

Cataclysm: The Myst Clipper Shicaine, Kerry Forrestal and John Fracchia (Bedlam Boys Publishing, 2016)

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Science Fiction, Fantasy, Science Fantasy

Introduction:

This month we are interviewing the authors of a newly released novel that pushes the boundaries of fantasy and



science fiction, combining them into a fascinating and unique mélange of Science Fantasy that, for me, sparks the imagination. To that end, I thought rather than perform an outright review of the book, I would interview the authors to investigate how the book developed and why.

Cataclysm: The Myst Clipper Shicaine is the debut novel by Kerry Forrestal and John Fracchia. It is one part science fantasy, one part horror and heavily spiced with an air of sail-punk, which when blended together spells a novel that is sure to capture the attention of sci-fi and sailing junkies like me. It stands out for me because where more Science Fantasy Novels sit primarily in one camp or the other (Star Wars – Science Fiction with heavy Fantasy elements, Krull – Fantasy with heavy Science Fiction Elements), this novel truly is a blend of the two.

The Myst Clipper Shicaine is gripping tale of a high tech world that was ravished by an unnamed cataclysm centuries before. Most of the world consists of badlands covered by strange and caustic mysts that burn and destroy all that they touch. Only a handful of far flung cultures have managed to survive this apocalypse. Kept safe behind their domes, these surviving peoples maintain an uneasy peace, with contact primarily maintained through the use of the great myst-clippers. Using every form of technology they can muster, these vessels sail over the mysts, and in so doing, recall some of the best elements of both sail and steam aged navigation.

Among these clippers one ship stands above the rest: the Shicaine. Once part of an underground railroad for sentient machines, her crew was betrayed and scattered. Five years later, they're being killed one by one, and it is up to their former captain, Nathaniel Gedrick to save them.

Interview:

I'd like to begin by welcoming the authors, Kerry Forrestal and John Fracchia to The Archaeologist's Guide to the Galaxy.

Both: Thanks, it's good to be here.

What was the genesis for Cataclysm: The Myst Clipper Shicaine? How did you come up with it, and how did you come to write it?

Kerry: While I was waiting to get into medical school I had some time to kill and as a gamer started tinkering with an idea for a multi-user game (MUG/MUD) or what people now know as MMORPG. Back then there wasn't the amazing computing power we have now to render whole worlds so I broke it up into zones to allow for easier loading. Each Zone needed to have it's own character and the idea for T'Amorach grew.

The name for the world was the result of a conversation with my father. He's Irish so I asked him for the Gaelic for "tomorrow" (Which embodied the hope of all the inhabitants of our world that they worked for a better tomorrow) which is Amárach. Unfortunately, everyone took that for a thinly disguised "America". By craftily using a writer's tool called a letter, we put a T in front of it and the result was T'amorach.

While it's a pretty cool environment for a game, it became clear that this was a world that I wanted to write in.

I discussed the project with John and he mentioned that he was working on something that might fit in well with the over all theme. My best description of the experience is working on a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle and having some of the borders done and a few areas when someone comes along and drops a few hundred piece section all completed into the middle and it fits perfectly. Then by bringing the rest of the work up to match it and be supported by it, you realize you had a 10,000 piece puzzle all along.

John: That's right. When Kerry pulled me in, he and I had just finished writing a play called, *Club Hell*, and were having a discussion about writing. We're both big fans of science fiction and fantasy and he started to tell me about this idea he had for a book that revolved around the concept of a world where a toxic environment had forced the surviving cultures into protected areas. The cultures were very different and maintained a tenuous peace. As it turned out, I had been sketching out ideas for a book about a theocratic culture centered around a female messianic figure. As we talked, we started to realize that the ideas meshed really well and started to develop the story together.

The world that the story is set in, T'Amorach, is quite unique. It combines elements of gothic fantasy with Science Fiction while adding a heavy dose of Tall Ship sailing adventure. Why did you decide to break the archetypes and set it in such an unusual universe? How did you come up with this vivid and fascinating world?

Kerry: ADHD?

Both Laugh.

John: It's a fair cop.

Kerry: Seriously, both John and I are lovers of diversity. We created a living thriving world filled with different types of people because it's what worlds really are. Each of our characters were intended to be the heroes of their own stories, there is no cannon fodder.

We've come to find that some of our "Bad guys" are pretty well justified in their actions, even though they oppose our central characters.

As an example, Kragen, the Prelate elevated to the supreme position in the religious zone, started out a cardboard bad guy, but as we wrote we realized that, though ambitious and a bit slanted in his views, he really sacrifices a lot to do what he thinks is right for the home he loves.

