

Ink Black Magic

A Mocklore Book

Tansy Rayner Roberts

SAMPLE

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*For my daughters, who are both artists
and superheroes.*

*Also by
Tansy Rayner Roberts...*

The Mocklore Chronicles

Splashdance Silver

(2013 edition, FableCroft Publishing)

Liquid Gold

(2013 edition, FableCroft Publishing)

Hobgoblin Boots

Love and Romanpunk

(2012, Twelfth Planet Press)

Roadkill/Siren Beat

(2009, Twelfth Planet Press

– with Rob Shearman)

The Creature Court trilogy

Power and Majesty

(2010, Harper Voyager)

The Shattered City

(2011, Harper Voyager)

Reign of Beasts

(2012, Harper Voyager)

Seacastle (ABC Books, 2007)

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Prospectus of Higher Learning*

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About the Author

*Extract from The
Polyhedrotechnical College
Prospectus of Higher Learning*

You may have read stories about magic with rules — where good magic and bad magic are easily distinguishable from each other and the sorcerer saves the world every single time. Such stories are lies and fantasies.

Magic does not follow recipes. Magic is not a natural tool for humans. It cannot be borrowed or stolen or manipulated. It is a howling random force that will tear you apart without bothering to learn your name. We have the misfortune to live on an island where magic is commonplace, where the landscape is a riot of colour and madness, howling spirits and flying fish. Magic is in the dirt, in the air, in our blood. There's more around than there used to be. One of these days our precious Mocklore Empire will surely fly apart in a cloud of golden smoke and purple sparks. This future is inevitable.

How do you protect yourself? Carry a sword, not a wand. Never attempt to use magic, even if the end seems to justify the means. You will always pay for such use, with a headache or a stab wound or a flying sheep where a man used to be. If you possess natural magical ability, learning how to safely *not* use that power will be the most important thing you ever do.

I will not teach your children warlocklore or witchery. I will teach them to know their unknown enemy, to learn

from the catastrophes of our past, to survive the orange mists and silver sparks and refrain from setting the world alight with green demon-fire. I will teach them not to use magic, and the lesson may very well save their lives.

Yours sincerely,
Mistress Sharpe, Philosophy of Magic
Department of Highly Improbable Arts

Vice-Chancellor's Note: Mistress Sharpe's Philosophy of Magic course is a prerequisite for many popular Second Year courses including Magic Studies, Alchemy, Neosorcery, Practical Mythology, Hedgewitchery and Creative Dance.

Chapter 1

Magic is a Bad Bad Thing

The dream was about heroes — impossible heroes with rippling muscles, ink-black eyes and amazing powers. They crashed! and banged! their way through the city, conquering villains with a biff! and a thwack! and a pow!!! Good triumphed over evil with swashbuckling ease. The heroes saved the world again and again, pausing only to exchange witty repartee or to redesign their colourful costumes. In a world of heroes and villains, everything was simple.

Egg woke up, fumbling for a spare piece of papyrus. He scribbled frantic notes with a scratchy pen. The ink in the bottle had scabbed over and made blotchy blobs across the page. Egg barely noticed the mess, too intent on the outline of a new super-villainess, an insect woman with glowing eyes and sensuous hips.

As he squinted to see the page, Egg realised that he was sitting in darkness. Outside, across the cobbled square of the student residence, the clocks struck the hour. Twelve long, sonorous notes drummed out of the tallest clock tower, a frothy confection of ivory spirals, glass runes and marble-white stonework. Three short, piping notes rang out of the middle clock tower, a solid piece of grey granite with gargoyles. Finally, four squeaky pips emerged from the shortest clock tower, a pink assortment of bricks swamped by bright purple ivy. Thirty-four minutes past midnight.

The clocks rang about twelve times a day, never exactly on the hour. When they had first been built they rang constantly, calling out the exact time at every minute of the day. Approximately four hours (and twenty-eight minutes) after the clocks began their noisy refrain, a delegation of students armed with axes, chisels and woefully inadequate padded earmuffs had persuaded Vice-Chancellor Bertie to impose the current restrictions.

Egg lit a lantern and stared at the papyrus, blowing on it to dry the ink. Where did they come from, these pictures in his head? He had never met a super-villainess before — although his mother did have some very strange friends — and yet he knew exactly what one looked like. He also knew which of his heroes would meet her first, and how that tale would tie in to the overall story arc.

What he didn't know was what to do with the story when it was finished. Everyone knew stories were for telling aloud, for spinning over an open fire or singing in a tavern. Hardly anyone wrote stories down, and no one drew stories in pictures like Egg did, with little bubbles to show that people were talking. The closest equivalent were the humorous hieroglyphs that you found scratched on walls, but they tended to be about sarcastic cats and amusing situations involving the workplace. They weren't about heroes.

Someone knocked, banged and thumped on the door. Egg was vaguely aware that they had been doing so for some time. He padded across the room in his pyjamas and bare feet and opened the door.

