It's more subtle?

Rhiannon: Yeah, I guess it's more subtle. I guess I wanted it to be non-

magical but with slightly magical elements. I didn't want the magic to overtake the monsters.

Nalini: I have a thing about magic. I like books with magic in them but Magic needs to have limitations.

Edward: It needs to be anchored. It sounds like it's almost mystical rather than magical.

Rhiannon: Yes. As I go further into the series it is explained more, but I wanted it to be limited as much as possible. This is why I didn't go into a lot of folklore and other magical creatures, I didn't want them to exist at all. Also I wanted Zeraphina to have no source of reference when she starts feeling like a monster. It's like, no one else in the world talks about feeling like this, so what's going on? And the way that the people in Pergamia have it going on in their back garden basically, and they're all so repressed and they just don't talk about it, they just let the soldiers deal with it. And the consequences for that come out in book three.

Nalini: How are your vampires different to normal vampires?

Rhiannon: The ones we have at the moment are on the way out, it seems. Vampires today - you might talk about the Twilight ones, and Anne Rice is still highly influential and hers are the vampires that I love the most. They're these sexless creatures who are almost purposeless and just envy what humans have which is not like mine at all. I'm not sure I could say any vampire as such inspired the Lharmellins. But then there are the harmings, which is what Zeraphina and Rodden are, and they're very much the teen angsty vampire trope where it's like 'I want to overcome my monstrousness'. Then again, maybe in that they're a bit different; a lot of teenage books are about embracing the vampire side and using the powers to their advantage, where Zeraphina and Rodden want to get as far away from theirs as possible. I guess that is more comparable to a zombie plague where you want to distance yourself as far as possible from the virus. The things that are bad are going on in the world; it's about getting away from that. So I guess they were similar to other sorts of monsters rather than vampires.

Nalini: *Blood Song* seems to be a coming of age story in that Princess Zeraphina is finding who she is, finding her place in the world. I was concerned that she was going to be passively waiting for Prince Charming.

Rhiannon: No, certainly not. There was going to be none of that. I was very conscious of it. There were times when I would wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat where I was like 'oh my god, is she active enough, is she her own person, I haven't made her into one of those passive heroines have I?' I have to say that she doesn't seem to have turned out that way. I was speaking to a friend of mine who is also a writer about a week ago and he was also telling me the main theme in his book. He asked me at what the main theme was in my book. I guess you could say it is nosiness; that insatiable curiosity. I'm like that myself when people are telling me a story, I'll interrupt them and be like 'I need this information' and ask them a lot of questions, and then 'okay, now you can continue'. It's this insatiable nosiness I have myself and it just came out in Zeraphina. It was not a conscious decision. I guess when you write your first novel you don't really think too much about it, it just comes out. If you're a nosy person you can be quite impulsive and she is quite impulsive. She is very much in charge of her own fate, which has consequences, of course, for her family and her sister especially.

Nalini: She got rescued but I like the fact that she wasn't being a passive victim.

Rhiannon: Yes she was definitely doing her best to get out of there. When she does get rescued she thinks to herself 'I wasn't expecting it' but she does give Rodden that jibe, 'You took your time', as if she had been expecting it the whole time, even though she didn't know that he was a good guy. I don't know if she would have got out of there without him, but he did show up at the 11th hour, at the right moment.

Nalini: *Blood Song* almost seems a normal young adult romance between Zeraphina's elder sister and the prince, but it's told from the lower levels perspective with a whole different angle. Why tell the story from that perspective?

Rhiannon: What do you mean?

Nalini: It's a bit of a Star Trek reference with the lower levels. You have a core group of people and there was a particular episode where you're told the story from the perspective of the ensigns and the younger group of people, the not-so-important people.

Rhiannon: As in Zeraphina is telling the story of Lilith and Amith and it's almost like they should be –

Nalini: That would be more traditional.

Rhiannon: Yeah. They were just falling in love and getting married, it was a bit boring. It was definitely important for the story. When I first thought of the story it was Lilith's maid, not her sister. Then I'm like - she'd have a lot more freedom to be nosy and to be an almost foot stamping sort of teenage girl if she is a princess and she is expecting to get her own way a lot. When she was seeing her sister and Amis fall in love, she is on the one hand going 'this is a stupid' and on the other hand it's actually really lovely. When she stops to think about it, she does love her sister and she does think Amis is a good person. It's almost like an afterthought. It's like it's been going on in the background the whole time and she's been so wrapped up in herself and it comes to her: 'I am actually really happy for my sister'. If there was nothing else going on in the background, it would make the story a bit repetitive. The older sister who is doing the right thing, the mother had something to hold up, 'why aren't you more like your sister?' Even though she doesn't say it, there is that overtone, it comes out more and more as the trilogy goes on.

Nalini: What can you share about the rest of the series?

Rhiannon: The second book is going to be a lot more of a journeying sort of story, getting out there in the world. Exploring what's going on. It's much more of a quest story, getting out there, discovering exactly what would be the result of their killing who they did kill in book 1 and whether that it's made a difference or not. And a lot more about Rodden, because there's very little about his past. He has a big sordid past that has to be gone into, which I had lots of fun writing. I grew up in Western Australia in the Pilbara region and that's a big influence on this. It's more like the desert that you'd find in North Africa but it was definitely inspired by what I saw and felt as a child. Also the belly dancing came from there as well. All of my books have an element of dance in them. I thought, I'll have to put some belly dance in this. I was watching videos on YouTube and I thought 'Wow, that looks amazing, I'll have to try that.' So I ended up taking it up myself.

Nalini: This bit of competition between Zeraphina and Lilith. How much do you think that's a reflection of –

Rhiannon: Me and my brother? Probably a lot actually. I guess, because I never had an older sister. I guess that's why I wrote Lilith, because I

always wanted an older sister.

[Raspberry from Rory]

Definitely the dynamic between the two, even though my brother is not remotely like Lilith at all. But Zeraphina is quite competitive with everyone, with Rodden and with her sister, so I guess, along with her nosiness that's probably something she got from me.

Nalini: You have two more books planned for this trilogy. Do you have any other books planned?

Rhiannon: Yeah, I'm working on some fantasy set in Melbourne that I probably won't talk about. It's been coming on for about two years based on a Grimm Brother's fairytale, one of the more obscure ones, and it's very unlike the other Grimm fairytales. There are no princes or princesses. I really wanted to get away from princes and princesses after *Blood Song*. I read it and I knew it was something I wanted to try out. Then a sci-fi which I've been working on this year. They're both about 30,000 words in and maybe a third done. The sci-fi is inspired by Patty Hearst who you might have heard of because of Stockholm syndrome. She was kidnapped by a people's army in the 80s. She was the daughter of a millionaire socialite. I guess she was a bit of a Paris Hilton. She was kidnapped by this army and ended up robbing a bank with them. There are these photos of her on the CCTV with an AK- 47. How do you go from daddy's little girl to robbing a bank and sympathising with your captors? So the sci-fi is sort of Patty Hearst with lasers and a lot of other stuff. Colonisation and terraforming. She is not a daddy's little girl character; it's quite a different sort of character, but that was the inspiration. There's a lot of stuff about journalism and the media and their responsibility. I've been following the Occupy Melbourne stuff for the last fortnight. It's like 'God, I need to work on that book again.'

Nalini: I read your post about the occupy Melbourne. Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

Rhiannon: No, I don't want to talk about it. That basically sums it up.

Nalini: How much do you think the sci-fi you're working on is influenced by your study of psychology?

Rhiannon: Probably a lot, definitely the Stockholm syndrome part. I loved doing my degree, I loved all the things I found out. I find there was always a little bit in my books that is drawn from the degree. The sci-fi is my

most cobbled together piece; a lot of things have been swirling around in my head that I just pushed together, whereas the urban fantasy: the sources are more singular. The Grimm brothers' fairytale and one or two other things. Something I did for Inside a Dog, the State library blog, was I listed these things that I was interested in and I found I could smoosh them together into a story. A lot of my personal interests come out in the story.

[*Tivali, Rhiannon's cat, decided that she wasn't getting enough attention and that she needed to assert her dominance over these guests she hadn't invited. It was very entertaining but also distracting*.]

Nalini: Are you going to be signing books at bookstores upcoming conventions?

Rhiannon: Not anything planned at the moment no. I had my book launch here actually, I wanted it to be quite family and friends oriented. Next August I will probably have a launch at a bookstore but I haven't done any appearances yet. I haven't done any speaking in public, I'm still trying to psyche myself up for that.

Nalini: According to Trudi Canavan it gets easier. She said she is very shy.

Rhiannon: Oh good. I've had to speak a couple of times for work and I've managed that okay. As long as I know I've got something to say. Tuesday night I was at the Inky Awards and these authors spoke and they were just amazing I was like 'Oh God…' The quality that is out there - and hearing Isobel Carmody speak and hearing Justine Larbalestier and all these wonderful authors I've got to have a good think about what I'd like to say.

Nalini: Supanova will be back in April. I mention it because you'd be in really good company. This year Dymocks was there with Trudi Canavan, Jennifer Fallon, Marianne de Pierres, Robin Hobb - Robin Hobb was the one with the longest queues - Margo Lanagahan, Isobel Carmody… Did I mention Rowena Cory Daniells and Marianne de Pierres? I can't forget them.

Rhiannon: Did you meet Marianne? I haven't met yet but we have talked.

Nalini: I've interviewed her.

Rhiannon: Cool. She is such an interesting woman.

Edward: Who was it that wanted the picture with Capt Jack Sparrow?

Nalini: Isobelle Carmody. She asked me to take a photograph of her with that guy who dresses up like Capt Jack who looks like Johnny Depp.

Rhiannon: He does.

Nalini: He really does.

Edward: He really does and his outfit and mannerisms: he's got it all really slick.

Nalini: Yes, so I have a bragging point that Isobel Carmody asked me to take her photo with Capt Jack.

Rhiannon: I saw a couple of pictures of you on your Facebook page as Dark Matter dressed up like storm troopers and dressed up as rebel pilots and stuff.

Nalini: Yes. Borrowed costumes, yes.

Rhiannon: Oh, amazing. And there were all these Star Wars characters, the girl with the blue.

Nalini: The Twi'lek.

Rhiannon: Amazing. Unbelievable. That must have been for a convention.

Nalini: Us as storm troopers and with the Twi'lek was with Glamour Puss studios, a tap dancing studio, was doing an end of year Christmas do, they were doing Killer Queens so they wanted some help. April couldn't get anyone else to do dress up so we were the bodies that filled the costumes

Edward: It was great. We went to a few rehearsals and the main performances.

Nalini: The very first time I dressed up was at Armageddon last year when I wore April's X Wing costume.

Rhiannon: That looks like Luke Skywalker when he was in the orange jumpsuit.

Nalini: Heaps of fun, but I don't know about this whole making of costumes thing, it's a huge amount of effort.

Rhiannon: It is, and I was just reading in Dark Matter: the gun importation;

you can be charged like it's a real gun. [*Tivali interrupts again*] Tivali is asserting her dominance; we will grovel before you, we will grovel.

Nalini: I don't know what the charges would be, but it does seem serious. And the police wouldn't talk to me. Basically said they're going to do their own information campaign in coming months and they wouldn't give me any extra clarification. What else does the future hold for you?

Rhiannon: This ghost anthology that I've been asked to be a part of through Australian literature review. Auslit is their acronym; their editor has asked me to be part of an anthology, and it is coming out next March. I've been planning a fantasy series that will have a bigger scope than Blood Song and probably won't be a trilogy. I really love the way Tamora Pierce and Kristin Cashore have created a universe that they can set a lot of different books in. So I want to work on one of those myself. I will probably finish my two standalones, my urban fantasy and sci-fi, and then get stuck into that. So I am very excited about the new fantasy series. That's about it for my plans for writing at the moment. I'm looking forward to finishing a book. I haven't finished one for almost a year; it's a good feeling to get the first draft and hugging it straight from the printer.

Nalini: NaNoWriMo should be a productive time.

Rhiannon: Yes I hope so, it should be a productive month. It's my birthday month as well, so I'll try not to celebrate too much.

Nalini: Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.

Rhiannon: Thank you so much for coming round.

***Possessing Freedom*, a ghost anthology:**

Alice, a teenage girl committed to a psych ward, struggles to separate what's real from what seem to be creations of her mind.

A nurse is killed by a ghost in Alice's room and she is blamed for the death.

When Alice's 'imaginary friend' tells her that ghosts are not only real but are coming for her, things get complicated.

The book follows an ensemble of characters in a near future Melbourne, via six narrators, as the ghostly realm clashes with the physical realm.

There is no cover for this anthology yet.

Rob Lloyd talks to Dark Matter

Rob Lloyd is an Australian David Tennant look-alike who performed Who, Me, a Doctor Who tribute comedy, at the Melbourne Fringe Festival and Armageddon in 2011. Rob Lloyd talked to Nalini Haynes and Edward Haynes at the Dandenong Pavilion in November 2011.

N: Our first encounter with you with was *Who, Me*. How did you get into sci-fi?

R: Sci-fi for me started when I was a kid, when I was really young, and seeing Star Wars. Star Wars for the first time is what I really remember. Star Wars and TV shows when I was a kid growing up in the 80s: there was a plethora of sci-fi related animated shows and toy ranges that had created these TV shows specifically to sell their wares. Autobots, Thundercats, Silverhawks and all these lines and lines of action figures from sci-fi shows that really sparked my imagination when I was growing up in country New South Wales. I can still remember going round with the action figures and acting them out when I was at primary school and imagining myself on different planets and flying spaceships. Much more enjoyable than actually thinking being trapped in a small town miles away from anything else. It felt a bit like Tatooine but it wasn't as cool. No moisture farms.

N: Did you have any friends that were into the same stuff?

R: Yeah, it was mostly me and my brother. We did a lot of stuff together, sharing our action figures and acting them out. I did have a couple of friends who went on the sci-fi bent together, especially in high school. Our group of friends solidified to a group of six, so we were sort of like the dirty half-dozen. My best friend and I liked drawing together, so we drew our favourite characters from comic books or TV shows, sci-fi

Rob Lloyd & Vicious Fish Theatre present

WHO, ME.

Devised and Performed by Rob Lloyd

Devised and Directed by Scott Gooding

'...a stellar piece of work...'
Chortle

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DESIGN: LLIAM AMOR

films… It was a big part of our nerd escape from all the bullies and the political drama that is high school. It's always good to try and step away from that and try to focus on who's your favourite Ninja Turtle, what did you really think of *Batman Returns* and stuff like that.

N: In some ways Facebook isn't different from high school.

R: Exactly. It's become the computerised form of high school. I'm 33 and I'm still in this high school mentality because of the Facebook phenomenon which freaks me out.

N: So how did you get into acting?

R: Star Wars inspired me into acting. I remember when I was in kindergarten or year one, we had a drawing project about what we wanted to be when we grew up. I remember specifically not wanting to be an actor, I wanted to be in Star Wars and I kind of knew that was an option: like being in films and movies and stuff. I remember drawing a picture of me being chased by an alien with a blaster from Star Wars and I remember acting it out and thinking this is fun.

It wasn't until end of year seven we got our subject choices. Up until then everything was compulsory, then we got a list of subjects and we could choose electives. I saw drama there and I realised that was what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. From grade eight onwards I pretty much focused on performing, so I got involved in a local amateur acting group. My year eight teacher was in his final year of teaching and he was the head of the amateur theatrical group. His name was Mr Gordon, he was one of my biggest influences when I was a kid. He pretty much directed me in my first five or six productions. A lot of the rules he taught me about acting I still follow now.

I was in a country town, there were not a lot of options there. Every time I got an opportunity to go to Sydney for the holidays, where my dad's family were, to do workshops with NIDA or anything like that was a way of getting out of the small town. It all really started when I was a kid but it really took off when I was in high school.

N: Why drama and not comic books?

R: I like drawing a lot, but I realised I enjoyed looking at pictures and drawing them as opposed to going off on my own. I can draw my own characterisations but they are very limited. The opportunities with acting were a lot more exciting, there were a lot more ranges of things for me

to do and explore. I knew the limitations of my drawing but I like the fact there was a lot more scope with acting: there was comedy, there was drama, there were all these exciting new things. Every drama class I did even at high school with only an English teacher who kinda liked acting, there was something new I could learn. I still did art way up to year 12 and I enjoyed that as well and still enjoy drawing a little bit, but every workshop I did, every class I did with drama, something new came out and that really, really inspired me.

N: That's great. Then you left the rural New South Wales for the rural city.

R: Yes. I moved from a small rural town of Dubbo to a larger rural town of Wagga Wagga. There's a funny process when you finish year 12, there's a thing called The Rounds that all drama students do. They finish high school and they audition for all the big acting schools in Australia. Through this time I met a lot of the same people from all different parts of New South Wales because I'd done regional drama camps, I'd done state drama camps, I pretty much did it every year, much to my parents' bemusement. They said 'you did one that's enough', I said 'No, no, I need to go back every year because of the community and the experiences and it's my oasis away from Dubbo.'

N: And they supported you in that.

R: They did. They understood the acting stuff and they were really cool about it, but in year 12, it was my final year at high school. I'd just got back from an excursion to Sydney for art and the next day I had to leave to go to regional drama camp for five days and mum just freaked out. 'Why are you going? You've been for four years in a row. Why do you need to go for another year? You've got year 12. I don't get it.' I said 'I just need to finish this off. This is my last year, I need to go.' She didn't get it but she let me go anyway. The Rounds is where you go to audition for Charles Sturt Wagga, Charles Sturt Bathurst, Napean, NIDA, VCA… Pretty much all the auditions are around the same two week period. So you just go from NIDA to Wagga to VCA and all these auditions around Sydney and just outside. And you'd see the same people all over the place, then you go away and you either get a call-back or not and then you get your offers. I was on the shortlist for Napean, I got into Bathurst and I got into Wagga. The Wagga course appealed to me most because it was an acting course

focused on screen acting as well as stage acting so there was a lot more variety. I was there for three years doing the acting degree and I stayed for another year to do my Dip Ed.

N: And you fell in love with Doctor Who while you were there.

R: I was a latecomer, yeah. I fell in love with Doctor Who in my first month of being at university. University is meant to be a time where you experiment, it's your first time out of home. A lot of kids out of high school were out drinking every weekend, they were coming in on Monday saying 'Oh I got so smashed,' and I just didn't get it at all or anything about drinking when I was in high school. I was frantically studying as hard as I could because I just wanted to get out of there as soon as possible.

We graduated and we went straight into our exams. My final exam was the art exam and the day after I had my first audition for NIDA, so pretty much as soon as I finished high school I was already looking to get out. When I got to Wagga it was great. I was out of home for the first time. I was 17 and meeting like-minded people, people who were nerds. When you're at university and you're doing drama, you're like 'let's see what radical clothes I can wear, this is what it means to be an artist. I'll wear flannelette shirts and velvet jackets, that's really cool'. No, it isn't cool. Flannel and velvet go together - no they don't. You need to learn from your mistakes.

I met Al. Al and I instantly got along. I met him at my Bathurst audition a couple of months beforehand. He made me laugh. We met each other on the first day at Wagga. He was born on 2 April 1978; I was born on 3 April 1978. We were pretty much the same age, the same build, the same look and we had the same interests. He was from England so he had his accent and he had all his stories; his mother used to be an actress and she was in an episode of The Persuaders, so he'd had a very

exciting dynamic interesting life. His parents had met and fallen in love and she stopped acting to marry him and then moved to Australia. My parents were teachers and I was from country New South Wales and now I'm here…but your life is exciting. I'm a country boy. So we made a connection and he introduced me to Doctor Who.

I talked about this with my director when we were working up *Who, Me*. As a kid I always wanted to know where I was with a show when I watched it. I couldn't just come in and start watching it without knowing the background, so any TV shows in the 80s that had a prologue at the start, like Knight Rider explained 'this is a man who does this for this reason' I'm like 'okay, right, I know what's happening now.' So Doctor Who, because it was so big, I said: I don't know who this companion is, and what are they doing, what is this Doctor… I needed someone to sit me down and explain everything from the start and that's what Al did. He explained everything and I went: now I can watch it, now I know the history of the character, I know who each doctor is, I know who every companion is, I know the back story of the production crew, I know everything about it now I can start. I don't know why I do that, some sort of slightly obsessive nature in me that wants to know every detail before I start watching it. That's like with Star Wars, I loved it as a kid, when I first saw it was before they added the episode four for the cinema release so it was just Star Wars. So when they added the Episode IV: A New Hope I'm going like 'oh crap!' And then they started talking about the prequels. I'm going 'okay yeah, I wanna know, but oohhhh…' It was really exciting until episode one came out, then…

N: Not so much.

R: Not so much.

E: Mesa thinks –

R: Yeah, mesa thinks he should have stopped at episode six.

N: One of the things out of *Who, Me*, that I remembered most vividly is your description of a sci-fi party.

R: That's one of our happy accidents that just came out through the rehearsal process. It's just a tangent that we went off on and the structure of the show reshaped so we didn't have it in there. Scott said 'No, we've got a have it in there.' We put this part of the show in and the people who are fans love it because it's funny and it's true and because it's a cliché.

A lot of non-Fans like it because they can see the dynamic, especially because we're all painted with the same broad brush, like we're all nerds. The little dynamics and diplomatic relations that all the fandoms have… I mean I only scraped the surface. All the little intricate little parties and groups that are set up within this whole fandom that is nerds. I like that part very much. People enjoy that part, they can see a bit of themselves. It's our own little community, it keeps us going. We have our own little backstabbing, we have people who think that they're better than others. And sometimes the lines cross: what if I am a Buffy fan but I also like Firefly but I also enjoy Star Trek as well and I do the cosplay thing as well? There should be more of it.

N: It's part of that post-modern culture, a bit of everything.

R: Yeah, a bit of everything, no segregation. Nerd-dom needs to spread out.

N: How did you get from Wagga Wagga to doing these productions in Melbourne?

R: When I moved to Wagga, my intention was always to move to Sydney. I was going to be a serious actor and I was going to do legitimate acting, fourth wall acting, John Hurt, the next Robin Williams, I was going to be the next Dustin Hoffman. I was very focused on doing that but in my first year we had to do singing. Our singing teacher was quite delusional and she booked us in to be part of this massive choral performance up in Sydney. A couple of us didn't want to go, so our head lecturer said 'While they go to Sydney, the rest of you need to do something else.' At Wagga there was The Voices Festival, where they have all these events happening: singing and speaking and poetry recitals.

Waitress: can I get you anything or are you happy just to sit?

R: No, we're fine thank you. Oh, um, that was very presumptuous of me. No, we're fine. I don't want anything else. Put that in the interview: 'Robert Lloyd was very presumptuous. I actually could do with a piece of cake but he cut me off. Arsehole. No wonder he only does solo shows.'

But yeah, The Voices Festival had an annual theatre sports competition. I did improvisation a little bit in high school, but I never really got it because I was so focused on being a serious actor. Anyway, I formed a team with a group of guys who didn't want to go to the singing convention and we did the workshops, that sparked my interest. I went: 'This is exciting! You

can create characters, stories, off the top of your head and there are these games and formats.' I found a joy in that.

We did the competition to a sold-out crowd of about 400 people in a local theatre in Wagga. Professional improvisers came down from Sydney to defend their titles because it had been happening every year. It just blew me away. Our first game, I was so excited, none of us listened and we almost bombed out in the first round. Then we clawed our way back and we made it to the final against the professional team. They pulled out a game that none of us had trained for and we'd never played before. They got massive points for that. The final game was a classic game that we chose. I created a character for the scene and I got a standing ovation. It was my first ever standing ovation and I was 18 years old and 400 people standing up and giving us a round of applause. We lost but that's when I went 'this is what I want to do with the rest of my life.' I met the Artistic Director of the local theatre company and he pulled me aside and said 'I want to train you up and another person to take over theatre sport stuff' so they flew me up to Sydney and started training me.

I was learning to improvise as a performer as well as learning how to teach impro. That inspired me. I did that for about three years. A friend of mine and I formed an impro group that became a musical comedy group called FreeFall. I did that in my final year of acting. I deviated away from the traditional way of acting, the fourth wall method of American acting, where you go and you get an agent and you get a job as a waiter and you wait for a call and you do acting classes. Theatre sports and improvisation opened me out to companies, Co-op groups who can go out and create their own theatre while looking for acting work as well.

My third year at uni was great because they couldn't fail me. I could actually stand on stage and I wasn't incompetent but I wasn't really listening to their specific view, I could do whatever I wanted. It was great. So I stayed for another year and we did more stuff with FreeFall. Shaun was from Melbourne and he said Melbourne was the home of comedy in Australia. There are venues everywhere, there are comedy festivals, so he said we should try that. So we decided to move to Melbourne in 2000 and we hit the ground running.

We started off in Wagga doing hour-long shows; when we got to Melbourne, they said, 'You've got a five-minute spot.' So we had to

cut material, we had to take songs and work on tightening everything up. While I was doing that we met other people who were doing the comedy rounds, other young up-comers who have gone on; Lawrence Leung, Charlie Pickering, Cam Knight, Andy McClelland, even Madeleine West, all started doing stuff as well at the same time; it was a really exciting time in the early noughties, all of these young comedians coming together at this time.

I was given the opportunity to help out at the Comics Lounge which was a new venue that opened in about 2001. They had an impro night on Sundays but the guy who ran that did it for about 3 nights. He left after three weeks of working with this company. The guy who ran the Comics Lounge sat me and my friend Beth down and said, 'Either you guys continue running impro night or I takeover and do whatever I want.' So that's how I started The Crew. I was running my own impro company at the same time as I was doing Freefall comedy stuff and we were doing festival shows and it just carried on from there.

I did a little bit of extra work here and there, but that was more for money and experience. It kind of depressed me doing extra work so I found more fun in going out and producing my own work.

E: that's where you get your energy from.

R: Yeah. You have to produce and publicise and direct and cater and all that kind of stuff on your own. It's only been in the last couple of years I've been able to get other people in to help direct, produce and all that other stuff, but I've always worked with other people, I love working with other people. I love the joy of going to do an impro show: you hang out with people, share ideas and you jump on stage and feed off other people and the audience, but I've never done a solo show before. Most people I've worked with in impro have been doing solo shows since they were 18 or 20. They've been doing 45, 50 min shows of stand up, finding what works. I'd been doing nothing but impro or group shows for 10 years. That's why I did A study of Scarlet last year, my first ever solo show. I just want to see if I could do it: if I could stand on stage for an hour and entertain people.

N: Was this the science show that was on last year?

R: My shows are dealing with obsession, so last year it was about Sherlock Holmes, because Sherlock Holmes was a big part of my life in high school.

A Study of Scarlet was the first Sherlock Holmes story I'd ever read. I fell in love with it, I'd read all the books and I loved Sherlock Holmes as a character. When I moved to university that's when Doctor Who took over. I always had my sci-fi connections but when I went for trips in high school I always had a Sherlock Holmes novel to read with me. So that was my first show, but I didn't put in comedy, I did it as a drama. There were little bits of comedy in there, but it was me acting out the first Sherlock Holmes story in an hour, and telling little stories about my obsession throughout. The challenge this year was to do a solo comedy show this year for an hour and see if I could make people laugh on my own for an hour as opposed to improv which I'd been doing with other people for nearly 15 years.

N: I think you succeeded. [smiling]

E: You certainly threw yourself into it

R: Yeah, well that's the way I've been performing ever since I was a kid. Completely wholeheartedly, physically, emotionally, verbally… It was great. It was good doing the season of *Who, Me* at Melbourne fringe first. The majority of people who came to see it at the start were non-Who fans, so I had a lot of people who were kind of interested in Doctor Who or extreme fans who brought a lot of friends and family along.

It wasn't until the last two or three nights of the season that the hard-core Doctor Who fans came along. That changed the dynamic of the show completely: that prepared me for Armageddon with 400 people. All hard-core fans, so the key moments in the show at the start where I do my bad stand-up, where you're not meant to laugh, doing it in front of 400 Doctor Who fans who were clapping and

cheering at every punchline: they actually got these jokes. When I do my interpretive dance piece, everyone was clapping because they recognised each of the doctors. At the Melbourne Fringe people had no idea what I was doing, they just thought it was funny seeing a man doing interpretive dance. I've had to explain to a lot of people it is each doctor's death. Some of the hard-core fans that came and saw it at the festival picked up on one or two things, but at Armageddon everyone got every single one, which was an amazing experience. It was a wonderful day. I kept saying it was a special day and my wife said that I sounded a bit special myself. She said to stop saying that. I said, 'Incredible, can I say that instead?' She said awesome, but I say that about everything. So she said, 'Okay, say it was incredible.' It was a lot of fun.

N: Do you find you get energy from your audience?

R: Yes. I had performances of *Who, Me* where the audience wasn't as energetic, they were enjoying it, but they were older audiences who were going 'yeah, that's okay. No don't do the pop culture references, tell me more about you.' So when I tell stories about myself that's what they want to hear. Normally a lot of comedians and performers get freaked out if the audience isn't with you and isn't on your side, if they're not vocally laughing all the time. You can build up a bit of a trauma if there aren't a lot of laughs and instant appreciation from the crowd. This show has really taught me to be a bit more patient, so if they're not laughing straight away, they'll get something else in time. On the Armageddon day they were so high energy, they were eager to show that they understood, it just helped so much with the flow of the show. It added another 5 min because of the cheering and applause and laughter. That's always a good thing, when you have to wait, for pauses in laughing, that's always a good sign.

N: When Doctor Who started again, what was that like for you?

R: It was great. The dark times went through pretty much all the 90s and the noughties. There were little bits of information of things happening like the novelizations picked up, the Doctor Who Magazine kept going for 15 years but had nothing new… Review the same episode again… 'Let's interview someone and get the same anecdotes again…'

Then they did *Scream of the Shalka*, which was the animated series they put on the net with Richard E. Grant. That built up a bit of interest but

not as much as they thought. Then six months later it was revealed that Russell T Davies and all that stuff, which was so exciting.