John: That's right, but I feel there's something else there. Kerry and I are what I would call connectors.

In our lives we tend to operate across traditional boundaries and hook up things that feel as though they naturally go together. So when we started to write, we weren't consciously thinking that the book should be sci-fi, or fantasy. We let our idea for the story drive where it went and it ended up as a bit of a mash-up. But I'm glad that we approached it that way, because it gave us the freedom to take the world wherever it felt like it made sense to go.

That actually raises another question, collaboration on a novel is often difficult. There are different visions and interpretation of vision that often come into play. How did you manage your collaboration?

Kerry: Beer mostly. And distance. The "Mute" button helps.

John: And fisticuffs. Occasionally blunderbusses at 10 paces were called for depending on the disagreement.

But seriously, for us it actually wasn't as difficult as you might think. Kerry and I have been friends for 32 years and have collaborated on so many things that we've learned how to navigate disagreement.

In the framework of writing, I think it's best explained by an experience we had while writing *Club Hell*. The play is about two sleazy marketers who die in a car wreck and wake up in hell. They decide that their best ticket out is to convince the devil that hell needs a makeover by recreating it as a resort. In order to do it, they need to make a big pitch and Kerry envisioned it as a religious revival scene. When he described it to me my immediate gut reaction was a resounding no. I thought it was too over the top and it made me think of fundamentalism. But in our script for months we had this placeholder sentence that simply said: "Insert revival scene here." One night we were debating the scene and he finally said to me, "Look, what's the harm in trying it? Let me write it and if it's not good, we won't use it." I realized that he was absolutely right and he brought one of my favorite parts to the play. So when we have one of those moments where one of us is digging in our heels, all the other has to say is: Insert revival scene here. It's become our cue to back off and give ourselves permission to develop an idea.

Kerry: Yes, it really helps to have developed a framework a long time ago. But there is a bit more. Every so often you meet a person who you will know your whole life. That's John for me. He has great ideas and he's pretty good at telling me when something sucks, which often it does. I have a bit of an advantage in that medical training gets you pretty hardened against taking the "that's the worst idea I've heard in a while" personally.

I've come to find that John is generally right (excepting the revival scene in *Club Hell*) and by being told something sucks, by someone I trust, I can move onto the next idea faster.

That I can see. It's never easy to take criticism of one's writing, but a long developed partnership is key, and you guys have known each other for a long time.

Kerry: You could say that. We met in college back in 1984. I was teaching a first aid class and John was taking it. We formed those bonds that you form in college over beer, broken hearts, aspirations and the struggle to become something more than what we are.

John: Imagine Binghamton University in 1984....

You mean SUNY Binghamton?

Kerry: It's called Binghamton University now... [\[1\]](#)

By heretics.

John: *Binghamton University* has a campus ambulance squad called *Harpur's Ferry* and I signed up to take an Advanced First Aid course. Kerry was the instructor. After that, we were loose friends throughout undergrad, but ended up in the same grad program and the friendship really developed there. In fact, it led us to start a business after graduation, which we did for a couple of years before deciding to pursue other career passions.

For me those passions led to a career in higher education. Now I work at Ithaca College as the Associate Director of Career Services. It's a career that allows me to help feed the passions students develop in college into careers.

Kerry: For me it led to medicine. I'm a physician in Emergency Medicine, though I also teach as often as I can, and to reaching out and collaborating with others to share ideas and methods. In fact, I'm presently working as the Ambassador to Ireland for the American College of Emergency Physicians.

John: Yeah, I think that we're both pretty wired to try anything that we think might be interesting to do and that has led us to very full lives. I'm very passionate about service to one's community so am a councilmember in my town (Caroline, NY) and involved as a board member of a number of non-profit organizations including *Twin Tiers Honor Flight*, *One World Market* (a fair trade store) and the *National Dance Society*. The arts are really important to me and in addition to writing, I'm also a musician/songwriter, experimental filmmaker, DJ on a non-profit radio station (WVBR) and member of a performing improv troupe (ComedyFLOPs). Somehow I still find time to spend with my wife Nancy and our six kitties.

Kerry: I work a little less directly with the arts, but I did recently built a tree house for my daughters and am getting less than dangerous with power tools.

Of course, I also love computers and gaming, which as I think we mentioned is tied to the origin of this book.

Well clearly passion and drive is a defining element of both of you. Did that come into play during writing. Did it help bring any one part of the novel under one writer or the other's domain?

Kerry: Nope. We broke it down evenly. I write the even words, John writes the “odd” ones.

