

Frank's Monster Blog

February 7, 2017

[Big Goodreads giveaway of *Return of the Arinn*](#)

Working with an expert marketing company (BooksGoSocial.com) to make readers generally, and US and Canadian readers in particular, aware that *The Return of the Arinn* includes a major US component, including an important role for an emissary from the US President. So it's all kind of exciting, even for an old professional hand like me.

The Return of the Arinn has already had some wicked reviews from US readers. And from Saturday, February 7, I am arranging a 30 book Goodreads giveaway competition of the paperback exclusively for US and Canadian visitors. So watch out for the competition on this coming Saturday.

Why not join in the fun!

January 26, 2017

[Ain't life full of surprises](#)

I'm peering out at Cock Robin, who is standing on my lawn under the bird feeder and peering right back at me. I'd put up a feeder on the weeping pear tree in my garden, cutting out a little window around it so I could watch them feed. We get a variety of birds, even in winter, many of them nesting in the bushes and stone walls that surround my ancient house and garden. But we also have resident magpies that are inclined to ambush the feeder and are capable of emptying it in a day.

But then my wife Googled the problem and came up with a solution. I should tie something reflecting, like a redundant DVD, to the tree right next to the feeder. I went one further. I dangled a redundant DVD on a string right in front of it. Big birds like magpies would have to approach the window from the front, where the DVD now dangles, meanwhile the smaller songbirds can easily come at it through the foliage from behind.

Hey presto!

No more magpies. Songbird feeding frenzy!

So how's the writing going?

I'm engaged in something unusual. My fantasy publisher has suggested I take a fresh look at *The Snowmelt River* to make it more amenable to foreign language translations. When translating a book into another language the foreign publisher has to pay by the word. A lengthy epic, such as *The Snowmelt River*, is too long for easy translation. Would it be possible to reconstruct it as two volumes?

The answer is readily.

So that's what I've been doing this week. I've put aside the new fantasy I was working on – which is now at the stage of a complete first draft – and I have returned to *Snowmelt River* to break it down into two volumes. The logical place for the break in the narrative is at the place where the Temple Ship breaks out of its prison of ice and first enters the liberation of the Snowmelt River. So that's what I am doing.

I shall, of course, have to rework the closing chapter to round it off as a suitable final chapter in volume 1. But that's a simple enough endeavor. I have also decided that I would have to read through the entirety of volume 1 to ensure it reads as a proper volume in itself. It felt kind of weird reading my own writing and reworking it in this way. I've simplified the text here and there – yeah, you've got it - to make it easier for a translator.

It's the first time I have ever undertaken an exercise like this.

Ain't life full of surprises!

November 4, 2016

[Jo Fletcher anthology goes to no 1 on Amazon](#)

The newly released Jo Fletcher Books anthology has just gone to no 1 (anthology fiction) and no 2 (anthology fantasy/science fiction) on amazon Canada and looks like it's doing something similar on amazon.co.uk.

Strangely nobody has taken advantage of the free kindle download as yet on amazon.com

It includes a short story by me, with the title *The Bane Returns*. It also includes some wonderful short stories by a whole raft of Jo Fletcher authors.

To get hold of it merely click on the kindle link at the following urls:

amazon.co.uk here:

<http://amzn.to/2auryZU>

or on amazon.com here:

<http://amzn.to/2ajrsGC>

or on amazon Canada here:

<http://amzn.to/2fhQ9TL>

Happy reading!

[The Jo Fletcher Books Anthology](#)

October 16, 2016

[New epic fantasy under way](#)

I'm glad to let my readers know that I am now well on the way to writing a new standalone epic fantasy novel. After completing The Three Powers quartet I spent six months or so just scribbling new ideas into a file that quickly grew to almost 300 pages of possible plot and characters.

A couple of months ago I had a look at what I had and decided there were three separate lines of narrative that would offer the potential of three separate novels. So I separated out the three strands. One was far more developed than the other two and I now adopted this as a working rough draft and began to enlarge and develop it. I began by spending a month or more allowing the characters to grow inside my head.

Three weeks ago I started a more formal draft of the book. I am now about a hundred pages into this "second draft" and moving quite rapidly. Within a month or two I should have a complete second draft that will read as a first complete narrative. From then on it will be revision and polishing until completion.

Am I enjoying it?

Tremendously so. This is my favorite stage in the creative process.

September 19, 2016

[Why I reluctantly disagreed with Tolkien](#)

I should say, to start with, that it was with the greatest reluctance that I did so, since I regard Tolkien as the greatest writer of fantasy that has ever lived. Those who visited my website, www.frankpryan.com, will see that I have even gone to the

trouble of purchasing a key letter by him dated to soon after he finished his great trilogy.

But in doing so he arrived at a decision both extraordinary and terrible at the end of Lord of the Rings. I remember, from very many years ago, how shocked I was to grasp his meaning when I finished the great epic fantasy.

When Frodo and all the great company of Elves, Dwarves and Wizards took the ship to sail west, this was a metaphor for death. Tolkien himself admitted it when he said that the entire compass of the great work was about the struggle between magical eternity and frail human mortality. He put it more bluntly: he said it was about "death".

This is in fact hinted at in the very letter from Tolkien's own hand soon after publication of the final book in the trilogy, which I put up on the website mentioned above, and when he tells a youthful reader that there will be no more books about Hobbits.

So now, perhaps, you take my meaning. I reversed this decision in Book 4 of my epic, The Return of the Arinn. I allowed magic to continue. But in doing so, as I now realize all too well, unlike Tolkien I have failed to completely extinguish evil. While magic remains, evil can never be entirely destroyed.

This, as I now begin to write a new series, is the inevitable consequence of what Tolkien himself foresaw.

July 28, 2016

[New voyage of discovery](#)

A long time ago, when I was much younger, I was inspired to become a writer through reading a series of key books. I shall list them:

Mann: The Magic Mountain

Sartre: The Roads to Freedom.

Joyce: Ulysses.

Faulkner: The Sound and the Fury

Steinbeck: The Grapes of Wrath.

Now I would add the first female writer to this pantheon:

Alexievich: Secondhand Time.

Books of this nature inspire in a single sentence, in a chapter, in a totality, that can only compare to great art, great music, and great science.

To share the experience, in words, and emotions, with a new entrant is, for me, a kind of bliss - an invitation to a new odyssey of discovery that so rarely comes my way.

July 26, 2016

[Get your free fantasy book anthology](#)

My publisher, Jo Fletcher, has now published an anthology of short stories by some of her writers. It includes a short story by me, with the title The Bane Returns. This story features a dreadful enemy you will encounter in my fantasy quartet, The Three Powers.

The anthology also includes some wonderful short stories by a whole raft of Jo Fletcher authors.

You can download the book entirely free right now on amazon at the following urls.

amazon.co.uk here:

<http://amzn.to/2auryZU>

or on amazon.com here:

<http://amzn.to/2ajrsGC>

or on amazon Canada here:

<http://amzn.to/2fhQ9TL>

July 25, 2016

[One for the bad guys](#)

I'm now fully engaged in writing a new fantasy novel. I won't say anything about narrative content but, for those who might be interested, I'm more than happy to describe in a general kind of way how I am going about things. Some of my techniques are probably unique (peculiar) to me, but the general kind of approach is likely to be similar to that of other experienced writers. I've been communicating with some followers on Twitter (@FrankPRyan) and so thought it might be appropriate for some of the folks here.

I've spent some four or five months thinking about plot and allowing the characters to fill out and become interesting in my mind. I usually scribble about this but I probably won't bother to read the scribbles once they are moving around inside my head and doing things that surprise me. They're doing this already. But can I now give budding authors a really important couple of tips.

Give your heroes and heroines faults (or weaknesses) as well as strengths. And be just as careful to let your bad guys expand into interesting personalities as the good guys. It's far more fun that way.

Remember there are lots of tips for writing and self-publishing on the index page of my website www.frankpryan.com.

Good luck!

July 2, 2016

[Of being on the edge of the real mystery](#)

I know everybody is immersed in GOT – so was I until the little girl was sacrificed. It's a great series, I do not deny, and has caterpulted fantasy into the news, and universal consciousness, all over the place.

So how do we other fantasy writers compete in such a competitive atmosphere? Where do we draw a different inspiration from?

I have explained, previously, how I draw inspiration from images - from art. I am writing a new book, my first standalone fantasy, which is partly inspired by art. It isn't inspired by any particular artist. But an artist that does deeply interest me is Francis Bacon. I have read two biographies and studied his work, albeit just from illustrations on line. Now let me open up another avenue to inspiration deriving from art, and more specifically, from Bacon.

I'm quoting from an interesting article in the British newspaper, The Daily Telegraph, for Saturday 2 July 2016, "Was Francis Bacon made in Monaco?".

I don't know if he was or he wasn't. But as often in an intelligent and stimulating article, there is a nugget to be extracted that might prove inspirational. This is the nugget: "... he wrote to his friend Sir Colin Anderson the sense of 'being on the edge of the real mystery'."

One of the extraordinary aspects of creativity, whether in art, literature or music, is that subconscious themes can be explored and thus contribute to the imagination.

Can I suggest to my readers, and in particular to those who aspire to write, that there is a profound creative truth in such exploration? It is likely to prove a hard thing to explore and include in your creativity, but very satisfying and inspirational if one succeeds.

June 28, 2016

Maps and epic fantasy

I just love constructing a new map to work with a new fantasy. It fits right in with my visual approach to writing. I use a huge, full size good quality artist's watercolor paper. Then I sketch out an outline that will be my new world. I will have already thought a lot about that first step - the construction of an interesting outward shape for my new fantasy landscape.

The remarkable thing is that time spent right at the beginning on designing your landscape, its shape, and how it will accommodate the strange places and portals, and beings within it, really will help you construct your story.

Now, if you feel inclined, take another look at the description of the landscape in the world of Tolkien, or my book, *The Snowmelt River*. See how the landscape helps determine the mood of the reader as he or she moves through the odyssey of both stories. Can you see how world building is a key part of the art of fantasy writing - perhaps any kind of fiction.

June 18, 2016

The reverse of novel to film

I have a bit of a confession to make, but it might interest the budding writers among you. I see visions, pictures first and then write the narrative. Yes, that's the explanation of why my novels are so visual, which is something many readers have commented on over the years. You won't find this in the books telling you how to write your first novel, but it is very important to me. Let me give you one or two examples that might help to explain it a little further.

If I go away to write, say to a desert island (and I do), I don't take other novels to inspire me, though I do take them because I enjoy reading them. I take pictures. By pictures I don't mean DVDs, though DVDs would work in just the same way for me. A young lady dear to me asked me to explain what I meant by this. I showed her one or two pictures, one taken from somebody else's art, one painted by me.

I asked her, "What do you see in these pictures?"

She told me what she saw, describing the pictures as she saw them. In essence she gave me an accurate enough description of what was shown. Then I explained what I saw in them. It took me a short while to do so. "Now," I laughed, "do you understand why I take pictures with me when I go away to write?"

"Yes," she nodded. "For you a picture isn't just a picture, it's a story."

She hit the nail on the head.

You won't be surprised to hear that, without anything but a rudimentary training in art, I once ran my own art gallery, in the Lancashire town of Bolton, UK. I much enjoyed contact with "fellow artists". My art gallery was known as "Bolton Fine Arts".

My love of art enables me to be inspired by great art, from any period. I regret that the only art I don't like is Surrealism, because it feels unnatural to me - like an art that doesn't come from the mixed inspiration of conscious and the subconscious but from deliberate conscious manipulation, like the manipulation of a stage magician.

There will be people who disagree with me. I do acknowledge their right to disagree. But that's another story in art, as in literature.

May 2, 2016

Summer in the air

After some diabolical weather, the sun is shining. Garden full of daffodils and tulips. Just got the garden furniture out of the greenhouse. Mr Robin behaving like Cock Robin, as usual. Where all other birds fly off as I approach the bird feeder dangling from the weeping pear tree, which will soon be in blossom, this one diminutive chancer comes up close and fixes me with his black beady eyes, hoping I'm going to turn over some soil and expose a juicy worm or two.

I didn't realize until recently that the American robin is not the same species at all as the British variety. Where the British robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) is almost as small as a wren and spends the winter here, the American robin (*Turdus migratorius*) is much larger, a member of the thrush family and, as its name suggests, is migratory.

Anyway, how wonderful that summer is looming. Do you know, I called the first novel I ever had published *Sweet Summer*. My feelings have remained steadfast on that glorious thought ever since.

March 3, 2016

Writing and reading crossover fantasy

Crossover fantasy - in other words fantasy that has at its very core the crossing over of characters from Earth to the fantasy world, or vice versa - involves complex considerations for plot and for characterization. It can also bring a particularly deep satisfaction for both the author and for the reader. I have deliberately employed crossover in my epic fantasy series, *The Three Powers*. I am considering explaining more about this, and the process of writing, editing, producing and publishing fantasy books. I have more than the usual author experience having published bestsellers in fiction and non-fiction in the UK and US and also having run a successful small press publishers.