Worst of all was six months later I didn't have an internet connection so I had to wait for it to be screened in Australia. I was going to internet cafes and looking up online for audience feedback before I'd seen it. I had a friend in England at the time that I hadn't spoken to for months. The first time I spoke to him I said, 'Doctor Who's starting up again – would you tape it for me?' He's never let me forget I did that. I've apologised to him profusely. But then series two started, and that's when I was invited to Who Night so I could see it the day after it was screened in England. It was just amazing to have it back.

I felt so far away from it. There was this massive cultural explosion in England and I always felt far away from it. It was like a party was happening on the other side of the street, I could see it happening but I had to stay home and finish my homework.

E: Awww…

R: Yeah, I know, the story of my life. Then when it came to Australia it was on and the momentum was building and there was excitement but it wasn't until the Tennant era until the female fans grabbed hold of it especially and made it their own and made him their own.

N: You bill yourself as the David Tennant lookalike, you do the eyebrow, you've obviously got in front of the mirror and practised, so what was that like for you?

R: Yeah. Work the eyebrow. Work the hand thing. Work the quizzical pose, work the chin back a bit…

Back in the old days of Doctor Who they did a couple of publicity shots but it wasn't a big thing. You go into the studio at the start of your run, they'd take a couple of shots, a couple of publicity photos here and there. Nowadays they saturate the market with photos, especially with Tennant's three or four-year era, he was photographed so many times. So much stuff for the visual dictionaries, DVD covers, CD covers, independent books, posters, action figures… So many images of him and there are only so many poses you can do. The eyebrow was used over and over, there was the hand… He didn't really cross his arms that much, that was Eccleston, but you just see it all the time. He was going eyebrow, eyebrow, eyebrow, hand, hand, eyebrow, eyebrow, hand…

Okay triumphant look, depressed look, quizzical look, humble look, all the same thing. He has this category of looks. He is only human. He can only pose so many times. Supermodels just do one look, they just look pissed off all the time and they get millions of dollars. They've got it easy. But an actor in a sci-fi show, Doctor Who especially… Sanctuary or Star Trek it's the same pose. It's that dignified noble warrior look. With Buffy it's all the same look, it's the 'oh, I'm so deep and sorrowful but there is a little bit of hope'. With Doctor Who, you've got to change your poses every single time. So Tennant was using 150 million poses and now poor Matt Smith has to do the same thing. Crap! Just stand, now jump, now run, now look confused, now look aware, now look self-conscious… You do feel a little bit like a performing monkey. People say: 'You look like David Tennant, can you raise the eyebrow?' and then they lose their shit. And I hate myself a little bit for doing that.

E: You obviously have some fun with it.

R: We were working on the show and trying to figure out the best way to do the Tennant stuff. We thought of having the prosecutor deal with it, that turned out to be a good way to go. Rather than having me there talking about it, you have this alternate personality. I think that's the only way I could have dealt with it, by having me yelling at myself, calling myself a consumer whore. A whore for the masses, I really like that. I like the fact that I get to yell and scream at myself, saying I'm nothing, I'm lost, I don't have a personality of my own. It's getting back at myself for all the whoring I have done with my Tennant lookalike.

E: With regards to '*Who, Me*' how many people are behind-the-scenes?

R: We've expanded it a bit this year. Me and Scott Gooding, we've been friends for years, we did A Study of Scarlet together, just the two of us. We co-devised the story. I don't sit down and write a script. We chat and record everything, then I take the best jokes and the best bits that we come up with and structure it into a script. This year we brought on a couple of other people. Scott McAteer who I've only known for about a year and a half, but he is a huge Doctor Who fan so he's very helpful being an outside eye drama nerd. Laura Milke I brought on as producer. Laura produced The Hounds; she was manager and producer and she is amazing.

For this production I wanted to get as much exposure as I could. For *A Study of Scarlet* last year I hardly did anything, we threw out a couple of press releases and we did really well. We sold out our one and a half week season. But this year I wanted to broaden it, especially because it's Doctor Who. Doctor Who is known better than the Melbourne Fringe Festival. We had a lot of people coming up to us who said they'd never heard of the fringe festival before but they saw my article in the Herald Sun, or they saw my article on the Doctor Who fan site. That was a big coup for us, being on Doctor Who news. My massive full-screen picture and the whole press release was plastered on the Doctor Who news page.

For Armageddon we had other people come in as well. Karina took care of merchandise. She set up before the show started, she directed people in and sold merchandise afterwards. I was there for another half an hour after the show for the merchandise. I like doing that, it develops that company and community feel. And that's why I've added all these other characters on stage as well. Standing on stage alone is still new to me, so I want as many safety blankets as I can. Just like Linus from Peanuts. So yes the company has expanded a bit which is cool.

N: In *Who, Me* you showed photos of your wife Karina photo bombing you. Was this before or after you started dating?

R: This is after. We've been going out for about three years, and she found a brochure for Armageddon 2008 I think, when Seth Green and the guys from *Robot Chicken* came out. She showed it to me and I said 'What's this? Conventions – yeah, I went to one in high school.'

She said, 'Awesome, we've got to go.' I wasn't sure but she said this would be really cool. So we went along and I went in civvies: I went in a regular shirt and jumper. I just tried to blend in and Karina's like 'why aren't you wearing one of your nerd shirts?' I'm like 'Oh, no, I'm far too old and mature for this.' [miming smoking a pipe] I don't even smoke, I know...

So we went along and the guys from *Robot Chicken* were cool, there was some dickwicks from *Twilight*, and we went into see that because Karina's got a guilty -know I won't say that, she'll kill me - my wife actually watches *Twilight* and she's read all the books. They had Cameron Bright there, and he plays a bit part, and he was horrible. He was a self-indulgent little shit, he's is like 'oh god, I'm cool, you think I'm cool, right?' And all the girls go

'Yeah, you are so cool.' This beautiful little 12-year-old girl stood up to ask a question, and she asked the most amazing question ever. Any actor would kill to have this question asked. She said, 'If you could play any role, any character in books, TV shows, whatever, who would you play?' Karina and I said that's just fucking gold. Maybe he'll get this one, maybe he will be able to redeem himself in our eyes. He went, 'I don't know - maybe I could play myself. I'll play myself in a movie.' Karina and I went 'That's it, we're out of here.' We saw the 12 year old girl - her soul died.

Apart from that, Armageddon was fun. Karina said we should go again. Next time we wore nerd shirts and people commented on them. Karina said I should wear my Tennant suit. Karina, her family and my family got me the Tennant suit for my 30th birthday. She said I had to wear it. I said if I wear it everybody else has to go in costume as well. So we did that at Supanova in 2011. Karina dressed up in her True Blood outfit so she had the Merlotte shirt and the apron, and her friend Domi went in her Harry Potter outfit. I had my camera. Everyone asked for photographs with me. I said yes if I could get photographs with them. It wasn't until about halfway through the day that I realised Karina was giggling after every photo. In every single photo she was photo bombing. It was absolutely fucking hilarious. So I love looking back at those photos and see the different expressions and how Karina pushes her way in. Some people look back and they see Karina in their photos. They're like 'Oh my god, it's a perfect *Who, Me* photo - it's got Rob and Karina in the background!'

Karina hasn't coped well with being part of the show. She is my good luck charm. After the show finished people were getting up to leave, and the people getting up in front of Karina were like 'Oh my god, oh my god, his wife was in the crowd! She was behind us the whole time!' Karina's like: this is not cool. She doesn't like being the centre of attention.

N: What does the future hold for you?

R: We're doing *Who, Me* for Adelaide Fringe. We're also taking my science/comedy show, *The Science of Doctor Who*, which premiered in November. We're definitely doing *Who, Me* for the Comedy Festival for a short season so people who have missed it can see it. We're trying to push to do an independent season and tour around Australia and I'd love to take it overseas, love to take it to Edinburgh for the 50th anniversary of Doctor Who.

It was really good at Armageddon: they had Sylvester McCoy and my favourite companion Louise Jameson. I love her so much. She is the same age as my dad but I still tried to snog her. No, I didn't. I was talking to her and I kept thinking to myself 'I could kiss you, I'm going to kiss you, you've got a beautiful face.' I was nerding out but I was there with Scott, so he pushed me aside and he took over. He got Louise Jameson's card, bastard. And she was saying 'Don't just do Edinburgh, there is also the Brighton Festival,' and she was telling me all these other locations to do the show.

There's a famous story about a guy called Toby Hadoke who is a Doctor Who fan and an actor: he did Coronation Street. He did a show for Edinburgh Festival a couple of years ago called *Moths Ate my Doctor Who Scarf*. It was a big hit, a massive hit. A lot of Doctor Who actors came to see it. He was commissioned by BBC7 to record it on CD. Louise Jameson voiced his mum, it was narrated by Colin Baker. Toby is now writing for Doctor Who Magazine and he does commentaries for the DVDs. He got a lot of exposure talking about his story of Doctor Who and his obsession with Doctor Who. He started out when he was a kid. I spoke to Louise about that in how *Who, Me* is the Australian version of Toby's show. She was interested in it because he's done really well.

It was really good to talk to them about the show as opposed to asking the same questions: what was your favourite story? We all know her favourite story – it's *The Sun Makers*. How was your relationship with Tom Baker? We all know the story of her relationship with Tom Baker - he was a bastard to her, and when she started to nark up, that's when he had respect for her. So it was really good to talk to them and get encouragement to take my show overseas. As big as Doctor Who is here, it's nowhere near as big as in England where it comes from. I've always wanted to go to Edinburgh; I need to do Edinburgh at least once in my life. Hopefully England, Australia, New Zealand and Canada: they're the big Doctor Who countries.

N: It looks like Doctor Who is taking off in America too. They've even got the Doctor Who bar, with the TARDIS and everything. You haven't seen that?

R: No. I've heard of the Doctor Who Experience but I haven't heard of the Doctor Who bar. Where's that?

N: It's in Brooklyn. (http://www.girlgonegeekblog.com/2011/07/a-tardis-lands-in-brooklyn-the-waystation-bar/) They have the mural on the wall, and the TARDIS is bigger on the inside.

R: Excellent. Well Craig Ferguson who does The Late Late Show, is keeping up the Doctor Who tradition in America. He has a TARDIS on his desk.

N: And Neil Gaiman gave him a vegetarian haggis which he put in his TARDIS.

R: Haggis. You saw that one as well. I love the man-love between those two. They met for the first time a couple of weeks ago, and they were tweeting the most tweetiest tweets back and forth and now he came back. They have this bromance developing, I love that. I love the romance that Craig Ferguson has. He has so much energy and passion. His love for Doctor Who as well. Matt Smith has been on three times, Karen Gillan has been on twice. Neil Gaiman has now been on twice. I loved when Craig goes on these massive Doctor Who spiels, and then he turns to the audience and says 'You don't know what the hell I'm going on about do you? And then he says fuck it, and he keeps on going. He talks about Doctor Who and he's just allowed to do it. He is trying to build it up as much as possible.

N: In *Big Bang Theory*, Sheldon is watching Doctor Who at 6:30 in the morning.

R: That's right, or as he likes to call it 'Doctor why bother' when he wakes up early and is trying to set it all up with Penny sleeping on the couch. That made me very happy. She is sleeping over and he says, 'well I've already missed the first 14 minutes of it so it should be Doctor why bother.' I like that.

So America is picking up Doctor Who as well. American fans got into Torchwood and then discovered Doctor Who which is kind of a backwards way of doing it.

N: Even Community did Doctor Who.

R: Yeah, Abed mentioned K-9. And what was it? Inspector…

N: Space-time.

R: Inspector Space-time. Yeah. They did a parody of *2001 A Space Odyssey* right at the end when the guy sees himself as an old version and then

he becomes that, it's an amazing section with the monolith there. Then Jeff starts to see himself as Pierce. Then he becomes an older version of Pierce, that made me lose my shit. I laughed so hard. I was such a film snob at that moment.

N: Are you going to be making *Who, Me* available on DVD?

R: A lot of people have been asking that. We filmed it for Armageddon and it looks really great. And we filmed closing night of Fringe Festival as well but that is just on one camera so we won't be using that. It's going through all the legal rigmarole as well. It's a good show that people can watch again and again. A lot of people want to buy it. But it's also the case that I want to keep doing it live, so people will still come out and see it as opposed to people saying that they don't need to come out and see it because they've got the DVD.

N: Do you think that would be their attitude rather than 'I've got the DVD so I want to see it live?'

R: It could be that as well. Stand-up comedians are a lot more hesitant to be filmed because once people have seen it, that's the material, it's been done. They can't do that material anywhere else because it's been filmed. With *Who, M*e it's different because it's an actual show, a story with a narrative. I'm much more inclined to film this and sell it as opposed to stand-up material. It's just trying to get through all the legal rigmarole of what images can I use, what sounds can I use… I have to find lawyers... We might have to choose a different piece of music for the interpretive dance but I love that piece of music because it's from *Tron Legacy*. Once we clarify all the legal ramifications it'd be really interesting to film.

I'd like to film it differently. I'd like to film different sections on different nights. Film all my stuff on one night and film all the prosecutor stuff on a different night and we'd cut it so it looks like different characters there as opposed to just having me turn my head. The ultimate dream would be to film it with a whole cast. Wouldn't it be great if I could get David Tennant to play me and I could play the prosecutor? I think it would be great to have David Tennant play the role he was born to play: Robert Lloyd. Let's see how this mainstream career goes for you David Tennant; let's see how *Fright Night* goes for you, David Tennant. David Tennant playing me, Robert Lloyd, and me playing the prosecutor screaming at David Tennant saying you're nothing like David Tennant.

N: Well, if it gets picked up by the BBC that's a possibility.

R: Well, that's the thing - I want to whore myself out to the BBC as much as possible. I made a point of showing how much Doctor Who means to me. I like the fact that it's a different type of story than British people would have seen. They don't know how Aussies live in country New South Wales and how something they take for granted could affect people in a completely different part of the world. That's what I'm trying to go for, showing the Australian part of my story – Strayan! How Aussie did I sound? Strayan! Part of my story. Crikey! I didn't have the classic cliché of hiding behind the sofa, I didn't have the thing that every Doctor Who fan has; they go, 'I watched it as a kid hiding behind the sofa, it scared me, that music freaked me out.' I didn't have that. I came to it when I was 17 when I knew the sets were horrible, I knew the costumes were bad, I knew some of the supporting actors were not good, but I also knew a lot of the actors were of a really high calibre doing an amazing job. Some of the scripts were absolutely beautifully written and when directed well they just shine for what they are. That suspension of disbelief. I remember chucking on an episode at university, not a very good one – it was Time and the Rani - and within the first 30 seconds everyone else is laughing saying it's so ridiculous, it's so stupid. I said you're training to be actors and you don't have that suspension of disbelief? I got very superior then: 'So you want to be actors but you can't suspend your disbelief and look at it for what it is. Oh. Surprises me. Oh.' So I was a superior nerd for that little bit there.

E: Did you say that you're performing regularly at the moment?

R: Every Friday night. I perform with the Big Hoo Ha at the Portland Hotel. They're an improv group from Perth. Their players have moved over here and they've set up a Melbourne version. I ran The Crew for six years. Then I started doing comedy shows on my own; we did Hound of the Baskervilles, we did *Every Film Ever Made*, and I went onto solo stuff.

The opportunity to work with Hoo Ha come up a year and half ago and I've been performing with them ever since. It's great on a Friday night, especially after a long week of school, just to vent and go down with them and perform. And get back to what I love doing which is just making shit up off the top of my heads. Heads? Head. So every Friday is pretty much down at the Portland Hotel, improvising with really solid

improvisers and really talented people. This is my way of trying to keep fresh, try to create new characters, new storylines, and connect with an audience. Just keeping my brain operating so I don't go stale and stagnant. (The Big Hoo Haa is now moving to Thursday Nights at The Portland Hotel in 2012).

A couple of years ago I wasn't doing stuff for the Hounds, I wasn't doing improvisation, I was just working on A Study of Scarlet. I was meeting for A Study of Scarlet once, twice a week and that's all I had of rehearsal - once a week for about five months. Karina sat me down and said you're not coping are you? I said no I'm not. I used to be performing two or three nights a week, sometimes four times a week. Karina could never really get why I was out so much. When she saw me when I wasn't doing anything…

N: You were dying inside.

R: Yeah. She said I needed to be doing stuff. Then Hoo Haa started up. So now she's aware of my need to get out and perform as much as possible.

N: It's part of who you are.

R: It's really weird. A lot of people say what you do isn't who you are, it's just what you do. I used to say performing is who I am. And that six-month period really showed me that it is part of my blood and it's what I need to do to keep myself fresh and going. I'm not doing it for any other reason; this type of show you put on for the pure essence of a performer entertaining a crowd. You're not going to try to get a leg up in the industry; you're not going to try to be noticed, to be spotted; you're just out there to have fun. You leave your professional brain at the door and you start creating and you go into the playground and have fun. In many ways performers are still children and I'm still very much a man-child. I don't have a playground any more: I can't go because apparently I'm creepy. Whatever. I can't go on the jungle gym. I can't go on the monkey bars. I can't go down the slippery slide, with that static electricity thing that hurts your arse. I can't do that now because I'm 33 and it puts the kids off apparently. So I stopped doing the playground. This is just a gag: I don't actually go to playgrounds. So yeah, my playground is the stage to keep myself fresh and happy.

N: With regards to hoping to work with the BBC and getting

David Tennant to play Rob Lloyd, what are your thoughts on Mighty Otakin and his animated version of Doctor Who? (http://mightyotaking.deviantart.com/journal/Regarding-Doctor-Who-animation-217961718)

R: This is new to me. I love finding out new stuff. I just gather it from other people.

N: Mighty Otaking was a fan artist of Doctor Who, and he's done some anime, and now he's taken his anime off-line, and he's working in a super-secret BBC production and nobody's guessed that it's Doctor Who. It's still to be announced. But in January 2010 someone was saying they think it's going to be a major animation of Doctor Who. I watched an animation on YouTube by Mighty Otakin (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kt3qZYUPi2Y). It has Jon Pertwee's voice, and the Master's voice. Where the voices have been taken from the original series and subtitled in Japanese. Where the voices are new, they're spoken in Japanese and subtitled in English. My favourite bit is where there is this woman in little shorts and a little top with a shirt over the top. The doctor just looks at her and told her to put some clothes on. Beautiful.

R: It should have been done in the actual show. That's probably Peri.

N: It was Jon Pertwee's voice.

E: It was captured from an old episode of Doctor Who.

R: Really? It's probably from the Demons where there is the part where he says to Jo, put some clothes on. That's great. I've never heard of this, I'll have to find it.

E: Did you put a link on Dark Matter's page?

N: I'm not sure. It was late last night while you were trying to get me off the computer so we could go and watch some TV. I linked this image of Doctor Who as manga and I was saying I could really see Doctor Who as anime, then somebody told me about Mighty Otaking.

R: A lot of the doctors have those rigid lines and a lot of those strong character features that are so anime-esque. Tennant has a very anime look, but also Troughton and Pertwee. A different style of anime.

N: One look at the doctor in this artwork and I could see it was Jon

Pertwee.

R: That's great. Now I've got something else to look up; that's good.

N: It featured the Cybermen and the Daleks and their actual voices, and the Brigadier.

R Excellent. It would be good if they could get him to animate more of the lost episodes like they did for The Invasion and what they're doing for The Reign of Terror, animating the lost episodes with the soundtrack and the voices. For the fans we love the lost stories, like it is a six parter but two of them are missing, so they animate the missing two episodes and put it out as a DVD.

N: Nearly 20 years ago we managed to get hold of a couple of Doctor Who stories that hadn't completed production. They had some film, some scenes as written dialogue and some voice-overs it was a whole mash up of stuff to create the whole story. One of the stories was Tom Baker, where he was poling along the river.

R: Shada.

N: There was another one from one of the really early doctors. I was into Doctor Who from *clears throat*

R: [snob-voice] from a young age?

E: A very little age.

N: My first Doctor Who memory was when I was about three, hiding behind my uncle's chair.

R: Oh wow. You have got the cliché down pat. That's awesome.

N: Yep. And the scene that I remember is Unit.

R: I've learned the bad side of being a Doctor Who fan and knowing so much. I met up with a friend, her and her sister came to see my show. Her sister is a huge Doctor Who fan, this one not so much. And they grew up with Doctor Who as kids. One of them said she had a teddy bear that she named Aggedor from the Doctor Who story.

N: Aggedor from the Monster of Peladon!

R: Yeah, but this is the thing: she said Aggedor was from her favourite Tom Baker story. I said actually it's a Jon Pertwee's story, The Monster of Peladon and also the Curse of Peladon. She got really angry at me saying, 'You just destroyed my childhood memory, okay. I thought that

Aggedor was in a Tom Baker story.' No, it was a Jon Pertwee story, sorry. So that's a bad side of being a Doctor Who fan, you correct people and you destroy their memories.

It's that whole 'the memory cheats', you remember certain things – there's a great quote from Russell T Davies, I'm paraphrasing obviously, he said what he wanted to do with the new series of Doctor Who is create a homage to Doctor Who of what people thought was Doctor Who when they were growing up. Everyone has their own memory of what Doctor Who was growing up; they remember certain images, certain tones. He wanted to take that time and recreate that as opposed to doing a direct rip-off. He wanted to create what you remember, but not what you actually saw. And that's what you get with Eccleston's first year. And they carried that on as well with Tennant. All the hallmarks of Doctor Who. It is what Dr Who is although it is not actually what you saw.

E: I want to see more of John Sims as The Master.

R: That's what really annoyed me. I'm there going: he's only going to be in it for two episodes. Sound of Drums is incredible. Series 3 is my favourite stories ever. I love it. Scott Gooding my director and friend had a massive argument with Richard Watts who is a series two fan. As fans do, they had a showdown: series 2 versus Series 3. The best episodes. They're going through each episode. Scott is going okay Smith and Jones okay, blah blah blah, Daleks in Manhattan horrible, blah blah blah, Human Nature, Family of Blood, Blink, Utopia, Sound of Drums, Last of the Time Lords, six episodes in a row, perfection, thank you, good night. That's what fans do. We argue and complain and show how big our information is to each other.

N: Have you seen the spoofs on the Internet comparing hard-core Christians to sci-fi nerds? http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNtnN_DiP3o

R: I have not seen that, no.

N: It's quite entertaining. There is no difference.

R: No. Not at all. No. This is how it is, this is what I believe… I loved the morsels of stuff you find on the net. This is what the fans have been crying out for: the Internet and YouTube especially. It's the perfect place for fans to get together, film what they need to… There's been an explosion. They can put on their fan fiction stuff, their fan videos, all that type of

stuff and share it.

E: And you've got Who fans everywhere.

R: Yes. I want to run with it as much as possible. Fans tell each other, they pass the message on. On the second Wednesday at the Melbourne Fringe we had a group of women come in their 40s and they loved the show. They said their husbands were coming the next week, and they'd bring the kids. The swearing is not too bad. So the mothers came on the Wednesday, the fathers came on the last Friday and they brought the kids as well. I found out that they were all Doctor Who fans and they met when they were kids through the Doctor Who fan club back in the 80s. So they met and fell in love as teenagers in the 80s, they married and grew up and had kids. Then Doctor Who came back and so now they've got the kids into Doctor Who, so they're old school Doctor Who fans and they're breeding new Doctor Who fans. It's an awesome story, you can't write this shit. It's incredible.

One of the dads said to me, 'Here's my son, he is a huge Doctor Who fan. He wants to be an actor. Do you have any advice?' I'm no-one to give advice, so I asked 'What type of performing do you like?' He is like five or six years old. He said he liked comedy. The only advice I could give is just to do what I did which is watch as much comedy as possible. Silent movie stuff, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s… watch everything, learn from them. The best way to learn is to watch and then do it yourself.

It is great to see the different generations. Because Doctor Who started in the 60s and went to the 70s and 80s, it was gone through the 90s but now it's back, you can have grandparents, parents, grandkids all follow it. I love that stuff: it's 50 years of history. And the stories are just as fresh. I don't really watch that much Doctor Who now because I just don't have time. I collect them all. I watch them here and there, but I mostly listen to the audios. The missing adventures from the 60s. I listen to those all the time in my car.

My current Doctor is Troughton. I've just listened to season one. It doesn't exist, it's just all in audio. So I'm listening to Power of the Daleks, Highlanders, Macra Terra, Faceless Ones, so I'm listening to those, not watching, just listening to all of them. Now I'm going through his second season, which is just great. 45 years ago nearly 50 years ago, and Faceless Ones has some really fresh ideas. I was listening to a William Hartnell

story, The Savages, which I'd never listened to before. It was Peter Purvis's last story. It's classic science fiction, very much like The Twilight Zone, The Outer Limits, but it is still stuff that is done nowadays. It's this timeless nature of Who, which I love. Especially with the audios you don't see the wobbly sets, you just hear the actors' voices. You hear the atmosphere, the music, it's really amazing stuff. And it's timeless, so kids nowadays can listen to it and it's entertaining. And they are. Kids are going back and watching classic Doctor Who and falling in love with it.

N: I think the BBC's got audio productions down to a fine art, and they have now for decades.

R: Especially with The Big Finish, they're producing great stuff as well with The Lost Stories.

N: Yes, Santa Claws - our cat - will be filling our stockings with Doctor Who this Christmas. Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.

Image posted on facebook by Sci Fi Australia to wish followers a Merry Christmas

Tansy Rayner Roberts talks to Dark Matter

Tansy Rayner Roberts, award-winning author of Power and Majesty, talks to Dark Matter.

N: Thank you for talking to Dark Matter. What inspired you to take up writing as a career?

T: I took up writing itself quite a long time before I was really thinking of it as a career. I was writing madly through my teens and I started novels pretty early because that's all that I read. I kept writing and writing and sold my first book before I finished uni. It seemed like this really possible thing. Then after getting two books published in two years I didn't get another one published for a long time but I already had the bug by then. I just kept going for it.

N: How does your family feel about your writing? That non-traditional lifestyle?

T: My partner has been incredibly supportive: he financially supported me through university and has continued to do so. Once the kids came along… writing, it turns out, fits quite well as a part-time job around the occupation of motherhood. I know there are many people for whom it wouldn't work, but it does really well for me. I'm quite good at making the most of the small pockets of time available to me. And my girls are really supportive. I think it's good that they do see me working; even though I'm not out of the house as much as their daddy is, they have grown up respecting the fact that I do that work. And my partner says he sees me as an investment.

N: That's fantastic.

T: It is. And it's nice every now and then that I can pay that back, whether it's financially or with something else. It's been really exciting the last couple of years - I've had a few successes. It feels less like I have to justify all that time I've put into it.

N: In 1998, you won the inaugural George Turner prize for

Splashdance Silver. What was that like?

T: It was kind of out of this world. I wasn't 20 yet, when I found out that I'd won the prize. I was on my third year at Uni. It was amazing. I'd made a few half-hearted submissions or queries to publishers with various projects but this was the first big submission I ever made. I almost didn't even send in the manuscript because I got nervous at the last minute. It was huge; I felt like I'd achieved this massive thing. The trouble then came with trying to build a career on top of it. I do think I was a bit young at the time to be able to do that effectively, but it was still pretty amazing. Going to Sydney and meeting my editor and feeling like I was part of this professional world…

N: Wow. When you say that you were a bit young to make the most of building on it, how do you think been older would have helped?

T: There's a lot of luck in our business. You've got to have the skill and you've got to have a lot of different disciplines going on, but you also have to have these moments of luck when everything comes together. If you can't capture it at that time and make the most of it, then the opportunity is lost. In this case, I was, it turned out, able to back up that first book with the second book, but the third one wasn't what the publishers were hoping for. They were less keen on the third one. I wasn't flexible enough: I didn't have the ability to turn on a dime and write a different book, which wasn't necessarily a bad thing but it meant that I wasn't really able to transform that early publishing success into an immediate career.

I think now as someone who has been writing a lot longer, and has a lot more knowledge about the industry, I have a lot more friends and contacts… I am in a better position now to back up any lucky moments with the hard work required and the discipline and all that sort of thing. I do think writers who start later than I did, often seem to launch themselves more effectively and make smarter business decisions. I don't regret how things turned out for me because having that early publishing success was an encouragement to keep going. It was also incredibly useful because I got 10 years of teaching creative writing night classes based on the back of those early publishing credits.

So even though I wasn't managing to get out a novel a year through my 20s, which I sort of felt I should be doing after that start, there were a lot of really good things that came out of it. I do think writers who get

their first real start in their 30s or later perhaps have more unpublished manuscripts under their belt, and are better able to build a solid career. But it's different for everybody.

N: It definitely is. You're a member of wRiters on the Rise [link: http://ripping-ozzie-reads.com/about-ror/]: why do you belong to a writers group?

T: This particular group has been going for a long time now – eleven years! I was very lucky, roundabout the time my second book was published. I was still young, I didn't really know many other writers and I was sort of picked up and mentored by Marianne de Pierres and Rowena Cory Daniells. They had this wonderful idea: once you get published there is very little opportunity for professional development because almost all the writing classes and writing resources are about getting published. There is an assumption that once you get published you almost have nothing else to learn, but those of us who reached that particular rung on the ladder are well aware that the job becomes harder, the expectations are higher. Just because you've written a publishable book once doesn't mean that you can knock one out of the park every single time. So they had this idea of forming a small community of writers who would help each other improve their craft. Because we're spread around Australia, we get together once every 18 months to 2 years and we exchange unpublished manuscripts and we critique each other. It's been an invaluable thing for me: having the advice of more experienced writers and getting a chance to develop my skills. You don't always get the time, even if you're on contract, especially if you're on contract with a publisher… you don't always get the time and leisure to write the best possible book in between deadlines, getting the opportunity to stop and think about what you are writing… Also to get a chance to see what everybody else is doing, and help improve their work. You learn a lot from critiquing that you don't get from just writing on your own.

Writing is such a lonely business, really, to do it effectively you've got to spend long hours at the computer by yourself. So having this little community to tap into every couple of years - we stay in contact at other times but there's no substitute for hanging out in a rented house a few days and drinking wine and sharing meals and just talking nothing but the industry for four days straight; it's pretty blissful I've got to say.

N: It sounds fantastic. Wikipedia says - and feel free to correct Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tansy_Rayner_Roberts - it says that The Lost Shimmaron was sold to the ABC on your behalf by wRiters on the Rise: how did that work?

