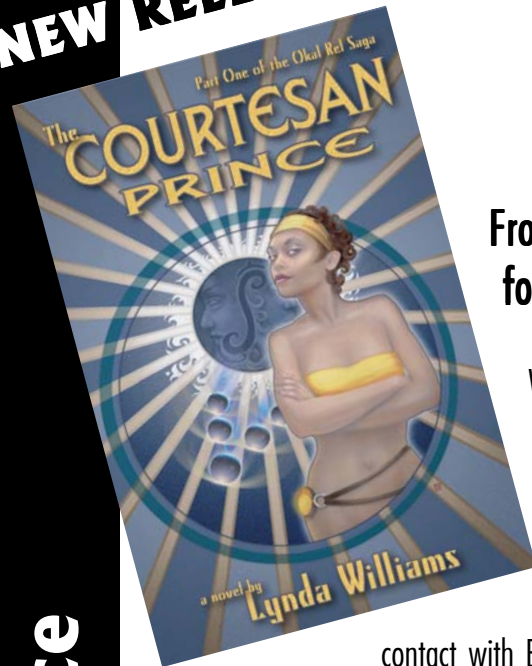


Courtesan Prince
**ABOUT THE
NOVEL**

NEW RELEASE



The Courtesan Prince

by Lynda Williams

From two cultures that should never meet, come four people who do

When Earth's first attempt to conquer the far reaches of space was thwarted by the failure of a faster than light transportation system, the first colonists were abandoned.

Subsequent colonizations were successful but ideological differences in cloning caused renegade scientists to sever their contact with Earth and establish their own unique world.

Now, thousands of years in the future, the scattered descendents of humanity have evolved into two distinct planetary societies: the Reetions of Rire, who rely on advanced computer technology to regulate every aspect of their lives, and the genetically superior and honour bound Sevulites, of Gelion.

With one conflict already behind them, these two cultures are once again on the brink of war. But one last desperate mission is launched and somewhere within a dark region of space, Reetions and Sevulites find themselves torn between their own alliances and the inexplicable desire that constantly draws them closer together.

Will the brilliant anthropologist, Ranar of Rire, find out more than he bargained for in the strange undercity of Gelion? Will the hot-headed Reetion pilot, Ann, learn that true love has a price? Will the Sevulite blade-dancer, Von, discover the dark secrets which hold the key to his world's survival? And will Di Mon, the proud Highlord of Gelion somehow find the strength to face the chaos that may destroy them all.

Isn't it time you entered the universe of *The Courtesan Prince*, Part One of the Okal Rel saga, a dazzling new science fiction epic of love, war, betrayal and the final redemption of humanity itself...

The Courtesan Prince

The Courtesan Prince by Lynda Williams

EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing / Now Available

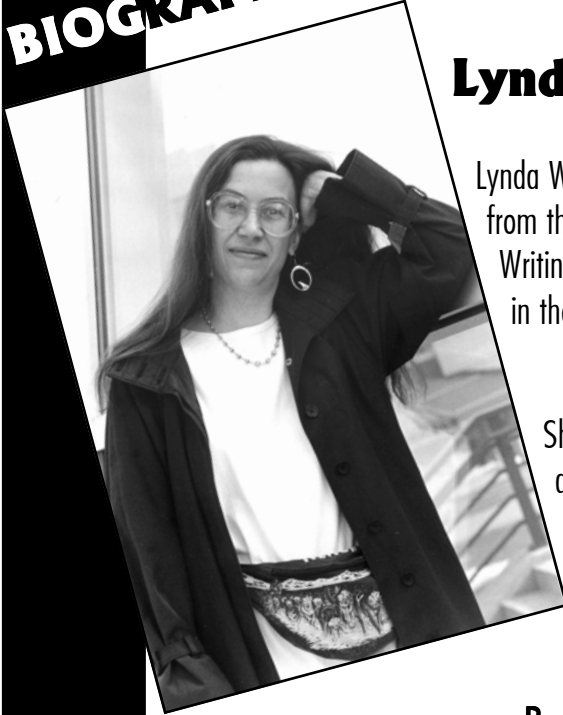
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BIOGRAPHY



Lynda Williams

Lynda Williams was born in Prince George, British Columbia and graduated from the University of Victoria with an emphasis in Chemistry and Creative Writing. She has written numerous short stories all of which have been set in the Okal Rel Universe.

She teaches computer literacy at the University of Northern BC and hold an M.L.S. from the University of Toronto and a M.Sc. from McMaster. Her previous book, *Throne Price*, which was co-authored with Alison Sinclair, was a finalist for both the *ForeWord* magazine Book of the Year Award and the Benjamin Franklin Popular fiction Award.

Praise for Lynda's previous work

"Williams ... spin(s) a densely textured, fascinating, well characterized study of humanity dealing in extreme situations. This isn't space opera, it isn't wonder SF, it isn't action adventure. This is serious human struggle, presented in an intelligent and adult fashion. Entertaining and provocative!"

