

In 2015 I was interviewed by Underground Book Reviews.

The questions were posed by Lynne M. Hinkley, the author of *Marina Melee*, is a marine scientist who has spent a considerable amount of time in the Caribbean studying oceanography. She currently lives in South Carolina, where she teaches, writes and spends time with her family.

This is how it went down ...

Today, I'm chatting with Adrian Baldwin, author of "Barnacle Brat: A Dark Comedy for Grown-Ups." Adrian wrote for television and a screenplay before turning his hand to novels, where that experience translates into clearly imagined characters and scenes, pulling the reader's smack into the middle Leon's adventures.

LYNNE: What inspired you to write about Leon Blank, a protagonist with a, um, rather flexible concept of reality?

ADRIAN: When I was a boy, I suffered a lot of migraines; the really viscous ones, the kind that could render a bull inoperative, let alone a child - and at one point (I still recall it vividly), I had a serious bout of hallucinations: the principle one being a green and purple knight, on horseback, riding up the stairs, out of a heavy fog, to do God knows what to me!

I suppose I mixed this particular memory with the fact that later, as an adult, I decided I needed to leave Manchester if I was ever going to write a novel, like I'd always wanted to. (I love Manchester but there are just too many distractions there and the city is such a noisy place! Seemed every time I sat down to write, there would be a car alarm or a dog barking or neighbours having a row or whatever.) Growing increasingly frustrated and feeling I'd lose my mind if I didn't get to write my novel (I just had to write a book!), I thought moving somewhere quiet and green, like Wales, would be the solution ... and bingo! before I knew it, these two elements had merged to become the engine of the novel: What if someone had to leave the city before they lost their mind? And what if it might already be too late!

That decided, and after I'd actually moved and got started, it seemed to make sense to dip into other personal events and experiences. So, I guess you could say Barnacle Brat is semi-autobiographical; that is, most of the events in the story are entirely fictional ... but some really happened. I enjoyed mixing up the two and wouldn't be surprised if readers can't be sure or guess incorrectly, which are which!

LYNNE: You have a wonderful video clip on your website with old home movies set to music (loved the tune BTW), and Leon watches a lot of home movies in Barnacle Brat. How close of a connection is there between your childhood and Leon's?

ADRIAN: Yes, Is History is a fantastic tune; I was very happy when Marc Rigelsford of Magic Arm asked for permission to set some of our Dad's home movie footage to his then latest single.

I've probably already somewhat addressed the connection between my childhood and Leon's in my previous answer but perhaps I could add that I didn't suffer at the hands of bullies as much as Leon does, and my gym teacher at school was nowhere near as creepy

as Leon's. Nor did I have a teacher murdered by a serial killer. And for the record, I'm not a Peeping Tom slash Voyeur like 'Richard' either - despite what some of my new reader friends may think! I don't even own a pair of binoculars! Okay, I do, but they're the tiny kind for watching birds. Of the feathered variety! They're not Big-Eye military ones like Richard's! Next question.

LYNNE: Is there a character in Barnacle Brat or any of your works who you particularly relate to, or who is your favorite--who and why?

ADRIAN: I guess, for the reasons I've already given, Leon would have to be the character I most relate to. As for favourite characters, there are so many; hmmm ... I do have a soft spot for Leon's dad, Lester - who, like my late father liked to do, often reminisces with old home movies. Wayne, the 'nutter' on the Metro, he was fun to write - Poppy has a special place in my heart (I love her sense of humour and edgy fashion sense) oh, and Chumlee, the obese teenage would-be lothario who decides Poppy is the 'older' woman for him! His captivating 'chat up' technique of pinning his victims against the window (onboard trams) with his ample gut whilst tonguing a Krispy Kreme Strawberry Gloss doughnut - what woman wouldn't welcome that?

LYNNE: Who will be in the cast of the movie version of Barnacle Brat?

ADRIAN: So far, John Hurt, Richard E. Grant and Emma Stone have confirmed their interest and filming is due to start in the autumn of 2018. No, of course not; I'm just kidding. But it's a lovely thought. One day! I'd love to see the guys from The League of Gentlemen in some of the roles: Steve Pemberton as Nobby, the frog-like newsagent with the beautiful younger Russian wife; Reece Shearsmith as Reg, Leon's overly officious boss; and Mark Gatiss, perhaps as peeping tom Richard - or Mr Crawley, Leon's creepy old gym teacher. As for Leon, I think he'd have to be played by an exceptionally handsome young man with a quirky sense of humour and oodles of simmering-under-the-surface sex appeal ... What?!

LYNNE: What is your background and when did you start writing?

ADRIAN: My background is Art, educationally, and then Computers, vocationally. A strange combination, perhaps, but I think the computer programming helps with the mapping and flow of my storylines: they do have their own logic, albeit a little warped. And the arty stuff certainly came in useful for designing and creating covers and spines. I may not be the best artist in the world but I'd always had a fairly clear image in my head of how I wanted Barnacle Brat to look, so it was good to be able to do this myself rather than employ a professional artist - even if he or she might have done a better job!

As for when I started writing, it seems I have always written (and always been a voracious reader of books): at primary school, I would write odd short stories; in secondary school, I wrote comedy plays for the fifth- and sixth-form drama groups; at Art College, I wrote comedic radio plays - and during my time working as a computer programmer, I was writing skits and sketches for various television comedy shows and TV comedians/personalities: people like Smith & Jones, Hale & Pace, Brian Conley, Rory Bremner, Clive Anderson, Terry Wogan, Paul McKenna ... I have also written three screenplays in the past but now focus entirely on crafting novels.