T: That was one of the things that came out of one of our weekends away. We had this idea of doing a children's series where each of us would write one book and it would all fit together. It was sold as a group effort to ABC books. We went through one of the agents, or a couple of the agents of the group of writers. ABC Books were keen on the series. A couple of us were also lucky enough to get regional arts grants for the books; I think there was something about the project that really appealed to the arts bodies, the fact that we had people from different states collaborating. It was going to be wonderful and ABC books promised us the moon as far as publicity and everything... Unfortunately the series didn't continue after about three books. The other writers whose books weren't out at that time, they got the initial contract payment but nothing else. It was a real shame but I think it was something that, with a little bit more push, could have done a lot better. We had to basically do all our own promotion and publicity and everything. As it turns out, it's quite hard to promote a series with each of the writers in different places. Mine was the first one out and we were able to do a couple of big launches that we organised ourselves. But the series didn't find enough of an audience… It was a shame because I think that the project had – we wrote some great books and the series had a really nice idea to it. It was just one of the things that didn't work out. These things happen, sadly.

N: Are those books still in print?

T: No. The first three are around: I have a boxful of mine. But no, they went out of print a couple of years ago. We've talked about the idea of maybe putting them out there ourselves. You can't really get another publisher to pick up the series when the first half has been published by someone else. It's something we talked about, but I think a couple of the writers were interested in taking their particular volume away and making it more an independent thing. So we'll see.

N: Let us know if there are any developments on the front.

T: Absolutely. I think it's one of those things that, when all this happened a few years back, the idea of self-publishing, as print or e-books, didn't

really occur to us as viable. But of course self-publishing has become a different thing recently. It might be something worth considering now, but it would still be an awful lot of work and coordination. We'd have to decide if it would be worth it to resurrect the series.

N: Have you thought about using something like Kickstarter?

T: It's not something we've talked about as a group, but that's the sort of thing that could be done now. I was talking to someone a while back about the possibility of publishing it as an iPad app. There are all sorts of interesting things you can do with children's books that, again, weren't really available four years ago when all this happened. So there are definite possibilities.

N: I look forward to seeing developments. You are one of the founding members of the Andromeda Spaceways In-flight Magazine: why was that started?

T: That was after my first couple of books came out. I had this quiet period where I was terribly busy but I wasn't actually being published. My second book came out in the same month that Melbourne hosted the WorldCon in 99, and that was a very inspiring time. In the two years that followed, a huge number of small presses and new publishing projects popped up all over the place. A lot of us who met at AussieCon or chatted on e-mail groups afterwards started coming up with all these different ideas. One that sparked a lot of interest was to run a magazine which showed the more fun side of the genre, so comedy, science fiction and fantasy and more of the fun, easily readable stuff. There were a lot of magazines that were publishing the more serious literary side in the short story field but not so much of the humorous stuff. I was known as a humorous writer, because my first two books were comic fantasy, so I was keen to be involved. I ended up being part of this really wonderful community. In the first few years we had a great time. We learnt how to build a magazine from the ground up. We were using a lot of electronic communication, which for me was wonderful because I'm stuck on my own a bit in southern Tasmania. I didn't know any other local writers who were working in science fiction and fantasy. ASIM was my first real online community. It was great fun, and I learnt a lot of stuff. It is still going to this day, though most of us who were part of it originally have drifted away. It keeps chugging along. I'm not sure if it still specialises

quite so much in the humorous fiction that it used to but that material was always very, very difficult to get hold of – a lot of people said they wanted a magazine of funny science fiction and fantasy but then the writers sent us their dark horror stories! It was quite difficult at times but it was a good time in my life, and I made many special friends through it. Many of them have gone on to great things!

N: And you edited a couple of issues.

T: Yes. Well, part of the idea of ASIM was it was run as a co-op. It was run bi-monthly which was a pretty big deal at the time, to have a small press magazine that came out that often from Australia. So to share the workload, the idea was to have a rotating editorship, and everybody would learn how to edit as well as doing the other jobs in the magazine. So you could edit an issue of the magazine, but only every two or three years. I really enjoyed it - I love editing. It's one of the things I've had to really move away from the last few years as other commitments have come up, but I enjoy it as a process. The choosing of stories and putting them together and working with writers to improve their fiction. That's something I really love, but I have to try not to get too distracted by these kinds of projects.

N: And yet you also co-edited AustrAlien Absurdities…

T: Yes. That was another project from a similar vintage. I met Chuck McKenzie at the '99 WorldCon. We'd been seeking each other out because he had his first book out not long after mine. His was comic science fiction and mine was comic fantasy. Because what we were doing was so rare, we grabbed onto each other as kindred spirits. As with ASIM, we wanted to do a book which was about the funny side of science fiction and fantasy. It was launched, along with Cat Sparks' first Agog! anthology, two years later at the same convention where the Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine was launched. That was my first experience editing; it was a really interesting project to do at that time.

N: So you've been an editor and an author. What insights have you gained from being on both sides of the divide?

T: I think perspective is important. I don't edit much these days but I have good friends who edit and publish, and we talk a lot. I like having that multiple perspective of what's going on. I think you can get very blasé about things like rejection letters and other stuff authors get quite

upset about. I know from all sides how these things work and I don't take it personally. I very rarely get hot under the collar about editorial feedback because this is a useful thing to make the work better. I have occasionally walked away from projects because of inappropriate levels of or styles of editing but I also think that my experience means that I can also recognise bad editing when I see it - editors who might, for instance, want me to write their book as opposed to writing my book. I like to think it makes me a more rounded person and gives me a better insight into all the other jobs that people are doing to make this happen. Certainly, having worked in small press, I never take anything that my publisher does for granted, let alone the book designer, or cover artist, or sales reps…

The self-publishing bandwagon is so big and shiny at the moment that there are an awful lot of people talking down the job of the publisher or dismissing it as something that is hardly worth paying for. I'm very aware as a writer that it is an essential part of the process. What publishers do for me as a writer is so important and it's really not stuff I'm that keen on doing myself. Trying actively to do more than one person's job in the process would become an incredibly draining workload. Finding time to write is hard enough with two small kids at my ankles!

N: So what are these other jobs that you are happy to let other people have?

T: Editing is the big one. I think having had good editors and bad editors and mediocre editors and wonderful editors, I know a wonderful editor when I find one. A wonderful editor is someone who can work with me to make my book as good as it can possibly be and can add something to the process without taking away from what I've done. I'm incredibly lucky with my trilogy because of Nicola O'Shea, who is an utterly wonderful freelance editor - she often does work for HarperCollins. She edited the first book and I was really lucky that she was available for the other two as well. Having the same editor on this project for book after book in the trilogy made a really big difference and made me feel a lot more comfortable in what I was writing and the end product. She's been tough with me when she needed to be tough. But also she is the reason I was talked into having two structural edits on the second book, which was a devastating blow at the time. I trusted her and I went with it. She was also the one that said that the third book was well enough put together

that I didn't need a structural edit at all. That was something to be quite suspicious about from many editors, but I trusted Nicola. I was really, really glad to have her as part of that process. So, yeah, editing is a big one.

Then there's copy editing and proofing, which is something an author can never do for themselves, because we are too close to the words. There is only so much that changing a manuscript into many different fonts can actually do. Then you have to give it over to somebody else to spot the small stuff - whether it's the little details of repetition or logical inconsistencies, right down to typos and transposed words.

Then there's book layout and design, which I know absolutely nothing about. It's not something I could even start to think about doing for myself, but I really appreciate it when I get a good layout because it makes such a difference. Then you've got cover design. (Twelfth Planet Press, who publish several titles by me, always make gorgeous books, and so I trust them with my work, despite them being a tiny independent press) You've got all these little things that happen before the book is printed. Then you've got publicity, promotion, you've got the books being put into catalogues to appeal to bookstores and distributors, the book reps who talk directly to the people who sell books. Then there's e-book production, which is a far bigger job than many people gives credit for, if you want an actual quality product and not a document full of layout errors.

If I were self-publishing I would not be able to do half of what my publishers do for me in the time I have available. I would be writing fewer books. I can see the temptation for self-publishing, and I think that some projects absolutely cry out for it. But I'm in no hurry to put myself into that particular basket, because I don't have the time to diversify in the fields. It's all I can do to keep up with my current workload, along with my family obligations.

N: Speaking of your current workload, you're involved in a number of different websites and blogs, podcasts and magazines?

T: I love to blog. I started on LiveJournal the same week I brought my first baby home from hospital. I had just left my academic life at university and became a stay at home mum. So I lost my daily social interactions with adults. Instead of a water cooler or tearoom to chat in at the office,

I have the online SF community through my own blog and through other projects.

I love to read and review books. Reviewing helps me make more time to read, and reading is so important for a writer, to stay in touch with what's happening. I don't review as much as I'd like to, but I try to keep doing it, whether it's for my own blog [http://tansyrr.com] or for ASIF [http://aussiespecficinfocus.wordpress.com/], which is my friend Alisa's Australian book review website. I also review short stories for a project called Not If You Were The Last Short Story On Earth' [http://lastshortstory.wordpress.com/]. Again that's partly sociable and partly to keep track of what writing is happening out there. I feel a certain degree of responsibility to not drop the reviewing part of what I do because I know that there are fewer female reviewers out there than male. As someone who tends to gravitate more towards women's books I want to keep reviewing and to keep talking about the stuff that I like because sometimes those books would otherwise not get mentioned that much. So there is a little bit of a social responsibility there but mostly it's fun.

Two years ago I started podcasting with two very good friends Alisa and Alex; our podcast is called Galactic Suburbia (http://galactisuburbia.podbean.com/). We talk about the publishing industry and books that we've read and the science fiction stuff generally with a lot of feminism thrown into the mix. That's been wonderful and the big thing for us is that we talk on Skype every fortnight. It makes a difference as opposed to just chatting over e-mail and then meeting at the conventions once a year. Actually getting to have this regular conversation has been wonderful. There is another community that pops up around that. These are the people who listen to us regularly and talk about what we've been talking about on Twitter and go and buy the books we tell them to. I always feel delighted and proud and guilty because I get the tweets after every episode of what books people have bought because of me. That has been a great addition to this online portfolio. It's that balance of creating something that we're proud of and we think adds something to the community. Also that social aspect: it's fun. I always say that the best PR you can do for your books or for anything, the best social media, are always the ones that you enjoy. As soon as you stop enjoying it, that's probably a social media thing that you shouldn't be doing. As soon as it stops being fun, it also stops being sincere and people can tell that. It

becomes a lousy advert for you and your books. It's kind of nice that it's a more effective publicity tool when you're enjoying yourself.

Underrepresentation of women

N: Speaking of the Galactic Suburbia podcast and some of the other forums you've been involved in, I've noticed recently that there's been a lot of chatter about the underrepresentation of women authors in science fiction and lists of significant science fiction. What would you like to say on the matter?

T: These are conversations people have been having for a long time. It's not new to be pointing out that there is still gender imbalance, but we can't stop talking about it just because it's not new. People do get complacent and it's so easy to assume that because you might be surrounded by mostly sensible people who aren't overtly sexist - who do think that women are completely equal - when you surround yourself with smart people like that it can be a shock to realise that in a lot of areas there still is no equality. Just because people aren't overtly making sexist comments - and let's face it, online, they do a lot of time - there is still the unconscious sexism. People make a list of all the books that they liked and they're not thinking about gender - of course they're not thinking about gender - and yet women aren't there. This happens over and over. Readers might take note of it and try to do something about it and then there is another backlash, or they just forget.

This is something that people have been talking about a lot lately outside of my own circles. In Britain, I've had the impression they've suddenly woken up and looked around and realised that they've lost so many of their female science fiction writers. They've either fallen into obscurity much faster than they should have, or they've gone off and started writing something else, or they've stopped writing altogether. A big part of that comes down to the science fiction that is written by women being treated differently. When you start unpeeling the layers, it's quite horrendous. Especially if, like me, you enjoy reading a variety of science fiction and you enjoy a lot of female authors, it becomes quite shocking. Something the Galactic Suburbia podcast is really proud of is how many male listeners we have and indeed female listeners, who have contacted us and have said, 'I actually started thinking about this because of something you said.' They've started looking at their reading and looking

at how many male authors they read and how many female authors, and whether they're being entirely fair if they discount something that was written by a woman. We've had many people saying that they're going out of their way now to read more works written by women because it wasn't happening without that effort. Sometimes your reading habits slip into a narrow subsection of what you think you like and you stop questioning them.

A diverse reading list is going to give you a more interesting view of the field, rather than reading the same books by the same category of people, whether that's gender or race or country. I'm getting to the point now where I'm eagerly seeking out stuff that isn't written in America just because there are so many books set in America. I'm realising how many countries I know so little about. A writer friend of mine, Karen Healy, who is from New Zealand - I'm in Tasmania, she is in New Zealand. These two places are really physically close to each other but I've never been to New Zealand. I didn't realise until I read her books that I'd never read a book that was set in New Zealand. I was appalled at myself because I knew so little about this country that was so physically close.

There are many other countries I know so little about, and I'm trying to question my immediate reading habits and trying to read more diversely. We talk about that on the podcast. I think it's part of what people find interesting, is that we don't claim to know everything. We're very much on a journey of trying to improve our own habits, even our own unconscious sexism that everybody's got to a greater or lesser degree. We try and pick out when we make mistakes and talk about how we were really wrongheaded about this thing and we're trying to do better about it. People enjoy the fact that we regularly confess our failings on the podcast and then try and address them.

N: I think we're all on a journey. It's better to admit ignorance and open yourself up an opportunity to learn and grow than to try and pretend that you've got it altogether.

T: Absolutely. I always find the people who will do that are, to me, the most interesting people. And the people I most want to hang out with. Somebody who will not admit to having made a mistake is really hard to have a conversation with. I'd like to get to a point where pointing out that you've inadvertently said something sexist or racist is the equivalent

to pointing out that you've got spinach between your teeth: it's a polite courtesy to let somebody know so they can rectify it as opposed to something which is a massively hurtful accusation. It can feel really bad when somebody tells you that you've done something that is hurtful to other people or said something that is inappropriate. It can feel like you're under attack and it's very easy to get defensive and angry about it and try and justify what you've done instead of just upping and going: 'Oh, yeah, I stuffed up. Sorry. I'll try and do better.' A lot of the huge flame wars on the Internet would not get to that horrible degree if more people were willing to say 'Sorry, I didn't see that. I stuffed up. I can do better.'

N: A case in point is the sexist EB games ad that came out a week or two ago. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GnX7IOGSJA&feature=youtu.be)

T: I haven't heard about that.

N: In the ad, the guy goes into EB games to buy a game and he has an argument with his wife beforehand. The wife says, 'Oh you're not going to go and buy another game' and he replies 'you go off and do the shopping and I'll just go in here and buy a game.'

T: Ohhhhh

N: It gets worse. He goes in there and he goes to hand over $100 for one game so it looks like they're saying the guy's stupid enough to pay $100 for a game when you can get it cheaper elsewhere. And the guy behind the counter says 'You don't have to spend hundred dollars: you can trade three old games for this one new game.' I've seen games in EB that are second-hand being sold for $80 plus dollars, so again the guy's being ripped off. Anyway, he trades three games and then he takes his wife out to dinner saying, 'I had an extra hundred dollars lying around.'

T: Oh dear.

N: Then, after the wining and dining, he's playing his computer game and she's doing the dusting. He is like: 'do you want me to help?' She says, 'No thank you, you've done enough.'

T: Oh jeeez. There's just so much to unpack with something like that, isn't there? I don't think of myself as a gamer: I do play a lot of games but I don't think of myself as being part of that kind of community. I find the discussions of sexism and women's role in gaming really interesting at

an intellectual level, because I don't get as emotional about that as I do about, say, the publishing industry. It is something that we do often talk about on the podcast, this assumption that all gamers are male. And there is this whole assumption about wives and the roles and… uhh, yeah.

The Next Generation

It drives me crazy because I have two daughters who love a lot of stuff that isn't Barbie. They are interested in games and they are interested in comics and they're interested in science fiction. We're trying to navigate all this stuff that tells them that it's not their place and it's not for them and if they do want to be involved in something like that then they're going to have to basically take on these very female clichéd attributes. It makes me angrier for my daughters than it makes me for myself.

N: I think we want our children to have more freedom and better lives than we've had. I think we also tend to appreciate the fact that we are a bit tougher and a bit smarter because we've got years behind us. But we always want the best for our kids.

T: Absolutely. You're there telling your daughters that they can do everything and the world is actually telling them something else and it's quite hurtful. One of the feminist blogs I read was talking about going into her daughter's classroom of six-year-olds and teaching them about sexism without necessarily using the word 'sexism'. They were talking about gender roles and particularly teaching them to analyse toy catalogues and figure out what toy catalogues are telling them about boys

and girls. I thought how wonderful that is. If there is any generation that needs more in the way of media analysis, it's my daughter's generation of six-year-olds. We need to be teaching them how to look at advertising, how to look at gaming. It's something I do try to do, to give my girls that commentary of: look, this is what that person is trying to sell you, it's not just a product they're trying to sell you, they're trying to sell you an idea, and it's not a good idea for you.

N: Yes. I went to a conference at Monash University, Tights and tiaras.

T: I was so jealous when I found out about that conference! I would have loved to go.

N: I'll be advertising things like that on Dark Matter's Facebook page in the future. I'm trying to tap into all the right markets to let people know what's going on. Tights and tiaras: one of the presentations was on the *Powerpuff Girls*. When my daughter was the right age and the *Powerpuff Girls* were on TV, I suspect she probably watched it but I wasn't supportive, I don't remember sitting down and watching it. So this presentation by Evie Kendall was an academic analysis of the *Powerpuff Girls*. It was amazing: here was this program aimed at kindergarten and the younger age group. This representation of girls, their relationship with guys, Ms Sara Bellum who was the female role model but you never see her face, and she's got a really curvy figure with enormously high heels… It sent very mixed messages. That kind of analysis little girls was very interesting.

T: Absolutely. My daughters have seen the *Powerpuff Girls* movie. I think you start looking closely at a lot of this stuff, it becomes very problematic. Even stuff that you might think might be more empowering than others; having a show that is about girl superheroes is a rare enough thing. If you have a child that likes superheroes, that's what they're going to want to watch. That's why all these shows or games have a responsibility and it's why we have a responsibility to point out where things aren't necessarily okay. That doesn't mean that you need to take those things away from a child; you need to point it out to them and make sure that they have a variety of influences.

N: Yes, and try to help them and watch with their eyes open so

they know what it's about, what they're absorbing.

T: Absolutely. And it's just as important for boys as it is for girls. What I think can be more destructive is that you have so many TV shows that are all boy characters or maybe with one token girl character. Boys are not encouraged in any way to be interested in stuff that is for girls or includes girls. So of course they are going to end up with this horrible mindset of girls not counting or girls not being interesting. Feminist mothers of boys in some ways have greater opportunities to make a difference, to make sure that their boys do see the value of girls and girl stories.

Tansy made a Tardis birthday cake for one of her girls

Something I've also noticed is where you often have TV shows that are quite good in terms of gender balance or gender roles, but the merchandise for those TV shows is taking five steps backwards. Things like Bob the Builder, which is mostly male characters, but you have Wendy. She is a really good female interesting character - then you look at the merchandise and she's almost disappeared. That is a pattern I see repeated. Like Harry Potter: although the main protagonist is a male, there are a lot of great female characters and role models for women. But then look at the Harry Potter Lego: almost all the characters are male. Characters who have almost no role in the movie are prioritised over female characters. If you have a mixed family of boys and girls and they both like Harry Potter, the toys are going to be much more directed at the boys. It's really interesting to start looking at that stuff and how toys are more gendered than the TV shows even though the TV shows or movies aren't necessarily doing a great job, they're often doing a better job. I get hot under the collar about that one.

N: What I've been noticing is that, where fantasy is written by women, you tend to have a group of protagonists and it's relational rather than about individuals going it alone. I think Harry Potter is a really good example because you have this group. Okay, Harry Potter may or may not have been the chosen one; some people still say it was Neville Longbottom. But the fact is that they wouldn't have succeeded alone, they needed the group to succeed in the

journey on the way, they learnt lessons, they grew up.

T: Yeah, very much so. There are so many women in Harry's life, and female characters that he respects. Sometimes he has greater respect for them than the text itself, but there's no question that he values the contribution of the female characters, the main role models and friends. I think it is great for both genders to get interesting stuff out of it. It's only a shame that some of the supporting material is less than open to both genders.

Tansy's novels and novelettes

N: While I'd love to continue on this topic I think I should ask you for a rundown of your published works to date.

T: Wow, okay. I will try to do that by going backwards because I'm going to remember them better that way. At the moment I have a fantasy trilogy with HarperCollins Voyager called the Creature Court. The first two books, Power and Majesty and The Shattered City are out at the moment. The third one, Reign of Beasts, is going to be released early in February.

N: So you've finished writing it, it's just going through the publishing process.

T: Yes, it's all done. Also this year I've had a small collection published with Twelfth Planet Press called Love and Romanpunk [http://www.twelfthplanetpress.com/store-items/love-and-romanpunk]. This is part of a series of mini short story collections by female authors. Mine is four linked short stories with heroes and Roman history and lots of things all jumbled up. I'm very proud of it, it's a very cute book and it's also purple.

N: It's purple: is that a selling point?

T: It is as far as I'm concerned. It's a very pretty cover. I was delighted. It's my first purple book: these things matter. Also from Twelfth Planet Press a couple of years ago, I had a novelette published, Siren Beat, [http://www.twelfthplanetpress.com/store-items/roadkillsiren-beat] which won the Washington Small Press award. That was published as a double with a piece by Robert Shearman, who is a world fantasy award winning writer as well as a Doctor Who writer. Going back a bit further we have the

Shimmaron book series for children. That's for 8 to 12 year old readers. Further back we have the AustrAlien Absurdities, which I co-edited, a long-lost and out-of-print book of short stories, then we get back to the original books that were published in the late 90s, which are Splashdance Silver and Liquid Gold and again, not in print, but they are drifting around on eBay and various places.

At some point I do have plans to do that self-publishing thing of putting up your backlist and having at least an e-copy available for people. I have that third book, which I made available on LiveJournal [http://mocklore.livejournal.com/] for the 12 or so people who were clamouring for it, but I haven't done anything since. I do want to put this out as e-books. But we were a bit stuck when I realised I didn't have an electronic copy of Splashdance Silver. I might have to either type the entire book or figure out how to scan it, so we got a bit stopped on the project. At some point we will look at getting those out there for people who are interested. I think that as far as funny fantasy with a young female protagonist goes, it's the sort of book that probably would have done a lot better if it came out five or six years later at the height of the YA boom. It's this luck thing, timing can make a huge difference. Part of the reason I've hesitated about putting a lot of energy into making those books available is because what I'm writing now is so different. It's this whole thing about putting your juvenilia out there. You might feel a bit embarrassed about how the sentences are formed because it was written 13 years ago… but also because it's sort of light and fluffy. I already have this problem when people come along to my book launches now and say, 'my daughter loves your earlier books so I bought this one for her.' And I am like, 'how old is your daughter? Ahh, I'm not saying you can't give my Creature Court trilogy to your 12-year-old, but please read it first before you do.' Because some people are not going to be happy about those books being in the hands of 12-year-olds.

N: Yes. [Laughing] I could see that, I have read the ones that have been published.

T: Yes, I know. They're a little bit more grown-up. So I do often have to do The Talk, especially if they buy them for people other than themselves. Look, I don't have a problem if you're going to give them to children, but do read it first. At least some of it. I'm not pro-censorship or anything, but at the same time when it comes to your children you want to make sure

that they're reading something that is at least vaguely age-appropriate. I worry that people having read my earlier books are too relaxed about how age-appropriate my books are going to be, just because the earlier ones were a lot more G rated basically.

Pseudonyms

N: Rowena Cory Daniells started with her pseudonym because her earlier books were children's and she wanted to differentiate so that there wouldn't be this confusion. Is there any possibility that you'll have a pseudonym?

T: I have that in mind. I didn't do that for the Shimmaron books for various reasons, but also because when that one came out it was less of an issue. But I do have plans for children's books, so I have in mind when I publish children's stuff or YA books even, from now on I will probably do it under another name to differentiate. There are many reasons to do it. Sometimes it's about genre and library categorisation because you're writing stuff that is very different.

I get to the point now where I can look at writing more than one book a year and I can diversify a bit more. I'm excited to be able to do that. I do think I will have to bring different names into the equation because I like my adult books to be quite adult without having to worry about that issue of what could happen if people put them in school libraries. Really, don't put them in school libraries.

But I want to write books that people can put in school libraries; I have lots of friends who are librarians: this will work well. So I have this name in mind when I have books that are ready to sell. That is something I'm looking at focusing on this coming year: trying to get some YA or children's projects out there. I'd like to have some more books my daughters can read before they're fifteen. I'm not looking forward to the year when they're at high school and their mates at school get hold of the Creature Court trilogy. Some of the mums from school are reading the books, and parents of my friends. I'm like: 'ooh, really? I'll just sort of brazen that out then.'

N: Have you had any funny looks or comments?

T: No, no. I can't complain about how supportive the parents of my friends are and how much they like the books just because it means they're reading my smutty bits. I'm all, 'okay, thank you for buying the

books. That's great.' [shifty eyes] People have been very kind to not come up to me and try to discuss the sex scenes in great detail face-to-face, which is good. I don't know if I could quite take that. I'm doing okay but I am steeling myself for when my daughters are old enough that their teenage friends will be reading that scene and 'Look, that's Raeli's mum!' Maybe I should have thought of that a bit sooner.

Sex in writing

N: So it won't just be the shock that parents have sex, it's the shock that is: my mother wrote that!

T: Yes. I might be having slightly varied sex talks with my daughters. Along the lines of: 'Well, then there's writing about it, which is a whole different category of sex.'

N: I was reading on the Internet where Patrick Rothfuss and Amber Benson got together for a book signing author appearance. They each had to read out a scene from their books. After a bit of chatter, somebody threw out the challenge that they would co-read a love scene, so they each took a part. They found it extremely challenging to do that. They even said that they've found it challenging to read a sex scene at all, let alone that. Have you ever thought of that?

T: I have definitely thought about it. It's something that's fine when I'm writing it because there's nobody watching. That thing of people reading what you've written is a whole different issue. It's important not to think about that when you're writing. I have got to the point where I've developed as a writer over the last 15 years or so. Certainly writing about sex and intimate stuff is not something that I was very comfortable with as an early writer. I've managed to overcome most of my squeamishness since then. I had some full on erotica published (not under my own name), and my parents have read it. That's one thing, but when they're actually reading it in front of you, it's a whole different thing. It's like: 'No. Can you please just go to another room or another house and just pretend you didn't read it.' As a writer, I just have to get over myself if I want to write as honestly as possible. I don't have to be one of those writers who leaves the bedroom door open when they write sex scenes, but I like being that kind of writer. I think that sex scenes are actually a really good way of expressing character. Sometimes two characters having sex is one of the most important plot turning points

of the story, and if you don't show it then you could be missing out on some pretty important revealing stuff. So I like the fact that I've got to the point where I'm comfortable writing that sort of thing and I just have to deal with the embarrassment afterwards.

My partner is not always comfortable with the fact that I'm writing stuff that is so out there. It does come from the imagination, it doesn't say anything about our private life, but people don't necessarily know that! So I'm really appreciative of the fact that he is supportive and doesn't get involved in trying to make me change certain things – despite his discomfort.

This is probably one of those things that he didn't see coming when I originally confessed to him that, in fact, I was a writer and this was something that was going to be part of our lives. It was a terrible thing: we started dating when I was at uni and I had stopped writing for six months or more. Then when we'd been together for a while I started again, so he didn't know at first that this was what he was getting saddled with.

N: I don't think it's as bad as you suddenly confessing you're a smoker or a crack addict or something.

T: You'd think not, but really, you can quit those things. [laughter]

N: I like that. [Laughter] I found in the *Creature Court*, sex was part of the plot. In some books sex gets in the way of any action, but in your books it is part of the plot and also part of the character development. It shows a lot about who the people are and their relationships to each other. How did you develop that?

T: It's something that came quite organically out of that story. The idea of sex and magic being connected is an old one. It's something a lot of fantasy fiction has sometimes avoided… and while there are many writers (mostly female ones!) whose who do address sexuality and/or sensuality wonderfully, there is an awful lot of fantasy that doesn't include it at all. Which is not a bad thing, because I don't think every book has to do that. I don't even think every book I write has to do that.

But, certainly with the *Creature Court*, it was important and relevant to my characters because I was trying to get across the idea of magic being something that corrupts you. They were very debauched characters! Sexuality as plot really interests me though I'm not that keen in putting

it in there if it is not relevant to the plot.

I'm currently writing a book in which I'm pretty sure one of the main characters is never going to have sex. She is somebody who has chosen abstinence - and I thought at first that was something she was going to move past, but I don't think she is. And I'm okay with that because it's a different kind of story.

It can be incredibly revealing of character to show what they're like at their most intimate and private, with one other person. Not that my characters (in the *Creature Court* at least!) only share with one person but that doesn't matter!

I think that, as a writer, that's really interesting. I'm fascinated with reading about how other writers tackle writing sex scenes, because we all have hang-ups about writing it. Stacia Kane wrote this wonderful series of blog posts about writing sex scenes. I really enjoyed it until she got to the point where she said (something along the lines of) sex scenes should never be funny, and I'm like, 'Oh, do me a favour!' … I never like when people say the word 'should'.

Of course sex can be funny – it depends on the characters, and how they react. It's going to be a very pretendy romance kind of sex if everybody is terribly serious all the time. The idea that the sex should be perfect is – odd to me. Sex that isn't perfect is a lot more interesting, fictionally speaking. The sex between people who really love each other, going at it for the first time – does it have to be fireworks in the sky and sunset for ever and everything produces instant orgasms. To me, I'm much more interested in the half-hearted attempts or the interrupted attempts. When two characters who are absolutely meant to be together have really awkward sex, or someone bursts out laughing halfway through, that can be a far better character reveal than them falling back romantically on to a feather bed and no one sneezing…

I like to go for the story options that give you a more interesting character to work with. With the *Creature Court* books, it was really, really important. I'm finding it really interesting now I'm working on other things, to address it each time: is sex going to be integral to these characters, is it less important, is it something that won't even factor in at all, which, at this point, might be a bit of a shock to my readers. And sex is so useful when all else fails and you can't work out what happens

next in the chapter … [laughter]

N: That's really interesting. I'll really look forward to seeing how these evolve.