If friends, or visitors, are interested in knowing more about this, all you have to do is to respond and we might set an interesting train of discussion going.

So let me set the ball rolling with one or two obvious extrapolations.

When a fantasy story is set entirely in a fantasy world, it offers a wonderfully escapist journey. When you put it down and stop reading - or when you have finished the story - you can return to your normal world content with the fact the adventure has ended. But in a crossover fantasy, the story, and characters, also exist in your real world. So you are not presented with the same easy avenue of escape. This offers the writer wonderful but also demanding additional avenues of creativity. It also offers the reader a much wider, but equally demanding, potential for sharing the adventure.

Perhaps visitors might like to think these observations through and give us the benefit of their thoughts and considerations?

February 12, 2016

Belated Response from the Teepee Village

A long time ago I saw a fascinating program on TV, called *The Village*, about a bunch of folks who had escaped the rat race to go and live in a tent community in the mountains of Wales. I was so taken with their humanity, determination and survival I was inspired to create a community like this in my thriller, *Tiger Tiger*.

I also wrote out the words of a poem from one of them (never identified) that captured their purpose and struggle (I live with the land where I am, and I drink from the mountain stream, etc). You might find it somewhere in my blog.

When I had completed *The Snowmelt River*, I wrote to one of their founders, called Rik Mayes, praising their efforts and enclosing a courtesy e-book of *Tiger Tiger*.

Today, many years later, I received a reply from Rik to apologize about the delay and to say he was now about to read *Tiger Tiger*.

Some friendships are kind of long in the genesis. But I'm chuffed anyway to link with folks who were an inspiration to me.

February 6, 2016

[First US Publication of The Sword of Feimhin](#)

I'm delighted to inform my readers that the first US publication of *The Sword of Feimhin* - a magnificent hardcover - will be published on February 9. This is the third book of my epic fantasy quartet, *The Three Powers*. I can't wait to see it for the first time.

All four of the books are now published in UK paperback and universal kindle, but a first in hardcover, yet priced to be little more than the paperback, is something special to look forward to.

January 19, 2016

[Symbiosis ain't about love](#)

A brief explanation of the difference between symbiosis in nature and love or sharing between humans.

Symbiosis, and its evolutionary implications, which is called "sybiogenesis", isn't quite the same as non-scientists tend to imagine. It isn't about being friendly, or about how perhaps boy and girl meet and all is hunky-dory from then on. It's about need and survival in the maw of nature. Only one partner needs to benefit, so it includes parasitism. Indeed many symbioses begin as parasitism. That's how the viruses in the human genome began. All symbioses fit somewhere into a spectrum from outright parasitism at one end and mutualism at the other end. Mutualism, in which two or more partners benefit from the association, is closer to what non-scientists imagine symbiosis to be. In human terms the closest equivalent is cooperation. Virulent parasitism can end up as mutualism - which is kind of interesting to think about.

Symbiosis is a vitally important facet of life on Earth. You can breathe oxygen because something like two billion years ago a virulently parasitic bacterium that happened to be oxygen-breathing invaded an amoeba-like nucleated organism. The amoeba-like organism probably ingested the bacterium as food. The bacterium

would very likely have killed most of the population of the amoeba, but not all. We know this because similar symbioses are being observed today in nature. The amoeba was unable to clear the bacterium from its tissues. So they arrived at a kind of stalemate. Soon - probably within a year - they exchanged genes. A new symbiotic organism emerged - a nucleated single celled amoeba-like organism that could now breathe oxygen. The bacterium continued to reproduce within the amoebal cytoplasm through budding. That's what our human mitochondria still do today. They retain some 37 bacterial genes, all linked to oxygen-breathing, while some 300 of the original bacterial genes have moved into our nuclear genome. Many of the latter are still linked to the biochemistry and physiology of the mitochondria. Understanding the evolutionary biology is key to understanding mitochondrial disease.

The inheritance of mitochondria, including diseases linked to them, is utterly different from our vertebrate type of inheritance. It is non-nuclear, doesn't follow the Mendelian laws of inheritance linked to our 46 chromosomes, and is entirely maternally derived. The latter comes about because the mother gives a living cell, the ovum, to our offspring whereas the father only gives his genome. Thus the "cytoplasmic" inheritance of all of us is maternally derived. The maternal cytoplasm includes her mitochondria. That means that part of your (and my) inheritance is identical to your mother's, grandmother's, and so on back indefinitely right up to that original amoeba-type/ bacterial genetic symbiosis two billion years ago.

If you wanted to play about with ideas, a million years ago a female human ancestor would be readily identifiable as your, or my, distant maternal ancestor if we compared mitochondrial genomes. She must have existed or we would not be here. In fact the mitochondrial genomes would be very close to identical.

This is not the same thing as the so-called Mitochondrial Eve. I discuss all this in a lot more detail in a science book I wrote called *The Mysterious World of the Human Genome*. You won't find this under my fiction author's name but under my non-fiction name, which is Frank Ryan.

December 30, 2015

[A new stand-alone fantasy novel](#)

My friends might be interested in the fact I am now writing a new stand-alone fantasy novel. I can't reveal the name or the plot, only say it has a very powerful theme.

As usual for me, I have been working on the theme, and the characters, and there is a strong artistic element to it, since I love art.

I could head into the sun for a break with five or six still pictures in my computer

case, and each picture would become a chapter in my work. That's how important the pictorial is to my imagination.

If my readers are interested, it might be fun to explain how the novel is progressing. I'm in no hurry to finish it. Again, if readers are interested, I might attempt to explain how I indulge a passion for art in growing the personalities of my characters? It might grow into a slightly crazy kind of a blog. Do let me know what you think about that . . .

More to follow . . .

October 16, 2015

[Why do so many readers love fantasy novels?](#)

This is a question I have asked myself, since I'm both an author and reader of fantasy novels. I have also written contemporary fiction and thrillers. But the attraction of fantasy is very different from these other categories.

I suppose the notion of escape from the tedium of the present or real world is part of the allure. The possibility of living in completely alien world . . . But then I hesitate because the worlds of fantasy are never completely alien. They vary a lot in the degree of their alienness . . .

Certainly, from an author perspective, there is a sense of freedom of thought, freedom of creativity, that is much harder to find in many other categories.

Another interesting aspect is that fantasy, when compared say to its sibling category, science fiction, appears to appeal much more to female readers than science fiction.

Fantasy is also a very broad category, with many sub-categories. So readers might like the fairytale variety and dislike the dystopic urban variety. Some, like me, feel free to include both dystopic and classical epic fantasy themes in the same series.

I suspect there will be many opinions on the answers to this question. But what do others think about it?

August 6, 2015

[Five Star Extravaganza](#)

Just totted up my five and four star ratings on Goodreads, and to my surprise . . .

A spectacular 154 five star ratings on my non-fiction books and 51 five star ratings on my novels, mainly the fantasy series. If I counted in the four out of five star ratings, the total would be more than doubled.

So I guess I owe a huge debt of thanks to all those readers out there for such a high level of appreciation.

Thank you so very much.

I'm just seeing the very earliest responses to my latest non-fiction, *The Mysterious World of the Human Genome*, and to their surprise, non-scientist readers in many countries are astonished to find that they actually understand it. They more than understand it - they are seeing the wonder of what lies at the very core of their make-up. And perhaps they are also realising how vitally important this is going to be to their health and happiness and the health and happiness of their loved ones in the future.

With regard to my fiction, the final book in the fantasy series, *The Return of the Arinn*, closes soon on a very great cosmic cycle. I'm glad to see that readers are beginning to order it in advance. Less than three months to go now, serialisation continues on www.fantasybookreview.co.uk.

May the Force (in my case, the Fáil) be with all of my much appreciated readers!

4 June 2015

[A Glorious Morning](#)

Spent a few minutes in the garden in the glorious sunshine. The lawn is glowing and the beds are full of bluebells and whitebells. I've been filling up the bird feeders. The main one, on the weeping pear tree, takes fat balls and peanuts and will be half empty again by the end of day. Mainly blue tits, great tits, robins, and hedge sparrows – but also big birds such as magpies and jays. Pigeons feed on their droppings in the soil underneath. We are occasionally visited by squirrels who wrap their bodies around the feeder, like snakes, to feed on the nuts.

The second feeder is on the stone wall of the porch visible through the mullioned window of the snug. My wife's favourite because she can watch the nut hatch and tits come and feed all day. The nut hatch is brilliantly colourful, quite big, and feeds upside down. We also have a surprise visitor – or more likely visitors – field mice. They have made a home in a hole in the stone where an iron gutter bracket is inserted. They creep down the wall and wrap themselves around the feeder, just as

the squirrels wrap themselves around the bigger feeder on the weeping pear. My wife has filmed them on her I-pad. Should I see them as vermin and do something about getting rid of them? Or should I just let things be and watch their antics with amusement? The jury is out . . .

I suppose I had better get back to work. I'm preparing the sixth chapter from *The Return of the Arinn*, so it can be added to the serialization on www.fantasybookreview.co.uk.

April 8, 2015

[US hardcover of The Tower of Bones](#)

I'm delighted to say that the US hardcover of *The Tower of Bones* is now published and available through all normal bookseller sources. Looks kind of handsome.

I love to read books in hardcover. It gives me a special buzz. I especially like to be the first to read the book, so it is pristine, with white pages (no coffee or tea stains, folded back pages, torn covers, etc). Even the very act of turning the pages to discover what is new on the next page is a distinct pleasure. I suspect it goes back to my childhood and getting books out of the library, which is how I came to love books in the first place. But who's to complain about something that is such an innocent pleasure?

Enjoy!

April 7, 2015

[So pleased about Doomsday Genie](#)

Perhaps others might connect with my feelings. I conducted extensive research to write a fiction of what appears to be a WMD attack on the Western World, in this case America. I had travelled through something like 30 states in the US, spent time at CDC in the Virus section known as Special Pathogens, looked up the FEMA response, and wrote the story as I thought it would really play out, in particular how it would involve scientists - not the Peter Sellers of *Dr No* sort but real scientists on the front line of a Bio-warfare attack.

I knew, being a scientist myself, that scientists would face up to the challenge as bravely as troops and I wrote it that way. Living in the UK, I had to engage an American editor.

I suppose I self-published it in a way, since I published it through my own small

press publisher, Swift. It was only ever published as a POD and e-book.

It proved to be the most successful of any fiction published by Swift. It is still selling, years after publication. But in another way, it helped prepare me for the violent confrontations in my fantasy series, *The Three Powers*, and in particular the final book, *The Return of the Arinn*.

We inhabit a dangerous world. We can't bury our heads in the sand. Writers need to confront what so many ordinary people are forced to confront in many parts of the world today.

So I don't regret doing it that way. Maybe you don't agree with me, but that's my perspective.

November 12, 2014

[The usefulness to a writer of a personal addendum](#)

It's been a long time since I gave some detailed advice to people who wanted to write their first short story – but now I propose to extend this to any kind of article, a chapter in a book, or as I am presently involved in, the first major revision of a typescript of an entire book. So as I progress, I hope to extrapolate from what I am doing to help people who might be a little bit less experienced. Sometimes very simple ideas can be useful. I shall start with a lesson I had to learn the hard way. This is the usefulness of a personal addendum.

Let me make clear that this is not intended for publishers, or readers of a book. This is entirely for you, as a writer – no matter what article, or story, or non-fiction book, or novel, you are writing.

For many of us, as indeed for me too, the first draught of an article, story or book, is a rough approximation for what will become the finished writing. In my case, I tend to throw in ideas, descriptions, characters, that come into my head at this early stage. But when I progress to the first revision, I – and you – must be prepared to be ruthless in cutting away what no longer is wanted.

But this does not mean that the deleted descriptions, chapters and sections, are useless in themselves. Sometimes they are just not right for the more condensed final version of the particular article, story or book. I am not talking about minor deletions, in the sense of words or sentences, but more major chunks. It might not be such a great idea to just jettison them – an action that is all too easy to do in this digital age.

So what do I suggest?

Make a file labelled "Addendum". Then save anything you think had usefulness or meaning, regardless of the fact it was no longer required for this particular article, story or book, in your file "addendum". Then, later on – maybe you might change your mind, maybe it sets ideas going for some new article, story, or book – you haven't lost it.

To illustrate the practical reality of what I am explaining, I am just about through a first revision of the fourth and final book in my fantasy series, The Three Powers, and my addendum now amounts to some 300 or so pages. I shall save these for future reference and usefulness.

November 4, 2014

[Just how trying is waiting for the final book in a multi book epic fantasy](#)

I suspect I may be encountering this right now with my Three Powers series.