A girl stood on the other side, her hand raised to knock again. She had the face of a heroine, the kind who gets rescued against a background of flame and intrigue. Her eyes were blue, her ponytail was blonde and her smile was angelic. "Is this Sean McHagerty's room?" she asked.

Egg slammed the door and went back to bed. "Go away!" he shouted as the knocking started up again.

"That's not very polite!" the girl yelled from the other side of the door. "Oy!"

Egg stomped across the floor again, shooting an accusing glance at his roommate's bed. "He's not here," he said as he pulled open the door. "His suitcases are here, but they haven't even been opened. I moved in three days ago and I haven't seen him. The only evidence I have that Sean McHagerty actually exists is that you are the twelfth girl today who has asked after him."

The angel with the ponytail stared at Egg as if he were insane. "I know he's not here," she said slowly. "I asked if this was his room."

"Oh," said Egg. "Yes, it is."

"Good." The girl pushed past him. She was carrying, Egg noticed with alarm, an overnight bag. It was pink. "Is this his bed?" She selected the spare bed and bounced experimentally on it.

"Yes," said Egg. "Um, what are you doing?"

"I'm moving in," said the girl. She took some things out of her overnight bag and headed into the tiny wash chamber. Her towel and flannel were also pink. "Won't be a minute. Feels like I haven't cleaned my teeth in a month." She closed the door behind her.

Egg stared helplessly at the closed door. He wanted to barge in after her and demand an explanation, but an inner voice sensibly informed him that you couldn't do that to girls in wash chambers. Plus, the so-called wash chamber, which he and the mythical McHagerty shared with the occupants of the room next door, was little more than a large cupboard with a copper washtub, a small water pump and a hole in the floor. There wasn't room for more than one person in there.

There was a splash, and some vigorous, frothy, teeth-cleaning noises. "I'm Clio," shouted the girl, indistinctly. "Clio Wagstaff-Lamont. Who are you?"

"Egg," he said, still a little stunned. "Egfrid Friefriedsson."

She opened the door and stuck her head out. Her mouth was still rather frothy. "From Axgaard? Awesome. You don't look like a warrior."

"I'm not," he said. "Not a warrior. Or from Axxgaard, really. It's just where my dad comes from."

"Oh, okay." A slender arm reached out to grab Clio's overnight bag and then vanished with it back into the bathroom. Egg heard rinsing and spitting noises, and a lot of quiet rustling. He backed away from the door and sat on his bed, sliding his inky papyrus page into a folder full of similar pages. He shoved the folder into a drawer and hovered by the window for a while, trying to look casual.

Clio emerged from the bathroom. "This is how it's going to work, Egg. Your precious roommate has seriously hooked up with my precious roommate, which means I've been locked out of my own room for two days while they discover the wonders of — well, shagging. Apparently it's something special. Who knew? I've tried sleeping in the library tower and I've tried sleeping in the corridors but it's just not working for me. Since classes start tomorrow and I don't want to fall asleep during them, I thought to myself, where is there likely to be a spare bed in this town? Then I said to myself, aha! Sean McHagerty is not in his bed, therefore his bed must be empty. Is any of this making sense to you, Egg?"

"Um," said Egg. He was still trying to cope with the fact that the angelic, ponytailed heroine had unexpectedly transformed into a peculiar creature with pink hair-curlers dotted all over her head and an old-fashioned white nightdress which covered her in lace from neck to wrist to ankle. It gave the overall impression that she was a large, queenly piece of sharp-cornered furniture.

"I live with my grandmother," Clio explained. "She packed this for an emergency, and I'm pretty sure she'd consider sharing a room with a boy to be a complete and utter emergency." She preened a little. "You won't be tempted to ravish me."

"No," said Egg quickly. "Certainly not!"

Clio frowned. "You don't have to be quite so fervent about it!" She climbed into Sean McHagerty's bed and tucked herself up to her chin. "I don't suppose you tell stories?"

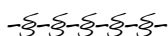
“I write stories,” said Egg, thinking of inky scribbles. “Sort of. I draw them, like humorous hieroglyphs only without jokes.”

Clio yawned and pulled more blankets over her. “Sounds good. Tell me one.”

“They’re not the kind of stories you just tell.”

“Tell me one anyway.”

Egg shot an anxious look at the drawer where he had shoved the latest in a large collection of untidy papyrus folders. He tried to think of the right words to explain just how private his stories were, and how they couldn’t just be read aloud like any old ballad. By the time he found the words, Clio had fallen asleep.



The Polyhedrotechnical College was the only higher education institution in the little Mocklore Empire. This was unsurprising, as most people still went by the old apprentice system, and actual qualifications were viewed with extreme suspicion. The College itself had only come into existence fifty years earlier because an entrepreneur named Cluft Cooper thought he could make his fortune by selling education. The former Emperor Timregis, then in the early days of his reign, had poured money into the project on the condition that he got to choose the architectural designs.

