

Tell us about yourself and how many books you have written.

I've written about ten – in my head anyway! In reality, the number of actual published books available to read is currently just the one, my sci-fi and horror anthology "Memos of Loss and Devotion". A science fiction novel, "The Fomalhaut Plague" will follow early next year (2014), with my second novel "glorious", a futuristic gothic horror story, to be released after that.

I've been writing since I was a child. Unfortunately, none of these early 'novels' have survived. I wrote short stories throughout my teens, before writing the first draft of "The Fomalhaut Plague" in the summer after I graduated from University. In 1999 my motion picture screenplay "glorious" was long short-listed in the Orange / Pathé screen writing competition.

Since the 1990's I've worked in IT. I'm a Chartered Information Technology Professional, a Chartered Member of the British Computer Society and an Incorporated Engineer. I currently work as a Project Manager on 'Big Data' insight initiatives.

As you might have guessed I'm a British writer. I live in Hertfordshire with my wife and daughter, although I was raised in the heart of Robin Hood country (Nottinghamshire), before moving to Sheffield to read Computer Science at university. I then lived in London for about a decade.

I have an interest in popular physics, molecular biology, astro physics, technology and computing, although I know nothing more about any of them than being able to type the correct search terms into Google.

All I have ever wanted to do is entertain and thrill with my writing.

What is the name of your latest book and what inspired it?

My latest book is the sci-fi and horror anthology "Memos of Loss and Devotion". It's a collection of the best of my short stories written between 1992 and the summer of 2013, although they have all been heavily updated and improved.

As I worked on the third, and hopefully last, major revision of my novel "The Fomalhaut Plague", I became impatient to release material, and I just had these stories sitting on my laptop hard drive doing nothing. So I picked out the best of them, gave them a major 'spit and polish' and packaged them up into this book.

Actually, I picked the ones that best fitted the overall themes of the collection, namely paranoia, loss, solitude and hopelessly misplaced devotion to lost causes. But don't worry, it's not all depressing doom and gloom, there are laughs in there too!

Do you have any unusual writing habits?

I'm incredibly slow and meticulous. I go back over my writing again and again, agonising over each word. I also constantly think of new things to add, to the point where I can never consider something finished.

I really envy writers who can bash out loads of text really quickly without the need to revise and edit. Writing is a long, slow, almost painful process for me. I'm also a night owl and do my best writing late at night when everyone else is in bed and the house is quiet.

I also tend to keep spread sheets of proposed and actual chapter lengths and use these to manage pace, although that doesn't mean that my writing is formulized and robotic. Far from it, it just means that I'm acutely aware that I have to build a sense of momentum and urgency.

One last thing, I tend to work on multiple projects at once, flitting between them and writing whatever feels the most urgent at the time. Literally whatever I have to get out of my head the most urgently.

What authors, or books have influenced you?

There are far too many to mention! I suppose the ones that spring to mind are Stephen Baxter, Philip K Dick, Brett Easton Ellis, J. G. Ballard, Kim Stanley Robinson and of course Arthur C. Clarke.

There was a time when I read nothing but Stephen Baxter! I'm heavily influenced by his ultra-realistic mastery of physics and how everyone feels like real science, even the fiction.

I suppose that all of the paranoia and character uncertainty in my writing is the influence of PKD. I would also love to be proved as prophetic as he was.

American Psycho is probably my favourite book of all time, and yet you can never be sure if the events in it have actually happened. You can certainly see Ellis' influence of painstakingly setting up a reality then systematically dismantling it in my own work.

Ballard is more of an influence for his quotes and interviews than his actual books, although I love 'Crash' because in a strange way it foresaw the sexualisation of the internet, and the fetish of technology, at a time before the internet could have possibly been imagined. He predicted human / technology sexual entanglement, he just couldn't predict the form of that technology, and automobiles were a pretty safe bet. I certainly extrapolate the path of this union in my writing.

Kim Stanley Robinson, especially in his Mars series, taught me the discipline of almost obsessive world building. I cannot tell you how much I hope those books come true. I channel some of that spirit in all of my books.