I understand how having to wait for subsequent publication of one or more new books is very irritating and the reader risks forgetting about the series. To help I construct a narrative story with a satisfactory conclusion in every book, so this can be read and enjoyed in its own right, but there still remains a main thread that continues right up to the fourth book, The Return of the Arinn.

I gather from some readers that they were surprised at the twist in the narrative where Mark and Nan returned to Earth - but Earth and Tir have been shown to be intimately connected from book one.

More tricky is the long wait that readers have to suffer before the final book in the series appears. I'm getting some flak for this, and reasonably so, so we need to find a solution.

Perhaps we should start revealing interesting aspects of the new book slowly - as it is finished - say a chapter at a time? Maybe we should use film - or art? Even better still we might involve the reader so it becomes interactive at some levels?

So please do offer us your creative ideas. It might change an important aspect of author-reader interaction - and wouldn't that be stimulating?

Ideas . . .Opinions please. We wish to help you and maybe you can help yourself.

October 27, 2014

Coping with Rejection – and Bad Reviews

The great majority of writers have had to deal with rejection during their careers – and just about all of us have had to deal with bad, sometimes malicious, reviews. How does one cope with such stresses? I daresay that different people will employ different strategies. All I can offer is my personal way of dealing with them.

Firstly rejection – I can recall, however many years ago, the gloom and frustration when a new rejection hit my entrance lobby floor. I wish I had known then what I know now. But it's easy to be wise in retrospect. The first tip I can give others is the fact that they are far from alone. The greatest writers in both fiction and non-fiction have faced the pain of rejection. For example William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* was turned down so many times that the manuscript had gathered its own patchwork quilt of wine stem and tea-mug stains on the title page. If you think I'm exaggerating, I would suggest that you Google writers and rejection of their books by editors. You might be surprised at the wide variety you come across.

I've also encountered this from the other side – that of the commissioning editor. I ran my own small press publishers for more than 20 years and rejected most of the scripts sent my way. Many were incredibly badly written, full of bad English, and hopeless punctuation. But some were well written and very imaginative. They just weren't suitable for the kind of books we published. So I'll give budding writers a few basic tips.

1. Do not send your script to a publisher that does not publish that particular category of books. They will inevitably turn it down, no matter how good it is.
2. Don't rush madly to send in your script as soon as you've written it. Spend at least half as long again as it took you to write it in reading and re-reading it, to revise and polish it. It is a fundamental mistake to imagine that the publishers will do this for you. Their editors are far too busy.
3. Don't be overly influenced by the praise of family and friends. They are unlikely to be experts and they won't have the objectivity you need to really advise you as to faults and problems with your script. If you are receiving encouraging responses from editors and think you have a really good script, then – and only at this stage – it might really pay dividends to hire a good editor to read it and advise you. I learnt this lesson the hard way, even as a budding publisher, and when I got the idea I made sure I got the help of a touch and highly critical editor. You learn nothing from somebody who merely praises and agrees with you. You need detailed and knowledgeable criticism. And when you get it, take note of it.
4. So you've grown fed up with sending it in to editors and agents and make the combative decision that you will go it alone. Then points 2 and will still apply – indeed they will apply with bells on. Give yourself the very best chance of success by making your script as sharp and telling as you possibly can. There are vast numbers

of books published annually. Give your creative baby the best start in life. Oh, and the very best of luck!

Secondly bad reviews – once again every writer suffers the slings and arrows of these outrageous misfortunes. They hurt. If all of your reviews are like this, you have a bit of a problem. But if only a minority are so – and this is usually the case – get over them. You are best advised to ignore them than to counter them. One of the problems out there in the big, very mixed and viciously contradictory world, is everybody has his or her own ideas about what things are about. So some readers will approach your books with a completely different notion of what to expect than what was in your mind when you set out to write it. They're not going to like your book. If they're in a minority, just ignore them. One of the best ways of dealing with this is to get on with something far more important to you, and of no interest to them, which is to get on with your day to day life – or even better still your next book.

If you can't help but be hit with the blues, be assured that time will prove a reliable healer. Just consider – can you remember what was really bugging you six months ago? Two years ago? And if not, why not?

If the short term remains painful, then the odd glass or two of Scotch (or in my case Irish) or a generous G & T might help. But don't drown in it. You're far too important to hurt yourself in this way and you have creative work to get on with.

September 27, 2014

[Free Trailer of Apocalyptic Thriller](#)

If you would like to be scared, here is the U-tube address for the spectacular trailer film of my apocalyptic thriller, *The Doomsday Genie*, by Alexander Tomov, with the animation of the entity by my friend and eminent science fiction/ fantasy artist, Mark Salwowski.

Enjoy . . .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjiRT...>

And then if you really want to be scared out of your wits, read the book . . . It is available for a cheap kindle download on amazon just about everywhere.

August 11, 2014

[My books of the last year](#)

Although I haven't listed it here yet, I am currently reading *H is for Hawk* by Helen Macdonald, and I am loving it already. It is the story of a young woman who finds comfort in working with (taming would be an inappropriate word) goshawk - a huge raptor when suffering the bereavement reaction to the untimely death of her father. Quality of the writing is key and this has quality *****

Another series of contemporary novels with the same urgency and extremely high quality of writing is Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*. Again quality of the writing *****

It's reassuring to see such high quality new writing appear. I shall put them up on my shelf with *The Songlines* by Bruce Chatwin and *The English Patient*, by Michael Ondaatje, among others.

Young writers, especially self-published writers, are forever bemoaning the fact people don't notice them or that marketing their books is so difficult. Marketing fiction is very difficult for all writers no matter how experienced. My advice, as always, is to improve the quality of your fiction. One of the major mistakes self-publishers make is they don't spend enough time and money in obtaining high quality editorial input. You get this automatically with a respectable publisher. And you can deeply impair your chances if you go for it yourself and ignore the need for editing.

I work very hard to get the best possible quality into everything I write, whether fiction or non-fiction. If the quality is good enough, people will sooner or later sit up and take notice.

August 6, 2014

[Why do we fantasy writers so wish to avenge wrongs?](#)

Okay - so why do we do it? Why do we fantasy writers wish to avenge wrongs? Why are we so concerned with saving the weak and dispossessed? Why do we want to see evil punished? Is it a quasi religious impulse in people who were brought up to think that way?

An author, Joseph Loconte, wrote an article in the *Times of London*, on August 2, to portray Tolkien and Lewis as believers in decency and justice, based on Christian heroism and nobility, despite both authors (and friends) surviving the trenches of World War I.

There may be an element of wisdom there. But I'm still not sure that it is all-explaining. What if, in epic fantasy, we mine feelings that lie at the core of our humanity?

What if we enjoy, however fleetingly, feelings of darkness? And then we want to cleanse ourselves of this by applauding the heroes and heroines that defeat and destroy that same darkness in us?

Am I being foolish in thinking us this complicated?

August 3, 2014

[The Sword of Feimhin - now out](#)

It's out at last, The Sword of Feimhin, Book 3 of my epic fantasy series, The Three Powers. Advance copies are now available from my dedicated website www.frankpryan.com.

I hope you will come to love the new characters, Penny and Gully, who are now engaged in setting up their own Twitter addresses.

Promises to be an exciting time!

Here is the frontispiece . . .

Strangest of all are the suggestions that Tír is linked to a sister world, variously known as Geb, Jörd, Gaia – or even Terra, a name akin to that of our world, Tír. Manifold are the references to this sister world in the legends of Tír, notably those of the warrior races such as the Fir Bolg and Shee. In both traditions the two worlds are spoken of as twins – as if worlds, like infants, might share the a single cosmic birth. Communication and even passage between worlds is said to be possible through Dromenon or the power of the Fáil. This same passage is said to have allowed the seeds of war to be carried from one world to the other, though such history is uncertain and largely denied. Most intriguing is the suggestion that the fates of the two worlds might also be entwined, as is occasionally seen, even dramatically so, in living twins. The implications are unknown, perhaps even unknowable. Yet one is tempted to question if the answers to the afflictions of one world might be discovered in the struggles and tribulations of the other?

Ussha De Danaan: last High Architect of Ossierel

July 9, 2014

[Secrets revealed and major giveaway](#)

With only a month or so to go before publication of the third novel of my epic fantasy series, The Sword of Feimhin, I am now preparing a marketing campaign

including a 20 paperback giveaway to winners of the giveaway competition here on Goodreads.

The previous two books in the series were *The Snowmelt River* and *The Tower of Bones*. *The Snowmelt River* rose to no 5 in the amazon epic fantasy bestseller list, eclipsing for a while individual titles of both *Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones*, both fantasy series I greatly admire.

I strongly suggest that people who want to discover Mo's secret, as well as the reason behind the burning of the city of London, read books One and Two first (they're very modestly priced on kindle) before reading Book 3, in which the Tyrant of the Wastelands declares war on Earth.

May 28, 2014

[Doomsday Genie becomes a cult novel](#)

I'm surprised, as well as a bit apprehensive, that my hugely dystopic novel, *The Doomsday Genie*, is being seen by readers as a cult novel - whatever that might mean. It is selling well in both the UK, the US, Canada and Australia and is now by far the most successful kindle of any book published by Swift. I always had some reservations about presenting such a dark image in my fiction. But I'm grateful to you guys, whoever you are, who appear to be buying and supporting it.

I conducted a vast amount of research, including entering the BSL-4 levels of the biosafety labs in America, to write it. I learnt a great deal from this that has helped me - maybe also terrified me - in my writing of the fantasy series, *The Three Powers*.

I recall a poignant meeting with a young father in a bar in New England, whose recently born son was in danger of death. We got drunk together, agreeing we would meet the next day if his son survived. I found myself alone.

Why does the idea of doomsday so entrance us? Maybe because on such a day nothing will matter anymore. No sin we have committed, no desire we have cherished, no love, no hate, nothing . . . All levelled to a dreadful playing field of anarchy and despair.

Why such a notion should appeal is both intriguing and disturbing. I wish I had the answers. All I can do is to write about it.

And that reminds me that the third book of my fantasy series, *The Sword of Feimhin* - which features a dystopic London rather than the US this time - is now approaching publication. In a few weeks time I shall be setting up a prize giveaway

here on Goodreads. How time flies . . .

May 17, 2014

[Proof reading on a glorious May day](#)

I have a fat collection of page proofs of *Book 3, The Sword of Feimhin*, in front of me, the final stage before it goes off for printing. As with a very good publisher (Jo Fletcher, Quercus), you do not expect more than a handful of minor glitches to be spotted at this late stage, when the script is set out exactly as it will be on the pages of the book. I shall read them in the glorious May sunshine - the birth month of my late and much loved mother.

In just a month's time I shall be making ready for a book giveaway on Goodreads for publication at the start of September. I should be receiving my author's copies as soon as August.

Make ready to meet two new and interesting characters, Gully Doughty and Penny Postlethwaite. They've already set up their own Twitter addresses, getting ready for some fun with readers.

I can hardly wait.

April 30, 2014

[Sword and Citadel reviewed](#)

I'm enjoying *Sword and Citadel*, the second compendium of *The Book of the New Sun* by Gene Wolfe. It's very well written, as was the first compendium, *Shadow and Claw*, but this time the narrative, while equally dark and mysterious, appears to have a more definite sense of direction.

It's taken me a while to read in part because the book I initially ordered from Amazon had a minuscule typeface, like the tiniest small print you find on the most obscure documentation. Impossible for me to read without difficulty and the print size would have massively detracted from any sense of enjoyment in the reading. I did manage to change it for a much better produced edition of the same book (the Gollanz edition) and I can now reading without pain and am able to enjoy the quality and inventiveness of the writing.

I do wish production editors would realise the problem long-sighted and presbyopic people have with tiny print.

I am very busy writing myself but I shall definitely finish it and write a review.

One of the great fantasy books to come my way. Approaching completion 24th June.

April 27, 2014

[Books must speak for themselves](#)

I have written something like 18 books, a quarter of them bestsellers. I should know that there is nothing I can do to make readers like my books other than to offer them and let readers decide.

It's a very peculiar thing, as well as being a wonderful thing, the symbiosis between writer and reader.

I can offer no guarantee that you, as a potential reader, will like my fantasy series, which is approaching publication of book 3, The Sword of Feimhin, other than readers have elevated the first book to a kindle bestseller.

I confess that I don't know any formula for writing bestsellers, and even if I did I would ignore it. I write because there is a compulsion in me to do so. I lose myself in the new world I create, just as I hope a reader does. Indeed I identify with and feel myself in there with my reader as well as the characters.

I have no tricks, no formulaic concepts, only a vision of truth. Yeah, I know how hubristic that might sound, but the world I am creating must feel truthful to me. It must work. The characters must be believable - I insist they oppose and confront me to make be believe they are real and true.

Some of my character are actually ganging up on me demanding, on line, more freedom. I have allowed them twitter identities but we haven't yet developed this as much as it appears to be demanding. Maybe those who want to contact Kate, Alan, Mo, Mark, not to mention Penny and Gully, should encourage contact through their developing twitter sites.

