

ANDROMEDA'S OFFSPRING



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Issue 1: Aug 2011

Welcome to issue 1 of *Andromeda's Offspring*, a fanzine which I hope will last the distance, open up new female voices in SF, raise the awareness of female SF writers and share ideas. After all, SF is the literature of ideas.

This fanzine got its name from Andromeda Bookshop, a little independent SF Bookshop in Birmingham that some of you may have heard of. You may also have heard of Rog Peyton, purveyor of books and a prominent and active SF Fan. This first issue is dedicated to Rog.

First off, let me say that I am not a bra burning Looney. Let's get that clear. However, I am passionate about the *perceived* absence of women SF writers.

I say *perceived* and not actual, because in the last list produced by Ian Sayles at Eastercon 2011, there were 151 women writers who have had an SF book published in the last rolling century.

That's pretty impressive by any standards, but I challenge you to name 20 of them without using Google. How many are on your bookshelves? How many have you read? Conversely, how many Urban Fantasy and traditional fantasy women writers can you name? Probably more than the women in SF you can name.

My point is this: Contrary to popular opinion, women do write SF. They are out there working hard. So why don't we know more about them? Is it that publishers devote less marketing budget to their work? Is it that publishers don't print them? Are they comfortable writing in SF? What are the barriers preventing women becoming as successful as, say, Iain M Banks and Alistair Reynolds? I want your thoughts.

As Max Bygraves used to say, "I wanna tell you a story".

At Alt.Fiction in June I chatted to a number of women, one of whom mentioned the "And Many More" syndrome. This would be an instance where a number of writers attend a convention and the male writers appear as headliners, whilst female writers appear on the posters as "and many more".

I'm *not* citing Alt.Fiction here, as there were a number of women on panels and Sarah Pinborough was heavily involved. But there are larger cons where this does happen. My question is 'why'? Since the tragic death recently of three prominent women in SF, this has become the topic de jour. So read this fanzine and join my Crusade.

I am releasing *Andromeda's Offspring*, with contributions by recognised names aimed at raising the profile of women in SF. These women SF writers are *out there*. Hell; Lauren Beukes won the Clarke Award this year. My personal crusade is not to deny the presence of women in SF. It is to prove it. What do you think?

Raven Dane wrote to me recently and proclaimed this

Fanzine as “A great idea! I grew up devouring every SF novel I could, moving to adult books from about 13 onwards. I loved the work of Ursula LeGuin, Tanith Lee and Anne McCaffrey. I didn’t separate them in my mind at the time for being female writers...they were just great writers alongside my other heroes such as Ray Bradbury and John Wyndham. But there is a strange preconception out there that women do not write SF. *Anything* to celebrate what they do is warmly welcome.”

And this is what *Andromeda’s Offspring* is all about; a celebration and recognition of women in SF.

Sean Chatterton also commented, “I think that it is well known that SF appears to be dominated by white middle class men. This is *not* because of sexism/racism by publishers, but by dint of that is who is mostly writing SF. Who are the main readers of SF? Are the market forces of the readership dictating what is published? Or just what gets past the slush pile? There are plenty of authors who have additional pen names when they change genre, and writers that even change sex when occasions suit. However, I would like to say, good writing stands by itself, and it doesn’t make any difference if it is by females, goats or even scary trees!” Valid point Sean; (the tree is reference I think to my website here)

Amanda Norman also wrote the following, “Just to reinforce your point, Raven Dane has reminded me of how much I loved Ursula LeGuin when I was a child, sadly forgot about her.....”

Well, forget no more. It’s time to open up the annals of female SF writing and share it will you all. On top of that, prepare to enjoy new stories by female SF writers. Over the next few issues you will read a serialisation of SF story ‘*Happy Birthday Harley Jones*’ a debut by female writer Sam Fennell. There will be news, books reviews & author profiles as well as fiction and articles by Jan Edwards and Rebecca Besser in future issues, so come on in and join the crusade! Enter *Andromeda’s Offspring*, if you dare . . .

RANT OF THE MONTH:

B-Movie Beauties (part 1 OF 2)

In my mission to understand the portrayal of women in the 1950s, I recently watched a handful of 50s B-Movies. Before I crack on, let me say two things;

1. All comments in this rant should be taken with a pinch of salt because;
2. All subject material is a reflection of its time.