Clarke taught me that logic can be fun in his 'Robot' series. In "2001" and its sequels, he also showed that science fiction can be simultaneously awe inspiring and also grounded in inconvenient reality at the same time.

I'm sure that I've not mention a plethora of influences. May be I should keep a list...

What are you working on now?

You mean apart from the endless promotion of my book "Memos of Loss and Devotion"?

I'm working on my first science fiction novel "The Fomalhaut Plague". This is the third, and last, major revision of it. It's the story of mankind's genocide of an alien race that threatened to destroy us, and the nature of how we destroyed them, and the repercussions of that act. I promise that it's nothing like you imagine from the title.

It's the first book of a series of at least three, but more than that it's also the setting for all of my other novels for some time to come. I'm going to further explore the universe it sets up. I'm working on a whole series of parallel novels set in the past and future of this universe.

I wrote the first draft in the summer of 1996, after I graduated from University, in just six short weeks while I looked for a job. I tried to use it to find an agent or a publisher before I gave up and moved onto screenplay writing instead. I got lots of good feedback but no takers. I reworked the book into an action adventure script but failed to sell it. In the mid to late 2000's I had another crack at it, but this amounted to little more than changing the tense. I couldn't let it go. I kept thinking that I had a complete ebook in waiting, just sitting dormant on my hard disk, and all I had to do was read it through and check for errors. Or so I thought.

I finally revisited it in October 2012. I thought it just needed a quick polish, but instead I found structural problems, a sci-fi novel with dated or none existent technology, unclear themes and awful characters names. So I started correcting it in my spare time. I massively revised the plot, moving chunks of it around and added new technology and layers. I've now been working on it for over a year!

It's currently all over the place, lying in pieces like a dismantled engine. Some parts are revised and up to date while others date back to the original 1996 draft and I still have tonnes of new scenes to write or old ones to revise. Anyway, I'll get it released just as soon as I can.

What is your best method or website when it comes to promoting your books?

Apart from awesomegang.com?

You have to use lots and lots of different sites, and methods, including social networking. I don't think that I'm any great expert as I'm still striving to connect with my audience. The greatest single website and weapon in your armour is still Amazon and the Kindle Direct Publishing free days, even though the influence and impact of free days diminished greatly when Amazon changed how they counted toward the rankings.

Goodreads is also an important one.

Do you have any advice for new authors?

Don't give up! Keep writing and also keep reading. You have to read in order to have the basic tools to write. Also, be disciplined and single minded. Don't let anyone diminish your self belief or stand in your way. Remember, your friends and family don't know you as a writer, and getting them to believe in you is the first suspension of disbelief you have to overcome.

But mainly I think it's a case of plot, plot, plot, followed by write, write, write followed by revise, revise, revise. Then it's a case of work like a dog to promote your book.

What is the best advice you have ever heard?

Jeremy Brock, writer of the Judy Dench film "Her Majesty Mrs Brown", once told me that there's no substitute for doing your research and that it can't be short cut. I'd agree with that.

I also once heard that if you think that you have enough good ideas for three or four great novels, then what you probably have is actually enough ideas for one good one. That has stayed with me.

What are you reading now?

Somehow I always manage to be reading multiple things at once. Right now I'm reading *The Singularity is Near* by Ray Kurzweil, *The Last Man on Earth Club* by Paul R Hardy and *2312* by Kim Stanley Robinson. There's also a dusty copy of *Flood* by Stephen Baxter next to my bed with a bookmark in it.

The Last Man on Earth Club by Paul R Hardy is a great read and is well worth £2.49 of anyone's money.

What's next for you as a writer?

The first task is to finish "The Fomalhaut Plague". Then the next four or five books are all plotted out and just waiting to be written. In fact, some of them are already partially written.

After "The Fomalhaut Plague" is my highly symbolic, futuristic, gothic horror story "glorious". This will be a really big book for me and I have high hopes for it. The script it is based on is my best work to date and I'm hoping that the novelization will be even better.