The result was a town, spilling out on both sides of the Great Mocklore Road. Due to the Emperor’s peculiar architectural whims, Cluft was a town like no other. It was crammed with towers, buttresses, mysterious hidden passages, upside down cottages and — due to its student population — lots and lots of taverns. Cluft eventually became an independent city-state in its own right, which was the Emperor’s reward to Vice-Chancellor Bertie Peacock for inventing the postgraduate thesis.

The Polyhedrotechnical College was made up of four Departments: Aristocracy, Profit, Certain Death and

Highly Improbable Arts. The Department of Aristocracy had only recently changed its name from the Department of Nobility, since there were too many over-literal parents who had questioned whether subjects such as History of Torture, Advanced Posturing and Dictatorship were *noble*, strictly speaking. Aristocratic, certainly.

Egg sat in the draughty Second Lecture Hall, waiting for a lecture. He was quite enjoying higher education so far. He had chosen a general degree, with first year subjects from each department. He was taking Perspectives of the Profithood, Basic Number Crunching, Introduction to Aristocracy, Social Study of Heroes and Villains, Philosophy of Magic and Tavern Skills.

The lecture hall was full of seventeen year olds screaming, gossiping, whispering and laughing. None of them paid attention to anything but each other.

The lecturer walked in from the back of the hall, striding down the steps in a long, heavy skirt. Her petticoats rustled. Her big black boots made a ringing sound as they struck the floor. She stood at the lectern and arranged her papers, cleared her throat. "Magic," she said in a firm, musical voice, "is bad. Very, very bad. There is a reason that this course, Philosophy of Magic, is compulsory before you take any other magic-related course within the Polyhedrotechnical College. My job is to drill into your sweet little minds the very important fact that magic should never be used unless it is the absolute last resort and sometimes not even then. Magic cannot be safely used At All. It is unreliable, deadly dangerous, and in almost all test cases, more trouble than it is worth. Any questions so far?"

Her audience stared at her. She was a statuesque figure in crimson and black. Her hourglass figure was cinched in by a firm leather bodice and her skirts spread out in a wide, full circle. She had huge golden eyes, a dark red mouth and scarlet hair tied up in an attempt at a respectable bun, though several loose curls escaped around her neck. She was not like the other professors.

Her name, they had been told, was Mistress Sharpe. One look at their scrolls for Social Study of Heroes and Villains told them otherwise. This woman was *famous*. The main topic of gossip among the students was the question of why she, of all people, was here. She had been a pirate, a criminal and a witch. She was young for a professor, but no one doubted her authority. Everyone was terrified of her — or madly in lust with her. There were some seriously kinky rumours about Mistress Sharpe. The latest was that she kept a sheep in her bedroom.

“The trouble with magic,” said Mistress Sharpe, addressing the first year class with a steady golden gaze, “is that it doesn’t work. This is why witches stick to the milder forms of magic such as herbalism and hedgewitchery, while warlocks rarely resort to magic at all, preferring to spend their time on mathematics and needlework. When you use magic — large or small — something always goes horribly wrong.”

Mistress Sharpe’s golden eyes changed focus suddenly, staring at a lad in the third row who had been making a disbelieving face. “Yes? Clifford. You have something to say?”

“Well,” said Clifford, blushing a little. “You can’t say that, can you, miss? You can’t say magic never works, that it always goes wrong. It must work sometimes.”

“Nope,” said Mistress Sharpe.

“But if you follow the rules?”

“Aha,” said Mistress Sharpe. She emerged from behind the lectern. “That is a very interesting point, Clifford. The rules of magic. What are they? Can you think of one?”

Clifford, his bravery swiftly departing, slumped in his chair. “Um, harm none, miss?” he suggested, his face blazing.

“That’s a good one,” said Mistress Sharpe. “Of course, it applies equally well to non-magical activities, we should hope. Yes, Yarrowstalk?”

A girl in the back row lowered her hand. “Please miss,” she said. “Don’t witches have special categories that make their magic work better? Like hedgewitches, or hearthwitches. Isn’t that a kind of rule?”

“Yes,” said Mistress Sharpe. “Very good. A seawitch’s magic, for example, is intensified by being close to salt water. If she casts a spell at sea, it will be ten times stronger than at any other time. But — and I can’t stress this enough — it still wouldn’t necessarily work. Even when you do everything ‘right’, magic does not always choose to obey you. It is a random, unpredictable force of chaos. The seawitch’s spell might go wrong. If it went wrong while she was at sea, it might go ten times more wrong. There is no way of guaranteeing that magic will work, or that it will work in the way you want it to, which is why it is better not to use it at all. Yes, Moonweaver?”

A girl in ribboned pigtails leaned forward earnestly. “What about spells, miss? If you follow a spell exactly, isn’t that like following the rules of magic?”

“Nope,” said Mistress Sharpe. She grinned widely. “You had Home Economics this morning, didn’t you, Moonweaver? With a cake recipe, you know it has been worked out by someone who had an interest in cakes. The chances are, if it’s a good recipe, if you follow the instructions exactly, you will get a half-decent cake. If you mess around with the ingredients and make it up as you go along, you also might get a great cake, or you might get a total bloody disaster. But you would think to yourself, that’s because I didn’t stick to the recipe. Am I right?”