The B plot of these early SF movies often tended to be rather polite romances between a scientific specialist/local doctor with the newly arrived beauty/Mad Professor’s assistant.

“Give women the vote and what do you get? Lady Scientists”

I started my B-Movie marathon with *Tarantula* (1955) featuring Mara Corday as Stephanie (Steve) and in respect of the romantic sub plot it was no exception. In *Tarantula* it’s a country doctor who is the main heroic protagonist who gets up to arachnid and romantic shenanigans. Nearly 20 minutes into the film the obligatory attractive female enters (Steve)

once the A plot gets out of the way. Steve is working in Graduate biology which promotes the response from our local doctor of "Give women the vote and what do you get? Lady Scientists". Said partly in jest, it's still a sign of the times that the vote is a relatively new concept and fresh conversation topic. It's also still a reminder of women's general position at the time. In order to get the job with the local 'Mad Professor' played wonderfully by Leo Carroll, 'Steve' wrote a 'paper to prove her mettle, yet gets a job as a rather glamorous lab assistant and cook. So what did the Professor do before? Who cooked before the delightful Steve came along?

"Science is science, but a girl must get her hair done".

As the film progresses we get the observation that Clayton "didn't expect to see a Biologist that looked like you. That was intended as a compliment of course". And what a compliment! I think . . . The film is essentially a product of its time, its wit at the expense of the female characters coming across as back handed charming compliments that the audience would not have even blinked at. My favourite part of course is when 'Steve' (perhaps she is given a male nickname in recognition of her scientific role?) takes a very necessary trip into the local town. For scientific supplies? Food? Er, no, for a hair do, after all "Science is science, but a girl must get her hair done". This is of course swiftly followed by a romantic interlude with the hero/local doctor.

Continual off the cuff remarks such as "Well, you know women" are interspersed through the dialogue and are again a true picture of the era in which *Tarantula* was filmed. But for all that, and its gauche poster (see below) showing a scene which doesn't actually *happen* in the film, it's still a rather good example of 1950s SF. And it's great fun. So, why the image below? Marketing of course. Though the script may be brave enough to have a female scientist, even with sly remarks at her expense, it isn't quite brave enough to have a poster without a prone, desperate female waiting for her male saviour. And damn, she looks sexy.





My next adventure in B-Movie land is the much loved *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). Co-starring Julie Adams as the head scientist's female assistant on an Amazonian expedition, said beauty is kidnapped almost aping *King Kong* (sorry!!) in which the creature appears to fall in love with the beauty, a B-Movie *Beauty and the Beast* if you will. She looks rather glamorous considering she's in the Amazon and is dragged through water.

But I'll say one thing. At least the woman of the 1950s had curves and wasn't too skinny. As the crew of the boat all stand on watch after a few of the Team have been murdered, the men stand by poised with rifles whilst our lovely heroine leans demurely posing against the boat weaponless. A scene that takes less than 7 minutes of a 1hr 18 min film also makes it into the publicity (see above – er, the poster not the monster).

Again, this film portrays the female character as rather vapid and really quite dim and pointless. And like *Tarantula* and pretty much every 1950s SF B-Movie, she doesn't have much of a constructed role. But even so, they should be viewed with a pinch of salt, as products of their own time.

FAN FICTION: HAPPY BIRTHDAY HARLEY JONES (part 1 OF 2)

BY SAM FENNELLS © Sam Fennell 2011

It was at my 80th birthday party that I realised that I was from another planet. Surrounded by the friends that I had made since my arrival at Sunrise Senior Living three years ago, I had a moment of realisation, clarity, before I drew a pathetic breath into my tarred lungs and blew out the candle on a frosted sponge cake.

As the flame disappeared, my sense of belonging, being grounded, being a part of this world left me. I did not feel afraid, but puzzled, and strangely comforted at the same time. Finally, everything made sense.

After cake and tea on the patio with my fellow comrades in care, I shuffled hurriedly through the corridors to my apartment, my faithful walking stick making its familiar tap-tap-tap on the polished floor as we went. I somehow needed to make my realisation tangible, real.

My apartment is small, just how I like it, I need little space. It reminds me of a bedsit I once had when I was in my early twenties; the room is split into a living room and bedroom space, I have a small counter with a hot plate, coffee machine and a small fridge. The en-suite bathroom compared to my old bedsit is a luxury.