T: Now I'm going to have people reading very carefully.

N: I think people are reading your work carefully anyway. *Siren Beat* features leather trousers, tentacles, a sexy sea pony and a kraken invasion of Hobart. Can you explain how you managed to fit all of that in one novel?

T: Even better, *Siren Beach* was a novelette. It's only about 15,000 words. It was one of those pieces of writing that just kind of - I won't say almost wrote itself, because that does take me out of the equation. It was one of those pieces that just worked when I put it together. I have struggled because my big project that I'm writing this year is a novel based on the same character. I found it quite difficult to write that because the original story was almost thematically perfect in the way that elements came together really nicely and it all fitted – I wanted the novel to be at least that good if not better!

It came from trying to write an Australian urban fantasy for a paranormal anthology which didn't end up being published because of the global financial crisis. I thought: 'okay, if it's for an anthology, I need to make mine as different as possible to try to get a slot. So I'm not going to write about vampires and werewolves because everyone will do that. I decided to set it in Tasmania because nobody else would.

So I started thinking about what magical creatures could do that job of the vampires and werewolves in urban fantasy in Tasmania. The main thing about Hobart is the dock region, the water there. That Tasmania is surrounded by ocean is a major part of our identity, so I started thinking about water magic. I came up with this idea that, okay, this is a world in which there are no vampires, there are no werewolves, but just about every water-related magical creature does exist. So you've got somebody whose job it is to stand at docks and protect the city from regular invasion by whatever watery creatures from whichever mythology are passing. Mermaids and sirens and kraken and sexy sea ponies and all that sort of thing. I had such a ball writing Siren Beat.

It's been really good to me I think. As far as one piece of writing, it's probably the first that got any degree of acclaim: so many people liking

it and talking about it, it got award nominations and then it won an international award from Washington which was just really quite shocking at the time for a short story set in Tasmania. But it just worked and I was so pleased with the response to it. And then I applied for a couple of grants to write the novel; I thought this is probably quite a grant-appealing kind of project because it's fantasy but it's set in Australia. You can talk about Australian themes. You can talk about writing something set in Tasmania.

Because of the urban fantasy I was able to put in all that guff about noir fiction and how noir fiction has a relationship with urban fantasy. I wrote these grant applications and I got money from Australia Council and Arts Tasmania to write the novel. And then I had to write the novel, which I'm very proud of, but it was very, very hard work this year. A lot harder than writing short stories. So I'm proud of that and trying urban fantasy as something a bit different. Not too different as I'm always writing stories that are set in cities, but writing something after the Creature Court, something that is set in our world, it was really enjoyable to do that. I really like my heroine and I like the set up. I like what I was trying to do with it. It's going to be workshopped with my wRiters on the Rise group this summer. Then it's going to the publisher, so we'll see. It isn't under contract or anything so we'll see if they like it; I hope they do.

N: Is *Siren Beat* still available?

T: Yes, from the Twelfth Planet Press website. [http://www.twelfthplanetpress.com/publications/roadkillsiren-beat] It's not available as an e-book at the moment because they're currently doing their e-books from scratch. *The Love and Romanpunk* is available as an e-book as well as a paperback. They're quite small books, which is a benefit because postage is very cheap. Twelfth Planet has quite a bit of my stuff: they have been very supportive over the last few years. *Siren Beat* is a good little read; it is paired with a very excellent if slightly depressing Robert Shearman short story which is also worth reading.

Future projects

N: What do you have planned for the future?

T: Many things. I completed NaNoWriMo at the end of last year, which I used to get a chunk of a new novel written. It's a whole different thing again. It's a kind of tropical island fantasy novel with Shakespeare and

necromancy. I'm really enjoying writing something so different. I have quite a few YA or children's projects that I've been working on: they're various degrees of being finished. I'd really like to get to a point next year where I'm sending some of that out. The third Creature Court book is out early in 2012. I don't have anything else under contract right now, so next year is going to be about trying to sell books more than anything. I'm trying to write more: I'm trying to do that thing that I didn't manage to do in the late 90s, which is take these recent successes and turn them into a fairly solid steady career. I still have my youngest daughter at home with me most of the week: she has a couple of years before she starts school, so I still have two or three of what I think of as consolidating years. Once I've got both my girls at school I feel like I should be able to write a lot more than I am right now. Develop this career a bit more substantially, but in the meantime I'm doing what I can.

A word to fans

N: It sounds really good. Do you have any words for fans?

T: I really appreciate hearing from the fans. I love it when people visit my blog or comment on podcasts: it's really nice to get a chance to get that feedback and some of it blows me away. I did a public reading for the local poetry group a couple of months ago, and some people came. There was a girl who came who had been reading me since her teens, with Splashdance Silver. It's still got its fans, more than a decade later. It seems like a very odd thing; I try to be as gracious as possible about coming into contact with fans, even though I'm pretty sure that they don't exist.

I ran a competition, and received a couple of drawings from people of costumes for the characters from Creature Court (http://tansyrr.com/tansywp/creature-court-fashion-challenge-first-wave/ and http://tansyrr.com/tansywp/creature-court-fashion-challenge-second-wave/) which was really exciting. I think all authors secretly, or not so secretly, want fan art. That's what it comes down to.

N: Have any of them been outfits that Velody might have designed?

T: Yes. That's the general idea. The making of clothes and the costumes in that series is just so important thematically. Rowena Cory Daniells said right from the beginning, she and Maxine McArthur kept telling me that

I'd have to start a Creature Court collection. It would be lovely but I'm not an artist. Somebody else has to draw the clothes. This was my way of trying to make that happen a little bit.

N: Are all the artworks going to be up on the website?

T: Yes. I only had a few entries in the end, but put them all up on my blog. It helped to pass the time while we were all biting our teeth waiting for the third book to come out.

N: In February.

T: Yes!

N: I look forward to reading Reign of Beasts and listening to future casts of Galactic Suburbia. Thank you very much for talking to Dark Matter.

T: Thank you.

John Richards talks to Dark Matter

John Richards is a co-writer and co-creator of Outland, the new sit-com on ABC TV, starting on 8 February at 9:30pm on ABC1.

Nalini: Thank you for agreeing to talk to Dark Matter. How did you get into all of this geeky nerdy stuff? Your interest seems to be beyond sci-fi but it also has a sci-fi focus, how did you get into this?

John: I think there's a fannish instinct. I really do, because Lee Zachariah from the Bazura project -

Nalini: I heard that podcast yesterday. (http://boxcutters.net/2012/01/10/episode289/)

John: He's such a great guy. He's a big Doctor Who fan as well. Again he has that thing of the obsessive nature wanting to know stuff, we want to be right all the time. It's really important that we are right. I wonder if you start off thinking 'well, I'm a fan of Doctor Who', but that also means you're going to become a fan of virtually everything else. The creeping thing is we need to know everything.

John Richards at the advance screening of Outland; Photo courtesty Outland FB page

Nalini: On the subject of Doctor Who, what's your first Doctor Who memory?

John: It's probably Jon Pertwee. But then when I was growing up they just repeated them constantly so it's hard to really know because it was on all the time.

Nalini: So you connected with Doctor Who when you were a kid.

John: Absolutely. It's funny that the Android Invasion just came out on DVD, which is not considered to be a classic by anyone. But I loved it so much because it's quintessentially what I remember Doctor Who being. It's a Tom Baker, with Sarah Jane, where there's a copy of an English

village. There's a small village they land in and it turns out that everyone's a robot.

Nalini: Is that finger loaded?

John: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's the most archetypal Doctor Who story for me. Recently someone pointed out to me that the plot makes no sense. It had never occurred to me. I'd never noticed that the plot makes no sense before because I watched that as a five-year-old. It's a bunch of cool stuff that happens. But I'm a fan. I grew up in a country in a small town in WA. Doctor Who was so glamorous, so exciting. Anything set in a city was glamorous and exciting, so anything that was science fiction was even more glamorous. I remember never being allowed to watch Blake's 7 because it was a bit too late. I think it was showing at 10:30 or something like that.

Nalini: Yeah, some of the episodes were showing at 11 o'clock at night. I was in high school and living with my grandmother and I had to beg to sit up late.

John: I remember every time I was allowed to, the very few occasions, it was always Star One. It was the same episode every time. It was the only episode I got to see and that was over and over again.

Science fiction was all about the world outside - the bigger universe, especially when you live in a small country town.

Nalini: Yes. Recently I interviewed Rob Lloyd who is from a small country town and he fell in love with Doctor Who – well, he came to Doctor Who late. Dare I say it: I actually spent quite a few years growing up in a small country town too. Maybe that's part of what shaped some of us into sci-fi fans.

John: Doctor Who, back then, was all about running away from your family and never going back to them, ever. The Doctor would take you away from that. Now you're on the mobile phone calling home every three episodes and crying, but back then you would leave that behind and you would never go back. Leela is not going back to her home planet.

Nalini: I never thought of it like that before.

John: Lots of orphans too. Orphans in the original Doctor Who, Nyssa, Tegan, Turlough… If you go back far enough… I've forgotten her name, she replaced Susan After Susan leaves... from the planet Dido… Before

Ben and Polly… I've gone blank on her name. Not many of her stories still exist... again, she's an orphan. The Doctor goes around picking up orphans and going: 'Let's go somewhere crazy.' So that's quite different, whereas now it's about home, about coming home. Back then it was about leaving home.

Nalini: Yeah, that's really interesting.

John: I miss that. I'm more a fan of classic Who than the new Who because I like that idea that it's all about you leaving your home, becoming a better person and going on to find your destiny. A lot of them go on to do something bigger or more dramatic – except for Leela who randomly stays to marry a guard on Gallifrey – but there's that sense of a bigger thing to be achieved.

Nalini: Do you feel that you've done that, you've followed in the footsteps of the Doctor's companions?

John: Maybe. Maybe to a degree. The show said you can leave and the life that you're in doesn't have to be the one that you're going to be in forever, you can make your own.

Nalini: Make your own life and your own family.

John: Exactly. Yes. And it's all about building your own family as well, whereas the new series is much more nuclear family oriented.

Nalini: Yes, especially with Amy and Rory. And Rose.

John: And Rose's mum. That's something we hadn't seen before, and Martha's mum. And Donna's. That was quite unusual to bring a family in.

Nalini: That was a real shift. Were you in one of these country towns where ABC was the only station?

John: There were two stations. There was ABC and there was the Golden West Network. I remember the Golden West Network was mostly Channel Nine, I think, but with slightly random local stuff. I remember them showing the Beatles cartoons in the late 80s.

Nalini: The yellow submarine?

John: No, the actual cartoon TV series from the 60s. And Crusader Rabbit, and all these other shows from the 50s and 60s that I'm fairly certain would have disappeared off normal television but, for some reason, they've had a copy. They had the regional news too, the great 15 minute regional news that was mostly filler because nothing really happened.

Golden West Network covered almost the entirety of Western Australia so you never knew when an ad was for a product that you could actually buy or not. You'd see an ad for a pizza shop that turned out to be in Kalgoorlie or something like that. That's 12 hours' drive away - that had better be a pretty good pizza. So, yeah, there was ABC and GWN.

Nalini: How did you get from there to here?

John: Geographically, we didn't have a high school where I grew up, so I went to high school in Perth. I got involved in stand-up comedy in Perth, which was the very end of the 80s early 90s.

Nalini: Oh, so you're a baby… [laughing]

John: You know that thing on IMDB - do I want my year of birth showing or is that going to do me out of work?

Nalini: I remember that thing on the Boxcutters episode that I listened to yesterday, where someone was saying 'I'm the youngest one in the studio' and I'm thinking 'hmmm'.

John: Oh, that was Lee Zachariah. Brett always tries to claim that he is the youngest, but he's actually the oldest... So I went to do stand-up. Then the obvious step was to move to Melbourne, because that's where comedy lives. So I moved over here and did sketch comedy on RRR. In the 90s I did some stuff for ABC TV and it kind of staggered on from there. Then I lived overseas for about five years from 99, I was in Canada and then the UK. I came back because I got some money from Film Victoria to work on a feature film script about a fictional gay and lesbian radio station in Melbourne. No relation to any real gay and lesbian radio stations in Melbourne.

Nalini: Is there a real gay and lesbian radio station?

John: Yeah, it's about three blocks from where we are at the moment. That one's called Joy, mine was called Happy Happy Radio. Nothing to do with each other. I came back and worked on that. And then, because I know Adam Richard, and I've known him off and on for many years through things like Channel 31 and the comedy scene, I said we should write you a thing, "we should write you a vehicle". We went through all these different ideas. I do remember he had this great idea for this thing called 'The Kylie Show'. It was good but it was so complicated and complex and difficult to write that I went 'No. What else? A gay science fiction fan club - let's do that one.'

We wrote a pilot, with a friend of Adam's called Troy. We wrote this pilot script and we sent it off: no-one was interested. We thought: let's make our own pilot, as a short film that we could put in festivals. Festival short films have to be under 15 minutes long but we knew if we did that people would go 'That's fine, but it won't stretch to be a TV show.' So we made it 25 minutes just like a normal TV show and we still got into a whole stack of festivals, which was quite amazing really. That eventually got back to the ABC and that's when they kind of went 'Oh, yeah, we kind of get it now.' We needed to find a production company so we went to Princess Pictures and that took a little while. So that was about 2007 I think.

Nalini: So how many years has it taken now?

John: The short film we wrote in 2005 and it was shot in 2006. We took it to festivals in 2006. So 2007-ish I think was when the ABC came on board. It was kind of odd because there would be money to write a draft of something and then it would go quiet again for months. I thought the show was over twice in that period, thinking 'Oh, that's a shame,' and then we'd get a call going 'Can you write another episode?' I have this theory that it's to do with momentum. I think someone pushed our show very gently at the beginning and it just kept creeping along. No-one actually got out the front and stopped it, so eventually it got made. It's kind of weird. It just kept creeping along.

Nalini: Do you think the success of shows like *The Big Bang Theory* have helped your show get off the ground?

John: I don't know because I think none of us even saw the connection until io9. io9 said it's the gay Big Bang Theory (http://io9.com/outland/), which I thought was odd. I don't think it is.

Nalini: From the ad that would be the connection that I would make, but it's the gay Australian *Big Bang Theory.*

John: I see it as the gay Spaced, so I think I'm ripping off someone completely different. It's quite an interesting show because Australian comedy generally is more observational: people do things and we laugh at them. Outland actually has deliberate jokes, which is a fairly rare thing for us culturally. I don't know why, you're often laughing at the characters rather than with them. You're laughing at what people do rather than what they say.

Nalini: I think it's really good if we can laugh at ourselves. Correct

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me if I am wrong but I think all the characters are either gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual in the show. I watched the ad and I don't care about their sexuality, I can still identify with this.

John: That is meant to be the point too: it is not niche because I wanted a show where every character is gay but that's almost irrelevant. I've always wanted to see a show where the head cop has a boyfriend who every so often you see in the home scenes, but that's it. That is what I would like, where there is a world in which that can just be such a matter of fact without it being an important plot point.

Nalini: That's like *Grey's Anatomy* - I heard when it was first cast, everybody was white. Then somebody said 'No, we've got to change this', and that's when they brought in all the diversity. What you're talking about is just increasing that diversity to a new level.

John: I had an idea that these characters have all these things that we think might be the thing that is their problem, their issue, but in fact science-fiction fandom is the one thing that they're a little bit nervous about. They're openly gay. Rae is a character who's in a wheelchair, she's a lesbian, she's a Torres Strait Islander, but none of that's an issue for her. It's her love of unicorns.

There are at least two or three of them who are still nervous about going out in public together, because they don't want to be seen as fans. So it's actually them having to embrace their fannishness and their geekness.

Nalini: How gorgeous.

John: There is a bit in the first episode that was probably more highlighted in the short film, which came entirely from when I was in a party in London. Someone made a joke about Daleks going upstairs. And part of my head went: 'oh for god's sake, in 1988, in Remembrance of the Daleks, they were doing it back then.' While another part of my head went: 'Don't say that out loud. Don't. Say. It.' We incorporated that into the show, this thing about censoring yourself. And that can be about anything. It almost doesn't have to be fannishness really, but it's gay and it's fans because Adam and I happen to be gay and fans. Therefore there's no research.

Nalini: All your life is research.

John: Exactly. That's what I tell my tax agent. But it could easily be... The short film played at a festival in London. A guy came up to me afterwards

and said, 'I'm not a science-fiction fan but I'm a train spotter.' He was coming out of his closet as a train spotter. So there's that sense that everyone's got something they're a bit funny about. The whole show is about, 'well, this is me… and all of this is me, and that's good.'

People think it's niche but it's not niche. It's everyone - everyone's like that.

Nalini: You just have to sit down and soak it up. Just the ad got to me it's like - no, that's not niche, that's global. I just hope that people can see that.

John: It's a very handsome show, it is beautifully shot, it is beautifully directed by Kev Carlin, it's a lovely cast. It's got a lot of heart in as well. There is more emotion in there, which is what Princess Pictures kept saying, "put more emotion into it". We just wanted gags about Joe Haldeman's The Forever War. 'No, no, no. A couple of jokes and then put more heart into it.' I think there's actually quite a lot in it.

Nalini: You're a fan of *The Almighty Johnsons*; you've talked about this New Zealand comedy TV series on Boxcutters. How much do you think the current style of *Outland* has been influenced by *The Almighty Johnsons*? I realise you started *Outland* before it was released.

John: We were working on *Outland* before Doctor Who came back, that's how long it's been. We've been through three prime ministers.

Nalini: True. 2005 to 2011, wow. I'm just wondering how much you think *The Almighty Johnsons* has influenced the character of *Outland* because it's a drama and it's a comedy, but you can't pigeonhole it. It sounds to me like *Outland* is a bit the same.

John: It's weird though, because by the time I saw the *Almighty Johnsons,* we were pretty much done. We'd shot *Outland* in 2010. Although I did write a fan letter to the *Almighty Johnsons*' production company saying 'It's so good, please let me write on it.' No reply. It is interesting with New Zealand television they're so much more open to genre than we are. Australia is so realistic: we're so obsessed with realism, whereas in New Zealand they'll make the Almighty Johnsons, or they'll make *The Cult,* or *Mataku*, they'll make strange little science-fiction tinged shows. I think as a nation we're quite hard core: 'that's not real, that'll never happen.'

Nalini: Do you think that's because we expect funding from

overseas to make anything that is not strictly realistic?

John: I think that partly comes out of the whole national characteristic: I think we're very no-nonsense. The weirder stuff in *Outland* we actually toned down a little. It's interesting when you write something like, say, the room is full of dildos, and you show up and the room has a realistic number of dildos. But I meant an unrealistic number of dildos, so there's this kind of sense that everyone in Australia makes reality. It is interesting, especially when you come in from a slightly sideways view. It's a national characteristic.

Nalini: I wonder how much it really is because I've heard Ben Browder saying that they were working on *Farscape* and they didn't even get awards for costume design. Soapies like Blue Heelers got them instead. The *Farscape* cast practically had to gate crash the Channel 9 awards because Channel 9 just didn't know what to do with them.

John: *Farscape* was an export; it wasn't made for us. If they made it for us, they'd be told 'It has to be a kid show, it has to have children in it.' But they were making it for overseas, so it's like 'Oh, okay then.' There is interest in the ABC now in some form of a science-fiction drama. Because of the success of Doctor Who, they're actually looking at that kind of thing. But as a nation we just don't make it. Even things like *Game of Thrones*… With *Game of Thrones*, it's almost like people who love it are going 'It's fantasy but it's okay.'

Nalini: Like they're coming out of the closet a little bit?

John: It's like they have to excuse it. The Green Guide in particular seems to have this tradition that either people just hate all science-fiction, so it's 'I hate this show because it's science-fiction, and I hate science-fiction,' which is not terribly useful as a review. Or they'll say 'I know it's fantasy but that's all right, there's not much of it. It's okay, and it's still good.' So I don't know, it seems to be built into us somehow. I don't know why. We all grew up watching Doctor Who.

Nalini: We all grew up watching Doctor Who: it's kind of like we have a special place in our hearts for Doctor Who.

John: We make awesome kids' science-fiction, we make great kids' stuff. I don't know why it stops there and doesn't get to be for adults. It's a bit sad isn't it?

Nalini: You finally managed to get *Outland* up and running with the ABC: did you actually work on the actual set while it was being filmed?

John: Oh, yes. Princess Pictures were amazing. Adam and I were involved with casting decisions. We may not have been at the top of all these decision-making hierarchies but we were definitely involved, we had a lot of input. It was great, and I was there for the entire filming as well. I was a director's attachment on the show so I was there to watch them and to observe and learn. It was also quite fun because Kev's a great director. He is a very Aussie bloke, and he's not a science-fiction fan. So every so often I would have to do that geek checking of pronunciations or explain the reference or that sort of thing, so that was kind of fun.

Nalini: So you were story consultants as well.

John: We were both geek consultants. We had quite a lot of involvement so they were great to work with.

Nalini: Do you think it's likely that there will be a second season?

John: I hope that there's a second series. I have ideas for one that are different enough so they're a continuation without being a repeat. I imagine we'll have to wait and see how it goes on air. Fingers crossed.

Nalini: Are there plans in place to export it?

John: I think so. The ABC has an export section, and I believe we've been in discussion with people from other countries. That's the bit that concerns the adults, and I'm at the kids' table. So I just wait to hear. It did play at the Seattle Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, the whole series got played there. I went over for it. They went crazy, they loved it. American audiences are just mad. They would laugh and just keep laughing at the next three or four lines. I'd think, 'shut up, it's a funny joke. Listen carefully.' And they get everything, they get all the references. I had a Norwegian tell me how much he thinks the Norwegians will enjoy it. Which is clearly my target market.

The geek thing, being a science-fiction fan, it's so international. We have our own language. If we meet each other, there's always something we can talk about. Breaking the ice is going to be easy. But it went down so well in Seattle, I'm kind of hoping - maybe they can re-make it, with Debbie Gibson in all the roles.

Nalini: I'm not usually a fan of the US remakes but at times it can be good. And if it does take off in America, well that's great.

John: I don't mind the idea of a remake. I haven't watched the remake of *Being Human* because I love the original of *Being Human*. But the thing is, I don't mind there being a US remake because it's not for me, and that's fine. The original one is so good, and I can watch that whenever I want. I'm happy with that. And I think our Outland is fantastic, if they want to remake it, well, that's fine.

Nalini: With the universal nature of it, you make a comment about the Daleks and the stairs. Have you read *Equations of life* by Simon Morden?

John: No.

Nalini: He actually said that one of his dreams is to make an encyclopaedia of references that he puts into his *Metrozone* trilogy. One of the references is about machines going up –

John: Stairs. It is funny; it has always stuck in my mind, as it is a joke people would make. Even after the show itself had dismissed it, it was almost like - you know when people believe things, and they're going to believe that regardless of how much evidence or proof there is. Somehow that is like a tiny tiny example of that. The show itself, since the 80s, has dismissed your joke. Even now, when we've seen hundreds of CGI flying Daleks, you still find 'Daleks going upstairs' jokes.

Nalini: But that's what we grew up with. In the 70s, I remember, I was in primary school watching - was it the Dalek invasion? They crashed into a planet because the power was being sucked out –

John: Err… Death to the Daleks? Was it with Jon Pertwee?

Nalini: Yes, with Sarah Jane, and there was a beacon on top of the city. I remember sitting there thinking it would be so easy to defeat these monsters because they've got tunnel vision and they can only go where the ground is smooth. And yet, when I had to take the scraps out to the chooks when it was dusk, I was terrified because there was a Dalek behind every tree.

John: [laughing] That's the thing though, isn't it? You have to decide you're going with it. You either make the decision that, yes I'm going to go with it, these are the most terrifying things in the world. Or you sit there

going: Ergh, they can't go upstairs. You go where it's more interesting. It's a better life if you engage with it rather than sitting back and making fun of it.

Nalini: Yes. It's about suspending disbelief and getting into it. Someone made a comment about the episode where three Daleks surround a building; well, you know, budget constraints. You just pretend.

John: [laughing] You have to pretend. Robert Shearman said in an interview about theatre, you know how you go to the theatre and you'll see some sand on the stage? That represents the beach. If you just got up and went: 'that's not a beach: that's just some sand,' people would think you are an absolute Philistine. And yet somehow with television, there is this idea of –

Nalini: There are different standards.

John: Yeah. People are going: 'Oh, that spaceship is not quite as realistic as I imagined a spaceship could be.' Go with it.

Nalini: Yes. Doctor Who in the 80s was very theatrical in a way. You wouldn't have people hiding and whispering, they'd throw the cover off, sit up and have a loud conversation, as if they were on stage. But that was the style in which it was produced.

John: Television generally seemed to have that. I kind of miss that in a way. Even the original Star Trek, look at the design. It is so bold and quite simple in a way; everything is a bit bigger.

Nalini: And they'd leave things to your imagination. This is all good.

John: I totally agree.

Nalini: That's the beauty of some of these fan films because they can actually be made cheaply. They've got stories that people can get into it. And the beauty of the Internet - you can find these things, like Pink five, a series of Star Wars fan films, there's this girl and she is one of the pilots (episode one is here http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fNX8TNKHbw).

John: There is a series on SBS called *Danger 5* and it's made to look like those 60s UK shows. All the exteriors are models, just like the Gerry Anderson series. The interiors are these large grey rooms. It's set either

in the 1960s when World War II is still going, or it's set in World War II which looks like the 60s. I'm not quite sure. It's almost disappointing that it's a parody, it's a joke series. If they'd done it for real, it would be one of these things where you'd go: 'I love this show.' You'd love the show so much, and they've got the guts to say 'let's make a show that looks like that. You have to come with us rather than us going to you.' I'll still watch it, though, when it comes up.

Nalini: So what are you doing apart from *Outland*?

John: There are a few other projects, almost all of which are at the ABC. It seems to be that's my world. There are a couple more projects: two of them have a science fiction tinge. Actually all four of them do.

Nalini: This is good. I need more science fiction in my diet.

John: Two of which are dramas and the other two are comedies, so we'll see how they go.

Nalini: Any release dates? Can you give us any further information?

John: No. I don't want to jinx it. They're just ideas out there at the moment, so we'll see if any of them go into development. There is certainly room for a second series of *Outland*. And I'm doing a lot of performance-y bits, there's a talk at ACMI coming up about sex and violence on television. (Find the event at ACMI here http://www.acmi.net.au/lis_sex_lies_television_screens.aspx.) And I'm doing more Boxcutters podcasts.

Nalini: Boxcutters seems to be getting bigger and better.

John: They're going off to Austin Texas, that's insane.

Nalini: I heard that you are going to WorldCon next year.

John: No. That was Terry Cross, I think he got confused and said it was WorldCon. It's actually the SXSW festival in Austin Texas, which is massive.

Nalini: What is the festival about?

John: It started off as a music festival. It's one of the biggest music festivals in the world but they've added an interactive festival as well. It is probably the biggest Internet podcasting festival. You have to be invited to go and they invited us.

Nalini: Wow.

John: I'm actually not going but it's just incredible to be invited to this massive event.

Nalini: I got the impression from that episode of Boxcutters I listened to yesterday that you cited work as your reason for not going.

John: It's more because my TV show's going on air. I thought I should hang around here and see how that goes, rather than toddling off to Austin.

Nalini: You have to watch TV so you're not going to Austin.

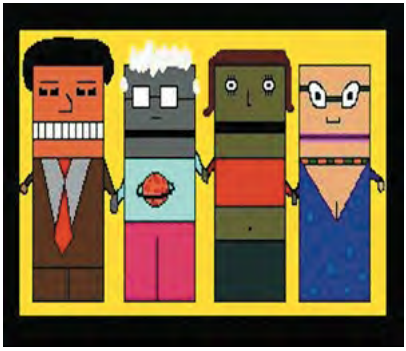
John: I'm going to watch *my* TV. [Laughing]

Nalini: Well, I can understand that. Are you still doing stand-up comedy at all?

John: No.

Nalini: So you are not doing anything for the Fringe or the comedy festival?

John: I'm doing one spoken word piece for Midsummer, an event called *Queer Nerd*, they invited me to that for some reason. (The event is here http://www.midsumma.org.au/events-calender/icalrepeat.detail/2012/02/02/1360/-/queer-nerd)



Queer Nerd

Nalini: I sense a theme.

John: [chuckling] There's a theme here, yeah. I'm going to give a talk about *The Apple* which is a 1980 disco musical, shot in Germany and set in New York. It stars a Scotsman as a Canadian.

Nalini: Is that easy to get hold of?

John: Ahhh…. I think it's on DVD. It's terrible. It's very loosely based on the Book of Revelation from the Bible. And Joss Ackland plays God. It is very very strange.

Nalini: What's your take on this?

John: I'm just talking about growing up, basically, and the idea that, in most of the future worlds I like, there were no gay people in the future. Even things like *Blakes 7* and Doctor Who, there were no queers in the future. This particular film, which is from 1980 - so I would have been eight

when it came out - is a film that is meant to be heterosexual but fails. It's got this weird sensuality bubbling through it. It's very camp, but not by design. I don't think it's meant to be camp; it's not meant to be *Flash Gordon*. Somehow it's become that, and that's what I'm talking about. It's the idea of how there are many different ways of viewing things and how these things can appear to us now. So that's my only performance comedy piece. I'm happy doing Boxcutters and the occasional talk.

Stand-up comedy is a bit too much like standing up in front of an audience and shouting 'please love me' over and over. It gets a bit desperate after a while.

Nalini: I can see that you probably want to move on, and what you're doing is really exciting. I'm just trying to build up a picture of who you are and what you're doing now.

John: I'm much happier as a writer.

Nalini: *Outland* starts on the eighth of February.

John:We have the Facebook page, that is our only really official online thing www.facebook.com/outlandtv. Have you seen the tumbler Where's Outland? (http://wheresoutland.tumblr.com/)

Nalini: No.