- R.F. Briggs, *Yet Another Book Review Site*

"An excellent piece of science fiction." - Lisa Ramaglia, *Scribes World* (5 Star Review)

"The book is a wonderful mix-combining two rich cultures with exactly opposite viewpoints on societal structure. Every character is complete and entirely human-wrapped up in the pride and prejudices inherent with their experience. Refreshingly, this is the first book in a long while I haven't been able to anticipate the plot or character types ahead of time." - Mica Currie

"An exhilarating and enjoyable read, *Throne Price* is enthusiastically recommended reading for dedicated and discerning science fiction fans." - *Library Bookwatch*

Lynda Williams

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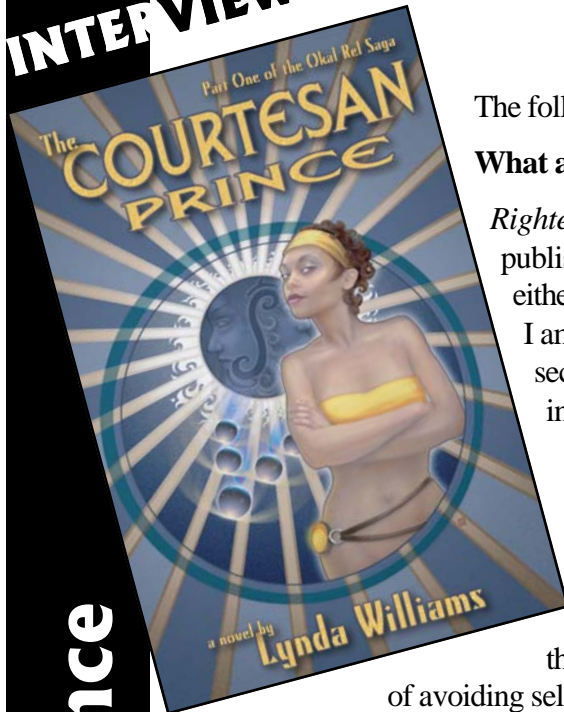
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The following interview appears on the Eternal Night website.

What are you currently working on?

Righteous Anger, the 2nd book in the main *Okal Rel* Universe series published by Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy, and written by either myself or myself with Alison Sinclair, depending on the novel. I am also working on the Guide to the *Okal Rel* Universe for my second publisher, Windstorm Creative, and recruiting stories set in the *Okal Rel* Universe for an anthology.

Could you give a brief outline of your Okal Rel universe?

Mankind is split into two major cultures, 1,000 years in the future, which reunite after a period of isolation to discover they have come up with very different solutions to the problem of avoiding self-destruction. Sevolites are neo-feudal, but their (forgotten) origins as bioengineered superpilots gives them an advantage as reality skimming pilots which is hugely important. It is reality skimming that poses the big threat to life in a space faring culture, since any single pilot can be a big threat to space stations or even planets.

Okal Rel is a religion (actually a set of them) that helps the Sevolites avoid wars of mass destruction through ritual warfare called Sword Law. Reetions are agnostic egalitarians with a very sophisticated political. Their society is made possible by non-sentient artificial intelligences known as arbiters. Ubiquitous surveillance and arbiter screening works in combination with human councils to support a very positive take on the transparent society. (See <http://www.okalrel.org/saga/reference/articles/sti/riresti0.html>)

Needless to say, not everyone is happy with their respective culture's solution to the problem of how to prevent human nature from ending life in the universe, nor with the other side's solution, either. But it all makes for great story telling. The main line series is published by Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy of Calgary, Alberta, and deals with changes that begin when Rire and Sevilom are reunited after a 200 year hiatus. Windstorm Creative of Washington State, USA, publishes novellas that deal with important incidents that fall outside that framework. A visual guide to the first 1,000 years of the *Okal Rel* Universe can be downloaded in PDF or as a digitbook, from <http://www.okalrel.org/saga.html>.

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You mentioned an anthology. Can anyone submit stories?

Yes. It is a contest, with a Feb 2005 deadline. The stories must be faithful to the setting and steer clear of nihilism, bunker mentality and techno whiz solutions to human problems that ignore the fact such things can be used for good or ill. For more information, visit the contest web page at or e-mail Virginia@OkalRel. If all goes well, we hope to make it a regular event, although we haven't decided whether that will mean annually. Since it is early days for the *Okal Rel* Universe as a phenomenon, those with a serious interest and decent writing skills have a good chance of getting a story accepted if they work with me and some well-versed friends of the *Okal Rel* Universe to get up to speed, and are prepared to accept the limitations necessary to maintain the integrity of the larger "saga". We can't have events taking place in the timeline that falsify the "truth" of the ten novel series and other works in progress. But there are still a universe of possibilities.

Who (Fact or Fiction) would you most like to meet, and what would you ask them?