In a strange way that helps me to work out a way that would allow real characters and thus a meaningful story.

April 5, 2014

[Book 3 up and coming](#)

It's been quite a long wait for readers, but I can confirm that the countdown to publication of Book 3 in The Three Powers epic fantasy series - The Sword of Feimhin - has now begun.

Readers may be surprised at the expansion of the theme to a dystopic London. I'll look forward to hearing your views.

I hope to offer the book as a prize giveaway at the beginning of August.

Many thanks to the readers who have read the first two books in the series, and the many readers who have offered ratings and reviews.

I do appreciate your feedback.

March 24, 2014

While travelling

Am travelling in sunny climes right now. Writing the final book in my fantasy series, which is now well under way.

My blog is, alas, way behind. But I promise to bring it up to date soon. . .

April 3

Just back in "Old Blighty" - for non-Brits, this is the affectionate term for England. Very much looking forward to publication of The Sword of Feimhin, which will be offered as a prize giveaway in Early August. So soon! Meanwhile I'm really enjoying Sword and Citadel by Gene Wolfe - started to read it while on the blessed sun-kissed beaches.

More anon . . .

April 4

Late night thoughts while listening to the single greatest piece of music ever written. I listened to it on the isolated beaches only days ago on the desert island of Fuerteventura, and I am listening to it now, and the wonderful thing is it is available for very little in terms of cost to anybody. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. I wonder if it will ever be surpassed.

You can lie on your back on beach, or carpet, and just lose yourself in the magical, Elysian music. Like snorting gold dust. But imagine listening to it on a subtropical beach while the starry plough, and Orion the hunter, and Pegasus the Olympian horse, are wheeling over you . . .

Bliss!

January 24, 2014

[A humorous take on Asimov](#)

Review of *Eye Candy* by Ryan Schneider

Self-published novel and a good advert for that fact.

Welcome to Los Angeles 2047, a world in which robots have taken over many of the supportive roles in society, provoking anger, hatred and social tension. This is the setting for Schneider's fast talking, fast moving, in the groove sci-fi thriller. I enjoyed the read very much, in spite of the fact it might have benefited from a tougher copy editing. I simply laughed my socks off in places. For example the patter between waiter and diners and chef in a restaurant where waiter and chef are robots, which was a clever pastiche of the real patter you encounter in restaurants. Zany hot rod characters +++. Sexual shenanigans +++. A love story of the wildest improbabilities. Robots racked by indecisions. Robots gifted with emotion and intuition that demand robot psychologists to treat them when they are suffering from post-traumatic stress through worry that they have broke Asimov's Third Law. Oh – and action, action, action.

A totally insane wickedly humorous romp of a book.

November 18, 2013

[Welcome to the apocalypse](#)

The three AH-64 Apaches stole in from the dawn horizon, like squat gray sharks invading a sleeping coastline. Emerging from the sea mists over a large desalination complex, they adopted a ground-hugging V-formation, the engines masked until they crossed over the security fence. The agricultural station was three miles ahead. From the air, the ripening fields of crops were laid out in radial slices so it looked like a gigantic target had been painted onto the desert. Cruising at 145 mph, the Apaches followed a raised embankment between two of the slices along which a solitary figure, wearing flapping Bermuda shorts, was jogging back to base after his pre-dawn exercise.

His hearing distracted by the earphones of his iPod, the man was oblivious to the dark shapes that were overtaking him out of the rising sun. A brief clatter of fire

from a 30MM automatic caused his body to crash to the ground. The right earphone, detached from the shattered bridge over his head, fed a tinny whisper of Borodin's second string quartet into the disturbed air as the gunships swept onwards in what seemed an unhurried pace.

Soon visible, the central compound was a cluster of a dozen or so cinder-block buildings surrounding a massive glass and aluminum dome. The dome was the dead center of the radial plan. It was the bull's-eye in the target.

The Apaches went through a coordinated parabolic turn to line up facing the living quarters, out of which figures were emerging in various stages of undress. The attack was directed by a clean-shaven civilian located in the front cockpit position of the lead aircraft. He clicked on a video camera to record the scene, capturing people wearing short-sleeved lab coats over otherwise naked bodies.

A single barefoot figure emerged from one of the buildings. He gazed about himself for a moment, as if in bewilderment, before running into the dubious shelter of the dome. Within moments an alarm screeched from the apex of the dome: a red beacon flashing inside the entrance. It merely heightened the panic. The air shrilled with desperate shouts and cries as the heavy M230 chain guns rattled into action, mowing the people down with implacable efficiency. The guns continued firing for about thirty seconds, after which the Apaches wheeled skyward, putting enough distance between themselves and the compound to allow the deployment of their Hydra 70 folding fin rockets. The oblong buildings disintegrated and a cascade of burning debris descended over the wrack of bloodied bodies.

In the lead Apache, the civilian spoke to the military pilot. 'I want to make a record of the anomaly.'

The lead peeled off from the others, rising a further two hundred feet before adopting a spiral route around the fields, the boundaries of which were highlighted with razor-cut sharpness in the low glare of the sun. From time to time the aircraft hovered, the civilian directing the camera to record specific features in the fields below. The variety of crops was staggering. There were several types of maize, irrigated paddy fields of ripening rice, cereals, root crops, endless rows of small fruit-bearing trees. The "anomaly" appeared to be everywhere. The examination and recording was conducted with the same implacable precision as the killing.

The helicopter continued on its spiral mission for five or six minutes and then it rejoined the other two that were still hovering over the now blazing compound. There was a pause lasting half a minute or so: information being exchanged.

All three Apaches rose to six hundred feet so the CPGs could position their Target Acquisition Designation Sights onto the dome. From what was effectively point blank range, they each fired two Hellfire missiles into the building. Designed for the destruction of tanks and heavy armour in the field of battle, the combined effect was

a massive overkill. An inferno mushroomed into the sky, against which the helicopters were reduced to gnats, tossing and pitching against the maw of red flames and black smoke.

(Opening pages of *The Doomsday Genie*)

November 9, 2013

[Review of Sandman Slim by Richard Kadrey](#)

James Stark wakes up on fire on a pile of smouldering garbage behind Paramount Studios in Hollywood. Somehow he has slipped out of the back door of Hell, into which he was exiled by his erstwhile friend and fellow magician, Mason Faim and five other members of the magic order. There's reason enough in this for him to want revenge. But he is consumed by a deeper and darker rage. Faim murdered Stark's girl-friend and lover, Alice, and for that crime Stark is determined to wreak havoc on Faim, and the five other traitorous snakes who betrayed him – and anybody else, human or otherwise, who gets in his way.

“Why'd you come back?” a bartender asks him.

“I'm going to kill some people... Probably a lot of people.”

Survival in Hell, where in his eleven years of incarceration he has fought and been scarred by innumerable gladiatorial battles in demon thronged arenas, has been a tough learning curve. Unknowingly metamorphosed to the eponymous Sandman Slim, he's going to need that experience to survive in a world dominated by demons, vampires, judgemental angels – and worse.

Welcome to the creative universe of author, Richard Kadrey. It isn't a world for the squeamish – those too delicate for cantankerous behaviour, hard-core swearing and the philosophy that goes with it. It most certainly isn't the world for the devoutly religious, who might resent impious references to god, angels, and all of the rest of the Christian pantheon, and who might become apoplectic with the novel's alternative explanation for the origins of angels, humans and life in general. For the humour, consider... “I am parked on a major thoroughfare in a stolen van. I have no shirt... I'm dragging around a dead guy accessorized with building materials. This is not a precise or subtle situation. This is a situation for mindless violence and brute force. First good news I've had all day.”

I suspect you have the idea by now. Lightning pace. Darker than jet humour. Irreverence piled on top of irreverence with a JCB shovel. Sword fights with angels. Beings worse than devils on your hero's tail. Battles involving the FBI, Homeland Security and a hero in no mind to consider saving the world. In other words, expletive-most-certainly-not-deleted filthy-ass fun.

October 28, 2013

[Review of Oryx and Crake, by Margaret Atwood](#)

This is novel within the so-called category of speculative fiction. It is written in brilliantly effervescent prose about an apocalyptic scenario, the near annihilation of the human species. We enter it after the apocalypse has already taken place and, in essence, the story retraces the events that led to it. Since this is Atwood, we can tentatively assume that her interest are unlikely to reflect the Armageddon per se but rather the potential for applying a magnifying glass to what it means, for good or for bad, to be human.

Our reader-friendly narrator is the jokily self-depreciative Snowman – Jimmy in a former life. Jimmy’s remorseful and backward-directed eyes, unstable emotions, and scatological humour guide us through the disquieting genesis of the catastrophe. Sleeping in a tree to avoid predation, he is far from happy to find himself one of a handful of survivors. Devastated by guilt, resentful of what new role might be expected of him in this brave new world of scarcity and danger, he gazes angrily at the drowned skyscrapers of a former great American city in the bay opposite his roost, haunted by what part he himself might have played in the catastrophe and pining for the happiness he has lost.

The Oryx and Crake of the title were his best, and most formative, friends dating back, at least in the case of Crake, to the world of his adolescence. But as the narrative unwinds we discover that this world was already morally bankrupt. Walled-off and guarded compounds accommodated the super-rich, isolating them from the semi-feral “pleeb-lands” beyond. Wealth, and social status, was centred on profit-driven genetic engineering of animals, and even humans, for sundry disreputable purposes including body parts. In Snowman’s sceptical, oft-times parodic, memories of his childhood, schooling and dysfunctional family, we witness a world already hurtling down the slippery slope. His mother, herself a scientist working in genetic engineering, abandons him during a conscience-driven breakdown. Little in the way of direct explanation is offered in the narrative so we are obliged to interpret her motivations and actions through her baffled and less than devoted son. We also witness, through the wonderfully scatter-brained and sex-addicted adolescent male ruminations of Jimmy, the inanely stupid potentials of genetic engineering in world devoid of moral compass. The hugely altered pigeons (transgenic pigs), the threatening wolfogs, and the people-friendly rakunks (hybrids of raccoons and skunks), typify the brainless experimentation and greedy exploitation.

Atwood employs a formidable arsenal of literary skills to enliven her narrative, including crystal clear language, cutting edge street talk, the spiritual leprosy of internet pornography, arresting neologisms, and, as with Snowman, a relentless,

desperately ironic viewpoint. Indeed, with Jimmy/Snowman she may have created one of the noteworthy characters of modern literature.

The rise to self-assertive pragmatism of the delightful and mysterious and quintessentially oriental Oryx from the vilest degradation to pragmatic human being is the second great characterisation. Of the key characters in the book, I have to admit that she is the one I would most like to share a conversation with over a bacon sandwich and glass or three of Cognac.

While dystopia and apocalypse is hardly novel as a theme, this is a disturbing, highly original and yet still highly entertaining foray into that seductive darkness. One senses, and identifies with both the anger and challenging spirit that drives the novel.

Sent from an internet café in the Canaries October 29 2013

October 27, 2013

[Atwood's Oryx and Crake](#)

On the beach and have just read/ reviewed Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake. Would have enjoyed a chat with Oryx if she existed in real life. Review just about done and moving onto The Year of the Flood. I hope to get the review posted very soon.

Masterpiece not of answers but of awkward very relevant questions!

28 July 2013

[What I hate in modern culture](#)

I am delighted to discover how many hates I appear to share with the late Iain Banks. For example I loathe the celebrity culture, which often elevates the stupid to heights where they can but embarrass themselves in ignorance and crass displays of undeserving wealth; I hate reality shows such as Big Brother, where largely pathetic people – what could be more insulting than to call a rational human being a C list celebrity – are encouraged to humiliate one another and be humiliated in turn; I hate the inane big Gypsy wedding for their hyper-extravagant espousal of what amounts to female subjugation; I hate the spate of smug comedians who belittle their audiences for laughs; I hate even more the same smug comedians who belittle the weak and handicapped for laughs; I hate the popular run of films which seem

unable to discover the magic of experience but instead indulge in excessive violence, or grotesque comic book narrative that was once the domain of twelve-year-old children, utterly implausible superheroes; I hate the boring, boring, boring Jane Austen upper middle class obsessions with the marrying of daughters . .

Whew!

Now that I've got that off my chest . . .

June 19, 2013

[What's in a name?](#)

A long time ago, or so it seems to me today, I wrote to Iain Banks to talk about names.

Iain had decided, for good or for bad, to use the name Iain Banks for his contemporary fiction - I disdain to use the term "mainstream fiction" since I regard no fiction to be mainstream - and to use the name Iain M Banks for his science fiction.

My question to him was had this worked? Was he happy with it? I was planning to separate out my popular science (Frank Ryan) from my fiction, (Frank P Ryan). Iain thought I should use the same name, but I decided I should use the separate names because the division between non-fiction and fiction is major and I didn't want to confuse readers.