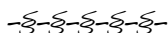
Moonweaver nodded hesitantly.

“Right,” said Mistress Sharpe. “With magic, you can follow the instructions of a spell completely to the letter, you can do exactly what the witch or warlock did before you and it can *still go wrong*. In fact, it will almost certainly go wrong if it works at all. Other people’s spells are almost certainly doomed to failure. Magic resents any attempt to tie it down. Yes, Friefriedsson?”

Egg hadn’t even realised that his hand was in the air. He lowered it slowly. “Mistress Sharpe, this is our first class with you. You haven’t consulted a register but you seem to know all our names. Are you using magic to do that?”

Mistress Sharpe smiled a dazzling smile at him. “That’s

a fascinating question, Friefriedsson.” She extended her smile to the entire class. “Any other fascinating questions?”



Clio was waiting for Egg as he came out of the lecture hall. She lay full-length on a park bench, her blonde hair spread out to catch the sunshine. As he approached, she cracked one eye open. “Hi.”

“Hi,” said Egg, dropping to the concrete and sitting down.

“I’m thinking of taking up Philosophy of Magic,” she announced.

“If you’d turned up an hour ago, you could have actually attended the lecture.”

“Don’t nag,” said Clio, yawning. “I really tried with History of Torture, but the lecturer has these horrible green blotches all over his neck and I was so busy staring that I didn’t take in a word of what he said. Ugh. After ten minutes of that, I just had to come and lie in the sun for a while to make it up to myself. What’s Mistress Sharpe like?”

“Okay, I guess. A bit intense. She has a one-track mind about magical disasters, but at least that should make it easier to predict the exam questions.”

“Just as long as she doesn’t have green spots,” said Clio. She lifted herself up slightly on one elbow. “You know who she is, don’t you? Who she really is.”

Egg grinned. “Everyone knows who she is. Kassa Daggersharp, pirate queen, scourge of the seventeen seas. Well, at least eight of them.”

“Oh,” said Clio, obviously disappointed at not being the one to pass on this juicy bit of gossip. “But do you know the best bit?”

“You mean how she was at school with the Lady Emperor, or do you mean the time she came back from the dead?”

“Not that,” said Clio scornfully. “I mean the love story.” She placed her hand against her forehead and swooned back

on to the bench. “The horribly tragic, melodramatically romantic and ultimately doomed love affair between Kassa Daggersharp and Aragon Silversword.”

“Oh,” said Egg. “That.”

“*She* was the madcap outlaw pirate queen,” sighed Clio, getting into the story despite his obvious lack of interest. “*He* was the famous ex-Champion and traitor of the Empire. They were completely and utterly in love with each other. They had grand adventures together — she rescued him from the Lady Emperor, he rescued her from the Underworld. But one day she woke up and he was just gone. Vanished into thin air. She was *utterly* devastated...”

“Does everyone do things *utterly* in this story?”

“Shut up. Yes. Anyway, Kassa swore off piracy from that day forward, disbanded her crew and dropped out of public sight.”

“Until she turned up here,” said Egg. “Teaching first years how magic is a bad bad thing.”

“She should know. She caused plenty of magical disasters in her day.”

“You do know that all this is recent history, don’t you? I mean, ‘her day’ was only a couple of years ago.”

“I know,” Clio said defensively. “It just seems like it all should have happened once upon a time. Like fairy tales. All the best heroic epics are told hundreds of years after all the characters are dead.”

“Why are you so interested in this anyway?” Egg couldn’t help asking. “No one cares about who Mistress Sharpe really is.” Well, yeah, they all told the stories. He’d never heard them told so lovingly, though.

“I care,” Clio said. “I happen to like tragical romance.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. Anyway, Aragon Silversword was my uncle, so it’s a family legend.”

“Oh,” said Egg. There was a long silence. Clio might be sulking, but it was hard to tell. Her eyes were closed against the sun again. “You know,” he said eventually. “My father is the exiled prince of Axgaard. He was chucked out

and disowned for having an affair with one of his father's Official Wenches."

Clio opened her eyes, staring thoughtfully at him. "My mother died when I was a baby. She was descended from the famous playwright Wilt Wagstaff and his leading lady, Lana Lamont. Wagstaff wrote *Baytriche* for Lana, then she left him because he wrote three plays in a row with no decent female parts for her."

"Well," said Egg, grinning as he saw the competitive gleam in Clio's eyes. "My mother is descended from the Silver Warlock, who founded the College of Highly Improbable Arts right here in Cluft."

"My grandmother is Silvia Silversword, who was cousin to the evil Lady Keela of Teatime and looked exactly like her when they were young, so they swapped places and no one noticed for four years."