This is one of the two images used in Where's Outland Tumblr http://wheresoutland.tumblr.com/

John: It's hilarious. It's actually created anonymously. We didn't know who it was for quite a while but we eventually worked out who it is. Our first two publicity shots were that very standard ABC 'five-people-on-a-white-background' thing, the kind of shot you automatically have to do. Someone realised you can put it into Photoshop and easily Photoshop them into other locations. Then this blog called 'Where's Outland?' started - because people have

been waiting for this show for quite a while - in which every day is a new image of them. So it'll be them on *Blakes' 7* or our five characters at the Kennedy assassination; every day they're somewhere else. It's just these two images. It's hilarious, it's very fun.

Nalini: It sounds it. It sounds like a bit of Where's Wally.

John: Someone just started it as a joke. It took us ages to work out who it was, which was also really funny. We were going 'Who the hell is doing this?'

Nalini: Is it someone associated with the program or is it someone out in the audience?

John: I think it's a friend of mine, but it's never been quite clear.

Nalini: So it's kind of a friend who is supporting you and is a fan.

John: Yeah. I like the fact we've got our own crazy fan before the show has even gone to air.

Nalini: That's good. *Spaced Out* is the local LGBT science-fiction fan club. Have you had an official or unofficial response from them?

John: Absolutely. The funny thing is, when we started running this, Adam knew about them but I didn't. I didn't know about the group at all, when we started. Adam went to a couple of meetings but I didn't go until later, until after the short film had been made. You can spot them in episode six. We invited them to come down and be on camera in episode six, in the Gay Pride March. You'll see at least three or four of the members there. And you'll see their banners, they lent us their banners as well. We invited them into a special screening we had at the ABC as well, and I popped into their Christmas party. So we try to keep those bonds as strong as we can.

Nalini: That's awesome. You've got Cathy Larsen who is in publishing, but I can't think of anybody else.

John: Cathy's in episode six, she is spottable.

Nalini: Cool. I interviewed Cathy last year.

John: She's great. She's mad, but she's great.

Nalini: I was just amazed. All the book covers. Forget the cat lady, she is the book cover lady.

John: Oh, yeah. I love it. She's got some stuff on her wall, I think, different stages of the artwork. It must be difficult making art work like that, then they go and put words all over it.

Nalini: I really like her original cover for the Obernewtyn chronicles that she painted. That was actually one of the covers for Dark Matter, for issue 4, I think.

The ad for Outland can be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSBZp2z0q9Q

John: It's a lovely ad. Princess cut that themselves, it came from within the production company. They kind of went: 'Let's sell it how we want it sold,' so people see such a good representation of what the show is, what it's really like.

Nalini: So many ads just don't grab me, especially when they're a sound bite intended to suck you in, but that ad really did. I'm looking forward to watching *Outland*.

Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.

This is the other image used in Where's Outland Tumblr
http://wheresoutland.tumblr.com/

Thanks to the ABC, Princess Pictures and the Outland Facebook page for permission to reproduce the photos.

Yunyu talks to Dark Matter

Yunyu's information on Facebook includes the following:

Yunyu makes music that sounds like the musical extract of Kate Bush, Isaac Asimov and Edgar Allan Poe -- if they plonked their DNA in a particle accelerator.

Her musical career started when her mom named her Yunyu (beautiful rhythms) and auditioned her into a classical music concentration camp when she was 3. Like all misfits, she found the classical environment a little lacking in humour. After countless, merciless tortures she finally tunnelled to freedom using nothing but a very blunt, leadless, eye pencil at aged 9. The trauma of the near death experience caused Yunyu to connect with Zombies and the Spirit world on a deep, personal level.

Yunyu's weapons of choice are keyboards and piano and also the Gu Zheng -- An age old oriental instrument. Yunyu won Australia's Triple J Unearthed with 'You Are Expendable' and subsequently made the 4 minute wonder music video. 'You are expendable' topped the Canadian college Charts for a month peaking at No.6.

Lenore's Song is Yunyu's most requested song at gigs. It is a reply letter to Edgar Allen Poe's – 'The Raven'. Writing dead people love letters is Yunyu's idea of romance.

Together with award winning producer, Matt Carter, and borrowing crew talents from Lord of the Rings and Superman Returns, a music video of Lenore's Song was made. An ambitious stop motion film, consisting of

17000 digital stills, Lenore's Song video achieved over 42000 views and counting on youtube.com

Yunyu likes her anime. Resoundingly influenced by Neon Genesis - Evangelion, Rurouni Kenshin and a steady diet of Hayao Miyazaki films (see Fireflies) mean that songs come off as sounding a little cute and J Pop influenced. She, however, worships literature from the dark side. So the music industry says she makes cute, morbid pop.

Since her escape from the classical realms, Yunyu has lived in mortal fear that her classical past might come a-hunting. As a result, she's always armed, overly paranoid and hears voices which she calls the muses.

"Whatever," say the muses. "Play our music, or face our wrath from beyond...."

Twisted Tales – Yunyu's 2nd album comes out in 2012.

www.yunyu.com.au .

www.facebook.com/yunyumusic

N: Hello. Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.

Y: You're welcome.

N: I'm fascinated by your bio; would you like to add anything to what you've got on Facebook?

Y: My initial training was classical but I couldn't sight read to save my life. When you're in a conservative classical environment and you can't sight read you're like the musical equivalent of a leper. In a really classical and traditional environment that is a no-go zone. Needless to say I just didn't stay in that environment for very much longer. I started when I was three and quit when I was ten.

N: Most children in Australia can't read English when they're three, let alone music. Did they expect you to sight read by the time you were three?

Y: Oh no, I started learning the piano when I was three. I would just memorise what was being played and I'd pretend I was sight-reading. Every musical lesson was a Mortal Kombat session. Basically someone was in pain at the end of it. Usually it was me. In the end I told my folks that I hate music, please bury the piano, burn it, I don't care, go away

music, I don't ever want to see it again. This combined with the fact that folks were buying bad piano cover songs to "inspire" (think cheesy 70s love songs) I figure that I didn't really have much to lose by cutting music out of my life.

I think the musical standoff lasted for a couple of years until I heard some songs I really liked on the radio. I remember getting to the piano and realising that I could still play by ear. It was nice, returning to music, but on my own terms. The rest, as they say is some kind of history.

N: You say your weapons of choice are keyboards and piano, so you stayed with the keyboard and piano since then?

Y: Yes, but on my own terms. I also do play the Chinese zither, the Gu Zheng. It's a 21 string instrument, quite long, as long as your average 88 key keyboard. It's really fun to play, a pentatonic scale thing, typical of chinese instruments.

N: When did you start playing that?

Y: I picked it up in high school as an extra-curricular activity. It wasn't very cool when I started though: by default, when you're a kid, if you have an instrument that is bigger than yourself with a case about the size of

a coffin, it's very hard to be cool when you're travelling with the school band and trying to haul this coffin thing up the stairs*Yunyu makes verbal tripping, crashing sounds*

N: You've won Australia's triple J Unearthed competition: how did you come to enter the competition?

Y: Serrendipity. At that point I had come from Singapore and I was still halfway through uni. I'd just got into song writing and discovering that I could write. It was probably six months after I first started writing. A friend of mine told me about the radio competition. At that point I was so new in the country I didn't even know what Triple J was, so I just entered because it looked like a bit of fun. The next minute I got this call saying I won Triple J Unearthed. It was a bit embarrassing because I think at one point I asked Caroline Tran who she was. That was bad. I didn't know the scale of it, the enormity of it until a little bit after.

N: When you started to realise the enormity of it, what was that like?

Y: Very honoured. Being so new in the art of song writing, you don't sort of expect to win anything or get anything from it. It was a hobby, I did it for me. So when that happened it was a bit of 'oh my god, how can I ever top that?'

N: It says that you made the four-minute wonder music video: was that like a prize for the competition?

Y: Yeah, I think South Australia film commission put out $10,000 to any animator who could successfully pitch for the bands who won Unearthed that year, so of course my song, along with the rest of the other winners, were put up on a website. People could download it and make animations to it. Luke Gibbs won the animation. I like that he had met violent death bear which was what you're expendable video was. It's like a killer Ken doll evil existentialist doll video. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5NX0owp1hI)

N: It says here you topped the Canadian college charts for a month. You were in Singapore, you moved to Australia - why did you move to Australia?

Y: To do my university. I was doing my information technology and systems degree, nothing to do with the arts. I was staying by myself so I have more free time then you intend to, so that's how I got back into

music as well. When I got the album recorded I put one of two tracks - they didn't have My Space at that point so I ended up going up and down the college radio list. I didn't care where they were based, I e-mailed everyone. Some of the music directors in Canada really liked the track and put it on, and the next minute I'm charting.

N: So you're an international phenomenon.

Y: Somewhat, isn't any online musician?…comes with the beauty of the internet really. I didn't really plan for that, I just sort of dropped it into some stations and next minute it happened. Pretty cool, because I was charting next to Jane's Addiction and stuff on 2 of the stations in Canada. After that, it also helped that my graphic novel heroes Warren Ellis and Neil Gaiman mentioned my music on their blogs.

N: I think I read somewhere that you haven't been signed up yet: have you signed with anyone yet?

Y: I'm signed to a management company but not signed to a label yet. I haven't really been convinced enough to be since the concept of most labels are in the doldrums now.

N: You're producing songs that are available on the Internet and are available to buy; are you producing CDs as well?

Y: My first album has sold out now. I think there are a couple of copies left but that's all. My next album, *Twisted Tales* comes out sometime in 2012. It's an episodic collaboration with an award winning manga artist; Queenie Chan. She's done this horror trilogy called *The Dreaming* and has worked with Dean Koontz as well. We've become friends through attending Science Fiction Conventions: I got to know her work and herself as well. So in 2012 the release will be a result of a collaboration along with an animation company from Thailand called *The Communist*. We're releasing the singles that are stories and they're all in episodic nature. Check out the trailer for the first single on yunyu.com.au http://yunyu.com.au/home/2012/01/05/finally-the-trailer-for-the-first-single-of-twisted-tales/

N: You have a history of enjoying anime and being inspired by anime. Does that come from your Singaporean upbringing?

Y: I'm not sure. Perhaps. I don't even remember a time without anime. Anime is something you're born into when you're in Asia I suppose. (It's called Dong Hwa Pian) where I'm from. I remember watching Osamu

Tezuka's Kimba dubbed into Cantonese and later Mandarin. I don't remember a time without Anime. (See the resemblence to a certain Disney production in this clip?) :D

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Di6oaHOLvf0

N: It's just part of who you are.

Y: Yeah, it's a huge part. When I came to Australia it was like oh, you guys are into it as well. I think it was pretty fresh at that point. That was I think when Dragon Ball was still showing.

N: It was certainly seen to be more for the younger generation. My son was really into it.

Y: Dragon Ball was around for the longest time for me so when I came here I was watching this anime that is 10 years old just airing in Australia. Good to see the growth of Anime in Australia though, it's all caught up now.

N: Do you have any personal favourites in the anime media?

Y: Hard to pick. Different favourites for different moods I think. I think Mushishi would be one of my top five. It's based on a guy who is basically

some kind of worm expert. A lot of the spiritual events or the ghost like events in the universe are explained by these wormlike or parasites things causing a disturbance, but presented in a really Zen-like way. So it's a really hard series to describe. There's also *Mononoke*.

N: I love *Princess Mononoke*.

Y: Ah, the other one.

N: Are there two?

Y: *Princess Mononoke* is the Hayao Miyazaki one which is good but you should check out *Mononoke* as well. It features an exorcist of sorts working in a world where good and evil aren't quite so well defined. Trouble making spirits aren't all evil, there isn't always flat out exorcism but a kind of negotiation, an understanding of the why and how of a spiritual event. Exorcism of a spirit is almost a last resort: *Mononoke* has very beautiful artwork, you'd like it.

Mushishi http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mushishi and *Mononoke* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mononoke_(TV_series) are my favourites. Then *Paprika*, I don't know if you know Paprika. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paprika_(2006_film) It is the original *Inception*. *Inception* copied *Paprika*, in my opinion.

N: That's not really unusual. I saw the most amazing flick on the Internet recently showing how the *Matrix* copied a number of Asian martial arts films and anime. There were scene for scene comparisons, it was pretty amazing, http://vimeo.com/29996808S so it doesn't really surprise me that *Inception* isn't original. That sounds great, I mean I love *Inception*.

Y: *Inception* was awesome, beautiful. I watched *Inception* first. *Paprika* was always something I'd say I'd watch but then I just never got around to it. Glad I did, wonderful work, great music. *Inception* seemed so obviously inspired by it – especially the lobby scene.

(If you want to know, I'm a bit of a martial artist nerd, quite a few of the clips mentioned in the vimeo clip you linked to all share the same Martial Arts choreographer as *Matrix* - Yuen Woo Ping. That man's a legend, I grew up on his films, I also lost my front tooth as a kid trying to copy his stunts. He's so well versed in so many styles of martial arts, since he's trained since he was a foetus. Neo's style is predominantly Wing Chun, nose rubs and OTT acting while fighting are tributes…not a copy IMHO.

– for those who are interested)

N: It's really good to pick someone's brains to get an idea of what to watch. I've watched a little bit of anime but not a lot; I want to get hold of the good stuff.

Y: Where do I start? There is a huge variety. It depends on what you're looking for. There's the awesome fantasy stuff I mentioned earlier then there's stuff catered for the salary man (*Planetes*). There's also the really crazy stuff, like I can't believe this is on TV sort of anime. There's one called *Health and Physical Education for 30-Year-Olds* (30 sai no Hoken Taiiku). This is like an educational anime to teach people how to date etc. The anime starts from the guy's perspective, then the girls. They have these fairy god fathers and mothers who then teach them to be romantic and talk properly and not do weird faux pas that will never land them another date again.

N: That sounds hilarious.

Y: The show is wrong, wrong and wronger. Especially the fairy godfather. It depends on what you're looking for, that's why you really can't not get into anime when It's got everything for everyone.

N: I was talking to someone at Armageddon who said anime isn't a genre it's a medium.

Y: Yeah. He said it so rightly, that's probably the best way to put it. It is so not a genre. You can't put a genre to this thing; it's like calling film a genre. It hardly makes sense.

N: How do you think anime has impacted on your music?

Y: A lot of my relationship with music comes from visual mediums. That's how I see music, with moving pictures. When I started discovering my song writing abilities and experimenting with different styles, I realised I just wanted to create the sort of music that told a very visual story. I'm a very visual person, but I'm trapped by my inability to draw. So I compensate with music and try to paint pictures with sound. The challenge for myself was always to tell a story or capture an image in 4 minutes, the length of a conventional pop song. Okay, maybe Anime stories would do it in 20-40minutes, but I'm going to try to do it in 4 minutes. I've watched many varied anime with musical styles that are always different and I learn from them, and I come across all these amazing composers like Susumu Hirasawa (Berserk, Paprika) and Yuki Kajiura (Noir) who

basically do really varied genres for one film. I kind of aspire to be that, so I don't just stick to one genre for all my music. I traversed the entire music territory because I think I should, because the characters in the stories I want to tell demand that to happen. That episodic nature in anime is what I wanted to capture in my music as well, especially in the creation of the new album *Twisted Tales*.

N: That's incredibly ambitious.

Y: I try. [Laughter] Never hurts to try. I have this morbid fear that I'll make songs that sound similar to one another. That's why I keep learning and keep trying to write tracks that are very different. Also I have a very short attention span I don't think I could work on one genre for a whole album. I'll never make it, my brain won't let me. With the upcoming album I found myself having to play a role somewhat akin to a voice actor, learning to sing a different style as the different songs demanded.

N: So you find you need to move on and find something fresh to stay inspired.

Y: Yeah, definitely.

N: You worked with Marianne de Pierres on a book trailer. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H30_T0C1LbY&feature=channel_video_title

Y: We worked on 2 tracks. One was *Angel Arias* and one was *Bluebeard*. With the song *Angel Arias*, working with Marianne was interesting as she gave me this whole new visual terrain to work on. Marianne wasn't too specific at that point in time about what the reference cultures would be except that it's a whole new alien culture. She hadn't given me at that point of time any cultural references at all, but when I was reading it, the story opened with quite traditionalist figures, the women being covered up and all that, my first thought was I hadn't written anything that was Middle Eastern-old Orient-Persian-type stuff, but I was going to try. Marianne's world presented that new

challenge which is fun. It meant I had to start researching that sort of music which I enjoyed.

N: So Marianne gave you the book and asked you to create a soundtrack for the book trailer.

Y: Yes, it was like: make stuff!

N: Did the visuals come later for the book trailer?

Y: The book trailer came last. I was talking about the first book which is Burn Bright. That was the composing style. Then the second track was for the second book called Angel Arias. It was a much faster paced one and it was quite good timing on her end because I had just been working on my last tracks for my album in 2012. She was like: come up with a second one. I said, 'You know what? This thing I'm working on called Bluebeard is going to suit what you have because it is so fast paced'; it dances in a similar vein but it doesn't tell much of the story. Angel Arias has to give a lot away. So I gave her Bluebeard, and the way Bluebeard was done it is actually a Morse code signal. If you listen to the opening of Bluebeard and you know your Morse code, you'd actually hear a Morse code on repeat.

N: What is the Morse code transmitting?

Y: It's SOS. Dit dit dit dah dah dah dit dit dit. Listen closely, you'll hear it in the rhythm of the verses for Bluebeard.

N: And they were actually talking in the book about codes in the music. Wow.

Y: Yes. *Bluebeard* to me was the person that needs help because he's just mental and wants to be the judge and jury and hurt people. So I put SOS codes into the music. When I read Marianne's book I was like: 'you and I are talking about the same thing', so that worked out really well. Some of my songs are based on codes, random numbers in phonebooks and mathematical formulas.

Bluebeard ended up being one of the hardest songs to write, which is

why it took so long as well. To do that meant it was a song in multiple time signatures. I hadn't really done anything much with multiple time signatures so that was a bit of fun and a bit disorienting.

N: It's a bit unusual isn't it, to change time signatures part way through?

Y: No, A couple of people have done it. I just don't know of many people who have done it with Morse code, which I thought was fun. Led Zeppelin have got a couple of songs that change time signatures, a lot of heavy metal bands do time signature changes as well. Makes for quite a bit of interestingness. I always wanted to do a song with multiple changes of time signature but I never had the right motivation for it.

N: Along with all this creativity do you need to have a day job or is this paying the bills?

Y: I do have day jobs that I'm working very hard to get rid of. Eventually I hope next year I will never have to look at another piece of programming crap again.

N: Do you think being in the IT industry has had an impact on your music apart from taking up too much time?

Y: Not really. That may be a lie - it probably does. I was realising the other day when you start creating you use many aspects of yourself. In my case I've always thought of music as a purely artistic endeavour and it's all going to be really fun and creative and everything.

I realise that as my craft developed, more of myself actually leaks into it. There is a mathematical/ science loving part of my brain that I've ended up using a lot more than I consciously intended to throughout the creation of my new album as well.

I mean, there's a song about a lost cosmonaut in there. Then there's this other song that involves me writing all the notes out in a manuscript, and seeing if I could create a catchy pop song where the notes would mirror each other when the manuscript was folded twice. Like musical origami.

N: It does? Does this mean you've learnt to sight read now?

Y: Hell no. No, I kind of had the song in my head and tested it out on the manuscript very slowly. And then I had somebody who could actually read check it, because I don't have much musical theory left in my brain now. I've had to relearn just enough to do it, just enough to get by.

Nothing more, my brain is stupendously lazy like that.

N: That's a really interesting way of looking at it because sometimes I think we can get bogged down in the rules and there are so many rules in music.

Y: There are so many rules in music. I can tell you that it's amazing how much you forget when you haven't touched musical theory for a while. In the making of *Bluebeard*, I forgot how long a bar was supposed to be. So when I was calculating and telling people what the time signature was I came up with something really frighteningly ridiculous like 33 quavers in a bar. A bar is not supposed to be that long. So stuff like that you get corrected for but hey, they are fun mistakes….to me anyways. Thing is, I don't really break rules out of defiance, mostly I just forgot they were there in the first place. Too many rules to track.

N: I can hear what you're saying and I can relate to it so well in writing. I think if I tried to write a novel 10 years ago it would have been a lot better than what I'm struggling with at the moment.

Y: It's pretty liberating when you don't know what you're not supposed to do. That's an advantage of not knowing the rulebook or having a very short memory when rules are concerned.

N: Things can always be patched up afterwards once you've had these amazing flights of imagination.

Y: I think so, and that's when you hopefully break new ground in interesting ways as well.

N: Yes. I've also had 10 years of academic studies, during which I've had most of my adjectives drummed out of me.

Y: Is that a good thing?

N: No. It's not. But I'm slowly unlearning. So you're working with a team of people in developing your music. How has this team of people come together?

Y: *Twisted Tales* is more than just a music album. It has music, manga and animation – a huge collaboration. On the manga side of it is Queenie Chan, we've been long time friends so I was really happy when she said yes to the collaboration. We are working with a few animation companies but one of them is "The Communist"

Music wise I've had the pleasure of working with very versatile musicians

through my manager. Twisted Tales is very musically diverse and challenging and working with great musicians who were well versed in a variety musical genres was imperitive.

N: Apart from this one album coming up in 2012, do you have any other plans that you can share with people?

Y: That's pretty much it. It's a mountain of work there. Closer to the time you will hear news of the album. It is quite an ambitious project because it is quite heavily multimedia. I mentioned we're working with a manga artist Queenie Chan, and animator company The Communist. It's going to be a multimedia collaboration where the same story is going to be told from three different perspectives in three different mediums. So the very nature of it is really full on next year, and we'll see where that takes us.

N: Do you have plans for the launch yet?

Y: We're looking at the early 2012 for the single, then touring.

N: Where are you touring?

Y: At the moment along the eastern seaboard, so Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane.

N: How are fans going to find out about the tour dates and stuff like that?

Y: I'll be really noisy on Facebook near the time, get on my mailing list definitely. My mailing list will have heaps of updates and heaps of freebies as well.

N: How do people get onto the mailing list?

Y: Go to yunyu.com.au. There is a mailing list signup there. http://yunyu.com.au/home/mailing-list-2/

N: Is there any hope of an international tour or are you just keeping it Australian at the moment?

Y: Keeping it Australian at the moment, but I'd definitely like to, depending on how the album is received next year, we'll start planning. My publicist is working on all the stuff that needs to be done. It depends on how it is received and if people overseas are making a lot of noise then I will go where the noise takes me, which would be awesome. I'm still looking for a reason to tour on the other hemisphere.

N: That would be great. With the local scene do you do the conventions like Armageddon and Manifest and Supanova?

Y: There are plans to. It makes sense as Madman Entertainment is our distributor. I have done a couple of other anime conventions in Sydney. I haven't done that in 2011 because of gearing up for next year and getting the show prepped for next year. The new album overhauled the show's old-style as well, so a bit of work goes into that. I guess we are looking to try and hit all these conventions again in 2012.

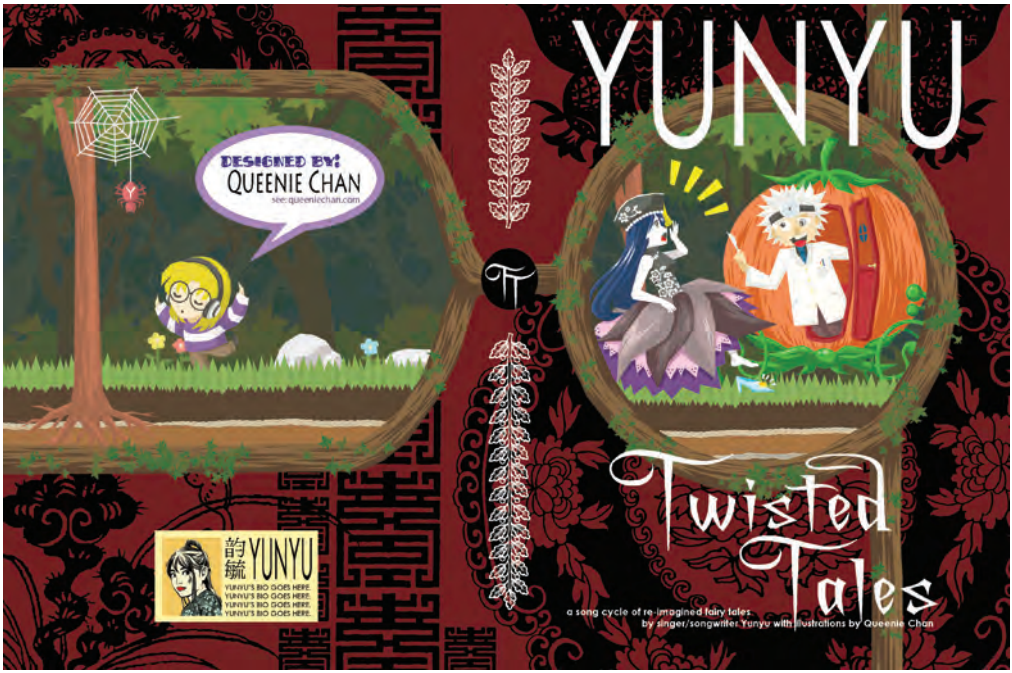
N: Is there anything you'd like to say to fans?

Y: You are my awesome awesome spiderlings and I look forward to sharing this wonderful album.

N: That sounds very exciting.

Y: We're all very excited and holding our breath. But it's going to be fun. Thank you very much for having me.

N: Thank you for talking to Dark Matter.



Letters

Thanks for the issue! I think I sent a letter to the last issue, though I'm so scattered from issue 300 that I'm not 100% sure! And, in a shocker, the latest issue of The Drink Tank is actually LARGER than DM! It also almost killed me to put it together, so there's that. How do you manage to put out issues of this size so often? You must have the fannish stamina of a marathon runner!

A few notes -

I love the cover! Simply a beautiful image that had me going back to page 1 several times! The combination of textures and colours plays so well, and the intensity of the stare really settles it. Five Stars, ten-out-of-ten level Awesome!

I'd heard a little about Vision Machine (Greg Pak is a friend from the Cinequest Film Festival, and his run on Hulk was awesome! If you've never watched his film Robot Stories, go and find it!) and I'm really interested! I might have to go about finding it!

Armageddon Expo sounds a bit like Wondercon, which has been a hit for me most years. It's really my scene and it's something that I wish WorldCon had a bit more of, if for no other reason that it might serve to youngen-up the attendees a bit.

I've still never watched The Guild (pronounced the Gwild, if you hang with the West Coast Fanzine Lounge crew) which is made weirder by the fact that a guy I've made films with, Sean Becker, has directed almost every episode. I do love Felicia Day too!

The Zombie Shuffle brings up a point we had discussed ages ago on my LiveJournal (which I'm told is still a thing...) What is the collective noun for a buncha zombies? I think we settled on a Shamble, but I prefer a Hack of Zombies. A Crush, Crash, Hunger and a Romero were all rejected, though I like a Romero quite a bit.

I also love that a photo exists of Amanda Palmer, Neil Gaimen, Felicia Day and Wil Wheaton. I mean, if I could choose four people to have over to my house to play a game of Fluxx, it would be those four... but only if Felicia wore that outfit.

You know, I've met Neil a couple of times, he let us use a few of his art pieces in Journey Planet, and he was recently on The Simpsons, which makes him the 10th person I've met whose appeared on The Simpsons. Now if we could only get him to write an article about Dr. Who for us...

I can't believe I'm going ot point out a mispelling, but I have to. Mydamnchannel.com is Rob Corddry and David Wain, not Wayne. I only point this out because David's awesome, a former member of The State and a damn fine director and writer. His film The Ten was great comedy. I've met him at a festival back in 2007. Nice guy.

Fletch rules: both the artist and the Chevy Chase vehicle...

I'd heard of The Enterprise of Death, and after double-checking that it wasn't a Star Trek tie-in, was almost moved to buying it, but alas, austerity measures around Casa de Garcia Grande (also known as Stately Chris Manor) prevented it. Looks good though.

Not as big a fan of Korean Cinema, though there have been some excellent films that come out of the Peninsula, I'm more of a Scandannavian/Russian/Indian film fan, but this one sounds like a good time.

Alright, this Denny's is about to throw me out! Good stuff, as always!

Chris Garcia

It's looking good yet again. Congrats!

Steve Cameron

Nice one! I look forward to having it as my bed time reading. Thanks, Nalini. I'm sure it'll be awesome (as usual).

Paul Bedford

Thanks Nalina - love the cover!
Marianne de Pierres

Dear Nalini:

Many thanks for issue 6 of Dark Matter…I will try my best to get this letter to you in time for the next issue. It sounds like it's almost ready, so here it goes.

A great cover…DTP and .pdf technologies mean that we can put great photographs on the covers of our zines. But, as you say, even a small fanzine can turn into a big business, especially big finances. If I can send something in the new year, I will, but right now, I am desperately trying to find some good work, and even a new assignment I had has fizzled out.

Those books for giving out sounds good. I am not sure how much distribution folks like Trudy Canavan and Rhiannon Hart get in North America.

Not many conventions here cater, either, but one convention coming up just north of Toronto over New Year's Eve, Futurecon, offers a meal package with the hotel and its restaurants. There's a lot of other restaurants and fast food places around the hotel, but they are smart enough to ensure that they get the lion's share of food business for that weekend.

I know Dean Haglund is on Facebook, and if I recall, because the X-Files was shot for many years in Vancouver, he is one of a handful of Canadian actors from the Vancouver area who got to be in the show. In some ways, in my opinion, it is sad when some actors who starred in a series or two never do get a chance to exercise their acting chops in other shows; they are typecast, and they are truly stuck. However, their consolation comes in being able to meet their fans, perhaps years or event decades after they left the show, and there are people who still love them and the characters they played. As I go through the zine…Sylvester McCoy, Erin Gray, Richard Hatch. You grab what glory you can get, and if you can't pad your wallet, a little egoboo does wonders.

Looks like a ren faire in Berwick. They are fun, but they are difficult to stage and there are municipal rules to follow, and politics to deal with. We used to have several ren faire-like shows here, but I think they are all gone. The Toronto Zombie Walk was more popular than ever this year, and the Zombie Walk founder, Thea Munster, got

married during the Walk. Lots of the usual weird and questionable press coverage, too.