I rested my stick against the wall by the door, switched on the coffee machine and hobbled over to my desk. My hip, I think, is

crumbling. I'm not inclined to face an operation for repairing it, my running days are behind me, new hip or not.

From the drawer underneath I pulled out a notebook, and wrote down 'Who am I?' in big letters across the middle, and underlined it. Twice.

Now what? I looked at the page expectantly.

Coffee. I poured myself a cup, and took a deep gulp.

I had never really felt grounded, like I belonged. 60 years ago I had been young man of mixed race trying to make his way as a lawyer in the big city. There had been schemes back then, schemes to help 'minorities' such as me, but I had refused all of them. I'd always angrily posited that whether or not someone was a minority rather depended on what room they were sat in at the time and who else happened to be in it. I should have swallowed my pride, accepted that helping hand that had been fuelled out of the guilt of others. Perhaps I would have made it as a lawyer, achieved something in life, made more money, lived in a nicer suburb. I smiled ruefully. I could go back in time and tell myself that, I would have been too stubborn to listen to the advice. Maybe my regrets today arose because I had lost that pride, spending much of my time discussing my ailments with young nurses and cutting coupons from magazines to save pennies here and there. Underlying it all though, was one thought; maybe I could have prevented my son from dying.



The irony did not escape me that at 80 I suddenly felt like I belonged somewhere completely different.

But did I? Really? I'd had a realisation, an instant. Even if someone came into the room that very moment and had said that I was from another world, I would have laughed in their face. My mind had received the information, but my mind had yet to digest it and comprehend its reality.

I looked at the paper.

"You're a silly old fool, Harley Jones", I said out loud to myself.

In a second I felt as though someone was standing behind me. I looked round, expecting to see one of the nurses; No-one. A breeze perhaps, I thought, but I turned back to the window and it was closed.

Then an abrupt sharp jolt through my body, like an electric shock. Suddenly I was doubled over, my head racked with pain. The coffee cup crashed to the floor, my head felt as if my mind had opened, that there was space in my mind that had never been there before. My skull was being expanded from the inside out, stretched, wrenched and pulled apart by some invisible hauling force. I dropped to the floor; my head in my hands, vaguely aware that my hip must be hurting, that there must be pain, but all I could feel was the stretching, the widening, the throbbing. I began to push into the sides of my head to stop the sensation of a broadening hole in my mind. Stop! Was I yelling out loud? Stop, stop, STOP!

And then, just as I thought I was going to die on my apartment floor, came a feeling of complete and pure bliss.

To this day, I have no other way to describe that feeling. I was filled with a calmness and serenity, as if someone had opened the windows of a chaotic dirty room and the air and sunshine had transformed it, made it perfect, cleaning everything and putting it all back to where it should be.

I had never known my mind to feel so uncluttered, so clear, so unsoiled.

Then came the pictures, a vibrant stream of images of fruits and trees and animals, of people, tall and slender dancing and painting, I heard music, light and joyful music. People were in fields laughing and singing and embracing. Landscapes were green and luscious, small dwellings lay under sulphur yellow earth.

I must have passed out, I think. I woke up on the floor; the coffee was still in a warm puddle next to me. I managed to sit up, but try as I might, I could not lift myself up. I cried out in frustration. I grabbed the handle to the desk drawer and attempted to pull myself up. The handle broke off in my hand. I sat there, looking at the pathetic handle, aware that my head throbbed, that my moment of bliss had been sullied by its cost – the embarrassment and the annoyance to come. If I still smoked, I would have reached into my shirt pocket, placed a smooth Marlboro in my mouth and lit it, blowing smoke rings into the air until I could have come up with a solution. Reluctantly, I reached into my shirt pocket, pressed the red panic button that hung on a cord around my neck, and waited.

My favourite nurse, Rosa, arrived quickly with a junior male nurse that I didn't know. After lots of cooing, fussing and various checks that I was safe to move, they lifted me and took me over to my bed, where I lay down and was told to wait for the doctor. Rosa's beautiful wide smile appeared only after I made a joke about whisky in my coffee.