John: I think we each have elements of the story that are special to each of us. For Kerry I think it's the Shicaine because he grew up in an area that has a rich maritime tradition. For me, it's Kwyne, because I've always had an interest in religious history and an abhorrence of religious fundamentalism. But ultimately, every bit of the book was developed, written and re-written by both of us. People have told us that it is not obvious in the writing that two people worked on it and I think that's why.

Could you each tell me about your favorite sci-fi works and how they influence your novel?

Kerry: I loved the craftiness of the traders in Asimov's Foundation and the clipper ship captains are heavily influenced by that writing. Piers Anthony and the Adept series. The Thomas Covenant series was awesome. So was Heinlein's Stranger in a Strange land, and the intrigue and scale of Herbert's Dune. I'd like to think that Hemmingway would thrive in Douglas Adam's "Hitchhikers" series. Neuromancer is of course evident in the Net-rogues. Clarke's moralism is always with the work. Obligate Tolkien reference.

In other media- Star: Gate(SG1, SGA), Wars, Trek. Firefly. V. Dr. Who (Recently visited Cardiff), Quantum Leap, Blade Runner, and New BSG before the last season. (Please note the visual media part was added after reading John's answer. OOOOOO, I hate it when he gets a better answer than me. HOWEVER- I referenced Firefly so I win)

John: I think that my influences are as much or more in fantasy than they are in straight sci-fi. Tolkien was the first author who really impressed upon me the power of creating a completely unique world as well as the importance of world building. I think he was a big influence for us, though our worlds are very different. I also like Arthur C. Clarke and Piers Anthony, particularly his *Bio Of A Space Tyrant* series and the first three books of the *Apprentice Adept* series. We love Elizabeth Haydon's *Rhapsody* series as well and she's been an incredible mentor to us. Kerry and I like to infuse humor into our works so there are likely undertones of Monty Python and Douglas Adams. *Hitchhiker's* is definitely one of my favorites. For me, visual media is also very influential and I'd cite *Blade Runner*, *Brazil*, *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Quantum Leap*, *Doctor Who* and *THX-1138*



as influences. I like them because they are all story driven works and while they do sometimes utilize incredible effects, the engine is always a great story.

Given the setting of Cataclysm: The Myst Clipper Shicaine, have sailing ships and mercantile clippers always interested you?

Kerry: For myself, they definitely have. Cutty Sark, Sea Witch, Flying Cloud, so many of the great clippers ships. Fast and maneuverable, they capture the imagination as no other ship of the time really could.

But more than that, I was intrigued by the period of time where sail was giving way to powered sail. Ernest Shackleton's ship Endurance was also fascinating to me. Having both power and sail on the Shicaine and other Myst clippers was a natural fit due to the power requirements of sailing above a cloud that would dissolve your cargo, your ship and you if you ever happened to settle down into it.

Now purists will say that an engine would never be installed in a clipper ship, it would go against it's purpose of being light, fast and maneuverable and they'd be right. Shackleton's ship was not a clipper but rather a Barquentine designed for polar work. She was sturdy and heavy.

BUT, in our world- it's doable.

John: For me, not so much though I also grew up on the ocean, but I loved the idea of using ships as a method of conducting sentients through an underground railroad. It also provides an excellent environment for character development.

Why did you choose to published Cataclysm: The Myst Clipper Shicaine via e-book and print-on-demand?

Kerry: The current pattern of "Traditional" publishing is a very economically demanding one. Publishers may deal in the arts, but they are not creating "art for art's sake." They have to try to gauge the market (which they're generally good at), invest in making the product, marketing it, place it in stores and if it doesn't sell- they buy the product back.

That's pretty hard to make a profit doing so they really need proven winners. Big names who will draw sales. It's increasingly rare that a publishing house will take a gamble on a new author without some sort of publishing record. The same is true of Hollywood, hence the number of sequels and reboots. A friend in the publishing business tells me that they DO sign debut authors at her house, so my knowledge in this area may be lacking.

E-publishing is democratizing writing in that anyone can access to having their work read. If it sucks, it dies. If it's worth something word spreads.

John: Two reasons. The first is that so much of the industry is now geared towards the delivery of electronic content and it allows us to put the work in someone's hands immediately. The second is that printing physical copies is expensive and requires a fair amount of storage space, so digital works better from that point of view. But, we both love physical books because they're tangible and tactile, and we believe that others do as well. In

fact, I think this is part of the reason for the resurgence of vinyl record albums. We long to engage works with multiple senses. So, print-on-demand was a way for us to have the best of both worlds.