"When my grandfather died," said Egg, "my aunt Svenhilda became the first female Jarl of Axgaard. She almost got assassinated for trying to make her subjects shave off their beards and be polite to women, and her husband is made out of clockwork. Also my mother Melinor, before she was the Jarl's wench and ran away with my dad, was sister to the infamous pirate Black Nell, who married Bigbeard Daggersharp. I think that actually makes Mistress Sharpe my cousin." He smiled, feeling smug. It wasn't hard to acquire famous ancestors in Mocklore. The island was small, the population was small and everyone got famous sooner or later.

Clio's grey eyes went flinty. "Twelve years ago, my father committed treason against Emperor Timregis and was executed by the Imperial Champion, his own brother."

Egg stared at Clio, too shocked to speak at first. "Is that true?"

"Yep."

"You win, then."

Clio looked a little sad. "I always do."

The door to the lecture hall opened and Mistress Sharpe came out, balancing a teetering pile of parchment

and papyrus scrolls.

Clio jumped up from the bench, pasting a cheerful smile on her face. "Mistress Sharpe? I was hoping to have a word about transferring into your class."

Mistress Sharpe looked irritated. "If you'd turned up an hour ago, you could have actually attended the lecture."

Clio's smile brightened noticeably. "Sorry about that. Can I join?"

"All right," sighed Mistress Sharpe. "As it happens, I've had a few cancellations from boys who think my cautious attitude to magic is unnecessary. I expect we'll be scraping them off the walls of your common room in due time. I'll add you to the list. Just remember that lecture attendance does actually increase your chances of passing the exam."

"Yes, miss." Clio hesitated. "Also, I had a message to pass on. From my grandmother."

Mistress Sharpe transferred her pile of scrolls and papers to her hip. Her large golden eyes looked incredibly tired. "Do I know your grandmother?"

"No, miss. But she would like to be remembered to you. Her name is Silvia Silversword."

Mistress Sharpe's armload of papers exploded. Scrolls and parchment scattered on the concrete, where the wind whipped at them. Mistress Sharpe stared at Clio. "Silvia Silversword?"

"Yes, miss," Clio said. Her smile faltered a little under the steely gaze of the professor. "She lives nearby, and she was hoping you could come by for tea some time. She would very much like to meet you."

"I bet she would," Mistress Sharpe said grimly. "That would make Aragon Silversword your—"

"Uncle, miss. My father's brother."

"I see. Egfried Friefriedsson, if you touch those scrolls, you will die a horrible death."

Egg paused in the act of attempting to help Mistress Sharpe with her dropped scrolls and parchments. "Yes, miss."

Mistress Sharpe turned back to Clio. "You're Aragon's niece."

"That's right, miss."

It was fascinating to see these two together, Egg thought. Clio was the type who fluttered her eyelashes and bounced confidently through life, but here was a woman nearly a decade older who was far better at it.

"Heard from him lately?" Mistress Sharpe asked.

"Oh, no," Clio protested, her eyes wide. "Not for years."

"That's something, I suppose."

"You must have really loved him," Clio burst out. "I mean, I've read all the ballads. Your story is so romantic."

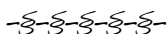
Egg closed his eyes. He didn't think that Mistress Sharpe saw things the same way at all.

He was right. Mistress Sharpe stared at Clio as if she were some new kind of invading goblin. She snapped her fingers and the scrolls and parchments reassembled themselves, leaping tidily back into her arms. "I don't know about romance," she said. "But next time I see him, I plan to shove a knife between his ribs." She spun on her heel and walked away.

"She did love him," said Clio, sounding satisfied.

Egg frowned. "She used magic to pick up those books. She said that no one should ever ever *ever* use magic."

"I bet she didn't say that at all," said Clio. "I bet she just said that *you* shouldn't."



A high, uneven staircase led up to Mistress Sharpe's room. Like everything else in Cluft, these stairs had been designed by a madman. Each step was a different shape and colour. If you climbed them fast enough, they could cause seizures.

Mistress Sharpe climbed the steps slowly. Her feet felt heavy. There was something ridiculously exhausting about the first day of semester. She had only given three introductory lectures so far — second year Practical Mythology and third year Creative Dance, as well as the

first year Philosophy of Magic — but her brain and body felt as if she had spent the last ten hours simultaneously ploughing the earth and learning several foreign languages.

It was their little faces that did it, she decided — those bloody first years. They got so much younger every year. Mistress Sharpe was only twenty-six, but the beginning of semester made her feel a century older.

She was five flights up, still climbing the ridiculous stairs. Pink, purple, scarlet, green and yellow flashed in front of her eyes; rectangles, triangles, hexagons. One of the steps, somewhere around the seventh flight, was a perfect sphere. It was single-handedly responsible for 50% of all sprained ankles in the entire Mocklore Empire. When Mistress Sharpe reached it, she stepped over and around it without even looking. Her feet were really hurting now. Maybe it was time to give up her signature black high-heeled leather boots. Time to invest in a pair of flat teacher shoes with sensible padding around the heel.

But, no. That would be the grown up thing to do and, professor or not, Mistress Sharpe was not yet ready to behave like a grown up. It was bad enough that she had a real job, a regular salary and a trusted position in the community. If her father was alive, he would be disappointed at how respectable she was.