Jacob French's stormtrooper walk across Australia continues to amaze. Looks like he's pushing a converted ice cream wagon. Continued good luck to him, and at least he's raising lots of money and awareness.

I think I have to finish this letter early, for I have to think about the evening job. I have had very little work this week, so my pay usually decreases substantially around Christmas time. And, the daytime job hunt continues, with some interesting leads and possibilities. I don't want all the jobs, I just want one, and that would be my best present.

All done, take care, our best for Christmas and 2012 to the Haynes household. See you next issue!

Yours,

Lloyd Penney.

Con Character by Ben Grimshaw

Book Reviews

Department 19

Author: Will Hill
Publisher: Harper Collins
Publish date: 2011
Reviewer: Jade Hounsell

Jamie Carpenter is just your average 15 year old, that is until he witnesses his father being killed by a group of men dressed in black, like SWAT, on his front lawn. Jamie has no idea who these men are and why they killed his father and nobody is very forthcoming with the answers. Two years on and Jamie is still struggling to come to terms with his loss, and dealing with being bullied at school, having no friends and constantly fighting with his mother. Then Jamie is attacked by what he thinks is a beautiful vampire girl - but that can't be right, can it? And if all of that is not bad enough, Jamie walks in as his mother is being kidnapped by this weird guy, who turns out to be the world's second most powerful vampire, and almost becomes a victim himself if not for the intervention of a mysterious 8 foot tall stranger, who turns out to be Frankenstein (yes I am serious!). It's Frankenstein that takes Jamie into the heart of a secret government agency called Department 19, whose job it is to protect the world from supernatural creatures. Once he is there it is explained to Jamie that his ancestors, including his father, have all worked for Department 19 for the last 100 years and he has to decide if he wants to continue the tradition and join the fight or walk away. As you may have guessed Jamie decides to join the fight, mainly because he wants to find and rescue his mother: that is, if she is still alive.

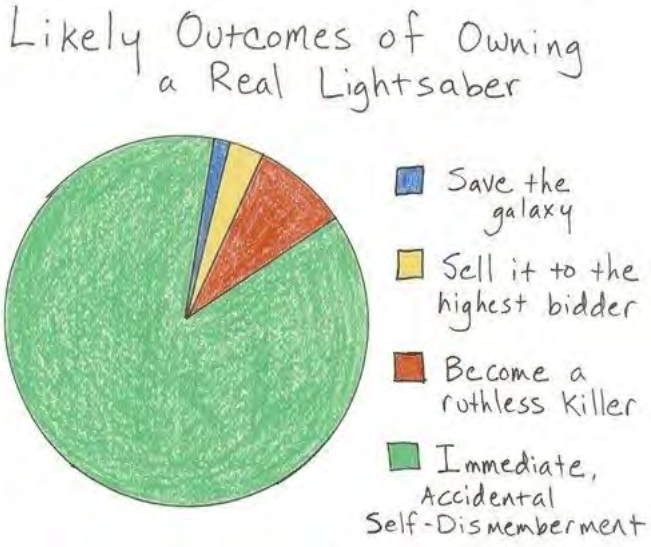
There is not a whole heap more that I can say about the plot without giving too much away but what I can say is that the book revolves around the question of what if the story of Dracula was real and not fictional? (Not to mention Frankenstein.)

As you would have guessed by now the main character in this book is Jamie, he is still young and when he is thrown into a nightmare

where everything he thought was fictional turns out to be real, he reacts as how I believe most people would react, making him a very relatable character. I feel that the rest of the characters are not as well explained or relatable, however this is the first book in the series so there is room for Will to continually build on them as he goes along.

The vampires in this book are also not the brooding, loveable sparkly kind (all I can say is thank-you), they are the more classic I want to rip your throat out and drink your blood kind. They strike with no remorse and kill in various horrific manners and the fight scenes in the book are quite specific and graphic.

I really liked this book: it is quite action packed and suspenseful. The only thing I have against it is that the book ends with quite a few questions still not answered, however since it is the first in the series I am not at all surprised. Even saying that, there are quite a few questions that are fully answered and explained in this one. This is the sort of book that you say you will only read a couple of pages but you really just cannot help but keep going and next thing you know it is 2am. Aimed at the teenage boy market, I think that this book does have something to offer to all ages.



Originally posted by Sci Fi Australia

Tymon's Flight

***Chronicles of the tree* book one**
Author: Mary Victoria
Publisher: Harper Voyager
Publish Date: 2010
Reviewer: Jade Hounsell

WOW! I cannot believe that I have never heard of Mary Victoria before I received this book. I was totally blown away by it but when it came down to sitting and writing this review I got to thinking what happened in this book to make me like it so much? In all truth while there were a few major events I couldn't think of why that would have had me so enthralled, then I realized it wasn't the big events that caught my attention the most, it was all the little things and things that you thought were of no consequence at the time coming back later on and fitting in so nicely.

Mary gives us so much information and back-story as she goes along that there are no questions as to why things are as they are.

Anyways, part of the blurb on the back says 'The World Tree rises up out of the seething clouds like a green mountain. All creation nestles in its green branches. There is no world besides this one… or so the people believe.' So if you don't quite get what that means, to put it simply is that these people live in a great tree, there is nothing else except other settlements on other branches, reached by air-ships, nobody knows what is above the canopy and what is below the cloud cover of the lower branches.

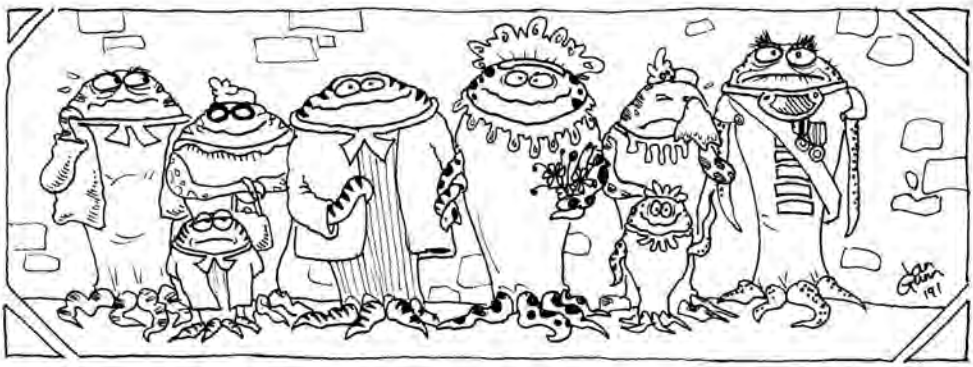
As the book is called Tymon's Flight you can guess that the main character is called Tymon, a young teen who has grown up in a seminary in the town called Argos. Tymon was left on the steps of the seminary when he was a baby and as he is approaching the end of his schooling he is left with the decision to become a priest or to work for two years bound to the priests if he is not apprenticed out to a wealthy merchant whom is willing to pay for his schooling costs. Becoming a priest does not appeal to Tymon at all as he has always had questions as to the teachings of the

priests religion, believing that there is more than what they believe and not everything they saw as 'evil' or 'impure' really is.

After a series of events, including Tymon questioning a priests' festival where a pilgrim throws themselves into a rift in the tree, talking to another 'pilgrim' which is prohibited to novices and encouraging an old 'mad' scientist to make an 'unnatural' propelled air-ship, Tymon is banished to the drought ridden colony Marak to work for another priest.

Once in Marak, Tymon finds himself ostracized by the local population. While he has more free time due to the priest that he works for either being drunk or high, he has nothing to do and no one to talk to. It really is no surprise that Tymon stumbles upon some hidden agendas and plots by the city's rulers and the priests. So Tymon takes the information he has and falls in with a group of rebels (mainly because he finds himself falling for one of their priestesses, Samiha) and then has to make some hard decisions on what he wants to do with his life. 'Fighting for freedom and power is not so enticing when it may mean betraying his own people and severing all ties to the world he knows…'

Once again I cannot express how much I enjoyed this book and am looking forward to reading the other two in the series as well as any future books written by Mary Victoria.



Silly Illo titled 'Alien Wedding', by Ian Gunn

Song of the Quarkbeast

Author: Jasper Fforde
Publisher: Hodder
Release date: 14 November 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Song of the Quarkbeast is set in an alternate world in the UK where there are dragons, quarkbeasts, magic and more. The second in the Last Dragonslayer series, it is possible to read Song of the Quarkbeast alone. There are sufficient explanations given that the first time reader can pick up on the ongoing story threads and understand the world without having read the first book, however I felt like I missed out on some fun.

Jennifer Strange is a foundling in a world where there are a lot of orphans due to the Troll Wars. She's working for a guild of magicians until she turns eighteen, at which time she will apply for citizenship. Jennifer has good relations with the guild of which she is de facto manager while the usual manager pops in and out of the timestream due to unwise spell casting. However, not all of Jennifer's relationships are on a good footing: the king positively dislikes Jennifer after events from the first in the series, there is a rival guild seeking to undermine Jennifer's guild, and some prejudiced people dislike foundlings on principle. The Youthful Perkins is a wizard about Jennifer's age who asks her out, complicating matters at work. Tiger Prawns is another foundling who, while technically Jennifer's assistant, will take over from Jennifer when she turns eighteen.

In the first book a quarkbeast befriended Jennifer and then died, leaving it's twin alone in the world. The twin quarkbeast is looking for something, possibly looking for it's lost twin, but it definitely finds trouble. Quarkbeasts can be vicious, they're fast, they lick chrome like it's candy and they eat metal. Perkins has to sit his exam (think pass his OWLs), the guild is trying to meet up with their time-hopping boss and the rival guild wants to destroy them. Just your average day.

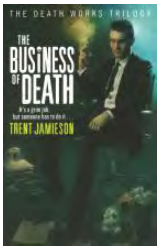
In terms of role models for younger people, Song provides strong

role models: Jennifer who, at age sixteen, doesn't take crap from anyone, manages the guild very nicely and yet is likeable with social skills. The Youthful Perkins is a nice Ponder Stibbons type (Discworld) who admires Jennifer, taking the 'new man' role. Tiger Prawns is there for younger members of the audience and to provide a bit of comic relief without being embarrassing; he could probably be considered to be a young version of Iolaus (from Hercules). The adults tend to be caricatures, whether they play the good guys or villains. While the villain of the piece is rather two-dimensional and comical overall, this fitted in with the style of the piece.

This is the kind of book that has many levels; think Pixar or Shrek. Kids will enjoy it, but there is another, deeper level of enjoyment for those with a basic understanding of, for example, quarks in quantum mechanics or international politics. I suspect there is another level for those who live in the UK as the Ununited Kingdoms (no, that's not a typo) have a political system evocative of the Hitchhiker's Guide. The reader who hasn't broadened their knowledge base to cover these topics can enjoy the story on a more superficial level.

The Song of the Quarkbeast reminds me of Artemis Fowl and the early Tiffany Aching books (Wee Free Men and Hat full of sky). I enjoyed this as a fun light action read and fans of the above will too. While this is aimed at a younger market, this book has wider appeal than the traditional marketing suggests.

The Business of Death



***Death Works* Trilogy**
Author: Trent Jamieson
Publisher: Orbit
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

The Business of Death is the Death Works trilogy re-released in one volume.

Steven de Selby is a thirty-ish guy living in Brisbane, Queensland, drifting through his life. Years ago he broke up with a girlfriend, Robyn, and is still pining over that relationship. Steven's friends and family care about him but despair of him, with his drinking and drifting through life. Morrigan, a business associate of Steven's father, is like a favourite uncle to Steven. Steven has an unusual job – he 'pomps' or kind of exorcises the dead, sending them to the Underworld, and returning Stirrers (intelligent zombies) there as well. (Pomp is a verb but also a noun: the name of the job or a description of the person who does the job.)

One day Steven is skiving off when he sees a ghost who tells him to run. Lissa was a pomp living in Melbourne, but she's travelled to Brisbane in her efforts to save pomps after all her friends and family in the Melbourne office were massacred. Unsure of who is behind this behaviour, Steve tries to make contact with survivors. Lissa tries to resist the call to the Underworld in order to help Steve, which requires a rather comical scene that could re-interpret some inappropriate public behaviour.

By the second novel, Steve has been promoted in the family business. He's also desperately in love with a real, live girl, drinking to the point of an intervention and trying to juggle too much without any innate ambition for fuel. Suzanne, another regional manager in the business, wants ten hours of his time unconditionally. I was surprised when she started using that time to mentor Steve, I expected something much more sinister. There was never any doubt, however, that Steve was being played by Suzanne and the other regional managers who were obsessed with office politics

while someone was killing people and the Stirrer god approached Earth. I was taken by surprise with the twist at the end, that set the tone for the third book. By the end of the second book, the scene is set for the third book; not so much in the way of surprises here, but the journey was enjoyable.

I saw many similarities between this trilogy and Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files*. Steve is similar to Harry Dresden in that he has a supernatural power and is trying to stay alive while fighting to protect others. Steve is as good as Harry at his very best romantically – I disliked the sense that Harry had a choice of Karen or Suzanne in the early books; this to me was the misogynistic dream and rather off-putting. When Steve falls in love it's total, he's besotted but not to the point of being annoying like Bella in Twilight. A temptress flirts with Steve, who's a bit of an idiot, so he's tempted for a few seconds (like any guy would be) but he's loyal and loving. And he pays for his slip-up.

In the best of the *Dresden Files* series, Harry has a team working with him even if he's the guy in charge. Likewise with Steve; he's the guy who's still alive in the first book, then he's promoted in the second book so he's the guy in charge locally, but he has a team. Steve's love interest supports him, loves him, and laughs at him, grounding him and correcting him when it's needed. This is a very healthy but imperfect relationship. Steve's love interest is a strong woman and yet Steve doesn't feel threatened by her strength or her authority, even when he knows she's the better part of him. Kudos to any male writer who writes such an interesting female character as a protagonist, but even more so when she's in a great relationship that is a focal point for the narrative.

Steve's relationship with Tim, one of his few surviving family members, is realistic in that Tim is family and a close friend while also being a rival. Tim and Steve diss each other in typical male (or Australian male?) fashion. Tim emerges as a potential threat later in the story, which provides a good twist without cheating.

Alcoholism is almost a character of this trilogy. Steve is a heavy drinker in the beginning, then in the second book he falls into a bottle as a means of coping with his new responsibilities and trying

to avoid impending doom. An intervention gives Steve a wake-up call, and yet this leads to a form of 'harm minimisation' rather than a cure. Steve's alcoholism is then challenged by – well, you have to read the third book to see how that turns out. It was an entertaining twist.

Brisbane is a character in *The Business of Death* as well. There is a stunning sense of place, where the city is superimposed upon the Underworld. Charon works the river Styx which is somehow symbiotic with the rivers in Brisbane. Although I've never been to Brisbane, I've lived in 3 capital cities in Australia, which have similar relationships with their rivers. Jamieson has captured the cultural relationship of the rivers and entwined it with his fantasy beautifully. Many hills in Australia are called 'One Tree Hill' but in this trilogy this name is given new context – the hill formerly known as 'One Tree Hill' is Mount Coot-tha where the cemetery is located, which is symbiotically linked to the One Tree (a Morton Bay fig tree!) of the Underworld. Throughout the story Steve hears the creaking of the One Tree, especially in his inner-city office where one window looks out onto Earth's Brisbane and another looks onto the Brisbane of the Underworld. At some stages in the story, characters head into the countryside; even here you get a strong sense of the Australian bush or outback – I'm reminded of Banjo Patterson's Clancy of the Overflow 'he's gone to Queensland droving and we don't know where he are.' Jamieson captures that sense of Queensland being where you go to get lost, you venture into the unknown, isolated in the bush facing down feral dogs…

The Business of Death is an urban fantasy with romantic overtones. It's as good as the best of the *Dresden Files*, complete with humorous moments to offset the impending doom, but it doesn't have as many overt pop-culture references as many of the books in the *Dresden Files*. In his acknowledgements, Jamieson recognises the influence of Fritz Lieber, Terry Pratchett, Neil Gaiman, Charon from Clash of the Titans, and Piers Anthony's On a pale horse. Furthermore, Jamieson is one of the award-winning group of authors, wRiters on the Rise. This writing group meets regularly to critique each other's books (see previous interviews with Marianne de Pierres and Rowena Cory Daniells). While The

Business of Death is very different in feel and tone of Marianne's and Rowena's books, the quality of the writing and the benefit of RoR's influence shine through. I highly recommend this for fans of urban fantasy with horror, romance, comedy and cultural themes.

Tiger's Voyage

Author: Colleen Houck
Publisher: Hodder
Publish Date: 2011
Reviewer: Jade Hounsell

The third book in the series picks up about a month on from the last one. As a warning, I will be mentioning some events here that were in the first two book so if you haven't and are intending on reading them please do not continue reading.

Ren still has lost all his memories of Kelsey despite all of her best efforts to try and help him remember. If that wasn't bad enough, Ren cannot stand being close to Kelsey for too long without experiencing physical pain. Ren then makes the decision to push Kelsey away and into the arms of his brother Kishan believing that is what is best for them all. As you may have guessed at some stage in this book Ren gets his memory back and then wants Kelsey back as well and gets upset when she chooses to stay with Kishan.

Do not despair! While most of this book is focused on the love triangle, the trio do manage to go on a new quest and try to gain the cursed brothers another 6 hours a day as humans. This one is water themed and the trio has to face off with five dragon brothers and a multitude of other sea creatures to gain the treasured prize.

While I absolutely have loved the other two books I have to say that I didn't enjoy this one as much. There was just too much focus on the love triangle and not on the quest, which really starts about three quarters of the way through the book. Ren has turned into a bully thinking he can tell Kelsey whom she can hang out with, talk to, dress and wear her hair while maintaining he has no feelings for her. He toys with her feelings so much that I have to wonder what the hell Kelsey still sees in him. Krishan has come off as a weakling, so eager to please Kelsey that he is willing to overlook everything that contradicts what Kelsey is telling him. The laughing, charismatic and egotistical Kishan just seems to be gone. Then

there is Kelsey herself, going backwards and forwards between the boys the whole time and using how they feel about her to antagonize them. And really is she that much of a goddess that every male that she comes across just swoons at her feet???

I know that makes it sound that I didn't like this book at all and that is not at all true, I did like it just not as much as the others. I just really hope that the next in the series isn't quite so focused on the love triangle and that all the characters end up with a sort of happy ending that they deserve.

The Extraordinaires

The extinction gambit book one
Author: Michael Pryor
Publisher: Random House
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Kingsley Ward is a young man who aspires to be a magician or escapologist in 1908. When a performance goes wrong due to the antics of stage hands, Kingsley's 'wild side' surfaces – he's a werewolf, although that term is never used. Rescued by the quick thinking of Evadne Stephens, a female juggler of some skill, diverse talents and extraordinary looks, Kingsley escapes to discover his step-father has disappeared. Kingsley and Evadne unite to look for Dr Ward. Along the way they meet Rudyard Kipling who has already written The Jungle Book, based on second hand stories Kipling heard about Kingsley. Their nemeses are later revealed to be Immortals, three magical, evil beings whose ultimate goals are somewhat unclear, but whose immediate goal is survival even at the cost of killing others.

Neanderthals living under London complicate matters further, seeking Kingsley to manipulate Dr Ward into revealing secrets to enable them to travel back in time to eradicate humans in time to save Neanderthals. Pryor's descriptions of the Neanderthals varied from being accurately described to being gigantic monsters who enjoy eating humans; this was not merely a matter of perception of others, but a varying focus of the Neanderthals themselves. No-one appeared to have told the Neanderthals that they are also the ancestors of Homo Sapiens.

Time travel is not just a feature of this story but also a plot point. In this, the first book in the series, Pryor is playing with the ideas and with the audience. Thought has obviously gone into actions and consequences and yet the grandfather paradox hasn't been explored fully; I have the distinct feeling that Pryor is leading the audience on to some dramatic event in a later book. (The grandfather paradox is where you travel back in time and kill

your grandfather before your father was conceived; if you weren't born, then how could you travel back in time to prevent your birth? Thus history develops causal loops and paradoxes. In The Extraordinaires, if the Neanderthals travel back in time to wipe out homo sapiens then, having wiped out homo sapiens, they wouldn't have the incentive to develop time travel to go back to wipe out homo sapiens, therefore homo sapiens wouldn't be wiped out…)

Evadne introduces Kingsley to the world of the demi-monde, which is not merely the world of thieves and whores, but is another, unseen, semi-magical layer of society. I was getting very strong Neverwhere (Neil Gaiman) vibes long before Pryor introduced the floating market. As London is so old and complex, with existing Roman structures below ground to this day, it is a fitting location for stories of two worlds co-existing mysteriously.

Steampunk-esque is a reasonable description of this novel; while not truly fitting the steampunk genre, Pryor toys around with steampunk-like themes and gadgetry. It appears most genuine steampunk is based on 'what if [insert technological change here]' – for example, what if the Babbage engine was successfully built? Or what if other semi-feasible technological developments were made in the nineteenth century, usually based on cogs, gears and fuelled with coal? Pryor has changed the technology of the era without extending his world-building to this extent. For example, an automobile in 1908 races away from Neanderthals chasing it on foot, whereas real automobiles in that era were slow. If I remember correctly, in this era someone had to walk in front of the car with a flag to ensure no-one was hit in spite of cars being slow and cumbersome.

Evadne wears spectacles that look not unlike tinted modern-day spectacles, however she adjusts her spectacles at the side or bridge of the nose to give herself night vision, enlargement or alter light settings. This kind of technology does not exist today, so at the very least Evadne should be wearing goggles with greater limitations instead of spectacles. The Extraordinaires is not strictly speaking steampunk with this kind of technological mish-mash, but adding in a hint of magic and time travel and it all works quite well, partly because The Extraordinaires doesn't take itself too

seriously.

Evadne herself is fairly unique. Evadne is an albino with pink eyes. It is highly unusual for human albinos to have pink eyes – we walk among you unnoticed due to our lack of pink eyes. Pryor has obviously done some research into albinism, and either chosen to ignore some of the worst aspects of albinism for the benefit of the story or, due to lack of understanding of the condition, has glossed over some aspects. I am pleased that the albino is neither a villain nor mentally ill or socially repellent in some way. Various forms of entertainment have almost universally represented albinos in a very negative light; Luna Lovegood, the kooky yet intelligent and loyal friend of Harry Potter, is the previously most positive albino role model of which I am aware. Representations of albinos are so universally negative that there is even a lobby group whose goal is to lobby creators into representing albinos in a better light. Pryor has written an albino protagonist who is active, incredibly intelligent and creative as well as the gorgeous love interest of the male protagonist.

Evadne and Kingsley are developed as characters in a tone not unlike Jane Austen, with inferences and humorous patter implying developments rather than bludgeoning the reader. Dr Ward remains a somewhat aloof character with secrets to be revealed, while Kipling becomes an interested ally. The Immortals and the Neanderthals make good villains, providing both black & white and shades of grey. The Extraordinaires is a light, fun read racing along with some thought to the two eras in which it was set. Highly recommended for teens and young adults and the young at heart.

11.22.63

Author: Stephen King
Publisher: Hodder
Release date: 8 November 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Jake Epping is a high school English teacher whose wife divorced him, claiming he was emotionally distant. Jake has few friends or attachments to his life, but has an association with Al Templeton, the owner/operator of a diner that has a portal to 1958. Al went back in time in an attempt to prevent JFK's assassination but failed; hence he recruits Jake in the hopes that Jake will succeed where Al failed. Al's experience shows that history resists change, and acts against it – Al developed a swift acting, debilitating form of lung cancer, so he couldn't live long enough to change history. Jake goes back in time knowing that history resists change, hoping he could fare better.

The contrast between 1958 and 2011 is explored well if not exhaustively. Jake's early experiences in 1958 emphasise the lack of environmental protection and occupational health and safety. Other contrasts include the better tasting food and the overall fresher smells of the environment – when away from ecological disasters. Society's attitudinal changes are also explored, including some discussion of racism as pertaining to moral codes, sex, segregation in education and public toilet facilities.

Moral codes are the most strongly emphasised as Jake develops a relationship with Sadie, a married woman. There appears to be little discussion of discrimination against women or attitudes towards divorce and divorcees – I'm not sure what the situation in the USA was during this era, but in Australia it was practically mandatory for married women to leave work. Sadie taught at the same school as her husband during her marriage and then secured a teaching positing in Jodie, Texas, as part of her escape from her abusive husband. There was no explanation as to why it was so easy for her to secure a position in the school given her circumstances, which was an unfortunate contrast with a potential

sacking for immoral conduct on the basis of her husband cutting her with a knife, causing embarrassment for the community. God's police got involved later, threatening to sack Sadie for immoral conduct on the basis of her relationship with Jake; this small-minded hypocrisy was mostly well-done except at that stage there was nothing preventing Sadie and Jake from getting married. Considering they were living in the 1960s, Sadie was a woman of the era and Jake claimed to love Sadie, it seemed strange that they didn't get married in order to avert trouble and generally make life easier for themselves.

There were two really big holes in the story for me. The first was the lack of emotional attachment to the goal. Firstly Al, then Jake, goes back in time knowing that they'd spent 5 years of their lives in the past, in peril while history tried to prevent them from changing history, with only an abstract attachment to the idea that maybe saving Kennedy would improve history. To be leaving all you know to effectively live in another country (the past) and to risk your life in a cause, there needs to be substantial justification beyond some abstract thought that it might be a good idea. [Spoiler alert] This is mirrored by the conclusion, which I felt lacked emotional depth as well – it just seemed too easy for Jake, whose emotional state seemed to be one of mild regret rather than a great loss.

The second big hole was the basic story about every trip being a reset. Throughout the book I found myself stopping from time to time and thinking, 'The basic premise [of time travel and each trip being a reset] doesn't work, so this isn't science fiction, and yet it's not fantasy either…' After reading the entire book I read the acknowledgements at the end where King revealed that he wrote the book one way only to have his son, Joe Hill, educate him about the dynamics of time travel (yay Joe!) King acknowledged that this resulted in a new ending to the book. This is very apparent – the Yellow card man was introduced in the beginning to lead into the new ending. I don't want to give away too much here, so I'll just say that the Yellow card man is both a solution to a writer's dilemma and the source of a plot hole. I started reading time travel and parallel universe stories (and not just Doctor Who) when I was in primary school, so I'm probably more focused on this aspect of

the story than the average reader.

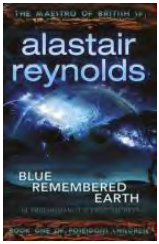
Another thing that bugged me – in an early trip Jake was injured but after he went through the portal no mention was ever made of that injury again. It wasn't clear whether that injury was 'reset' or not, which was an important point as Jake lived his life in fear of reprisals from history. Did Jake know something the reader didn't? One assumes that the injury was not reset as the cancer that Al developed during his attempt to change history was not cured by Jake travelling back in time to 'reset' the past. By the end of the novel the reader knows more, but during the story I was frustrated by this omission.

JFK is old news and an ongoing obsession for America. I've seen a number of movies and documentaries about the era, more on JFK than even Martin Luther King. *Red Dwarf* already did an episode where JFK's assassination was averted, causing disaster. As such, I'm surprised that this book kept my attention, carrying me along as well as it did. King managed to make an old story fresh again, which I think, at least in part, is due to his extensive research on this subject giving it the authenticity of history. This is the first Stephen King book I've read - I don't like horror so I've avoided King. Having read this book and enjoyed it so much, I'm much more inclined to read the *Dark Tower* series now.

Why did this novel keep my attention so well? The larger events such as JFK's assassination were made more real, more immediate, by looking at the consequences for Hop-along Harry, who, in one timeline, suffered brain injury, in another he died in Viet Nam, in another he had a different experience. This made the larger story more personal and the potential consequences more important. It was this kind of personal detail that helped me to become emotionally involved in the story and to care about the outcome.

Overall I'm giving *11.22.63* three and a half stars on the basis that, although flawed, this doorstopper novel kept my attention, kept me reading and caring about the outcome. *11.22.63* is recommended for fans of Stephen King, for people who enjoy historical novels, alternative timeline novels, suspense and more.

Blue Remembered Earth



Author: Alastair Reynolds
Publisher: Gollancz
Release date: 10 January 2012
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Sunday and Geoffrey are sister and brother whose family lives in Africa after the Resource and Relocation catastrophe caused by climate change. Geoffrey lives on the family estate working with elephants, begging for funds from the family, while Sunday lives in a city on the moon, in an unsurveilled zone. Hector and Lucas are the cousins who have seized control of the family business, including controlling the funding for which Geoffrey must beg. After the death of their grandmother, Hector and Lucas blackmail Geoffrey into going to the moon to investigate the contents of a safe deposit box. Fearing some kind of scandal, Hector and Lucas act to protect the family business. Entangling Geoffrey and Sunday in this investigation results in more questions, further investigation puts their lives at risk.

Reynolds' Terminal World was strongly influenced by one of my favourite science fiction books, Asimov's Prelude to Foundation. Likewise, *Blue Remembered Earth* had a similar influence. While Reynolds' work remains unique, he juxtaposes different philosophies and lifestyles as a means of exploration beyond the geographic. Ethics are raised as an issue, especially in terms of Lucas' implants that enable him to switch off empathy.

Politics are a theme of *Blue Remembered Earth*; while the politics is not the primary focus of the plot, international and family politics adds a distinctive flavour and realism to the overall narrative.

Although the Resource and Relocation period of Earth's (future) history was terrible at the time according to the historical accounting given the reader, Reynolds' view of climate warming appears to be very positive and even minimalist compared to many of the predictions presented at the Utopia, Dystopia and Catastrophe convention in 2010 just prior to AussieCon4 (see DMF issue one for an article about that conference). This is no 'doom and gloom'

prediction of Earth's future.

I picked up on two primary references to ancient mythology. Poseidon, after whom the entire trilogy is named (Poseidon's children) was the god of the sea in ancient Greek mythology. This has significance in terms of space being seen as a sea. I suspect additional meaning will be attached to this name in the remainder of the trilogy, but to explain that theory would be to give a spoiler from late in the book. The other primary reference to ancient mythology was in the naming of an underwater city, Tiamaat, who was an ancient Babylonian goddess of the ocean and chaos, from whose slain and divided body Marduk the destroyer created the heavens and the earth. Tiamaat is part of the United Aquatic Nations in Reynolds' speculative fiction. The UAN add to the political climate, bringing both opportunity and potential for chaos.