Now that your novel is out, are there things you would have done differently?

Kerry: We're storytellers not really writers (though Elizabeth Haydon still holds out hope that we may become so somewhere in the far off future). I'd say better planning and more efficient writing. That said, with two people writing whatever came into their heads and then trying to get it all to mesh created a lot of depth and complexity. In some cases we've had to create whole subplots to bridge gaps.

John: You mean besides take fifteen years to write it? Not really, because as first time novelists, we needed to develop and understand our process. We both tend to be experiential learners, so jumping in and trying was an important part of our education. But, there are things we did in the first book that we will not do in subsequent books. We have a better understanding of how to approach the writing process and we think that our readers would like to find out what happens to the Shicaine before we're dead.

Speaking of the Shicaine, I very much enjoyed the feel of the merchant sailing ships that you pull off in the scenes set on the Shicaine herself. Did you need a lot of research to get that sense?

Kerry: I was out on the water from birth and was sailing from the time I was 12, though I've not had much opportunity since med school and fatherhood to do so. Screaming along the water propelled by wind is one of the great experiences in life. I think where we needed quite a bit of help was in nautical terminology. We also had to hit the sweet spot between using proper terminology and not getting so lost in it that the reader couldn't make out what we were saying.

John: There is a certain knowledge base that you need in order to authentically represent the ship environment, particularly for readers who love this niche. We are fortunate to have people in our lives with a great deal of knowledge and experience with ships, so we consulted with them on things like terminology and ship layout. We also worked on the premise that close quarters facilitate close relationships and in order for those to exist, we needed to invest in character development. It was important to us that crewmembers have a history, shared values, and genuine regard for one another. For those things I think we drew on our own relationship and that's why the crewmembers approach each other with care, respect and humor.

Now, this book is told from multiple perspectives, and a lot of them at that. Which characters do you really feel are the most central? Which pull the story along the best or have hidden details within their story arcs?

Kerry: Derring is an embodiment of an idea that sometimes the most devout people in a religion are not the obvious ones. In 37 years of dealing with people's medical secrets I've found a fair number of devout people to be utter frauds. Derring is an outcast among the devout, yet has done more to keep her faith intact than many others. I find this a compelling situation.

Another is Gedrick. He's the quintessential amalgam. He is, for me, the embodiment of strength through

diversity. By embracing all the world has to offer without prejudice he has become the strongest of the strong. He carries with him enormous strengths born of diversity both within and without. His crew are culled from the best of every zone and he carries gifts within himself from all the cultures.

I love that Derring and Gedrick have this epic love affair that can never be consummated. They love each other, but in our lore when Lokaryn become aroused, they kill. They would die for one another, they would sacrifice all for one another, but can never be together.

Of course the romantic in me can not let that stand and perhaps I have found a solution. . . .

John: For me Kell is a driving force. The idea of a vampyric character with multiple personality disorder just opened up so many interesting possibilities. In spite of the obvious driven evil within the character, there is also a certain innocence and vulnerability because she is the victim and by-product of a fundamentalist worldview. I also like that she allowed us to explore the concept of lokaryns and blood alcohol content. That particular chapter still makes me laugh aloud.

I can really see how each of those work, and how they drive the story forward both as individuals and across the whole arc of the tale. And that tale is kind of unique. It is something I've noticed more and more recently with Indie books, some of the best ones really push the genres, and Cataclysm: The Myst Clipper Shicaine certainly does that.

I look forward to other books set in this world. Thanks you both for joining us.

Cataclysm: The Myst Clipper Shicaine is now available from Amazon and other book sellers in [hardback](#), [paperback](#) and [ebook](#) format. You can buy them by following clicking on the appropriate format above, or ordering them through a bookstore near you.

[1] I should note that, as it turns out, all three of us are graduates of The State University of New York, Center at Binghamton, which changed its public name from SUNY Binghamton to Binghamton University back in the late 80s. Only a handful of crusty old timers still have any objection to this. This common bond between us led to a quick camaraderie and many jokes and conversations not included in this interview.... Some unfit for publication anywhere....

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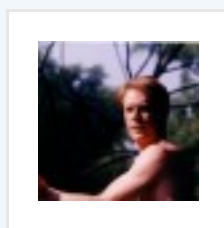
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About Thomas Evans

I'm a writer of mysteries, espionage, and speculative fiction. In my previous incarnation I was an archaeologist specializing in gender and identity in Iron and Bronze Age Europe. Mostly, however, I was known for my works with the use of geomatics, multiscalular spatial analysis and landscape theory within archaeology.

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