Mistress Sharpe reached the eighth landing. She let herself into her room, closed the door behind her and leaned on it for a moment. Slowly, she removed the two dozen hair pins and the sturdy wire snood which kept her hair in some semblance of order during the day. Her dark red curls tumbled down around her shoulders, and she was Kassa again.

“Remind me, Singespitter,” she said aloud. “Why did we pick a tower room for our accommodation?”

Her roommate did not answer. Sprawled out on Kassa’s bed with his nose in half a dozen serious academic scrolls, he barely even glanced at her over his little horn-rimmed spectacles.

Kassa knew the answer to her own question. On the far side of the cozy room was a pair of glass doors. She

opened them now, and stepped out on to the tiny balcony. The view was spectacular. You could see the sea from here, as well as the misty Middens and the wide spread of the colourful Skullcap mountains.

A breeze rippled through Kassa's hair. She unlaced her leather bodice, tossed the garment into the room behind her and inhaled the cool air with pleasure. Her belt followed the bodice, then several layers of skirt. Still clad in her rumpled chemise and three or four petticoats, she sank on to a stool and began working on her boots.

From up here, you could see the Empire go by. Out to sea, there were several white sails — pleasure yachts, no doubt, enjoying the sunshine. As Kassa watched, several large purple and red sails moved in on the small white ones. Pirates.

"Don't you miss it, Singespitter?" Kassa said wistfully. "All the adventures and escapades and heroic deeds?"

Singespitter snorted. He had settled into academic life marvellously and was halfway through a treatise on the intellectual ramifications of bestial metamorphosis. He was more than happy to leave behind his life as a mercenary and pirate. He lifted a large purple quill with his cloven hoof and scratched a note on one of his scrolls with incredibly precise handwriting.

"Don't get ink on my quilt," Kassa called to him. She wiggled her stripy-socked feet, now free from the heavy leather boots. Finally she could relax.

Out at sea, the little white sails fled this way and that, frantically trying to escape the dread pirates. Kassa watched, and sighed a few more times. She could almost taste the salt from here.

Being an ex-pirate was one thing, but being an ex-witch, an ex-outlaw, an ex-heroine of tavern ballads and an ex-captain of her own ship was an awful lot for one woman to bear. What was worse was knowing why she had given it all up — not for morals or honour, or even because she fancied a quiet life for a change. She had done it for a man. A filthy, stinking, slimy member of the opposite gender.

Kassa managed her most pitiful sigh yet. She had a nasty feeling that giving up her career because of a bloke also qualified her as an ex-feminist. So much for Kassa Daggersharp, scourge of at least seven and a half of the seventeen seas.

Singespitter baaed lightly, reminding Mistress Sharpe that she had essay questions to plan, a lecture to write for tomorrow and a staff dinner for which she had volunteered to contribute a salad.

“Shut up,” said Kassa, wiggling her toes and staring out to sea. “I’m allowed at least ten minutes of whiny self-indulgence every evening. Don’t spoil it for me.”

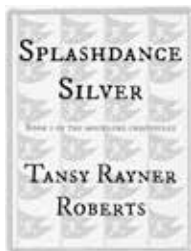
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tansy Rayner Roberts was first published in 1998 with *Splashdance Silver*, the first of the Mocklore Chronicles. Since then, she has had seven more novels published (one under the name of Livia Day), travelled overseas, won a bunch of awards including a shiny chrome rocket, gained a PhD in Classics, and had two children. She lives in a messy house with lots of bookshelves. Sometimes the Tasmanian landscape still looks like Mocklore to her, but she is yet to spot a flying sheep.

Tansy's website can be found at <http://tansyrr.com/> and you can follow her on Twitter at @tansyrr. She is a co-host on two all-female podcasts: *Galactic Suburbia*, talking about books and the SF publishing industry, and *Verity!* talking about Doctor Who.

The Mocklore Chronicles **by Tansy Rayner Roberts**



Splashdance Silver

ISBN: 978-0-9874000-2-4 (ebook)

Kassa Daggersharp has just heard word that her dad's dead and she's heir to a vast silver treasure-trove from the famous Splashdance pirate ship.

But in grand pirate tradition, the last will and testament of Vicious Bigbeard Daggersharp doesn't actually say where the silver is. And to add to Kassa's woes, everyone – from legendary royal champion and pin-up boy Aragon Silversword to the the Emperor Lady Talle – seems to be trying to find and claim the silver for themselves.

This hilarious story of the race for the Splashdance silver is about pirates and politics, treasure and traitors, epic adventures, magical mysteries, nearly-true-love and things which glint in the night.

Liquid Gold

ISBN: 978-0-9874000-4-8 (ebook)

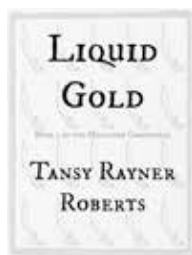
Liquid Gold – the most seductively dangerous substance in the history of the cosmos – has just been discovered in the Mocklore Empire.