The name Sunday echoed Heinlein's Friday for me; I'm not sure if Reynolds deliberately incorporated this reference into the book or if it was just me.

Reynolds created some language for his book: for example 'voked' replaces 'invoked' and refers to initiating a futuristic phone call. Quangle is a kind of quantum encryption on Reynolds' futuristic internet or phone/radio system. This language is kept to a minimum so as not to impede one's ability to immerse oneself in the story, but the initial usage jarred as it was one of the first clues within the story that this was the future. I thought this was effective without overwhelming the reader as it was not overused.

I thoroughly enjoyed *Blue Remembered Earth* as quality science fiction, of which I read too little. This book is highly recommended to science fiction readers who are prepared to read a trilogy of doorstoppers. If you're an avid reader of doorstoppers who would like to explore science fiction, this is a good place to start.

Anywhere but Earth

Authors: Keith Stevenson (editor), Sean McMullen, Margo Lanagan, Cat Sparks (Goodreads Author), Brendan Duffy, Kim Westwood, Robert Hood, Patty Jansen (Goodreads Author) , Richard Harland
Reviewer: Thoraiya

See Thoraiya's reviews on http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/236412413. Republished with permission.

Let me start off by saying that this book is not small. Like 'X6', this latest anthology is in stark contrast to the svelte offerings of Twelfth Planet Press. 'Anywhere But Earth' is a hearty meal to be digested slowly over days; weeks; months.

So take your time, and enjoy. The stories are diverse and consistently top-notch. Like last year's 'Sprawl' and this year's 'ASIM #51', none of the stories stand out as an obvious cull, and the potential for my least favourite to be someone else's outstanding story of the year is obvious. Bonus: The type is not migraine-inducingly small. Bless you, Coeur de Lion!

So what were my favourites?

Out of 29, there were 5 that made me huggle the book in sheer delight.

In Alan Baxter's 'Unexpected Launch,' a couple of cleaners as sole survivors of an alien attack provide first humour, then a creeping claustrophobia, culminating in (view spoiler).

Next, the ominously titled 'Pink Ice in the Jovian Rings.' CJ Paget had me mesmerised by the strong, slang-peppered voice of the soldier protagonist. Talk about showing, not telling. 'Pink Ice' was funny and sad and just amazingly written.

Kim Westwood made me sit up and pay attention with 'By Any Other Name,' a brief and beautiful story where the masterful world building consists of chilling, contradictory word choices.

'Pyaar Kiya,' by Angela Ambroz, who I hadn't read before, also hooked me from the start, her style so fresh and confident that I'll

definitely be hunting down her other published work.

As for Steve Cameron's 'So Sad, The Lighthouse Keeper,' I was looking forward to it all the way through, and had to make an effort not to skip ahead. You know about my tragic lighthouse obsession, right? Anyway, this story was even better than I'd hoped. The characterisations were spot-on and I found the structure and symmetry of the story incredibly satisfying.

(I did consider making it 6 favourites by including Richard Harland's excellent 'An Exhibition of the Plague,' but although I loved it, I thought it was a bit of a cheat. The story really did feel like it was on Earth. Sorry, Richard :D)

Right. So what about the rest?

If there was a theme besides the obvious, it was that though settings change, people stay the same. Callie Voorhis evoked the loneliness of an envoy's wife in 'Murmer,' Cat Sparks the fear and hope of adolescence in 'Beautiful,' and Simon Petrie revenge and rites of passage on Titan in 'Hatchway'.

My attention was easily held by Lee Battersby's descriptive powers, Richard Harland's smooth and seemingly effortless storytelling, the atmosphere of Robert N Stephenson's piece and the beautiful melancholy of Liz Argall's.

'Memories of Mars' by Chris McMahon made me want to make an attempt on the oxy-mix record; his aliens were great and I loved the line, ' "To make the Swarms with Halased," scented Goldexis boldly.' How romantic! Penelope Love made me want to play 360-pool. 'SIBO' was another well crafted story with an admirably clear, strong voice. Donna Hanson had me laughing at her Fleche foreman – and shaking my head at the plight of her hapless protagonist, while Erin Stocks gave me chills in another creepy crash-survivor story, 'Lisse'.

William Wood's story was suspenseful and might have been more so if I didn't have to stop reading and reach for a calculator to work out that a hundred million seconds is about three years (*Arnie Voice*: Stop eet!) while Rob Hood's tale of Arthur Groom and his horse, Bugger, in search for the Desert Madonna had me utterly engrossed and second-guessing myself until the end. (A really fun

character, Rob. Feel free to write more of Groom's adventures!)

Steve de Beer earned my forgiveness for the neglect of women in 'Psi World' with his development of a fascinating ecosystem, while Damon Shaw embroiled me in an unforgettable, fast-paced vendetta in 'Continuity.' Wendy Waring examined an unbridgeable communications gulf in 'Alien Tears.' Patty Jansen introduced me to the very cool concepts of constructs and warp-surfing in 'Poor Man's Travel.'

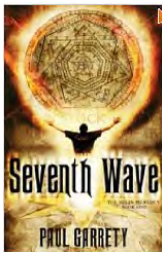
Brendan Duffy managed an eerie future prediction (I read about the 'iGeiger' in 'Space Girl Blues' on the same day Japanese phones with Geiger counters were released) and TF Davenport conjured a lush, tangible world with tenderly drawn characters that I could, again, easily consume more of.

Where Margo Lanagan was inspired by angler fish, Jason Fischer was inspired by spiders, but instead of the usual mindless man-eaters, he had his protagonist, Reinlok, searching for love, wanting to 'have Naello around as my companion, not just in the mad frenzy of our mating and my attempted murder.' I really enjoyed the twists and turns that 'Eating Gnashdal' took.

Sean McMullen explored virtual identity with the curious main character of 'Spacebook,' while Mark Rossiter delved into a cloudless apocalyptic future; I loved the visual of the Three Sisters sticking out of the water. Jason Nahrung, as usual, wrote beautifully, but handed me horror in sci-fi clothing. One day, he'll gift me with a glimmer of hope!

Thank you SO MUCH Donna Hanson, for helping me over the No Eftpos hurdle at the highly enjoyable NSWWC Spec Fic Festival, and I hope I'll see everyone there again next time with another awesome CdL anthology!

The Seventh Wave



Author: Paul Garrety
Publisher: Harper Voyager
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Rebecca Muir

This is the first book in Paul Garrety's *Helix Prophecy* books. Set in Australia in the present day, it is a book about the occult and the paranormal. Spirits from another dimension (who used to be in control during ancient times, the source of stories about Atlantis, pyramids and other ancient cultures that seem too advanced for their time) want to come back to Earth and take over, riding on waves of astral energy. They have sent an advance guard to prepare the way. Cervantes, previously human but now a vessel for one of the spirits, has set up the Club, an exclusive network built on power and influence. Top people in societies around the world are invited to join and given access to power, helping them to become more successful and gratifying all their secret desires. Working for Cervantes behind the scenes are humans driven by desire for power or by fear as well as vampires who feed on your life force and Robes, sorcerers who are not of this world.

Arrayed against them are a group of magic users called the Helix. The Helix has been decimated by a virus planted by the Club which kills them if they use their powers. Only a few remain, powerless to stop Cervantes as he prepares for the final astral wave, carrying the other spirits.

Freda, one of the last of the Helix, arranges for Callum, a professional thief with issues relating to his wife's death on the job to meet up with Sam, a journalist who also has issues from the past. She thrusts them both into situations where they must confront the demons of their pasts and discover their true destinies. Together they seek to thwart the Club from harnessing the final wave.

The Seventh Wave explores what it means to be on the right or wrong side. It is a "good versus bad" story, but it is not simplistic. Many of the characters are confronted with the choices they have made and given a chance to change. The book explores the idea

that what really counts is whether you are going to put yourself first, or whether you are prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of others.

I would not recommend this book for younger readers, as there are some sex scenes and some issues discussed which are probably not appropriate for children or young teens, but older teens or adults who are interested in the paranormal will probably enjoy the book. I'm not really into stories of the occult myself, but it was still an interesting read.

The Sending

Author: Isobelle Carmody
Publisher: Penguin Books
Publish Date: October 31, 2011
Reviewer: Jade Hounsell

The Sending is the 6th book in the Obernewtyn Chronicles, or the seventh I think for overseas readers. There really is no point in reading this book as a stand alone; you really have to read all the others in the series to understand what is happening and the key characters. Believe me reading the rest of the series will not be a chore; Isobelle really has created a captivating world that is very easy to be lost in.

I have been reading this series since Isobelle made a visit to my school when I was in year 7 and I purchased a book for her to sign, so that's something like, (oh gosh I now feel really old) 18 years. Each of my books has been read no less then 10 times each and the only gripe I have is that it can take years between books. However once I have my hands on the newest copy I totally forget the gap and once I have finished reading, I totally understand why.

If you haven't already read the series, and I highly recommend that you do, then most of what I am about to say is not going to make a whole heap of sense. The time for Elspeth to leave Obernewytn and complete her quest to destroy the weaponmachines, has come. The dog Darga has returned which is the signal that she

is to leave Obernewtyn and never return. With only the horse Gahltha, cat Marumann and Darga for her company, Elspeth must leave Obernewtyn and everyone in it behind without any warning or goodbye, and that includes Rushton whom Elspeth has finally allowed herself to fully love.

Elspeth is guided by Darga, Gahltha (The Day Watcher) and Marumann (the Night Watcher) deep into the mountains where they must seek the assistance of the wolves whom are suppose to lead her where she needs to go for the next part of her quest– that is if she can first convince them to. The wolves have an overpowering hatred of humans due to the cruelties that Arial inflicted on the pack in years past.

While waiting for the wolves to make their decision as to whether they will help or not, Elspeth makes the surprising discovery that she is not to undertake this journey alone as she had always thought she would. There are several companions waiting for her, all of whom are known to her and some whom she cares deeply for. (I will not spoil it by telling you who!)

Each of these companions has been sought out by the Agyllis bird in their dreams or as a voice in their mind, giving them instructions that have lead them to be here at the same time as Elspeth. Elspeth for her part, knows that each and every one of those chosen would all be there for a very specific reason although at that moment she has no idea what those reasons may be.

In all truth, not a whole heap happens in most of this book. It really is a setting up for the next (and I think last) book of the series, *The Red Queen*. However there is a heap of information and building of characters in this book that will have fans of the series left feeling very happy and eagerly awaiting the next. Also be warned that the ending of this book is a real cliffhanger, something that has never happened in this series before.

The Emerald Tablets

Author: Paul Garrety
Publisher: Harper Voyager
Release date: 2011
Reviewer: Rebecca Muir

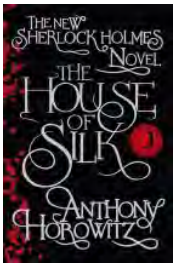
This book is the sequel to Paul Garrety's paranormal thriller The Seventh Wave. It had quite a different feel to the first book – it is more of a sci-fi book about a technologically advanced society rather than a book about the occult.

Callum is thrust forward fifty years into the future. Confused and isolated, he must make sense of who he is and what has happened, and decide who he can trust. He eventually rediscovers Maggie, whom he has been separated from. Together they must once again risk everything to stop the Immortals gaining complete power. Along the way he meets an angry young woman called Leah, and her insightful son Matty. They need each other, but Callum must first gain Leah's trust.

As in The Seventh Wave, this book explores the need to decide between serving self-interest and sacrificing for the sake of others. In the "baddies" we see self-interest taken to its ruthless extreme and revealed for the damaging path it is. The other characters, Leah in particular, are faced with difficult choices to make. Is a little self-interest justified, despite the cost to others? How far do we need to go, how much sacrifice should we be prepared to make for those around us? These are important questions the book raises.

I enjoyed this book more than the first one, probably because I'm more into sci-fi than paranormal. As with the first book I would recommend it for older teens or adults rather than younger readers. It was a fast-paced and generally enjoyable read, with interesting characters and a fascinating imagined future. It is a blend of sci-fi, adventure and romance.

The House of Silk



The new Sherlock Holmes novel
Author: Anthony Horowitz
Publisher: Orion
Release date: November 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

The first time I saw the Sherlock Holmes movie starring Robert Downey Jnr I hated it because it wasn't the Sherlock Holmes I remember. The second time I saw the same movie (hubby loved it) I enjoyed it more, taking it more at face value as a contemporary interpretation of a classic character rather than as an attempt to recreate the original Sherlock Holmes. I just wish Hollywood would stop trying to recreate, reinterpret and reboot old stuff: the same movie could have been presented as a contemporary of Sherlock, even with a cameo from the 'real' Sherlock, and I would have been much happier. This being the case it was with ambivalence that I saw the 'new' Sherlock Holmes novel advertised - I was filled with excitement and horror – but I knew I had to read it.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote Sherlock Holmes as a series of short stories, originally for publication in newspapers I believe (Wikipedia is down due to protesting SOPA so I can't check my facts). Anthony Horowitz has authorisation from Conan Doyle's estate to write this novel. Sherlock Holmes was an obsessive-compulsive type whose powers of observation, combined with a pipe or three of opium solved many mysteries (my mum told me it was opium when I was in primary school and commented on Sherlock's smoking of tobacco: again, Wikipedia is down). The narrator of the stories was Dr Watson, a close friend of Sherlock's, who accompanied Sherlock and acted as biographer. Written for an educated, genteel market, the stories were sensational by the standards of the time but not so sensational as to include stories about same-sex pedophilia. The original stories focused on mysteries concerning genteel people not the working class. It is important to note that Doyle's stories were set in his own era, so there were no cultural discrepancies.

The House of Silk begins with Carstairs, the co-owner and operator

of an art gallery, requesting that Holmes investigates a mysterious stranger who he believes is an American gangster seeking revenge after an investigation into stolen paintings results in his brother being killed in a shootout. This investigation takes up about the first third of the novel, introducing Carstairs' wife whom he met on the voyage home from America, and Carstairs' sister who is convinced that Mrs Carstairs is evil. Miss Carstairs then takes seriously ill, lying at death's door, while Holmes and Watson are distracted by the torture and murder of a boy around whose wrist a clean length of white silk ribbon is left as a message. This leads Holmes and Watson into a new investigation that is obviously going to be tenuously linked to the first story at the inevitable reveal.

It has been over 20 years since I read any Sherlock Holmes stories, so although I read them repeatedly for about 10 years, my memories are somewhat clouded with time. I think the overall style of writing is similar to the original stories, but numerous errors were made in the telling of the story.

Firstly there were period errors such as a woman being introduced as 'Joanna' instead of as 'Mrs Fitzsimmons' or 'Mrs Joanna Fitzsimmons'; the latter would have been as familiar as that society permitted in that situation. The woman was subsequently referred to as 'Mrs Fitzsimmons' consistently. Another period error was describing paintings as 'faded' and later other paintings were described as 'dark and faded'. Oil paintings painted with pigment as would have been the case in nineteenth century Britain don't fade as they get older but they can yellow, darken and the surface crackles with age. To describe something as 'dark and faded' seems contradictory. There were also cultural discrepancies such as a child caught stealing was not sent to gaol but was sent to a children's home where the children did not 'wast[e]' hours on the treadmill but instead were given an education and were apprenticed to trades.

Horowitz is clearly familiar with the original series and yet he has chosen to reinterpret characters and give 'new twists' where in my opinion he should have stayed true to the original material. For example, Inspector Lestrade was introduced, described in terms of the original character and, at the same time, re-interpreted in

a much kinder light for the purpose of this novel. Horowitz also acknowledged that the original stories were about the 'well-to-do' and that this story was a break with that tradition.

In order to justify my low rating of this novel I will now discuss developments very late in the plot. **Be warned: if you're planning to read this novel at all, DO NOT read on, just skip to the last paragraph for the summary if you wish.**

Sherlock Holmes intentionally walks into a trap, and even knowing it's a trap he is entrapped. He is then conveniently framed for murder, apparently shooting a passer-by who just happens to be the girl he's looking for. No explanation is given as to why she's in the right place at the right time; Horowitz doesn't say she was forcibly held there or anything, she's just there and happens to be the person who is shot. Three stalwart members of society, including one lord, one doctor, and an evil albino police officer, converge on the shooting resulting in Holmes being arrested then remanded for a hearing. I won't get started on the evil albino issue in the interests of brevity; suffice to say that the evil albino was a caricature with similarities to Voldemort (sigh).

Holmes then spends a period in gaol, which seemed to be a convenient means of extending the story by having Watson bumble around on his own. This became increasingly irritating as the love-lorn Watson kept bemoaning the loss of Holmes' powers of observation. Watson is warned that he has 48 hours in which to rescue Holmes from an assassination attempt and is given one key with which to help Holmes escape from a heavily fortified prison. Watson places this turn of the century key (not as small as keys these days!) in the spine of a book and fills either end of the spine with wax in order to glue the key in place. Apparently the key and wax in the spine did not affect the opening or closing of the book and was unnoticeable to Watson. If pages are going to be spent discussing Watson's solution and attempt to smuggle the book to Holmes, the author should have actually tried this himself – there is no way this would have worked, and Watson, being the intelligent man he was, would have known this.

Watson was not allowed to speak to Holmes at all. Apparently

the evil albino, Inspector Harriman, had the power to prevent all visitors during his investigation, which seems unrealistic. A person with connections such as Holmes should have at least been able to access a lawyer, especially when he had his first appearance in court, but Holmes was not allowed to speak at his own hearing nor did he have legal representation. This is a violation of law in that common law sets out the principles of natural justice, which include being able to answer accusations.

After a number of attempts to speak to Holmes, Watson is suddenly granted access to see Holmes less than 24 hours after being told he has 48 hours to rescue Holmes from the assassination attempt. During his tour through the prison, Watson realises that one key would not be sufficient for a successful escape attempt. He is also filled with remorse for how he had recorded the ends of stories, never thinking about the consequences for the villains Holmes had apprehended?!

Watson is told that Holmes had morning tea at 11 am and was suddenly taken ill, removed from his cell and placed in the infirmary. Later Watson is told that Holmes identified arsenic in his broth by taste at dinner time the previous day but was not taken ill. Holmes did not drink the poisoned soup but 'kept some back' to prove to the doctor that the soup was poisoned. How Holmes 'kept some back' when all his personal possessions had been removed and he apparently hadn't kept the bowl of soup was not explained. Holmes, who was not allowed to speak to anyone, then requested to speak to the prison doctor and was granted this wish although he was not ill. Holmes discovered that he knew the doctor, a character from a previous story who had inexplicably suffered significant career misfortunes after doing no wrong, thus ending up employed at the prison. This doctor was prepared to assist Holmes to escape on the strength of this relationship. They chatted for some time that evening without repercussions. Holmes did not take ill after his food was poisoned at dinner time nor at breakfast but then 'took ill' after being poisoned at 11 am during morning tea. The assassins were only very mildly suspicious apparently, investigating Holmes' lateness in dying about 3 pm.

After waiting on Holmes for some time the night before, the doctor

is then at work before 11 am the next morning when Holmes stages his illness. In the period between, presumably the doctor has had other duties as well as eating, sleeping etcetera. The doctor apparently managed to provide Holmes with a wig and makeup sufficiently convincing to pass close scrutiny by Dr Watson although there is no mention of how these props were obtained. As Dr Watson was in residence at Baker Street and Holmes had no keys to the 'other lodgings' he later claimed to have around London, how these props came to be available at such short notice is inexplicable. Also an ill inmate died right on cue as required for the plot; Horowitz has obviously watched some Alfred Hitchcock and thought he'd outsmart the reader by adding a twist to an old prison escape story where the escapee hides in a coffin.

Holmes needed to get a message out of the prison so apparently he used the criminal network as casually as one might use a telephone to send a message. As police officers that fall foul of the law are targets of violence rather than becoming welcome participants in the criminal underground, Holmes needed an additional relationship or justification for co-operation to make his use of this messenger believable.

A few other issues with the plot included Ross having run away from the boys' home six months previously but then, when his mattress received its *monthly* turning, Ross's book was discovered underneath the mattress. Having entrapped Holmes once, the villains decided they could do it again – and Holmes and Watson walked into a second trap, Watson being careless enough to barge into a room and be assaulted from behind.

Miss Carstairs was poisoned using bath salts and continued to deteriorate when she was so ill she was being sponge-bathed by the servants. Therefore the servants must have continued to use the bath salts in the water but they were impervious to the poison that was affecting Miss Carstairs through contact with her skin and inhalation in vapour form during bathing.

Futhermore, the alleged assassin in the beginning of the book turned out to be a highly respected, diligent detective employed by the Pinkerton detective agency. This detective decided to resort

to blackmail and theft after having been refused a part of one payment by a client. This is a huge character change from a man whose *agency* was not paid in full, it wasn't just him. Anyone in small business can tell stories of clients who don't pay or only pay under duress; it beggars belief that a respectable, long-serving detective would suddenly turn criminal for so little provocation as one partial payment. The target of his blackmail was a person known by him to be a murderer as well, it was not the person who had refused to pay.

The House of Silk was originally the central feature of an opium smuggling ring, the supplier to lesser dens, but by the end of the novel it had become a brothel of boy prostitutes for well-to-do men. This brothel was apparently only open occasionally, not every night. The opium smuggling seemed to have been forgotten.

As far as I remember, every case written by Doyle was resolved by Holmes sitting down, smoking a pipe or three at home before the classic reveal. Although Horowitz refers to a 'three pipe problem', Holmes does not smoke while sifting through the facts of either case. The action and resolution is much more contemporary, with shootouts and a raid on the brothel; only the first story is concluded with a classic reveal.

Watson's wife apparently comes home with Typhoid fever towards the end of the book. Although he indicates this kills her, apparently she manages to have a holiday with a friend and at least two successful pregnancies after catching the fever before her eventual death.

In conclusion: *The House of Silk* is a deeply flawed novel based on classic characters. It has obviously been enjoyed by many due to it's approximate 4 star rating on a few websites, but analysis of the plot reveals flaws. People have argued for years about the effectiveness of Holmes' observations, giving alternative explanations. This novel begins with observations but mostly relies on action for resolution. *Monk*'s early seasons were a far better contemporary interpretation of this classic work. Two stars.

Samiha's Song

Author: Mary Victoria
Publisher: Harper Voyager
Publish date: 2011
Reviewer: Jade Hounsell

Ok I have to say that I really didn't give you much in the way of plot with Tymon's flight, that really is because so much happens within it that it would really be too hard to for me to define it for you in a short review. Same is to be said for this one, so again I will give you the blurb on the back cover then tell you what I think:

'Tymon leaves his new home and his beloved Samiha to complete his Grafting studies with the famous Oracle of Nur. But Tymon and fellow traveller Jedda find that locating the Oracle in a corrupt and lawless city run by pirates and slave-drivers is no easy matter. Samiha's fate has been predicted by Grafters down the ages. When she is captured in Cherk Harbour and charged with grand heresy, there seems to be no way out...but Tymon does not believe in fate and is desperate to save her life. As chaos hums through the Tree, survival revolves on the fate of just one.'

As you would have gathered by now *Samiha's Song* is the second book in this series and continues on pretty much straight from where *Tymon's Flight* left off, so I really wouldn't encourage reading this one until you have read that one. Also being a middle book it neither starts nor finishes like a stand alone book would.

Despite the name *Samiha's Song*, the book is still predominately about Tymon, although there are a few chapters that are told from the character Samiha's point of view. Also there are a few paragraphs here and there throughout that are told from Jedda's, Wick's and Lace's perspective as well, I found that this gives you a much better insight into what drives certain characters to act a certain way or a different view point on part of the story already told.

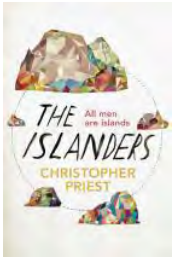
Tymon's character has grown quite a bit since the first book, he now takes on more responsibility, makes difficult decisions and stands by them and endures much hardship in this journey-

physically, mentally and spiritually. He is learning from most of his mistakes however he still has a really bad habit of listening to what others have to say then doing what he was planning on doing anyway. Come to think of it if he did do as he was told all the time, we wouldn't have much of a story so maybe it's not such a bad trait…..

I really was incredibly shocked to discover how much I loved the first book, mainly due to never having heard of Mary Victoria before, and was left thinking that maybe the second in the series would be a huge let down. Well, I can say that was definitely not the case, this book is filled with as many twists, turns, hidden plots and incredible places and characters. The main characters have become more evolved, or mature, in this book, revealing more of their true natures, pasts and possible futures.

This maybe a spoiler or if you read the blurb above, maybe not, so please stop reading now if you don't want to know. A key character is killed off in this book which I found hugely disappointing; however it was not unexpected at all, although I lived in hope that events would change enough to stop it from happening. The death has huge ramifications for Tymon and I cannot help but think there is more to be revealed about this event in the third book.

The Islanders



Author: Christopher Priest
Publisher: Orbit
Year: 2011
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

The Dream Archipelago consists of thousands of islands that gird the equator. To the north and south are two large continents consisting of a number of nations who seem to be perpetually in a state of war. Mapping or navigating the archipelago is almost impossible due to a physical anomaly, a time vortex which plays with space and time in bizarre ways. And so The Islanders is a guide, a gazetteer, much like a Lonely Planet book, that introduces

the reader to the islands.

In preparation for reviewing this, I returned to The Dream Archipelago, a collection of short stories set on these islands that I first read over twenty years ago. And instantly I remembered why Christopher Priest is one of my favourite writers. Several of the stories in that collection were achingly beautiful. Priest has returned to this archipelago on another occasion too. The Affirmation features a protagonist who visits this world as part of his delusions.

It's difficult to describe this book as either a novel or an anthology of short stories. It reads much like a travel guide. The first third of the book catalogues islands, detailing political structures, geographical landscapes and local history. As such, it took some time for me to 'get into' this book. But then came chapters which read like court documents, self contained short narratives, and before long recurring names and details start to emerge within an overlying story arc. Indeed, this collection of documents contains a plot, a narrative regarding a murder. But it isn't long before we realise that the narrator is extremely unreliable. (And since the protagonist in The Affirmation is delusional, is this world simply a dream?)

While this book will not be to every reader's liking, it's hard to deny that it's an extremely brave experiment that has been successfully executed in the hands of a master storyteller. Reading the previous collection is not necessary before reading this, although doing so will add much colour to the experience.

As a book, I completely loved it, and I intend to re-read it again shortly in order to see what I missed first time around. Highly recommended.

Vengeance

(The Tainted Realm Trilogy - Book 1)
Author: Ian Irvine
Publisher: Orbit
Year: 2011
Reviewer: Steve Cameron

Tali, a young slave girl, is not the obedient silent type. And that makes her life in the subterranean camp. Ten years have passed since she saw her mother murdered, and watched as the assailants took an unknown item from her body. She has promised revenge on her mother's killers, but now a powerful sorcerer is after her and can only be defeated through her magic – magic she neither understands nor can control. Fate brings her together with Rix, a young nobleman, who, by chance, also saw the killing occur. And as they flee, hunted by their enemies, the truth of the killing and other secrets are uncovered. Rix and Tali must learn to trust each other in order to defeat the sorcerer and save the kingdom.

I must admit to having agreed to review this book with some trepidation. It's been a very, very long time since I've picked up a trilogy of doorstop fantasy novels to read for pleasure as these days I prefer shorter science fiction books or short story collections. (Who has time to invest in several thousand pages in the same world – only one of the reasons I've yet to pick up Robert Jordan or George R. Martin) Yet I was pleasantly surprised at how quickly I lost myself in this novel and how much I enjoyed it. Ian Irvine is an Australian scientist, and I'm a little embarrassed that I'd not previously encountered his work. The writing is clean and precise, and fast paced, with beautiful description and credible dialogue. A created world that is interesting and believable.

I look forward to the next in the series. And in the meantime, I might even continue in the fantasy vein and start reading *Game of Thrones*.

The Art of the Adventures of Tintin

Author: Chris Guise
Publisher: Harper Collins
Release: 2011
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

As a bit of a collector of books, and art books in particular, this book is a proud addition to my shelf. Don't judge a book by its cover – why not, especially if it's an art book? In this case, the cover is inspiring. A hardcover in landscape proportions, with a dark background contrasting with the moon silhouetting Tintin and Snowy, beneath which the title glows. The pages feel like satin as I explore the contents.

Tintin was first developed by Herge, the pen-name for Tintin's writer and illustrator, in the 1920s and 1930s although Herge spent most of his life working on Tintin in one form or another. Herge was accredited with developing the Ligne Claire (clear line) style of drawing. All of the Tintin comics use this clear, even style of line work filled in with fairly even colour. The new Adventures of Tintin movie remembers the old story and style but modernises it for the twenty-first century by creating a 3D Tintin movie.

3D is all the rage at the moment, which is something I'm not wildly excited about. I loved Avatar for its visuals but I've discovered that movies that claim to be 3D and claim to be using the same technology as Avatar vary significantly in their quality. Sometimes I think 3D is just a gimmick to get people in the door or following the fashion without using the medium effectively or, worse still, without having a good story and characters to present to the audience. For some people, Tintin is a precious childhood memory profaned by conversion into a 3D format. Others are overjoyed to see Tintin 'growing' with them and being introduced to a new generation. I haven't seen the new Tintin movie yet: I find it difficult to justify going to the cinema when a trip to the cinema for two people to see one movie costs more than the DVD or Blu-ray. Therefore I

can't comment on the movie or the transformation into 3D, only on the book.

The Forewords are laid out well, with colourful caricatures of the various authors of the pages. Although the text is rather small, it's not intense to look at the page with plenty of white space surrounded by well-designed graphics. A brief introduction to Herge, the creator of Tintin follows before an explanation of how the movie was a collaboration of three well-known screenwriters, Stephen Moffat, Edgar Wright and Joe Cornish, who blended elements of three original Tintin stories.