Iain, to put the record straight, appeared to have regretted the fact he had used different names for his science fiction and his contemporary fiction. He dissociated himself from the snobs who considered science fiction a lesser "genre". I never use the term "genre" for much the same reasons. I prefer the term "category" which seems to me to be less affected. I have written a contemporary novel and considered it easier to write than fantasy, which is actually very demanding.

March 18, 2013

[How to write a fantasy short story – or even a novel](#)

In many ways a fantasy story is just like any other story, with a single exception. It has to contain an element of magic. Maybe it will be an adventure story – though it could just as easily be a very ordinary kind of story that contains that all-important magical ingredient. Whatever works for you. Maybe you've liked the magic of Harry

potter, where the story is set in a school for magic. But it could also be that your story is set in a very ordinary school where somebody, or something, extraordinary is going on. Or it could be a dark story, with vampires, or ghosts, or witches or goblins, or all of them. It could be a lighter tale, like those of Terry Pratchett's Discworld, with bumbling wizards, whose spells are constantly going wrong, or a friendly character known as Death, who has a fondness for curries. That's the great thing about writing a fantasy story – it's fun to write and your imagination can soar in so many different ways.

But come on now – if it was that easy wouldn't we all be as rich as J K Rowling or Terry Pratchett? Ahem – so okay! There's more to writing a good fantasy story than just the fun aspect. You have to be able to write a good story. And while there is an element of hard work to this, I shall now show you that the hard graft of writing, yes and even process of learning how to go about it, can also be fun.

A 12-year old living in Canada asked me what made me want to become a writer. I could have said "magic" and, in a way, it would have been true. A more practical question is this: Why would anybody – yes even those of you who have no desire at all to become professional writers – want to be bothered with learning how to write? In fact, people – anybody and everybody – need to be able to communicate experiences, or ideas. Writing is a very good way of doing this. It links imaginations. When you read a book or a short story, or a magazine article, your imagination really is linking up, one-to-one, with whoever wrote it. That makes writing a very personal thing – and it also makes reading more personal and exciting than maybe you thought about before. Just think about when you read a book, how you have to imagine characters and settings for yourself. That takes a little bit of your own powers of magic. And it's why the film, if a film follows a book, can sometimes be a little bit disappointing. You have already created the world of the book in your own imagination and the film shows it through somebody else's imagination – the film director's.

Hey – and don't get the idea that writing is only about fiction. Writing is about anything that goes down on paper, or these days into an electronic format, whether novels, short stories, articles in magazines, or on-line – even your own personal e-mails!

Hold on a minute. So how, then, do you define a writer?

Well, if you check your dictionary, the answer may surprise you. A writer is a person who writes. And that means you're a writer already.

Of course not everybody makes their living from writing, but it's obvious that we all need to be able to write. The smarter you are at doing this, the more successful and satisfying your life is going to be. Job applications, essays, lectures and presentations won't worry you as much as they might otherwise. You'll be rootin' an' tootin' with more confidence, because you'll have a better idea of how to go about it.

Am I kidding you?

I don't think so. Because once you grasp the essentials, you will discover that the very process you go through to write your short story, or even a full novel for that matter, applies to quite a lot of that other stuff you will later need to get on with in your life. I should know. I learnt the hard way. I began as a doctor and scientist, writing and reading scientific articles. I then took the quantum leap to writing fiction. From there I returned to writing non-fiction books. And now, I have gone full circle to writing popular fiction again. I have learnt through my own helter-skelter experience that the principles are very much the same for all kinds of writing.

But here you are now, thinking about writing a fantasy story – and all for yourself. Nobody is forcing you to write it. Nobody is telling you what to write about. All I can suggest is that you think about it as fun. What is more, you won't really be judged on what you write. And at the end of it you will have learnt some neat tricks about writing that will help you understand the books and articles you read, whether for your own enjoyment or to help you analyse job applications – even to answer those bothersome questions in examinations.

But I have never been any good at English!

That doesn't matter. I was no good at English at school. I'm not proud of it, far from it. But I was shunted into the science stream and so I had to drop English literature at a stupidly early level. This was a disadvantage to me later and I had to catch up on what I had lost. So, even if you think you are lousy at English – if, like me, you have never received a single good mark in an English essay – you can turn it around by taking part in this competition. People may be surprised by this more articulate you. They might even ask you what you've been up to. So take a tip from the late great comedian, Peter Cook, who, when asked these same questions on his return after many years absence from the scene, remarked: "I've been thinking about the world and everything in it." Improving your grasp of writing might just open up the same world to you.

So, okay – over the course of this blog I'll be giving you some helpful tips, based on a lifetime's experience of the ups and downs of a writer, both of fiction and non-fiction. I'll be concentrating on short stories, because a short story is much easier to write than a full length novel. You might even find some of this helpful if you are writing non-fiction, an article for school, or a magazine. You can even ask me a question or two and I'll do my best to answer them. And the great thing, as I have said already, is there will be nobody judging you. It's just going to be fun – a self indulgent exercise just for yourself.

So why don't you just make yourself comfortable and get ready to open up your imagination and have a little fun with words.

February 15, 2013

[For journey's end - or for the journey itself?](#)

This is the question I now pose for my readers, and friends, who have supported my fantasy series, The Three Powers. I have put up the first intimations of Book Three on my website, frankpryan.com - but can't tell you its name until formally declared. It is complete in draft form and now I am taxed with polishing and editing.

Can't wait to liaise with my artist friend, Mark Salwowski, on a dramatic vignette, which will first appear on the book's page on my website. It is likely to involve a frighteningly dystopic scene in central London. More information now going into the page. I'll be sure to post details here in Goodreads as soon as I can.

But to return to the theme of this blog post, I personally enjoy the journey. This is how I felt when reading Tolkien's Lord of the Rings for the first time.

I am now in the position of a goldsmith back in Celtic, Anglo-Saxon or Viking times, who has cast the creation through the lost wax method and is now gazing at the rude thing that has emerged, crusted in slag and blurred around the edges with leakage, but who can see the glitter of what promises to be the enchanting final result. (Enchantment takes time and effort as well as inspiration) Already in his mind's eye he imagines the garnets, rubies, emeralds, the enamelling - the final leg of the journey to completion.

This stage of the creation, the polishing and embellishing, is what I enjoy the most. One has to be as careful and creative in this as in the initial storytelling.

With Tolkien I was there for the journey. Never wanted it to end.

December 10, 2012

[Stick to your guns](#)

This is one of the most important lessons I have learnt over 20+ years as a professional writer.

A long time ago – about 1995, I think – I decided to write a fantasy series of novels. I wanted to start with my characters as teenagers, because that's a very interesting and important age, when personalities are being laid down. I started out with six characters and ended up, in The Snowmelt River, with four, Alan (American), Kate (Irish), Mark (Londoner) and Mo (adopted Australian half aborigine). I was already

a successful novelist, with three thrillers published, *Goodbye Baby Blue*, *Sweet Summer* and *Tiger Tiger*, which eventually found a readership of hundreds of thousands. Should have been no problem extending to fantasy...

Don't you believe it!

One of the most pernicious things about being a writer is the fact that the establishment tries to peg you into a hole. One pigeonhole if you like. And there you are supposed to stay.

Well I wasn't for staying.

Maybe I was a little crazy to try to do this. But recently two very experienced editors agreed with me – that writing is a folie-a-deux – with both writers and editors/publishers needing to be slightly mad, and with the two creative madnesses entwined, rather like we grow into one another as married couples.

I spent two or three years allowing the teenage characters to come alive inside my head. Meanwhile I sketched out four books in a series, each a story in itself, but the whole moving on as what my German friends would call a gestalt – a whole.

But now the pigeonholing came into effect. My fiction publisher balked at what I was writing and my agent was also concerned. I agreed, against my better judgement, to rewrite the first book, already substantially written, as an adult fantasy thriller – so it would "fit better with my profile". I have to admit that it was successful, in sales terms, and also reader response, but not for me. When it came to the second book, I had to write a subtle, humorous relationship between Kate and a dragon. Wouldn't work in any way other than Kate as teenager.

And the truth was I missed my teenage gang of friends. I had allowed them to be entombed in the limbo of characters locked away within the writer's imagination, never to be allowed the freedom to develop.

I dumped the series. I recalled my copyright. And I probably sulked. Not very grown up of me, I confess. But I never gave up on my original plan. Now, with the help of friends, such as publisher Jo Fletcher at Quercus Editions, Brendan Murphy, general manager of John West in Ireland, and London agent Leslie Gardner, my teenage personalities are emerging. And boy is it better! Those personalities, locked away for years, are relishing their release. They're rewarding me by doing things that surprise me. They're really making it work.

The Snowmelt River is gathering some fine reviews - and slowly the e-mails from readers are starting to come my way. Most readers appear to love the book. They find they get to escape into a different world while they're reading it. And that was what I wanted. But most of all, they identify, really strongly, with the teenage characters, who have such passionate and intense interactions, and who are

maturing to adulthood during the series.

For me that's the most important thing – it's what the link between writer and reader is all about.

The Snowmelt River went to #8 in the epic fantasy bestseller list at amazon.co.uk. Sales into America are just beginning. The second book in the series, *The Tower of Bones*, has been published and has collected four five star reader's ratings here at Goodreads. Books Three and Four are currently being written. You wouldn't believe how satisfying it is to have my original creative inspiration come to fruition.

November 2, 2012

[A scary story](#)

I make no apology for the fact that *The Doomsday Genie* is a very scary thriller. I used real knowledge of evolutionary biology to create an entity, which - though I never planned it this way - became the dominating personality in the novel.

I was, in part, influenced by admiration for my friend, the late Lynn Margulis, whose work on symbiosis will, in time, be seen for its true iconoclastic nature.

I was also concerned that genetic engineering was potentially dangerous, even if it might also be argued that it is a necessary step towards the future. This, combined with the very human hubris involved in the race to create the first truly artificially generated life-form - none that have appeared so far would qualify for this as I see it - was the spark that set my imagination on fire.

I had fun with Mark Salwowski who designed the utterly brilliant cover design.

I used to imagine how it actually worked - it is described in the novel - while listening to One Tree Hill by U2.

October 24, 2012

[What am I doing today?](#)

I have finished book three of the fantasy series, The Three Powers. The title is *The Sword of Feimhin* and it comes out in January 2014. People who loved my dystopic science fiction thriller, *The Doomsday Genie*, will like Book three. So just a little over 3 months off. The US first publication of *The Snowmelt River* is even closer – a handsome hardcover to be published in November. We're running a giveaway of 12

of the hardcovers leading up to November 1. I hope it goes well and readers enjoy both books.

I'm also linking up with my friend, the artist Mark Salwowski, who lives in Australia. He's been working on a vignette for the second of the fantasy books, *The Tower of Bones*, and we've been having a bit of a laugh liaising on this over the last few days. Mark is great fun to work with. Worth visiting his website www.salwowski.com.

I've also become more active on Twitter over the last month or so. Had to close down my FB page because they kept going into my mail lists and writing to everybody.

I've returned to reading Keith Richards' autobiography, *Life*. Enjoying it a lot. I played lead guitar in an amateur R & B group in the 60s so he lived the life I aspired to when I was a teenager. That makes the book especially fascinating to me. But also the contacts and interactions with all of the big names in early blues and R & B also make it particularly interesting. He was a bad boy, in his own admission, and shouldn't be able to remember it so vividly - but he does and we're all richer for it.

Here's a quote from Keith Richards' book . . .

"The most bizarre part of the whole story is that having done what we intended to do in our narrow, purist teenage brains at the time, which was to turn people on to the blues, what actually happened was we turned American people back to their own music."

Is that the truth or not - probably depends on your perspective. But even if only partly true, it was quite an achievement.

September 28, 2012

Give your children/ grandchildren their own fairytale

In a kind of accidental way I wrote a fairytale for my little granddaughter. She loved it and it was the only fairy story she ever wanted to hear when I babysat her.

Then, when my little grandson came along, I wrote a second fairytale, just for him. He too loved it.

Even as they grew older, they wanted the same stories, but now we'd play games around the stories, for example making deliberate mistakes that they would immediately spot.

We laughed our heads off. It was incredible fun.

I would recommend it for parents and grandparents. Don't worry if you have never written a short story before. If you can't think how to do it, visit the index page of this website and go to the freebies page. Download the free link on how to write your own fantasy short story. But to tell you the truth, there's no need to go to any lengths.

Don't worry if you've never written any kind of story before. Nobody is judging you. Your children and grandchildren won't mind if you make mistakes. They'll love it and you for it and never forget the fact you gave them their very own fairytale.

September 24, 2012

Why Mozart would have written fantasy

(Written with an element of tongue in cheek – okay?)