Then there's a novel set slightly further in the future in the same universe as "Fomalhaut" called "Ratslips". I already have quite a lot of this as it was the first novel I attempted in the late 80's / early 90's. I was supposed to be writing it with a friend. I wrote my chapters and but he never got around to delivering his. I'm adding a couple of new elements to update it and incorporate it into the "Fomalhaut" universe.

Then I want to work on a "Fomalhaut" prequel called "World War A" about the near fatal war with the aliens. It will be set only slightly into our future on Earth and the cataclysmic war with the "Fomalhaut" aliens will be almost incidental to the plot, after all, we already know who wins! It will also employ a slightly unusual narrative device.

Then it's "The Fomalhaut Plague" sequel proper. Although, I might write it sooner subject to demand, as "The Fomalhaut Plague" ends on something of a cliff-hanger, although the main questions of the novel are resolved. This book will raise the series to a whole new level.

After that I might write a First World War naval drama that I've been dying to write for years. I can't say too much about it as I don't want anyone to beat me to this real life story!

You can find excerpts of most of the above on my website. As you can see I'm going to be busy for a long time to come!

What is your favourite book of all time?

Normally I tell people it is American Psycho by Brett Easton Ellis, which I do love, but I am also very, very fond of Titan by Stephen Baxter and World War Z by Max Brooks.

My guilty pleasures are Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte, The Outsider by Albert Camus and 1984 by George Orwell.

When did you begin indie publishing?

At the start of October 2013, with the release of my sci-fi/horror anthology "Memes of Loss and Devotion".

Why did you make the choice to go indie?

Mainly for control, both of my image and my output, and to be honest for the potentially better royalty rate. I had also become disillusioned with a traditional publishing route that seemed to shun newcomers unless you had an advocate on the inside. It seemed a case of who and not what you know.

What do you enjoy most about being an indie author?

Being the one in control and writing what I want to - have to - write, without someone else dictating what is commercially viable. After all, how do you know whether a market exists without offering the product?

What do you think is the hardest part of being an indie author?

Having to do it all yourself. It's not enough that you produce 70,000 compelling words; you then have to become an expert in cover design and typesetting. Then you have to become an expert marketer. Then you have to do all of the manual labour and heavy lifting yourself. Also, gaining traction and maintaining momentum is also hard when it's all just you. You can't rest and you're often stretched in many different directions at once. Still, there's plenty of advice out there. The indie author community is very generous when it comes to sharing its experiencing and giving away valuable advice.

If you had it to do over again, would you choose to go indie? Why/why not?

Yes, absolutely! The sense of achievement is all greater when you've done it all for yourself. You can look at every aspect of production and take pride that "you made this". You also get to learn from your mistakes, and know that next time it will be even better. Of course, there's the small matter of writing 40,000+ words before you get to try again. I've had some experience of traditional routes and the journey can end very abruptly and without warning. In the indie world, you set the acceptance criteria and the pace and the quality gates. Then of course, you take all of the plaudits for the success. Also, in the indie world, your work is out there forever. It won't go out of print or be pulped. You can play a much longer game. That's why I chose the indie route, and that's why I'd do it again.

How is Writing In Your Genre Different from Others?

In science fiction it's not enough to have compelling story inhabited by great characters, you also have to extrapolate a future technology, and then foresee all of the implications that your future

technology will have on society and individuals. Then you have to repeat that for all of the technology in the world that you're created. In effect, you have to invent an entire future society, its culture and all of the changes in behaviour that these technologies will necessitate. Ultimately, you need to invent a plausible and compelling technology that utterly changes human behaviour and capability, while still proving that despite this technology, human desires and drives remain unchanged. That's a much greater burden than most of genres.

Random Fact Sentences:

When I was growing up ... I wanted to be an astronaut, when I realised that would never happen I wanted to write about it instead.

I once ... predicted 3D printing a gun, but then it came true before the book was released and I had to remove it.