Doctor Andrews arrived after a few minutes in a blur of white coat and dark hair, and immediately looked in my eyes and pressed and moved parts of my body. He looked at me with a furrowed brow of patronising concern.

"How are you feeling Harley?"

"I'm fine Doc, must have just tripped on something."

"No new aches or pains anywhere?"

"Not a thing."

"Hmmm". He nodded. "Well there are no broken bones, everything seems just fine, but it must have been a bit of a shock, falling like that, we might see some bruising. I'd like to see you tomorrow; will you come and see me in the morning?"

'No problem Doc', I replied.

My hearing is as good as when I was 20. Oh, I went to concerts, 'gigs' we called them back then, open-air festivals, listened to thrash and dive music too loudly on various personal stereo devices that got smaller and smaller as I got older and older, but somehow my hearing never suffered. At Sunrise, I almost wish it had deteriorated, because then I wouldn't hear the patronising conversations in low voices that happen between nurses and care staff and doctors. I would have remained happily oblivious.

"Observe him tonight", the doctor had said quietly to Rosa. "Let's get some tests done in the morning, but check on him regularly tonight." Rosa nodded in agreement.

I looked up at the ceiling and closed my eyes, thinking of the bliss, my escape route from this mundane existence that revolved around mealtimes and trying to fill the spaces between.

I was woken by Rosa later on, at about 8pm, she had brought me some dinner on a tray from downstairs. I ate it dutifully, and went back to sleep, dreaming of another world called home.

Where am I from?

I stared at the letters I had written down the day before on my notepad as I sat at my desk, sipping a morning blend of coffee, Doctor's visit completed and hip no longer aching thanks to new painkillers.

I began to doodle, subconsciously at first. Then my doodles became pictures. Then I began to draw; the dwellings in the earth, the mountain ranges, the slender people,

cities with crystal spires and water fountains at their heart. As I turned the pages of my notebook, I became more absorbed. I was following a downward spiral, at the bottom of which had to lie the answer, the truth, the bliss. My sketches became more frantic. I scribbled quickly – arrows and lines pointing to shapes with notes; ‘crystal spires’, ‘underground houses’, ‘sky is very blue’.

During dinner I fidgeted, gulping my chicken and gravy quickly, refusing any dessert and as soon as I could I tap-tap-tapped off to my room where I wrote all night, only being disturbed by the night nurse who came every evening at 9pm with a paper ramekin of pills.

At moments, I would cry out into the dark ‘Aha! Yes, yes! Of course’, as my mind extrapolated more connections and corrections, working harder and harder to bring every image together to give me an answer. I was exhilarated, excited, energised.

At my request, Rosa bought me another notebook, and a couple of days later, another.

“Why are you writing so much Harley?!” she asked one morning, her face beaming, “I swear I’ve seen you do nothin’ for the last five years but watch Westerns on TV, and then all of a sudden you hit 80 and wham!”, she punctuated with a clap. She bent down to me in my chair and placed a hand on my shoulder, “You’re not having a mid-life crisis now are you?” she whispered with a grin.

“Yeah”, I chuckled, “I’m writing a book, I’ve seen all those films now, they don’t make ‘em any more... so I’m writing a book, keep me occupied for the next 80 years!”

“And what’s this book about?” she said, moving away to tidy around my apartment, checking all was in order, checking I hadn’t wet my bed.

“Well,” I turned away from her in embarrassment as she checked the sheet was dry with her hand, “I dunno, but it’s gonna be in space, I mean, a different world, just somewhere different.”

“Well that sounds really interesting Harl”,

coming back over and leaning over my shoulder, “But in the meantime, take your pills, all of ‘em!”.

Without protest I swallowed the white and the yellow and the red. I had no real idea what any of them did anymore.

“And Harl, I’m just going to place some of these night-time shorts over here for you, you know, it saves any bother if it’s difficult to get up in the night.”

I replied with an embarrassed, ‘thank you’ and turned back to my notepad.

I continued to scribble. There was so much to put down, but after few days from my realisation, there were more blank moments, more instances of staring at the white paper, right hand sore and aching, not sure whether what was in my mind was human or alien or invention. I had at times, become so absorbed in my frantic scribbling, I had forgotten to have lunch and cups of coffee had been left to go cold.

