

Dan Rabarts, a rising star

Originally from Coromandel, Dan grew up in Whakatane and Lower Hutt and has now settled in Whitby with his wife and two children. He completed a Theatre and Film degree at Victoria University and works in the lighting sector of the film industry. However Dan has a double-life as an up and coming writer specialising in sci-fi, fantasy and horror, selling his first story in 2011 and publishing around eighteen stories to date. Dan most recently won Sir Julius Vogel Award for Best New Talent last year.

How did your interest in writing develop?

Like most writers I know, it's more of a compulsion, maybe even a disorder of sorts, or even an addiction. Suffice to say that when I was seven, and the rest of the class was learning to write the letter "J", I took the practice sentence "Jane's long journey to Jamaica" and stayed up well after bedtime that night writing about how Jane's plane crashed in the sea on her way to Jamaica, and she was the sole survivor, and about the desert island she was swept onto.

Who are your influences?

My influences are fairly wide-ranging, but have to include the masters of the genres I work in, such as Stephen King, Peter F Hamilton, and China Mieville. Another author I hugely admire is the late Hugh Cook, Kiwi writer of fantasy, sci-fi and horror, who sadly passed away in 2007

What is your most recent publication?

A few days ago, US publisher Permuted Press released the anthology *Fat Zombie*. Edited by Wellington author Paul Mannering, *Fat Zombie* is a collection of stories of unlikely survivors of the apocalypse and includes my story, Endgame, which tells the tale of a chess master and social outcast who treats surviving the zombie hordes as all strategy and pieces on a board, until he becomes a piece himself.

What genre would you identify yourself in?

I write across the spectrum of (mostly) speculative fiction, and almost always with a tendency to the darker side of things. It's not that I want to scare people, but these are the stories I have to tell. I rarely get the choice not to tell a story when it needs to be told, I just grab a pen or hit the keyboard and let it roll out, even when it hurts to do so. The only other zombie story I've ever written, *Children of the Tide*, which won the Melbourne Zombie Convention Short Story Contest in 2013, was so harrowing to get down on the page that it took me almost a week to write the last page. The story was in charge and it had to be told the way it happened, and I had to tell it. I have a duty to the characters to make their voices heard, and I do my best to appease them.

Do you think that horror or the dark side of the story demands to be heard because of the times we live in? Also have you noticed a resurgence of post-apocalyptic literature?

There's certainly a resurgence at present in the literary horror scene, by which I mean horror which is more about the world we live in and the fears within us than about gore or cheap frights for their own sake. As a father, and as a writer with a social and environmental conscience, I think that my fears for the world my children are growing up in feature quite strongly in my writing.

It's the purpose of speculative fiction to do just that: to speculate. If we look at where current political, social and environmental trends are taking our race and the planet, then the coming together of science fiction and horror is an almost natural, unavoidable evolution of such genre fiction. It also goes some way towards explaining the current explosion of post-apocalyptic fiction, which was huge during the Cold War and the mid-eighties, when the possibility of global nuclear destruction was an omnipresent and very real fear for many people. Today, this type of fiction has become relevant again as more evidence stacks up to support the scientific case that we're in the grip of disastrous climate change patterns, while the vast majority of the consumer-driven population continues to deny personal responsibility for this. While I'm not convinced that the end times are upon us just yet, I do think the impact of anthropogenic climate change will mean life is going to get much harder for many people in years to come, and this in itself leads to strife and suffering. Horror and science fiction are a scrying glass into that, if you like. We might not like what we see, but we shouldn't ignore the oracles.



Where do you see yourself in the future?

I'm actively seeking publication for a fantasy novel I completed and I'm working on a collaborative horror/crime novel with Lee Murray, which we will be putting out to publishers very soon. I have another novel well underway and hope that the year will be kind to me and I'll manage to get it finished. I'll continue to write the stories I have to write, and do my best to get all those voices heard in as many places as possible. My other writing collaboration, the writing band Cerberus, will continue to work on stories and send them out into the world, after our first story together was published last year.

For a full list of Dan's stories published to date and samples visit dan.rabarts.com/fiction.

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