I used to work as ... a door-to-door door salesman, "Hello Madam, can I interest you in a...oh, I see you've already got one."

Everyday I ... wish I had more time to write.

I like to ... meet people who have enjoyed my writing.

One day ... I'll get to stop promoting / marketing and get back to writing again!

I am thankful for ... every single person who reads my work.

I write best ... late at night when it's quiet and everyone else in the land is dreaming.

I am working on ... a sci-fi novel called the "The Fomalhaut Plague" about the consequences of exterminating an entire alien race; it's a very small character driven piece painted on a huge interstellar canvas.

I have always wanted to... write something that resonates with millions of people. I don't want much do I?

What inspires you to write?

Perhaps a more appropriate question would be 'what *compels* you to write?' For me, I feel this strong compulsion to entertain and thrill with my writing. I also have this theory that most writers are just compulsive liars, permanently embellishing the details of their lives. Writing gives them the opportunity to pick apart the weave of the different threads of their lives – situations, conversations, secrets – then legitimately re-weave those strands into the fabric of their novels. Finally, I guess that like most entertainers, it's a form of showing off and an opportunity to display assumed mental prowess.

Tell us about your writing process

I keep extensive notes as I work on a book. I use OneNote because it allows me to dump everything I find – websites, text, pictures, drawings, tables, research, etc. – into subpages. I create a new notebook for a novel then a tab for each aspect such as plot, treatment, background, characters and research etc. As things occur to me I can make notes on the nearest device such as a PC, laptop, tablet or even phone, and it's all backed up and synchronised via MS Skydrive.

As far as the plot goes, I can begin to write it out and then go back and add to it by simply typing more detail in. At some point I begin to chunk this into chapters. I then estimate the chapter

lengths and record this in a spread sheet so I can make decisions about pace, minimum length and where the act breaks etc. are. I update the spread sheet with actual scene/chapter lengths as I write. This sounds very mechanical and formulaic but there are rules to writing, and you have to master the archetype before you can break those rules.

I pretty much have the plot when I begin to write but new elements can occur to me as I go and I can accommodate this in the OneNote notes and spread sheet before I start to pull the novel apart and potentially get lost.

Do you listen to or talk to your characters?

My characters are either people I know, or are amalgamations of people I know, or are based on famous people, so I already know how they talk or act in certain situations. Often I choose them because they share the beliefs of the character or personify the traits of that character. They may also have been chosen because in real life they reacted in a certain way in a given situation or used a certain phrase. Sometimes, the opposite happens, I include actual events, decontextualized and reinterpreted, as plot points, complete with the original protagonists. In this respect I try to ensure that they are authentic and genuine because they are literally real people.

What do you think about the future of book publishing?

I think that if indie publishing is to thrive and prosper then something has to be done about the variable quality of output. The unacceptably poor quality of some releases is choking the output of the more professional authors, like weeds choking a fragile blossom. I'm getting tired of opening books, some with very professional and enticing covers, only to find that the writing is amateurish, unengaging, and most unforgivable, full of spelling and grammatical mistakes. All indie publishers are being tarnished with the same brush, and it is very hard for readers to trust indie authors and sift the wheat from the chaff.

There's a saying that everyone has a novel in them, unfortunately, for most 'authors' that is exactly where it should have stayed! There needs to be some reliable method of ensuring quality control and I don't think that leaving it to the market, and reader reviews, is reliable enough. My hope is that a few really trusted review websites will rise to prominence and the consumer will have a universally trusted source of quality measurement. Not that quality is always required to generate sales! But that's a very different story, and I won't name names...

Some really big hitters have chosen the indie route, mainly for the control and higher rewards. The hard part is for competent writers to break through all of that noise and find their audience. If good authors don't find readers in sufficient numbers, then they will have no option but to revert back to the traditional publishing route, and that will significantly reduce the number of good writers who can publish their work, and we may find that some very fine authors just don't have the drive and self-promotional tools to push their valuable work through the publisher's filter. If that happens, then we're all going to lose out.