But no sooner does its creator, Mistress Opia, realise its breathtaking capacity to manipulate time than Sparrow, the troll-raised mercenary, steals it away.

With the Liquid Gold unleashed, nothing will ever be the same again, certainly not for Kassa Daggersharp, who is unexpectedly killed by a rampaging trinket. As the Underworld's latest client, Kassa is in a position to notice that something is terribly wrong with the afterlife – and everywhere else.

Meanwhile, an escaping Sparrow teams up with Daggar, a profit-scoundrel doing his best to be unscrupulous. But neither are prepared for the repercussions of tampering with the Liquid Gold.

Tansy Rayner Roberts' hilarious sequel to 'Splashdance Silver' has a full complement of dysfunctional gods, dastardly villains and butt-kicking heroines.



The Bone Chime Song and Other Stories

by Joanne Anderton

ISBN: 978-0-9807770-9-3

Enter a world where terrible secrets are hidden in a wind chime's song; where crippled witches build magic from scrap; and the beautiful dead dance for eternity

The Bone Chime Song and Other Stories collects the finest science fiction and horror short stories from award-winning writer Joanne Anderton. From mechanical spells scavenging a derelict starship to outback zombies and floating gardens of bone, these stories blur the lines between genres. A mix of freakish horror, dark visions of the future and the just plain weird, Anderton's tales will draw you in — but never let you get comfortable.

**The Bone Chime Song
Mah Song
Shadow of Drought
Sanaa's Army
From the Dry Heart to the Sea
Always a Price
Out Hunting for Teeth
Death Masque
Flowers in the shadow of the
Garden
A Memory Trapped in Light
Trail of Dead
Fence Lines
Tied to the Waste
With an Introduction by
Australian horror luminary
Kaaron Warren**



*...follows a fine horror lineage from Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery* through *The Wickerman*... – Scary Minds*

Dark, unexpected and tightly written, Anderton makes a fantasy world seem completely real, while using a premise that spirals from a shadowed and lonely place. – ASif!

...a stunning descent into dark decay and the grisly madness of eternity... a chaotic and beautiful fairy tale with a patina of gangrene. – Specusphere

...Anderton has constructed an exuberant and positively traditional SF story with strong female central characters... – ASif!

[Anderton] has a real mastery of the surreal ... and somehow manages to make the surreal seem normal ... reading this book will fill you with horror, wonder, awe, sorrow, delight, surprise and admiration." – Kaaron Warren

One Small Step, an anthology of discoveries
edited by Tehani Wessely
ISBN: 978-0-9874000-0-0

Sixteen stories of discovery from Australia's best writers. Each story in some way addresses the idea of discoveries, new beginnings, or literal or figurative "small steps", but each story takes you to places you far beyond the one small step you imagine...

Journey through worlds and explore the reaches of the universe with this collection.



CONTENTS

Foreword by Marianne de Pierres

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"Firefly Epilogue" by Jodi Cleghorn

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"The ships of Culwinna" by Thoraiya Dyer

"Shadows" by Kate Gordon

"By Blood and Incantation" by Lisa L. Hannett & Angela Slatter

"Ella and the Flame" by Kathleen Jennings

"Original" by Penny Love

"Always Greener" by Michelle Marquardt

"Morning Star" by DK Mok

"Winter's Heart" by Faith Mudge

"Cold White Daughter" by Tansy Rayner Roberts

"Baby Steps" by Barbara Robson

"Daughters of Battendown" by Cat Sparks

"Number 73 Glad Avenue" by Suzanne J Willis

Epilogue
edited by Tehani Wessely
ISBN: 978-0-9807770-5-5

ep-i-logue: an ending that serves as a comment on or conclusion to what has happened.

Climate change, natural disaster, war and disease threaten to destroy all we know. Predictions of the future are bleak. But does the apocalypse really mean the end of the world? Is there no hope for a future that follows?

Twelve writers take on the end of the world and go beyond, to what comes next.

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- "A memory trapped in light" by Joanne Anderton
- "Time and tide" by Lyn Battersby
- "Fireflies" by Steve Cameron
- "Sleeping Beauty" by Thoraiya Dyer
- "The Fletcher Test" by Dirk Flinthart
- "Ghosts" by Stephanie Gunn
- "Sleepers" by Kaia Landelius
- "Solitary" by Dave Luckett
- "Cold comfort" by David McDonald
- "The Mornington Ride" by Jason Nahrung
- "What books survive" by Tansy Rayner Roberts
- "The last good town" by Elizabeth Tan

To Spin a Darker Stair
edited by Tehani Wessely
ISBN: 978-0-9807770-6-2

Forget everything you think you know about fairytales with this boutique gift book.

Featuring the exquisite art of Kathleen Jennings and two incredible stories by Catherynne M Valente and Faith Mudge, *To Spin a Darker Stair* is an enticing package.