I would have loved to write music but lack the formal musical education, though not the appreciation, to do so. I did run an art gallery for nine years and painted pictures that sold, but my real artistic talent, what little I possess of it, lies in literature.

For me, of all the fields of fiction, the one that flies - soars - closest to the mind-blowing ecstasy of great music is epic fantasy. I realise that there may be people out there who disagree - you are very welcome to do so. Nevertheless I hereby defend my thesis.

Great fantasy widens the mind to an almost limitless potential, as does great music. The world you enter, as a fantasy writer, is the same world that a composer enters, quintessentially the world of your own imagination. You can't just look around you and make notes, though deep characterisation, as with any other field of fiction, will involve a deep empathy with people in their joys and suffering. You must allow the strange, sometimes disquieting, but equally rapturous, creative process full rein to invent a world that never has, and perhaps never could, exist.

Of course there are rules in both fields of endeavour. Your fantasy world must make sense, no matter how imaginative, just as the symphonies, concertos, and sonatas - and the best of blues, pop, rap, and jazz - must follow the quasi-mathematical rules of music.

I should add that if Mozart were alive today and writing fantasy, I have no doubt it would also accommodate a good deal of ribald humour.

Above all else, the worlds of music and fantasy share two wonders: absolute freedom of creativity and perhaps even more important still, magic.

03 July 2011

[Exhibition at Chatsworth](#)

Went to a great exhibition of my friend, Endre Röder's paintings, in the sculpture room at Chatsworth Hall, seat of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, last Wednesday. Endy's paintings have increased roughly eight-fold in value over the last 15 years or so - so even if your interest is purely financial - and mine isn't, he's worth taking a look at. Visit www.derwent-wyefineart.co.uk. Note they've produced a book on Endy's work, and it is a multi-colour-illustrated work of art in its own right.

Also met a couple of delightful young ladies - Elaine Munson & Gill Gibbon - who have set up a successful art gallery in Whitby. They have some very promising artists on their books, from surrealist/abstract to probing the real biological self - see www.abbeywalkgallery.com.

I really like artists. They're my kind of people.

A lovely sunny day! Wimbledon on the box. Close to finishing the second book in the Snowmelt River fantasy series. Just finished a new feature article for New Scientist on the topic of metamorphosis.

I intend to do nothing all day except sit in the sun, read, do a couple of killer sudokus and maybe the Sunday Telegraph crossword.

A fun day!

07 April 2011

[Not a bed of roses](#)

My world is not a self-congratulatory or comfortable world of sitting on my butt and writing book after book, all duly acclaimed. Hey – my world is far from that. Getting my first book published was the single most difficult thing I ever managed, somehow, to do in my life. I wrote the usual autobiographical first novel, which was, I now acknowledge, unpublishable. It was experimental, influenced by James Joyce, but I was nevertheless devastated at the time, when it was rejected by the one agent I sent it to. I have said this before, and I will say it again here, that books are like children. When they die, the pain is like a child stillborn. Three or four years ago I went through a rather different kind of nadir that I thought I would never come out of. Yet, today, not only is *Metamorphosis* following on *Virovolution*, but even my long-worked-on fantasy, *The Snowmelt River*, is beginning to make waves of its own.

Again I emphasize that this is not self-congratulatory – quite the opposite. What I am trying to do is to encourage others going through those terrible periods of initial rejection, or the depressing troughs that come and go throughout just about every successful writer's life.

Hey – a bed of roses it jollywell ain't.

What then of people who are driven, through the pain of rejection, to publish their own books? Well, I suppose it depends on what drives them to write. If what they hope for is bestseller status, with lots of money, good luck to them. I've written several bestsellers, but they are not my favourite books. Writing for money doesn't inspire me so I don't feel inclined to comment, other than to wish them good luck. But if they are driven by a creative urge to write something interesting, like a painter creates a landscape or a composer writes music out of the sweat and blood of his or her life, that does inspire me. And, in a peculiar way, a writer driven by such creativity, even if self-published, might succeed, even if his or her readership is limited.

From this perspective I feel that it is always - always - no matter the pain - worth persisting, even if you labour all your life only ever to write one great book, like Melville's Moby Dick. I know that Melville wrote others, but nobody has ever heard of them. The more I read of the experiences of writers, poets, artists and composers, the more I witness a commonality of purpose and pain. It's a peculiar, but spiritually elevating, labour to communicate mind to mind with a reader who appreciates the efforts that went into its creation.

There will be sceptics, I know, but a purist might nevertheless argue that if only one other human being loves your creation, it was worth it.

01 April 2011

[Hope the date is not prophetic](#)

Today New Scientist reviewed my book, The Mystery of Metamorphosis: A Scientific Detective Story. The book has been more than a decade in genesis. "The book is a must for entomologists, marine biologists and the downright curious." Let's hope that there are a lot of curious people out there interested in what fascinated and baffled Aristotle.

Indeed New Scientist are even further interested and it looks as if I shall be asked to write a feature about what might be called our human metamorphosis.

Getting ready for the trip to Dublin. I like visiting the Irish capital, since the people are so very friendly compared to most other capitals I have visited. I've clapped on a bit of weight over the last year or so and am now on a reducing healthy diet, with plenty of omega-3s and not too much omega-6s, and am exercising on my daughter's cross-trainer. Writing is a very sedentary occupation, and the temptation to surf on the internet adds to the problem. But the cross-trainer is a blessing to me since I can hop onto it any time between tasks and get some exercise.

A bit of good news that other authors on Authorsden might like to share.

Since we set up the e-books, they're flying. Ignoring my new book, *The Snowmelt River*, which has the advantage of being new, the biggest seller, consistently so, is *The Doomsday Genie* - my sci-fi thriller based in America. And the second best selling e-book is a bit of a surprise - my earlier thriller, *Goodbye Baby Blue*. And do you know what? I could have predicted this judging from the interest level in these titles on Authorsden. You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to realise that the sales must be deriving from people visiting my site on Authorsden.

So thanks, whoever you are! Long may it continue!

19 March 2011

[Icing one's glass from nature](#)

Just back from two weeks holiday in the Canaries, where the weather was pretty atrocious – the worst I have ever experienced there and I've been visiting the Canaries for twenty years. A Scottish visitor I met in a bar, held his glass of whisky out of the open door to let it hail into it – providing his ice.

You have to keep your sense of humour at times.

E-books continue to surprise me. My biggest seller in e-books at the moment is quite different from what I would imagine from print sales – it's my US-based science-fiction thriller, *The Doomsday Genie*.

I'm off to Dublin Castle early next week for the prize-giving awards for the Irish teenage fantasy competition. We received some beautiful entries, so it will be a pleasure to meet some of the kids who wrote them. I gather that I will be MC with another writer, who helped with the judging, also contributing, and Brendan Murphy, the general manager for John West in Ireland – whose vision made it all possible – presenting the prizes.

Should be interesting.

Polishing the metamorphosis book for publication in the UK, a little later than in the US. I also did a little polishing of the page proofs of my paper on human endogenous retroviruses in MS before I travelled. The paper is liable to take some of my colleagues by surprise and should appear in print very soon.

We are becoming increasingly aware of how important retroviruses, similar to HIV-1, have been in human evolution, and this extrapolates to human embryology, reproduction and day-to-day physiology, so it's hardly surprising they might also be playing roles in disease. This is a new sub-discipline and much remains to be discovered but it's looking like very promising ground for novel research.

I was invited to speak at the European Society for Evolutionary Biology meeting in Germany in August - one of four speakers who will talk on the extrapolation of evolutionary biology into the wider domains of medicine and the humanities. I'm kind of looking forward to that.

Busy, of course - but that's how I like it.

Much enjoyed Nina Munteanu's science fiction novel, Darwin's Paradox, while on holiday. Some very clever writing, cementing family relationships into the plot. Nina has also written a very good guidebook on how to write fiction - The Fiction Writer, published by Starfire World Syndicate.

Six of my novels have now been converted to e-books and put up for sale as Amazon kindle books. Time will tell if this proves a success.

20 February 2011

[Van Morrison](#)

Read an article in the Scotland on Sunday by what I presume, from the drift of it, to be an engagingly rascalion-Unionist Scottish Conservative, who goes by the moniker of Gerald Warner, and who claims in all seriousness that, as a result of the economic crisis, Ireland has lost its soul. Not quite sure what he means by it, but there is a good deal of anti-Irish cynicism going around, as well as few genuine home truths, in the article. Needing to get away, spiritually and ideationally - and seeing in music - and most especially a song with lyrics that would at least equal Dylan in poetic vibe, I had another look at and listen to Astral weeks by Van Morrison. I did so because the lyrics have long puzzled me. In ordinary English - the sort much admired the English media - but not by me - admire as shorn of adjectives, and such literary pretensions - the lyrics are bizarre to the point of obscurity. But I don't think they are. The emotion behind them, the powerful, repetitive, tidal movement of the words, the morphic backing, proclaim otherwise. So I Googled. A very interesting

experience. It would appear that the words are indeed poetry coming from the deepest, subconscious, strata of the soul - born from the longing for a world that once appeared innocent. That world was the Belfast of Van Morrison's childhood and the innocence was in the mind of the youth - to be raped, torn apart, and lost, in the troubles of the Northern Ireland.

19 February 2011

[I'm becoming a chatter-box.](#)

Update - who'd have thought I'd become such a chatter-box! A blog is essentially a lonely soliloquy - and I wouldn't have thought it my scene.

The Amazon Kindle e-book version of *The Snowmelt River* is already selling. That's one of the fantastic things about e-books. Extraordinary speed between production and sales. I like that. I'm a fast fibre person. Hey - if it's people from Authorsden - thank you!

After something like forty years in medicine and science, people sometimes ask me what life is like now as a professional writer. I reply - busy.

I'm very much looking forward to publication of my new science book, *The Mystery of Metamorphosis*. I'm up for the controversy it will provoke. I'm also writing the final third of the second book in *The Snowmelt River* series - should finish the second draft in the Canaries soon. I'm receiving a lot of e-mails about that, so it's nice that I can reassure readers that it is coming, and soon.

I had a tête-a-tête with my publishers at HarperCollins in London recently, to knock out some ideas for a new science book, which produced something exciting that I am also working on. I have a new and lengthy scientific paper about to appear, extrapolating the wonderful work on HERVs in the human genome and multiple sclerosis, and I am working on two joint papers with other scientists. I am also busy inventing new fantasy short stories for my two lovely young grandchildren.

Busy.

But all of this is kind of by the way. The real thing that is on my mind, pleasing me I suppose, is that my all-American sci-fi thriller, *The Doomsday Genie*, has been properly edited at last. We released a POD that had dozens of editorial glitches in it. But with help I have now worked through it and corrected the glitches. And, thanks to my Indian contacts, we have released an e-book that is devoid of the glitches.

One of the most stimulating collaborations involving this particular book was with Mark Salwowski, who insisted on understanding where I was coming from, scientifically, in constructing the engineered artificial life form - the entity - that is the strongest personality in the book. I think that tells you something about Mark as an artist. As so often, I worked with music, and in designing the entity - in observing it in my mind rotating, and reading the DNA of any life-form it encountered, I had the U2 song, I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For, playing in my mind. You could say it was the song of the entity.

18 February 2011

Darkly classical

I don't know if it was clear from the above or not, but yesterday was rather a depressing day for me, in acknowledging the rise of the e-book and, perhaps a blow to the printed page. But today Chelsea Green have cheered me up no end by sending me the finished full cover for the new science book, *The Mystery of Metamorphosis*. It's absolutely brilliant. I can't praise them enough. I'm celebrating by sharing an excellent bottle of claret with my wife and listening to one of the most inspirational pieces of classical music ever written - I often listen to it while writing a particularly dark or exciting passage of fantasy - Mahler's Das Klagende Lied. The classical equivalent, in my perhaps daft opinion, to the Stones (Only Rock and Roll) in pop.

Cheers!

17 February 2011

Swings and roundabouts

... or if you prefer it, praise and grumble time.

Praise - oh, yeah - for those much denigrated people in India who help out publishers throughout the Western World. And grumble about my football team, who appear to have quite forgotten the fact that in order to win matches you have to stop the opposition putting the ball in your net.

Who are my hopeless football team - Sheffield Wednesday, who, if the present run continues, will be compelled to change their name to Sheffield Yesterday. Former FA cup-winners, top league players, the same team I took out season tickets for the

whole family to support, back in the days when my wife would stand on her seat and shout encouragement, and when my son and my daughter were still young enough to engage in family pursuits. I think my American readers will be familiar with the distinguished gentleman who has taken over my football team, and club.

So here's the local newspaper headline and I think it just about says it all:

Sheffield Wednesday chief admits recovery is 'bigger job than imagined'

Milan Mandaric has admitted for the first time the job of reviving Sheffield Wednesday's fortunes is a "bigger challenge than I imagined".

23 comments...

Oh, I think it would be prudent not to reproduce the comments in polite company.