LYNNE: Tell us about your writing method. Do you start with a story idea, a scene, a

cast of characters? And are you a plotter or pantster?

ADRIAN: How do I start? Hmm ... I suppose the 'start' is a sudden fusing of several disparate ideas that have been hanging around for a while: a sense of an overall storyline, a couple of key characters, one or two scenes that could be funny, an interesting setting ... these separate aspects suddenly gel and begin to gather a momentum of their own - so then I commence mapping (plotting, you might say) to see if I have enough to expand this world into a substantial story; one that people will hopefully choose to explore. For all the mapping and plotting, though, the actual writing can turn up many surprises which I hadn't accounted for - some I drop, others I go with; e.g. secondary characters who insist on having a bigger part, more involvement, more lines - so in this regard you may see me as a 'pantster'. So, plotter or pantster? I guess I'm both!

LYNNE: Why did you choose to self-publish? And let's hear a bit about your experience. Smooth? Bumps in the road? Lessons learned?

ADRIAN: Being an 'Indie writer' and publishing independently gives me complete control over the stories I want to tell. It also allows me to produce the cover I feel suits the book. Besides, I didn't have an offer from a traditional publisher on the table for *Barnacle Brat*. Perhaps because I hadn't approached any of them. To be honest, I didn't want to spend month after month waiting in the slush-pile, then be read and most-likely rejected; I just wanted to get my book out there so people could start reading it - and letting me know what they think - which many of them have! Seems a lot of people have felt a connection with Leon and his challenges. Someone who shall remain nameless even said she felt she was falling a little bit in love with him! Aw.

As for how easy it is now to publish independently: it's very easy! I partnered up with completelynovel.com and the whole process was super smooth - without an outlay of money as required by the old self-publishing 'vanity press' companies. And at the end of the day, the books are produced by the same printers the traditional publishers use - so what's the difference? Be proud to be an Indie I say! (By the way, as happy as I am being an Indie author, if any of the major publishers were to wine and dine me, tell me how surprisingly quirky, absurdly surreal and disturbingly funny they think my dark comedy is, then offer me a six book deal ... who knows? I might be tempted!)

LYNNE: Any advice for new writers or those looking to write dark comedy?

ADRIAN: For new writers in general: if you're in this for the wroupies (writer groupies) and/or overnight riches, forget it! Turns out both are a myth! So, you might as well go do something else. But if the reward you seek is the completion of your novel, it's definitely worthwhile. Just be aware that writing can be a long hard lonely road (cue the violin strains) ... in fact, perhaps you should write this down and refer back to it whenever necessary: Keep going and never give up!

For those looking to write comedy of any type: write what makes you laugh and ignore the frowners who just don't 'get it' (it's all subjective, anyway). Do that and others who do find the same things funny, will eventually find you. (Please note: this may not apply if you're deluded - i.e. one of those sad people who think they're funny ... but they're really not. We all know that guy, right? And if you don't know him - he's probably you!)

As for dark comedy, specifically: Only write this if you're one of those who 'gets' it. Although it's a growing sub-genre (finally!), many in the mainstream will probably never be amused by it. That's just a heads-up, so you know. I mean, it's fine by me; the kind of readers I'm looking for are those who actually relish something different - something dark and quirky and left field; the ones who really 'get' dark comedy.

So, yeah, to sum up, my advice is, and I know I'm repeating myself: If your work makes you laugh (and you're not that deluded guy), there's a great chance others of a similar mind will, too - so persevere and keep faith in yourself!

LYNNE: On your website, you list your favorite authors, those who've had a strong influence on you. Quick, no thinking, just first, knee-jerk response: Who is #1 on the list?

ADRIAN: That's an easy one. Kurt Vonnegut Jr! ... No, Bruce Robinson! ... No, Kurt Vonnegut! Oh damn ...

LYNNE: Finally, what are you working on now?

ADRIAN: I'm working on books 2 and 3 in my Let's All Laugh at Death trilogy. Three separate stories linked by theme, a handful of crossover characters, and a serial killer known as the Head Honcho. Barnacle Brat is the first of the three books in this series. The Let's All Laugh at Death theme being: Cope with death by laughing when you can - it brings balance to your grieving. (I think Buddha once said as much; though it's also possible I just unwittingly made that up - I do that sometimes.)

Book 2 will be Stanley McCloud Must Die! and The Snowman and the Scarecrow makes up the final part.

In Stanley McCloud Must Die!, ancient and inveterate gambler Stanley McCloud learns he hasn't long to live, but refusing to believe his prognosis he puts a massive bet on that he will reach his next birthday. Unfortunately for him, the independent bookie he uses gets nervous as the day approaches and decides to bump him off with one of her many fun, but ever-so-slightly fatal, proposition bets.

In The Snowman and the Scarecrow, young Joe's grandfather dies as they're making their traditional Christmas snowman. (Always a festive downer when that happens!) As a way of coping, the boy searches for the missing snowman; it's a small town, how far could he have got? (Unbeknownst to Joe, the snowman was destroyed by insensitive local teens.) Before long, Joe runs into an out-of-town drifter who promises to help ... but does the old vagrant have ulterior motives?

Well, I guess that concludes my interview. Thank you for your questions, Lynne. I had fun - I hope you did, too! And thanks again for taking the time to read Barnacle Brat (a Dark Comedy for Grown-Ups).