"... brilliant idea and equally brilliant execution."
— *Specusphere*



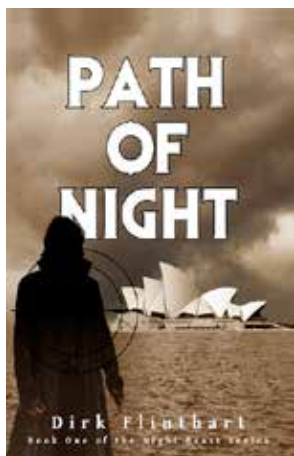
Path of Night

by Dirk Flinthart

ISBN: 978-0-9807770-8-6

Michael Devlin is the first of a new breed. The way things are going, he may also be the last.

Being infected with an unknown disease is bad. Waking up on a slab in a morgue wearing nothing but a toe-tag is worse, even if it comes with a strange array of new abilities.



Medical student Michael Devlin is in trouble. With his flatmates murdered and an international cabal of legendary man-monsters on his trail, Devlin's got nowhere to hide. His only allies are a hot-tempered Sydney cop and a mysterious monster-hunter who may be setting Devlin up for the kill. If he's going to survive, Devlin will have to embrace his new powers and confront his hunters. But can he hold onto his humanity when he walks the *Path of Night*?

Dirk Flinthart is an Australian writer of speculative fiction who lives in northern Tasmania. Notable to date mostly for short stories, he is also the editor of the Canterbury 2100 anthology, from Agog press, and has the distinction of sharing a Ditmar award with Margo Lanagan, which he is quite proud of.

Path of Night represents Flinthart's longest published work to date, and is planned as the first in a series of stories centering around Michael Devlin. The next one is well under way...

...action driven, laced with humor...I am hoping that there will be a sequel. — Roger Ross (Amazon)

After the Rain
edited by Tehani Wessely
ISBN: 978-0-9807770-2-4



The aftermath of rain, be it showers, storms or floods, can change the landscape. In this book, fifteen of Australia's best and brightest speculative fiction authors offer literal and figurative interpretations of what follows rain, in this reality and others.

From the earliest of bible stories to World War II Germany, from tiny creatures grown of raindrops to alien planets and future worlds, *After the Rain* considers the changes rain can bring, if one steps slight left of reality.

from the dry heart to the sea by joanne anderton
powerplant by dave luckett
daughters of the deluge by lyn battersby
when the bone men come by peter cooper
the birth of water cities by angela rega
wet work by jason nahrung
fruit of the pipal tree by thoraiya dyer
europe after the rain by lee battersby
heaven by jo langdon
visitors by peter m ball
mouseskin by kathleen jennings
offerings by suzanne j willis
the shadow on the city of my sky by robert hoge
my flood husband by sally newham
eschaton and coda by dirk flinthart

“...hopeful and depressing, and thoroughly engrossing.” — ASif!

Australis Imaginarium
edited by Tehani Wessely
ISBN: 978-0-9807770-0-0

Boasting original cover art by Shaun Tan and containing twelve all-Australian, award-winning stories by some of the island continent's finest speculative fiction writers, *Australis Imaginarium* challenges you to reconsider what you think you know about Australia and its inhabitants, old and new.



Australis Imaginarium collects work from across the past two decades, showcasing Australian storytelling at its very best.

“Once a Month, on a Sunday” by Ian McHugh
“Night Heron’s Curse” by Thoraiya Dyer
“Hunter of Darkness, Hunter of Light” by Michael Pryor
“A Pig’s Whisper” by Margo Lanagan
“Stealing Free” by Deborah Biancotti
“Suffer the Little Children” by Rowena Cory Daniells
“Virgin Jackson” by Marianne de Pierres
“The Claws of Native Ghosts” by Lee Battersby
“The Jacaranda Wife” by Angela Slatter
“The Dark Under the Skin” by Dirk Strasser
“Red Ochre” by Lucy Sussex
“Passing the Bone” by Sean Williams

*“... stories authored by Australian mastercraftspeople ...
each one is perfectly crafted ... speculative fiction at [its]
finest...” — Suz’s Space*

Worlds Next Door
edited by Tehani Wessely
ISBN: 978-0-9807770-1-7

What you have here is not a book, but a key to worlds that exist under your bed, in your cupboard, in the dark of night when you're sure you're being watched. What you have is a passport to the worlds next door.



Containing 25 bite-sized stories for 9–13 year olds by Australian authors including Paul Collins, Michael Pryor, Pamela Freeman, Dirk Flinthart, Tansy Rayner Roberts and Jenny Blackford, *Worlds Next Door* is perfect for the budding reader.

“...a completely satisfying, wonderful collection...” — Aurealis Xpress

“There are so many excellent stories in this collection...” — Daniel Simpson

“...a fab little anthology...” — ASif!

“...a book that gives us tempting little slices of cleverness in the realm of magical writing...” — Kids’ Book Review

“I love the diversity of this collection.” — Kids’ Book Capers

“An engaging collection of speculative fiction ... this is an excellent collection for both the library and the English faculty.” — ReadPlus

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Insert Title Here... edited by Tehani Wessely

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