But now to the praise:

I read an article in the rag for authors here in the UK - The Author - by my fellow countryman, Eoin Purcell. The title was "Cannibalism" and the first paragraph began, "Will the boom in e-books lead to more people reading, or will e-books simply siphon readers away from printed books without developing a new base of readers?" I think the title gives away the conclusion.

Ahem - but actually the words that caught my attention were "the boom in e-books". I rather thought to myself, I had better get on board this boom - and fast.

My most recent novels, The Snowmelt River and the US-based The Doomsday Genie, had never been published formally as e-books. So I began to conduct a little research of my own. A lovely lady, in that same edition of The Author, wrote a helpful article on how to construct your own e-book. But I simply do not have the time to do that. I made contact to see how much it would cost, in the UK, to have the job done for me. It amounted to £500 plus VAT (the European Mafia extortion factor) which would lead to somewhere between £600 and £700 per book of the length of The Snowmelt River.

In the past I have steadfastly refused to engage with the very polite Indian businessmen who have been sending me e-mails about their acumen with e-books. But, you know, times change and circumstances, football-wise and book-wise, are apt to kick one up the butt.

So I contacted a couple of the same polite gentlemen. The upshot - the same e-book for £80. I couldn't believe it. But what was there to lose?

Ahem - go ahead, I ventured to one of them.

The gentleman duly did - produced a perfect e-book of The Snowmelt River. I mean, like - in a few days without quibble or payment in advance. Wow!

The Doomsday Genie quickly followed - I'm moving onto Taking Care of Harry, with quite a few more to come. I have learnt how to easily convert from ePub to MobiPocket - it's takes the difficult feat of hitting a button in a program called Calibre. And MobiPocket can be downloaded straight into Kindle...

Wake up, my friends - wake up! Do you remember the words of the old Bob Dylan song, "The times they are a changin'". You don't believe it? Borders gone in the US and the UK and Angus and Robertson in Australia. Waterstones struggling here in the UK. Is it all down to internet bookselling, or does the problem run deeper? The present economic situation is not helping the trade - but it may be helping the rise of the e-book. If you're in the writing or publishing game, it really is time to sit up and take a long hard look at what is happening. People talk (including me) about hating reading anything other than the printed book. But you know what they said about the Wright brothers and their infernal flying machines.

The age of the e-book is looking like the approaching tsunami. And how long will these Indian colleagues be able to keep their prices so low we can convert an entire list for almost nothing?

11 February 2011

Cover Quotes

It would appear that we are getting some fairly remarkable cover quotes for Metamorphosis. I'm naturally delighted. And so maybe I should mention a structure -- the geneticists would call it a domain -- on chromosome 7 of the human genome. It is spectacularly important and spectacularly alien.

Why do I say alien?

It is largely made up of viruses. For the scientists in my readership, they can find it if they Google ERVWE1. ERVWE1 translates, in human terms, to HERV-WE1. In other words it is a human endogenous retrovirus of the HERV-W family. Without it there would be no offspring -- the end of humankind.

And -- I am afraid -- it is a viral insert. Indeed not just a viral insert but a retrovirus with a genomic structure very similar to HIV-1, the viral cause of AIDS.

But this is a viral structure that is 10,000 nucleotides long. To convict a human of murder you would need only 30 to 50 confirmative nucleotides in certain positions

within the human genome. Those who want to dismiss the role of viruses in human evolution might sit back and consider their options here.

This virus has been symbiotically incorporated into the human genome where it changes the fate of the placental interface. There is no alternative interpretation, scientifically, other than viral symbiosis. The viral genetic control region, known as an LTR, controls its own gene promotion. So it isn't just a viral gene that has been conserved by natural selection -- it's a major component of a viral genome. And when it is expressed, by the implanting human foetus, it causes the placental cells that interface with the mother to change their essential nature, and create a confluent layer, like a layer of plastic, studded by nuclei that have lost their cellular boundaries.

We now know of eight different viruses, all related to HIV-1, that play roles in human reproduction. Other symbiotically incorporated viruses play roles in human embryonic development and in our day to day physiology.

Viral symbiosis is thus an important force in the evolution of life, and in human evolution.

02 February 2011

[Exciting developments](#)

Chelsea Green have been receiving some fantastic accolades from other nature and ecology writers for the cover quotes in my forthcoming book, *The Mystery of Metamorphosis*. I've got a really good feeling about this book. It was absolutely thrilling to research - I hope some of that will shine through so readers can share it with me. A book that describes the creation of what I think may have been the first human-created new life form. And not a bacterium - something far, far more interesting!

Meanwhile, on the Snowmelt River front...

Swift Publishers have released *The Snowmelt River* as their first Kindle on amazon - and immediately it has started to sell. The great thing - and that's the wonder of the digital age we live in - is that now my readers from the US, or Australia, can download the book with a single click and simply start reading. I think we're only just waking to what this may do to writing and publishing. Think about all the delays in the past between an author writing a book and the book itself becoming available to the reader. I already have readers of *Snowmelt* asking me what happens to Kate. In fact I have already written two thirds of the next book and I know perfectly well what happens to Kate. Something strange and wonderful is the simple answer -

and now my readers may not need to wait very long to discover exactly what for themselves.

I even wonder about the potential for a more direct reader to author interaction in the future...

Celebrations!

19 January 2011

[Irish teenage fantasy competition](#)

I am currently working through the finalists in the all-Ireland teenage fantasy short story competition -- and it is a great pleasure to be involved. I'm really enjoying it. Children are, as they say, the future, and I have confidence in them.

People ask me how come I, as consultant physician and scientist, am interested in fantasy. It's a fair question.

Well, let me explain that, as I see it, high quality fantasy is an art form in itself, much as opera, or poetry are art forms.

If only those who doubt this were to read the highly creative short stories these Irish teenagers are expressing, they might change their minds.

An elderly friend has just died, which provokes me to write about a very different thought.

As a hospital doctor I was very frequently in the position of attempting to help elderly patients who were suffering from terminal illnesses. It was a challenge to know what best to do in terms of caring for people where there was no cure.

What these patients needed, above all else, was to make normal contact. To be understood and appreciated in a normal human way. To my mind, even on the busiest of days, I made a point of spending at least as much time with them as with any other patient. It wasn't any kind of obligation. Rather it was a privilege. I would sit on the side of their bed and shake hands and talk to them about what mattered to them. Above all else, they appreciated the physical contact -- the holding of hands, or an arm around their shoulders. In my day this was known as "the art of medicine".

I have many treasured memories, some very poignant, some more humorous, of my life in medicine. I witnessed, again and again, courage in the face of pain and extreme stress of the sort you would only otherwise witness on a battlefield. But no

medals were issued in this arena. Above all else, I came away with a great admiration and empathy for ordinary people.

And yes, to return to fantasy, I do write stories in which ordinary children display extraordinary courage and resourcefulness because I know, from my own personal experience, that ordinary people, whether children or adults, possess that courage in abundance.

08 January 2011

[Astral Weeks](#)

I'm listening to one of my favourite pop tracks, Van Morrison's Astral Weeks. I suppose I should confess that I sometime splay music, either openly or through my I-pod, as I'm writing.

My new science book, *The Mystery of Metamorphosis: A Scientific Detective Puzzle*, is nearing completion with the publishers, Chelsea Green. I've said it before and I can confirm it here - they're a terrific bunch of people. They take real pains to get it right, with a series of experts all contributing on editing, copy-editing, page design, cover design, marketing and promotion - all the sort of thing all publishers do, but they do it really painstakingly well. Coming soon to a brain near you. Ha ha - I've stolen the joke of my artist friend, Mark Salwowski, who has also helped with some of the chapter-head illustrations that are intended, always, to further explain the text! Here's to success!

I'm relaxing - some might say escaping - by returning to book two of my teenage/adult fantasy series. Some of my readers will know that I wrote a free-access booklet (also brilliantly illustrated by Mark) telling potential writers how to go about writing a fantasy short story. One of the points I highlighted was the need to examine body language. I believe this is vitally important, not only in writing fiction but also in life. I've said all I intend to in the booklet.

Today I put it into action, in writing the interaction, at a key point about halfway through the second book, where Irish teenager, Kate Shaunessy, is interacting with a dragon. The nature of the dragon, and the implicit interaction, is key to the narrative. Thoughts, emotions, veer powerfully in this relatively short chapter, but I say nothing of this, merely work with dialogue and body language. It's a subtle way to go about it, but intensely satisfying - I hope the eventual reader, maybe towards the end of this year, just feels it, senses it, rather than thinks it.

I'm off to watch a couple of recorded videos, one about the Who, in reflection on their difficulties and successes, and the other about the ever pleasing Jonny Cash.

Discovered a lovely fresh Beaujolais, which will greatly enhance the pleasure.

Cheers!

P.S. I may be unconsciously learning some delightful bad habits from another friend, the celebrity chef Keith Floyd, with whom I once did a hilarious video. Poor old Keith, who died last year. Deeply missed!

29 December 2010

[A perfect day.](#)

I wrote an entire book chapter for the second of the fantasy series, *The Tower of Bones*. Then got on my work clothes and repaired a badly damaged door -- the 3 ft of snow has wrecked a lot of things -- so my wife can now get her car out and get on with normality.

This evening watched an hour-long program of the Who biography. I never gave them enough credit. High quality rock and roll -- much better in live performance than my favourite Rolling Stones. Fantastic guitarist, who plays both plectrum style and finger style on an acoustic, and an equally accomplished bass guitarist -- I should explain I was an amateur guitarist but just not good enough, though I have kept the old Hofner. Followed by High Renaissance art -- an hour-long program on the art of Agnolo Bronzino. He's a guy you rarely hear about yet was the epitome of painting in his day. Beautiful, serene, pictures -- mostly portraits of the Medicis and group pictures. Trying to find the right words to describe what I am looking at -- like maybe an artist from four hundred years ago who could capture the poetry of what it means to be human.

I was reminded of a certain quality in the art of my friend, Endre Roder, whose quality I recognized the first time I saw his pictures here in Sheffield about two decades ago. I ran an art gallery in Bolton, Lancashire, for nine years. Endy Roder's paintings cost very little in those days. I bought four at the University Arts exhibition -- and I never regretted it. Endy's a friend whose art is now rapidly increasing in appreciation and price.

Back to Agnolo Bronzino, whose insight, and grasp of mystery, is so mind-blowing it is capable of giving us reason to believe in humanity at a time when we see so much unpleasantness associated with our species. I'm reminded of the words of G K Chesterton, in defence of fantasy -- that fantasy showed us not that dragons were real but that dragons might be defeated. You know that's what a great artist, or writer, or composer can do. They can lift us up out of the mundane and unpleasantness.

28 December 2010

Christmas

Had a very pleasant Christmas, with the family coming to the dinner cooked by my wife, ably assisted by me (Ha-Ha), in our seventeenth century farmhouse, with roof and walls of stone, mullioned windows, etc, in the village where England was first united in about the year 800. Snow on the ground but it refused to snow on the day.

Guts and gizzards!

Tonight I have enjoyed an inspiring reprise of the life of Beatrix Potter on BBC2 - a lady I admire both for her science, against ignorant male bigotry, and for her writings for children. Feelgood factor +++++

Yesterday I did some work on the www.frankpryan.com website to introduce a different inspiration, the gentlemanly behaviour of JRR Tolkien. In 1998, already engaged in the fantasy series for teenagers and adults (Snowmelt River) I travelled to London to bid for letters and such artefacts at the famous Sotheby auction house - a first for me. I had to make careful arrangements with my bank in Sheffield before travelling to London, so I could make bids in the teens or tens of thousands of pounds. What I was really after was a small piece of paper, about the size of a page of a paperback novel, on which were hand-written 22 words in Latin.

But what glorious words!

Here they are, for the cognoscenti among you:

Numero pondere et mensura Deus omnia condidit

Hoc symbolum suum honoris et benevolentiae

Gratia Dignissimo Doctissimoque huus Albi

Possessori posuit

In English it reads "Number, weight and measure, God created all these things. I have placed this, my motto, for the honour and best wishes for the most worthy and learned possessor of this book."

Now there's a worthy inscription on the frontispiece of a book to be given away to someone. Who was the author - well it was none other than Isaac Newton, who bequeathed us the concept of gravity, amongst other things. And the book in question was, almost certainly, a limited copy of his magnum opus, *Die Principia Mathematica*.

I failed to make a bid since the first bid went over my head. But I did come away from the auction with an inspiring letter. The author of the letter was Tolkien, who even went to the trouble of addressing the envelope with his address embossed on the letter itself by one of those old machines.

Tolkien wrote that a young correspondent should have felt free to offer as long, and critical, a critique of Lord of the Rings as he had felt inclined.

You can read it for yourself on the website. But what struck me was Tolkien's humility. This was inspiring in a different way to the Beatrix Potter biography.