There was a mounting dissatisfaction in me and I was getting crabby, that was for sure. I had had a marvellous moment, a realisation that I was part of something, I belonged somewhere, and the more I thought about it, the more events in my life I remembered where I had distinctly felt that I didn’t belong, that I was somehow at odds with the world. But I had expected something to happen, something after my realisation, some kind of intervention. I didn’t belong *here* anymore.

It was six days after my realisation that Rosa gravely asked me if I was alright.

“I’m fine”, I muttered, “but I’d be happier if I was where I belong.”

“You belong right here, Harl, this is your home. We’re worried about you”.

“This is not my home”, I snarled, “this isn’t even the right damned planet!”, and I turned to stare out of the window.

I heard Rosa move over to the bed.

“I’ve just put some night time shorts here for you”.

“I don’t need them”, I said indignantly.

“I leave them every night Harley, just in case you have a little accident.”

"I haven't had an accident for 75 years!" I said.

Rosa paused. "Well they are there if you need them Harley", and she left the room quietly.

I opened the window to get some air and leaned out, looking into the dark night. I was furious, indignant. Was this it? My life is done? I should have been somewhere else. But now was I left here to rot? Having some carer leave incontinence pants out for me every night? Where the most exciting thing that will happen will be playing Bridge on a Tuesday afternoon? And my real home, the planet where I really belong, which for some reason I realised only in my old age, was unreachable. Whatever I was, alien or human, from some other human planet, or maybe not just mixed race but mixed *species*, I had been abandoned, left behind.

I looked up at the sky.

'Assholes', I murmured.



Rosa, I think, had been agitated by my behaviour, because the next day I was called into see the doctor.

"Good morning Harley" he said; furrowed brow, insincere smile.

"Don't patronise me". My words had no effect, or at least if they did, Dr. Andrews didn't let it show.

"How are you feeling Harley?"

"Fine."

"How are you sleeping?"

"Fine".

"And how is your appetite?"

"*Fine*".

Doctor Andrews paused, and looked at me

his pale blue eyes full of patronising concern.

"If you don't mind me saying Harley, you don't look fine. Some of your friends are worried that you've become quiet and withdrawn lately, and that you're not as social as you used to be."

I said nothing.

"Rosa said that you had been forgetting a few things."

"I'm *old*", I said. "That is what us old people do – forget things."

"We all forget things from time to time, of course", he said, his leather chair creaked as he sat back. "But we need to make sure that you are fit and well. Are you happy here Harley?"

"I don't belong here."

"You a very much a part of the Sunrise community here Harley, you have many friends and people that care about you here. Where do you think you belong?"

I said nothing.

"Rosa says you have been doing a lot of writing, and that you might be feeling confused."

I thought of the notepad. '*Who am I?*' It had said, lying on my desk, when I had fallen and pressed the panic button. The her looking over my shoulder at my sketches.

"I'd like to do some tests."

"What kind of tests?" I asked.

"Some blood tests to make sure you are healthy, not anaemic or anything. And some cognitive tests."

"Cognitive?"

"Yes, you know, to check your mind is as healthy as your body", he said, with a smile that seemed purposefully designed not to cause alarm in the mind of a patient. I didn't work.

"You think I'm senile? You think I'm losing my mind? There is nothing wrong with me, I'd be better if you people didn't check up on me every five minutes!"

"It's just a test Harley, just a test."

I nodded irritably and rolled up my sleeve.

That night I had the first dream I had had since my realisation. I was on my planet, with the sapphire sky and the crystal spires

that seemed to glow above me as I walked through grassy fields lined with trees, my stick in hand. There were people walking around, real human people that looked just like you or I. Occasionally I would see a person walking around who looked a little different - taller, slender with a slightly longer neck, but nevertheless, human.

"Welcome, Harley", said a voice behind me.

"Where am I?" As I turned, I saw a being, one of the slender tall ones.

"Home", replied the voice. His eyes were dark, his face strangely feminine.

"Where is this place?" I asked.

"Far from where you are now Harley. Very far."

"How do I get here?"

"We're trying to find you."

"But you know where I am, I'm on Earth, you're talking to me, you know where I am."

"We're trying to find you Harley, I promise. I must go now".

'Wait!' I said. I wanted to know so much. The tall man turned back and looked at me, despite the similarity in our appearance; there was something inherently alien in his gestures, in his demeanour, in the way his head cocked to one side very slowly as if to understand me.