Original art is shown as Guise explains how the original artwork was used as a basis for the 3D movie. Two-dimensional ligne claire landscapes and vehicles were converted into three dimensional artwork; the initially featured underwater scene is particularly impressive and pretty in a painterly CGI style. The following two sections are about the characters, how performance capture technology was used, and the scenery.

I've found a lot of art books about movies tend to either choose lesser images for inclusion in their books or the quality of the stills is lacking: the image is a bit blurred. This is the case, for example, in the *Lord of the Rings* photo books I've collected. Not so with Tintin, however, as the images are clear and the scenery shots are gorgeous; images vary in size, including lots of large one or two page images. Some of these images I'd love to hang on the wall.

The Art of the Adventures of Tintin is an impressive coffee table book, eminently suitable to decorate your coffee table open or closed, to flick through while you're enjoying a coffee or for your guests to browse while you're making the coffee. It is also a proud addition to my collection of art books.

While this might read like an advert, the only payment I've received is a copy of the book. And I'm not sharing. :P

Comic Books & Graphic Novels

Astonishing X-Men #45

Author: Greg Pak
Viewed on: Comixology
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

In this issue of the *Astonishing X-Men*, several of the X-Men have been kidnapped and trapped in an alternate universe. None of these X-Men are from the same universe, so they all have different histories and conflicting backstories, including with each other. This is played for humour to leaven the plot where another mutant is trying to steal their powers and kill them. In this segment, none of our heroes are duplicated although they all experience disorientation upon meeting their friends' counterparts. There is one particular panel that seems to reference Red Dwarf and the multiplicity of Rimmers in the graveyard, a very nice touch.

The artwork is strong black and white line and shading with colour overlaid electronically, including overlaying some of the black lines so that, for example, the black lines surrounding a glowing red column look a darker shade of red. The images are clear, well-drawn and vibrant with colour. The software I used for reading this issue via Comixology was well-done; it was not the best I've used to read comics, but it was easy to turn pages, to magnify and to move around the page. The colour of the artwork shows up very well on the computer screen; the comic is vibrant in this medium.

The male characters are very masculine and ripped, with six packs from clenched abs in every panel, regardless of whether they're naked to the waist like Wolverine or clothed like Cyclops. The women, on the other hand, are overly curvaceous. The initial close-up of Emma shows her in a submissive position, head down, eyes averted, crouching in what amounts to a bell-jar for a human or mutant specimen. Emma's first words were, 'I don't mean to

diminish your enjoyment of this manly outburst, but you're doing a wonderful job of fulfilling all of our enemy's greatest dreams.' I'm not sure if this was intended as a dramatic entrance for Emma or a double entendre. Emma's low-cut sleeveless bodice, long-sleeved gloves, skirt slashed up to the low-cut waistline and thigh-high boots are clearly intended for the male gaze. Shadow, by contrast, showed very little actual skin but her outfit was formfitting. It was interesting to examine Shadow's appearance in various panels because she wasn't shown that often. When Shadow was shown, she was often partially obscured by other characters or in strange positions for someone who was running or breaking lights. One noticeable exception was a panel with Cyclops and Shadow shown slightly side on and to the rear. Cyclops' arm was held back in what looked to be a slightly uncomfortable position for standing, thus obscuring his bottom, while Shadow's bottom was clearly shown in her form-fitting suit as her arm was forward.

The artwork is dynamic and vibrant. My only reservation is in the visualisation of the characters; I'd like to see more realistic depiction of characters, including less sexualisation of the women: even just toning it down to the movies' level would be good. The difficulty I have in reviewing this comic in terms of the story is that it is issue 45 in a series that I haven't read. The premise for this story – a clash of alternate universes – is one I am biased towards. When done well, these stories are entertaining, bringing freshness and variety into a larger series; *Deep Space Nine*'s mirror universe is one such example. Bringing a number of characters from various universes can create conflict and misunderstandings between characters that can be very entertaining. As I've read Greg Pak's *Vision Machine*, I have a high opinion of Greg's writing and high expectations for the over-arching story.

Screen Stuff

Troll Hunter

Director: André Øvredal
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Troll Hunter or Trolljegeren is a Norwegian horror/comedy mockumentary movie about three college students, Thomas, Johanna and Kalle, who pursue Hans in the belief that he is a bear poacher. The students hope to interview Hans or make a documentary around Hans' bear poaching. However, Hans is not a bear poacher; Hans is a troll hunter. A government conspiracy has kept the existence of trolls a secret, to the point of placing dead bears at sites where animals and humans have been killed by trolls. Hans works for the government by killing the troublesome trolls before calling in the government agents who place the bear. At first Hans tells the students to clear off, but after they follow him, placing themselves in extreme danger, he reconsiders. Together the four travel around looking for trolls. Apparently trolls don't like Christians, which fact was used to build tension throughout the movie.

Troll hunter is in the style of many wild-life documentaries, with Hans in the role of the wild-life expert who risks his life in service, and the college students in the role of film-makers. The camera man is rarely seen although he is a character in the movie. Johanna does sound, usually walking around with a large microphone. The third in the group appeared to be the director and Johanna's boyfriend. The students were fairly unlikeable, although I'm not sure how much that is a result of the dubbed voices and how much was their characters: they were arrogant, stupid (who goes into a blasting zone?) and demanding. The camera guy seemed more nervous and respectful, but he had less impact on story development than those in front of the camera. Hans was a mysterious character whose story began to unfold somewhat.

True to the story, the camera is hand-held, moving, shaking and sometimes aimed at the ground or a tree during times of stress to place greater emphasis and suspense via the sound track. This is mostly successful, although I found that, at times, it was distracting – too much camera shake made images confusing. When the camera 'broke', it still functioned but with pieces of glass over the image. This was overkill in my opinion as, with a broken camera lens, you wouldn't have usable images. A replacement was found, so the movie continues without this distraction.

Fairytales were referenced throughout the movie whilst also being dismissed as stories. The implication is that, although the government has covered up the reality of co-existing with trolls, there is some kind of racial memory that is partially consistent with the 'facts' of troll hunting. My favourite aspect of the fairytale versus reality was a visual gag involving goats and a bridge.

The trolls were very well thought out. There were several species of troll, as varied as species of lizard. Each had its own environment and habits, but were visually different from one another. The troll aspect of the movie was very detailed, so the troll hunter came across quite convincingly as a real-life hunter who hunts and kills rogue lions, for example. The trolls themselves were muppets. I thought the first troll, with three heads, was way overdone, but none of the other trolls were anything similar. The mountain trolls reminded me strongly of the Mystics in Dark Crystal. Overall the trolls were good in their detail, visual and theoretical, and how this impacted on the story.

I watched the dubbed version of *Troll Hunter* instead of the original language version with subtitles. I would strongly recommend that people watch the original language version – the dubbing was not great. The voices lacked authenticity and the voice-acting lets the story down a bit. The dubbing also had the feel of being written by someone who was familiar with formal English but not colloquial English: it was a bit stilted and artificial in a few places. The advantage of watching the movie the first time through using dubbing was that total focus could be on the visuals, especially the trolls.

I expected a certain climactic event for most of the movie (if you pay close attention you'll pick up clues); where *Troll Hunter* surprised me was that it didn't devolve into a schlock horror. There are horror themes but *Troll Hunter* is not any stronger in horror than *Angel* or *Buffy*, and not as strong as the highest-classified *Dark Angel* episode. The story and the comedy are as much a part of the movie as the horror. Some critics have commented that *Troll Hunter* is in the style of *Cloverfield* due to its found-footage hand-cam style, but I watched *Cloverfield* and feel any comparison between *Troll Hunter* and *Cloverfield* is unfair to *Troll Hunter*. I enjoyed *Troll Hunter* whereas I wish I hadn't bothered to see *Cloverfield*: I thought it was dreadful. In fact, this is the first time ever I am even vaguely pleased I saw *Cloverfield* – but only so I can comment on the fact that *Troll Hunter* is far superior!

Overall, *Troll Hunter* was a good movie that benefitted from not being in the Hollywood mould. It's not your fast-paced action/thriller with lots of bangs and flashes – this is a wild-life horror/comedy mockumentary. The plot had a few mild twists along the way although nothing that betrayed its 'documentary' style. There was tension build-up as I expected a certain event, but the follow-through after this event was handled surprisingly. If you're sick of Hollywood stereotypes and want something in a different vein with more intelligence then this is the movie for you.

Notes: Hollywood remake coming in 2014, produced by Harry Potter's Chris Columbus. #5 most popular film at 2011 Melbourne Film Festival, also playing every major festival throughout 2011

Priest

Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Priest (Paul Bettany) is a former warrior-priest who defended humanity against vampirical aliens until they were rounded up and forced into detention centres. Although most humans fear vampires, some want the immortality they offer. These humans become vassals and food for the vampires until, if they are 'lucky', they become traditional-style vampires. One such vampire, Black Hat, a former priest (Karl Urban), was taken and changed against his will. Now he seeks vengeance against Priest and, as a former friend, knows how best to lure Priest into the open to enact his vengeance. Black Hat kills Priest's former lover and his brother and kidnaps Priest's daughter. The daughter's boyfriend seeks out Priest, hoping Priest will help in a search and rescue mission.

Later a priestess is sent to kill Priest but, having served together previously, she gives her loyalty to Priest not the Monseigneurs. This character seemed to have been introduced purely to be an obvious Hollywood-style love interest, as all the other priests were male, however the relationship wasn't taken anywhere in this movie.

Set in a post-apocalyptic world, IMDB cites this as being an alternate world, however my impression was that this was a far-flung future world after an alien invasion went awry. Perhaps I was paying too much attention to the visuals and not enough to the audio commentary that gave the background.

Most people live in a city ruled by a cadre of Monseigneurs. Early scenes reveal that the order of priests were the right arm of the Monseigneurs until the vampires were subjugated, then, fearing an uprising of this powerful warrior-class, the priests themselves were subjugated, forced into menial labour and shunned by society. In some key scenes the Monseigneurs sit in an arc on their high chairs, looking down from their podiums at key individuals. These scenes are clichés, as this scenario has played out so many times

in so many movies, however clichés are clichés for a reason: they tell a truth. In a very short space of time in the first scene with the Monseigneurs, the viewer learns many things about life in the city: there is no separation of church and state, no separation of judiciary and legislature and policing. The Monseigneurs are all-powerful; to disobey them is to call down imminent execution upon oneself. The Monseigneurs are also afraid and are probably hiding something, although that will be revealed in a later movie if there are sequels. All the scenes with the Monseigneurs needed to make them perfect was the inclusion of Derek Jacobi, Christopher Lee and Ian McKellen along with some exploration of their history and motives.

The city scenes were Bladerunner-esque in their appearance, adding to the post-apocalyptic feel. The city was covered in heavy cloud, creating eternal night within the city walls. The reason for this is not apparent; I'm guessing it's either pollution or something the Monseigneurs have done: they clearly have a hidden agenda. Outside of the city, the clouds suddenly end: it's like going through a doorway from shade into sunlight, which supports my Monseigneur theory. Beyond the limits of the clouds, the countryside appears to be mostly salt-pan-white desert, creating blinding contrasts with the city and between day and night. The scenes in the countryside are heavily influenced by Mad Max and Westerns, with the cowboy culture riding around on motor bikes and seemingly scavenged

vehicles. Visuals were remarkably stark and yet detailed throughout the movie. Close attention needs to be paid to every set prop as it appeared the minimalist style was intended to emphasise the importance of all imagery used.

The characters are engaging although I was disappointed that the Monseigneurs were so two-dimensional. The dialogue was crisp with occasional comments that were too austere and shocking for banter but had a similar effect. The backstory was delivered efficiently with a combination of comic-book style art blended with movie-storyboarding and imagery. Visuals were compelling. IMDB rated *Priest* as PG 13, which is an Aussie M rating. I enjoyed *Priest* very much, and so did the minion – we agreed we would watch it twice before I wrote this review, and I think we'll watch it again soon. This is highly unusual for us. I strongly recommend *Priest* as an intelligent post-apocalyptic and vampire movie out of the usual flavour.

Space Battleship Yamato

Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Please note: this review is written without having seen the original TV series of the same name.

Twenty-second century Earth is under attack by an alien race who has not made contact and has not revealed their objective in this ongoing war. Earth is being bombarded by radiation, rendering the surface uninhabitable. The space battle continues, with heroes valiantly defending Earth and dying, while the aliens' technology improves to surmount Earth's defences. The Japanese government and a captain of the Space Battleship Yamato decide to deceive the people of Earth into believing that there is hope in Earth's dying days, hope of a device that will clean up the radiation in order to make the surface green again. While the audience knows the government is deliberately deceiving the people, the extent of the deceit is only revealed over time through the movie. A call for volunteers to man the Yamato results in an unusual crew who needs to form into a fighting force and a community in this journey.

Reference is made to the original Battleship Yamato in this movie. According to Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battleship_Yamato, the Battleship Yamato was sent on a one-way mission to protect Okinawa only to be sunk en route in April 1945. The Wikipedia entry doesn't seem to give the interpretation the Japanese gave to the Yamato in this movie, which was one of inspiration in a hopeless situation. Although named for a ship that failed in its mission, the characters in the movie draw strength from the historical ship and strive to succeed where their historical counterpart failed.

Before people write in telling me that Japan produces the originals and America the remake, I'd like to point out that I watched Kimba

the White Lion as a child, then I saw The Lion King. However, I have insufficient experience with anime and Japanese productions in general to place this movie within its proper context, so I will discuss it within the context of what I've watched. I felt strongly reminded of Battlestar Galactica throughout this movie; also Crusade, Star Wreck: In the Pirkinning, Star Trek and a few other TV shows, but predominantly BG. The opening shots of pilots in ships, the CG fighter ships and space battles were very reminiscent of the above TV shows and movies (with the exception of ST fighter scenes), but the similarity to BG went further. Susumu Kodai was a Starbuck-esque character whose insubordination put the ship at risk in order to save another pilot, for example. Kodai was promptly put in the brig by the captain, but not until the captain also risked the ship to give Kodai a chance of success. The captain was dying of cancer, just as the president in BG was dying. Thus the captain had to hand over command while staying in the role of mentor, enabling exploration of issues around responsibility, authority and choices in command. Romance and other relationships developed on board during their journey; the most important relationship was the romance between Kodai and Yuki Mori, set up right from the beginning where she stands out in the crowd carrying a chip on her shoulder against Kodai. There was a Spot-like cat introduced at the boarding stage, allowing for a few comical moments throughout the movie. Kodai has no family and his primary friend is a tricorder-like device with artificial intelligence; unfortunately we see little of this relationship or the personality of the tricorder until the climax.

Space Battleship Yamato felt like a much larger story pared back to basics in order to fit the story into the time available. Unlike Shyamalan's The Last Airbender, the basic story held together, but the development of characters was glossed over (with the exception of Kodai's ethical struggles with command), opportunities

for humour only glimpsed in passing in favour of a focus on military encounters and drama. While I enjoyed this movie, I would have preferred to see this made into a short series, somewhat like *Game of Thrones*, allowing for development of an epic journey where the characters with their disparate backgrounds develop friendships and romances, humour is played to the full as a counter-point to the drama and the struggle to survive is maximised.

Fans of the TV series tend to not be fans of the movie as, like *The Last Airbender*, the movie has suffered by comparison to the TV series. IMDB rates the movie at 6.1 and the TV series at 8.4. As such, I'd recommend *Space Battleship Yamato* to people who want a science fiction movie that's not Hollywood (a bonus!) and who haven't seen the TV series. If you enjoy the movie, it may be good to then see the TV series: a bit like watching the movie before reading the book so you're not disappointed in the movie, the story gets richer.

Image from icanhascheezeburger.com

Robot Chicken

Season five
Reveiwer: Nalini Haynes

This was my first foray into *Robot Chicken* so it was quite an education. Each episode is about ten minutes long, consisting of several sketches. Each sketch is a parody of a movie or pop culture. Stop motion capture is used for the image, with pop culture toys used as characters. Anything from smurfs to muppet babies to Halloween movie figurines are used to parody the original in an irreverent, fast-paced style. The voice over crew consists of a lot of stars with whose work most people would be familiar.

Created by Seth Green and Matthew Senreich, I just had to watch this series at some stage. Seth Green is awesome and has been on my radar since *Buffy* and *The Best Man* – forget the leading man, Seth made that movie!

Robot Chicken is rated MA for good reason – there's a lot of blood and gore as well as some very adult jokes about sexuality. I thought some of this was hilarious while some of the humour wasn't in my style. As each episode is short and every sketch is shorter, I found it very watchable even though I didn't like some of the sketches. Sometimes the sketches I didn't like were a bit like watching a train wreck: horrified fascination kept my attention before the fast-paced action moved on. *Robot Chicken* has a cult following and will remain a classic with movie buffs and pop culture enthusiasts.

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The Adventures of Tintin

Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Tintin is a reporter who travels the world with his terrier Snowy, who is part hero and part comical sidekick. Captain Haddock is an alcoholic ship's captain with good intentions. Thompson and Thompson are identical twins who are world-famous detectives although probably due to 'assisting' Tintin more than on their own merit; they're a slap-stick comedy duo.

The Adventures of Tintin is a TV series in three seasons that started in 1991. The TV series is based on a much-loved classic series of 23 comic books written and illustrated by Belgian Georges Prosper Remi who took the pen name Herge in 1927. Herge pioneered the Ligne Claire style of illustration where all the lines are clear and uniform in appearance. This gives a flat aspect to the drawing. Although a number of the Tintin stories were originally black and white – the original release was in newspapers in the 1920s – they were released in colour during Herge's lifetime. For example, Blue Lotus was rereleased in colour in 1946, although still based on the original newspaper drawings previously released between 1934 and 1935. The lines and colouring in the comic books and TV series alike retains Herge's straightforward style, bold lines and strong colour without using tone for depth.

Herge's illustration style is so distinctive, classical and of sentimental value to so many, it's a disappointment that the remastering of this collection was not handled with more care. There are portions where it looks like there is dirt on the screen and other portions where the recolouring has been done so badly it looks as though Tintin has dirty streaks or paint is running on his face. The first time Captain Haddock is introduced, both his beard and his sweater look like they're covered in dandruff or lint. Most of the remastering is adequate to good, but there are numerous portions scattered throughout, that need more care. My guess is the remastering was rushed to take advantage of an expected increase in sales coming

from the release of the movie.

The stories themselves are well-researched, satirising the politics of the era in which the stories are set. Issues touched upon or historical events satirised include refugees and the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. There are numerous changes in the stories from the comic books to the TV series; these changes include removing much of the violence and significantly toning down alcohol, especially Captain Haddock's alcoholism; sadly this loses some of the humour. Snowy talks in the comic books although people don't understand him; Snowy makes observations or acts as narrator, but this is lost in the TV series.

The Adventures of Tintin is a classic series that holds a significant place not only in 20th century literature and art history but in the hearts of millions of people. I remember reading the comic books in primary school, and although I prefer the comic books to this day, the cartoon series is well worth watching. Toned down for a G rated audience, this is a series that can be 'just entertainment' for the family or can be used as a launching pad for teaching history to the next generation. Hopefully the next 'remastering' will be done with more care for the work and less of a focus on deadlines.

I would like to acknowlege Wikipedia as the source for background research; what I couldn't pull from memory, I sourced from Wikipedia.

Fan-made Star Wars remake

At this link you can watch a *Star Wars* remake that is almost *Robot Chicken*-esque in its style; the original *A New Hope* has been made by hundreds of fans, with individual efforts linked together with John William's music score. I've only watched a bit of if so far, but I love the imperial destroyer apparently made of paper with its burners actually burning, and the rebel troops defending the diplomatic craft - check out the different helmets they wear! Awesome. http://www.giantfreakinrobot.com/cool-stuff/watch-star-wars-uncut-online-hundreds-fans-unite-create-galaxy.html

Gantz

Director: Shinsuke Sato
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Kurono and Kato are two young men who die in a train accident then find themselves in an afterlife with a number of other people who have also been killed. A huge black ball called Gantz sends them out to hunt down and kill aliens. The black ball opens up to reveal a naked man hooked into a computer, racks of weaponry and suitcases holding form fitting suits that give super-human powers to the wearer. All the people who gather in this afterlife room are then teleported out to the hunt; those that survive are teleported back. In between hunts they live their old lives, caring for a brother, attending high school and being pursued by a pretty college student, while trying to come to terms with their double lives.

A love triangle seems inevitable, especially after a naked woman, Nishi, teleports into the afterlife. Kurono is disappointed to discover she's interested in Kato. Kurono is oblivious to the pursuit of a pretty girl who draws manga. Disappointed in love, Kurono becomes obsessed with the potential power of the suit. Kurono decides that he is a superhero and leader for the group although Kato is a natural leader who cares for others.

After killing a few aliens, the human hunters discover a new alien who declares that she will avenge the death of her friend by destroying humanity. It appears that there is an alien community hidden on Earth that is becoming a threat to humanity's survival.

I saw one plot twist coming from about a third of the way through, but that was okay: this plot point provided motivation and raised

the stakes for Kurono and Kato. This movie was part one of a story with the conclusion provided in part two. As yet I haven't received part two for review, so I can't comment on the complete story. At the end of part one mystery still surrounds Gantz the ball and human inside: who and what are they? Are they good or evil? Kurono needs a good smack down in order to learn to work in a team while Kato needs to take a more active role in leadership; I hope this character development occurs in part two. Nishi needs to be rescued. The aliens are a threat that needs to be resolved.

Based on a manga series that has already had an anime TV series, Gantz is following in the footsteps of other anime/manga with live-action films trying to summarise the story. Based on the movie, I'm very interested in reviewing the anime version. The two versions tend to be very different, with the anime TV series having much more depth due to more screen time allowing for further exploration of the story and themes.

Rated MA for good reason due to the violence and gore, Gantz has horror, science fiction and supernatural themes but appeals to a broader audience than slasher supernatural flicks. Hunt scenes are interspersed with scenes of characters' 'normal' lives, giving balance to the story. I'm waiting for the conclusion but so far this is a promising story. Gantz is recommended for anyone looking for a science fiction/horror movie with a lot of action and violence and a little romance.

Subtitles in English.

Outland

ABC1, premieres on 8 February 2012
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

The press release sums up the characters in Outland thus: 'There's Max (Toby Truslove), insecure and looking for love; the sexually-adventurous, muffin-baking Andy (Paul Ireland); Rae (Christine Anu), the moral centre and unofficial head of the group; the high-camp, high-maintenance Fab (Adam Richard); and the wealthy but socially-inept Toby (Ben Gerrard). It's an odd, and often precarious combination of personalities.' Rae is not only the woman and Torres Strait Islander, but she's also in a wheelchair.

This group of people are quite comfortable with their sexuality but some are much less comfortable with being sci-fi geeks and with being seen with the other, more exuberant, geeks. In the premiere episode Max has a date that goes very well until it is revealed that his date is anti-sci-fi and wants to come in for 'coffee'. Max claims his immaculate flat is a mess and rushes inside to hide his precious SF collectibles, but there's not much he can do about the artwork on the walls. This artwork includes a very large image from *Close Encounters* on the wall behind them that Max tries not to look at while his date appears oblivious to the origin of the image. This initial episode sets up the series well, showing established relationships developing with the change in circumstances.

Circumstances have changed for the group because they were part of a larger science fiction club, split after a messy break-up between two members and someone being set on fire – accidentally, of course. Thus each week they meet in each other's homes, opening themselves up to discovery and more intimate friendships than existed previously.

'Geeks in the closet but gays out' is a definite theme of this series, a universal theme with which a broad cross-section of the community can identify. There are times when we all have something that we're in the closet about, whether it's geekdom in general or liking something that is considered to be less than

respected: like train spotting as John Richards mentioned in his interview. Storylines are not limited to daleks going upstairs or other geek jokes, however: the characters have underlying depth explored as the humour entertains the audience.

Rae was given a nude photo of herself with a request that she allow the photographer to exhibit the image in the second episode. Rae was very concerned about exposing herself in public like this. I don't want to spoil the story, so I'll just say this: there were a number of issues that were raised and discussed in varying depth. The nude photo is never actually shown to the audience, but the way it was handled cinematographically was simultaneously comedic and powerful not to mention compelling.

I have two criticisms to make of the series so far. Firstly, all of the men are white and appear middle-class, while Toby is just stinking rich. This doesn't reflect the cultural diversity of Melbourne, the city in which the series is set. However, if, in a second season, they replace any of the characters, I suspect I will personally incite a mob to riot. I'd like to see a few characters added to the mix to bring the cultural diversity the show needs, rather than replacing characters. Some of the love interests could certainly be from diverse backgrounds, although I think Rae's ex being white to Rae's Torres Strait Islander was excellent.

My second criticism is that Max lives up a steep flight of stairs, established early in episode one. In spite of this, Rae managed to appear at the top of the stairs in her wheelchair with no apparent difficulty or assistance. I'm not convinced that Rae's kitchen was wheelchair friendly either: the benches and layout appeared to be somewhat traditional rather than wheelchair accessible. The makers of *Outland* should be applauded for including a wheelchair user but they need an advisor. Some of the difficulties faced by people in wheelchairs could be a source of both humour – as in how ridiculous is it that this need isn't met – and the difficulties can be part of the 'heart' of the show.

Skeletons in the closet, relationship issues and the science fiction culture make this a must-watch program for anyone who is sufficiently motivated to read this review. I personally identified

very strongly with these characters even though I don't identify as part of the LGBT* community. My rather conservative husband enjoyed the two episodes we watched and declared that the series has universal appeal. I'm giving *Outland* 4.5 stars, but only because I think 5 stars mean absolute perfection. I also predict awards.

*LGBT means Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transsexual

Underworld Awakening

Directed by Måns Mårlind and Björn Stein.
Rated: MA15+
Running Time: 88 mins
Reviewer: Peter Turner

In the twilight cloaked streets soldiers conduct a purge with fire and silver. The secret existence of vampires and lycan's has been revealed to the world. Publicly denounced as an incurable plague they are hunted in a war of extermination.

When soldiers come for Selene (Kate Beckinsale), the strongest and, the last of the death dealers she chooses to flee and meet her lover Michael Corvin (Scott Speedman) at the docks. Unfortunately their plans to evacuate are disrupted and they a both knocked out.

The majority of the movie occurs twelve years later when a child with unheard of powers, known only as Subject2 (India Eisley), release's Selene from cryogenic sleep. Immediately she sets out to escape from the heavily fortified laboratories of ANTIGEN, the privately owned bio-tech firm with the monopoly on non-human testing and extermination, ran by head scientist Dr. Jacob Lane (Stephen Rea) and guarded by his loyal son Quint Lane (Kris Holden-Ried).

Aided by vampire rebel David (Theo James) and Detective Sebastian (Michael Ealy), Selene struggles amongst shoot-outs, road battles and looming monstrous lycans to reunite her family, unravel conspiracies and ultimately find their place in a brave new world.

The visual delivery of the Underworld films remains sleek and neo-gothic. The dark leather clad heroes remain in clear focus throughout despite the sinister setting. The modern flawless special effects provide for seamless terrifying transformations and the slightly science fiction elements scattered throughout the film.

The sound scape of the film is constructed in such a cunning way

that it is barely noticeable just how little dialogue is in this movie. It seems almost as if the script exists purely to provide a excuse to move the action to a new location.

The fourth underworld film builds strongly on the previous films and ends leaving the viewer wanting more. Personally I enjoyed the non-stop fast paced action and didn't mind too much that several scenes feel almost like the directors have drawn their inspiration very heavily from other films in this genre.

3.5 / 5 Stars

Watch this if you liked : Blade, Resident Evil, Daybreakers.

It is currently (at the time of writing) in both 3D and standard release

Watch for: Subject2 is named 'Eve' in the end credits.

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.

Evie Kendal

Evie is currently completing her Masters in medical ethics at Monash University where she also works for the Faculty of Science and Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies. Her honours thesis "A Narratological Study of J. R. Ward's Black Dagger Brotherhood series Volumes I-VIII" was completed in 2010 through the School of English, Communication and Performance Studies at Monash. At present Evie is guest editing a special edition of the academic journal *Colloquy: Text Theory Critique*, focused on submissions from the Sìdhe Literary Collective's recent conference "Tights and Tiaras: Female Superheroes and Media Culture."

Ian Gunn 1958-1998

Ian was an award winning artist, receiving many nominations and awards. The awards Ian won include best fan artist Ditmar (1989, 1990, 1995, 1997, 1999), best fan writer Ditmar (1990), ASFMA best media fanartist (1991, 1996), ASFMA best media writer (1996), FAAN award for best fan artist (1996) and the best fanartist Hugo in 1999.

Dark Matter is privileged to be allowed to use Ian's work, thanks to K'Rin Pender-Gunn, Ian's wife. To find out more about Ian's life and work, go to http://members.optusnet.com.au/kringunny/ianbio.htm.

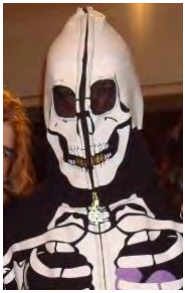
Jade Hounsell

Well, what can I say but NERRRRD!!! I have to say I'm most happy when gaming, reading, watching sci-fi or at a convention, but I am absolutely in my bliss zone when cosplaying. I am late to the wonderful world of cosplay, only being introduced in the last few years by my younger sister, but feel freer in a costume then I do in "real life". I excelled in the English side of things in school, but decided to let my parents and teachers down by not following their intended university path and instead went straight to work in the automotive industry, where I still work to this day. Throw in my rambunctious husky and water loving feline and bam there you have my life in a nutshell.

Nalini Haynes

Nalini's first memories of SF are at the age of 3, hiding behind her uncle's chair terrified but unable to take her eyes off 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.

Peter Turner



Was born in the year of the Dog under the sign of the Hunter. Has have been making up stories since he could speak. Has contributed to several workplace newsletters. Has had various careers including Retail Shopkeeper, IT Help-desk and Australian Public Servant. Has diverse hobbies from Starwars to Chain-maile to furniture design to heavy metal music to shooting zombies and motorbikes. Has recently become engaged to his stunning girl friend. Has a pet dog with a fur as black as the space between the stars.

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 Coeur De Lion’s ‘Anywhere But Earth’ anthology and has a story in Fablecroft’s forthcoming *Epilogue* anthology.