I returned to a key chapter in the second book of my fantasy series inspired by both.

Back to the Iain M Banks book, which is inspiring in yet a different way. He discusses human behaviour, in particular our grossest behaviour, in war, genocide, conquest, imperialism, at a conceptual and philosophical depth you wouldn't expect in a science fiction novel - the book is called "Matter", so I think you might think it appropriate.

Another remarkable observation today. In the Daily Telegraph obituaries, two singular Englishmen, Patrick Pollen and Major John De Burgh, the former an artist in stained glass windows, and the latter a war hero, who excelled in training racehorses: both settled in Ireland and lived there throughout the troubles in the North, making seminal contributions not only to Irish art and horse training, but to their beloved disciplines in a more international fashion.

When you hear about behaviour of this social relevance and you see the actual people in pictures attached to the obituaries, you know you could spend a very pleasant evening with them, sinking a glass or two and smoking a forbidden cigar or two - or three.

It may not seem like much, but it's kind of reassuring that the world is not so bad as it is sometimes painted in the media, and that some of us, maybe most of us, are doing the right things.

Night Music.

Glass of Port.

Havana Cigar – a forbidden pleasure indeed.

Heaven.

Alas, the cigar was wishful thinking . . . I value my lungs.

22 December 2010

[A very busy day](#)

A very busy day, starting for me at 06.00 am. We have a very good title for the Metamorphosis book at Chelsea Green. A secret for the moment. But all proceeding to plan. Wonderful introduction by Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan -- I mean really insightful. Moving on to start a new paper aimed at helping virologists work on the way symbiotic viruses change human evolution -- I'm writing it jointly with Professor Luis Villarreal of UC Irvine. Finished the first third of the second draft of the second fantasy novel -- things moving so brilliantly with Snowmelt River, I really need to crack on with the second. Almost a hundred visitors to the dedicated website, www.frankpryan.com today. Lots of e-mails to reply to. Just wrote a chapter involving the confirmation of the New Kyra of the Shee.

All done by mid-afternoon.

You work hard, play hard. Now early evening and am savouring a very good glass of vino blanco. Replying to readers' e-mails in a relaxed frame of mind. Listening on my I-pod to Van Morrison's anthemal Astral Weeks as I do so - and as I write this blog. Tonight I will revisit Ian M Banks, Matter - a curious science fiction novel, very long, beautifully written of course, with slow-distilled universal themes.

Perfect nocturne music!

19 December 2010

[Improving children's writing skills](#)

I have written a short article on how sponsorship helped us to conduct a major national exercise in Ireland aimed at improving kids' writing skills. It is included in my articles for anybody who is interested. It would be relatively easy to set up a similar exercise, albeit on a smaller scale, in schools.

18 December 2010

[On writing . . . and dancing](#)

My new non-fiction title, *Metamorphosis*, is approaching completion with Chelsea Green, my US publisher. It's great to see the page edits. In fact they've made a superb job of the editing. I'm delighted that my eminent colleague, Lynn Margulis, is writing an introduction to the US edition. In the UK an Oxford-based publisher, Oneworld, has taken the rights. It's an exciting time to see a project that has taken me some ten years to complete now come to fruition -- though I have written six or seven other books in the interim.

I now have some time to return to my fantasy series, and am immersed in the second draft of Book Two of *The Snowmelt River Series*. Non-writers might not realize that revising the first draft takes much longer than actually writing the first draft. I don't want to reveal the name of Book Two right now -- I learnt the hard way never to reveal the name of a new book until it has been established with ISBN and so on. Now there's a useful tip for would-be writers.

People ask me how I can write in two very different categories, such as popular science and fantasy, but it really isn't a problem at all. In fact it's refreshing to have the choice. I tend to work very hard and very fast, so that after a month or two, in which I would write a minimum of a hundred or more pages, I'm ready for a rest and a change. If I didn't write in the two categories, I wouldn't write at all at this stage. I'd just watch sport and documentaries -- or clear off to the Canaries and walk on beaches and drink wine (some sacrifice!) and generally waste my time. So it actually makes a deal of sense to write in two categories.

I make no secret of the fact I do this, but I try to separate the two by using Frank Ryan for science and Frank P Ryan for fiction.

I had a conversation with Ian Banks about this, many years ago, and he gave me the idea of the middle initial.

Just finished watching *Strictly Come Dancing* with my wife and we were delighted they got the right winner this time -- Kata Tointon. She's brilliant!

07 December 2010

[Great review](#)

Just read Glenda A Bixler's wonderful review of my fantasy novel, *The Snowmelt River*, for AuthorsDen. She has come out and said it's the best fantasy she has ever

read -- "This book is a powerful, outstanding book, dare I say far superior than Harry Potter." Wow -- now I'm getting a little excited myself.

The full review by Glenda A Bixler is on my news pages.

It certainly made my day!

02 December 2010

Viruses in MS

Just finished revising a new scientific paper on the role of HERV-W in Multiple Sclerosis. It's satisfying to apply the evolutionary lessons of Virolution in a way that might, at the end of the day, actually help people.

Working through the copy-edited pages of Metamorphosis for Chelsea Green. It's a beautiful subject -- all today dealing with the insect metamorphosis section. I just love the chapter-head inserts, each of which involves a small gray-scale image relevant to the text. Little things really do make a difference. Something in the text made me look up my interview with the late great Joshua Lederberg, Nobel Laureate and former President of the Rockefeller University. They were very good to me there when I was researching the TB book and, later, when I returned for this interview as part of my research into the theme of viral symbiosis back in 1994.

Almost done with the revision of Metamorphosis -- just a few more days work! Book coming out in March 2011. Can't wait!

Meanwhile, Sheffield is caught up in a blizzard. Temperatures tonight will be as low as minus 11 in hilly places. But I can't complain. In parts of Scotland it's already minus 21. Grandkids love it.

Problems with running out of milk. Also toner for the printer. But wonderful news from Ireland to say that the teenagers being recruited for the John West Fantasy Short Story Competition have exceeded 5,000. Possibly a national record for a short story competition.

If I can't get any physical exercise, I can at least get some mental exercise. Off to do the tough sudoku from today's Daily Telegraph.

27 November 2010 #2

Excellent day getting even better.

Today I've had a small flutter of e-mails from readers of The Snowmelt River. It's great to hear that they are enjoying it -- and asking about the next in the series. Uplifting!

I guess I should explain what I mean by that. Half my books have been science books, whether medical science or biological science. A lot of people have written to me about them, especially two of them, *The Forgotten Plague*, when folks who had suffered from the disease told me their stories, and my latest science book, *Virovolution*, which saw an avalanche of correspondence with scientific colleagues. More than 700 letters and communications between the two.

Contact like this about science books is intellectual. Don't get me wrong, I am very passionate about science, both medical and biological, and I enjoy contributing and respect the twin disciplines very deeply. Contact with readers about fiction, and particularly teenage/ adult fiction, is less intellectual, and more intimately personal.

That's why it's so heartbreaking for authors to have their novels turned down. It happens to most of us at the beginning. A novel that you've poured heart and soul into for some years is a little like a beloved offspring. So when it's turned down, it's as if your own offspring was rejected, stillborn. It provokes a real, heartfelt pain. Thus when a novel is published and readers strongly identify with it, it's as if your literary child is loved and wanted. That's special -- it's why I use the word uplifting.

Milan Mandaric has bought out my football club, Sheffield Wednesday – end of a harrowing period of debt that has kept the club in the lower divisions of English football.

Raise a glass and a cheer to better times!

23 November, 2010

A fracas between a bus and my car

Three things have somewhat dominated my day. The first was an accident in which a bus ran into my car when parked opposite my local grocery store -- and then sped away without stopping. Fortunately for me there were witnesses who noted the number, time, etc, so that all of this morning was devoted to getting the bus company to own up to it -- which they did -- and getting them to come and look at my damaged wheel, burst tire, damaged rear wing, etc. I'm now without a car until a temporary replacement arrives tomorrow.

Another third of my day was devoted to preparing for more Irish radio interviews tomorrow, when I'll be talking about the background to writing *The Snowmelt River*.

The final third of my day, while bemoaning the financial crisis that is afflicting my native Ireland (though I have lived in the UK since I was 13), I have been attempting to help a smaller, but nevertheless significant crisis – the survival of my football team, Sheffield Wednesday.

I am attempting to help "the Owls" through what I know, writing and publishing, and letting them have some of the income from it for a while. To tell you the truth, I'd be devastated if they went under.

Stupid and emotional of me, no doubt, but there you are. Here's hoping they weather the storm.

Same day, just a lot later...

The *Snowmelt River* has just received its first review and a brilliant one. The reviewer was Shelley Marsden for the Irish World.

See

http://www.theirishworld.com/article.asp?SubSection_Id=10&Article_Id=16587

I'll put up some details on the reviews page tomorrow. It's so difficult to get newspaper reviews of fantasy because of a mistaken prejudice against the genre, which is actually at least as imaginative, if not more so, than contemporary fiction. I've taken the front page of both the New York Times Book Review and The Washington Post Book Review, but this is just as thrilling in its way. The reviewer took the trouble to visit the dedicated website www.frankpryan.com, which is exceptional in my experience, and she also acknowledged the important and much valued contribution of my artist friend, Mark Salwowski.

You've got to sit back and enjoy the good things as much as you brood on the bad. I'm savouring this little piece of good news with a gin and tonic and with The Rolling Stones album, *Exile on Main Street*, on my I-pod.

This is the same me who once lay on the rug with a bottle of champagne and spent something like four hours solid listening to Wagner. I suppose, like L. Frank Baum's marvellous character, the Princess Langwidere, in the third of the Oz films, we all keep a selection of heads in our subconscious wardrobe, so we can pick up the one we most feel like today.

Can you imagine it?

18 November, 2010

[Mark's pic of Qwenqwo Cuatzel](#)

Spent some time working again on the chapter-head illustrations of Metamorphosis, then replied to an Australian evolutionary biologist who is interested in the possibility of using human genomic viruses to try to date the spread of modern humans into Asia. Massimo Palmarini used sheep endogenous retroviruses to study the spread of pastoralization in ancient times, so why not something with humans.

Relaxing now, having received a fantastic picture of one of my fantasy characters, Qwenqwo Cuatzel, dwarf mage of the Fir Bolg. It's just so fabulous I had to get it into my fantasy website straight away. see www.frankpryan.com.

Mark Salwowski -- you're brilliant!

Visit www.frankpryan.com

17 November' 2010

[Why is fantasy important?](#)

I've been busy all day with media interviews in Ireland, where I was asked why, as an international level scientist, I think fantasy is important. It is true, I have been replying to scientists in Australia, the UK, and the US today alone. But I still think that fantasy is important, and the reason why is that fantasy is important to children.

GK Chesterton said that fantasy was important not because it showed children that dragons existed but because it showed that dragons could be defeated.

Dragons in Chesterton's explanation weren't merely creatures of mythology but metaphors for great and terrible evil. The tragic fact is that a great many children encounter dragons of this sort daily.

And that is why fantasy is important.

13 November, 2010

[Keith Richard's biography](#)

I should point out that the times indicated are not accurate. What appears to be sometime in the early hours of the morning, US time, is quite a different time here in the UK.

Here's a quote from Keith Richards' book...

"The most bizarre part of the whole story is that having done what we intended to do in our narrow, purist teenage brains at the time, which was to turn people on to the blues, what actually happened was we turned American people back to their own music."

Is that the truth or not – probably depends on your perspective. But if only partly true, it was quite an achievement.

What am I doing today?

I'm reading Keith Richard's autobiography, *Life*. Enjoying it a lot. I played lead guitar in an amateur R & B group in the 60s so he lived the life I aspired to when I was a teenager. That makes the book especially fascinating to me. But also the contacts and interactions with all of the big names in early blues and R & B also make it particularly interesting. He was a bad boy, in his own admission, and shouldn't be able to remember it so vividly -- but he does and we're all richer for it.

What am I working on?

Working with a great bunch of editors at Chelsea Green on my forthcoming book, *Metamorphosis: The Beautiful Mystery*. I have been researching this, as with The Snowmelt River fantasy series, for ten years, off and on, writing many other books in the meantime, but always haunted by the theme of metamorphosis, which is central to both the non-fiction and the fantasy.

Also working with my friend, the artist Mark Salwowski, who lives in Australia. He's been working on a poster for The Snowmelt River and we've been liaising on this today. Mark is great fun to work with. Worth visiting his website www.salwowski.com.

Mark's poster is already brilliant, bringing in the main characters and the drama of the narrative, but needs a bit of tinkering. I wish I could show it to you here and now but there appears to be no room for adding a picture to a blog. Instead I shall insert it onto the home page of the Snowmelt website www.frankpryan.com, so you can take a peep and see what you think of it.

P.S. I see that Mark has inserted a joke into the poster-in-progress. My wife likes it and wants to keep it in the final poster.