"Must you leave?"

The tall man nodded and turned away.

'At least tell me your name!' I called after him.

He turned back and looked upwards, as if considering this for a moment.

"You can call me Michael," he said, "I believe this is a popular name from your culture on Earth".

My heart stopped for a moment, I stared at him.

Then he turned and left, and in a moment had disappeared as if he had dispersed into a crowd and become a hundred people.

"Michael was my son", I whispered.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH AND MEET SAM FENNELL

NEWS BURST: AUG 2011

American SF Author & this year's Arthur C Clarke award winner Lauren Beukes, will be making the following appearances in August on;

[FCC Free Radio](#), 14th Aug, between 12.00 and 2.00pm

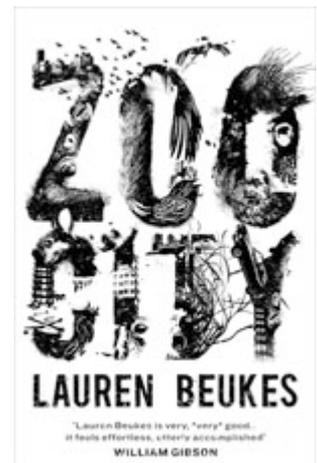
Reading at [Mid-Manhattan Library](#), NY, Monday 15th Aug, 6.30pm

Appearance at [KGB Bar](#), NY, Tuesday Aug 16th, 7.00pm

Signing at [Borderland Books](#) in San Francisco, Sunday Aug 21st, 7.00pm-8.00pm

Appearance on [Studio 360](#), airdates to be confirmed.

Various panels and kaffeklatches at [Renovation](#) (WorldCon) from Aug 17th-21st



The nominations for this year's World Fantasy Awards have been announced. The World Fantasy Awards will be presented at the World Fantasy Con, to be held the weekend of October 27-30 in San Diego, CA.

Among the Best Novel category we also have *Zoo City*, by Lauren Beukes

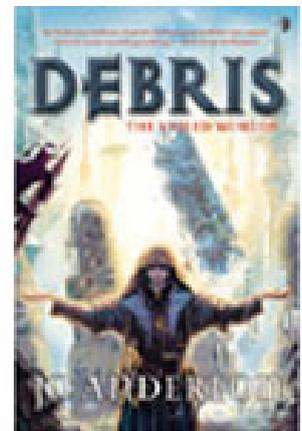
NEWS BURST: AUG 2011

Coming in October 2011, we have the debut from female SF author Jo Anderton.

“In a far future where technology is all but indistinguishable from magic, Tanyana is one of the elite”

Tanyana, the heroine of Jo Anderton’s debut SF/Fantasy novel *Debris* can control pions, “the building blocks of matter . . . manipulating them to alter the very structure of the world”. In this future world science adds an ethereal beauty to this novel. I’ve read the first chapter and it looks to be tantalising stuff. I will be reviewing *Debris* in the Sept issue of *Andromeda’s Offspring*.

The reason for Megan Fox’s absence in the latest Transformers film has now become clear. Speaking out, star Shia LaBeouf has been quoted as saying that “Megan developed this Spice Girl strength, this woman-empowerment [stuff] that made her feel awkward about her involvement with Michael, who some people think is a very lascivious filmmaker, the way he films women. Mike films women in a way that appeals to a 16-year-old sexuality. It’s summer. It’s Michael’s style. And I think [Fox] never got comfortable with it.” Sources inform me Fox apparently got the boot because of comments she made about Michael Bay which Steven Spielberg took exception to. Labeouf may be biased, given he was having an affair with her during production on the second movie. Good for her. Saying that, does she really need to worry about her next film? And is she actually any worse off?!



NEXT ISSUE: Sept 2011

Coming next month we have;

- Part 2 of Sam Fennell’s story *Happy Birthday Harley Jones* including a brief bio of Sam
- Part 2 of *B-Movie Beauties*
- Author Profile – Joanna Russ
- News Burst
- Classic Book Reviews – *Memoires of a Space Woman* by Naomi Mitchinson & *The Female Man* by Joanna Russ
- Contemporary Book Reviews – *Debris* by Jo Anderton & *Zoo City* by Lauren Beukes

THANKS FOR STOPPING BY