There isn't a book I have read and enjoyed that didn't leave me feeling as if I had, indeed, had a conversation like that. Most recently, I've been reading a biography of Wilfred Laurier, who was Prime Minister of Canada in the early 1900s. I admire how he managed to juggle success and integrity. At the same time, he didn't even acknowledge that Canada's native population might have minority rights even more profound than those of French-speaking peoples, despite his sympathies for the half-native Metis of Manitoba who were a French speaking minority. Maybe it is a case of no one being able to expend themselves in all causes. Maybe it is a case of cultural blinkering that makes it impossible for even exceptional people to transcend their own experience and self-interests in more than a few, inspired ways. I think such exceptional people and their times have much to teach us. First and foremost that no one is perfect, and we should value the good in each other as well as object to what we can't accept.

History is such a rich place to learn about human nature. I used to read popular science books for pleasure, now I find myself reading history more. I read fiction, also, but less than I used to now I am producing it. I have read a lot of fiction in my time, of course, and have a long and fluctuating list of "favorite" authors: Alison Sinclair, obviously (Alison and I have been friends since first year university); Marie Jakkober, a fellow Canadian Alison introduced me to; Lois McMaster Bujold is a pleasure to indulge in; Guy Gavriel Kay's great sagas, pulsing with life and pseudo-historical settings; Dave Duncan's trilogy of "Blades" novels centred around the death of his Henry VIII-like character; and that's just to name a few.

In visual media, I admire Josh Whelan for *Firefly* and also *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. Disappointed by the ending of *Angel*. It sort of fell apart and betrayed the hope it nurtured like a flickering light, with comedy and pathos intermixed. The older I get, and the grottier the world gets, the more I feel that artists who engage our sympathies owe it to their audience to leave them with hope and a sense of meaning in the world. Making meaning lies at the heart of being human. We've been busy destroying it with wrecking balls for too long, without asking ourselves what we'll replace it with. A high credit card limit? Not very satisfying in the long run, and not very noble by any standard.

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Is writing your full time occupation, if not what is?

No. I have written for a living, but not fiction. I was once a newspaper reporter and worked for the B.C. government one summer, to produce a report. By day, I am an educational technologist and parttime instructor at the University of Northern B.C. I don't expect to be able to support myself and my family through writing fiction. But I do look forward to earning enough to expand the enterprise. I tend to re-invest in the *Okal Rel* Universe whenever possible. It is more than "just a story" to me. It's where I work out my ideas about living. And enjoy myself.

What was your first professional sale? How did it feel when you received the acceptance?

Thrilled, naturally. My first professional sale of fiction was to Circler Press. I was a bit apprehensive because they are an erotic press, and although my principle character, (He's called Von in Edge's forthcoming novel *Courtesan Prince*) spends formative years as a courtesan, I didn't want to dwell on the sordid details so much as the psychology and story value.

Sex is something I've been confused about since girlhood. What's good? What's bad? What is just last century repression and what will hurt like hell if you go for it? What's male and what's female, is it nature or nurture, and does it really, really matter as much as everyone seems to make out? Didn't help that I was a tom boy and had a hard time not being interested in dirty jokes. I was a geek too, and into computers in later life, although in many things I am very typically female.

In any case, I felt like I was coming out of the closet a bit by appearing in print at all, and to do so in an erotic press felt awkward. I didn't feel comfortable waving around "S&M Pasts" and saying "Look! I'm in here!" But I didn't use a pseudonym and I have no complaints about Circler. I was thrilled to make a sale. I remember telling Alison it was ironically appropriate that Amel appeared first in an erotica press.

I was very happy when Cecilia Tan of Circler asked my permission to include "Bride's Story" — the short story she bought — in a "best of" collection called the *Erotic Fantastic* that also included a story by Catherine Asaro. So that was the first. By the time Alison introduced me to Edge, to discuss *Throne Price*, I had half-resigned myself to never getting the *Okal Rel* Universe into print. It was too complex, too long and had too many things going on it. My passion for it could not be reconciled with the advice one gets at writers' conventions, good and useful as most of that may be.

I didn't want to "study the markets" and write accordingly—I wanted to write the saga. And not much else. Every time I tried to cast stories in other settings, it either felt like work or started morphing into something that could fit in the *Okal Rel* Universe, like the story I placed online with Lunacat in New York City that deals with a time closer to our own than that of the main series (<http://www.lunacat.net/books/webpub/writerscall/wc-posterity.htm>). I was so happy, when Edge bought *Throne Price*, that I made the mistake of sort of mentally holding my breath to see the book in print. And discovered that there is a lot of hard work between that first draft and the final product. For everyone.

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Brian Hades, at Edge, was a wonderful surprise, though. I have lain awake nights worrying about my work surviving the editorial process, of course, like every other writer, but on the whole I have been blessed in my publishers. I have heard so much from authors, complaining about publishers, that I was almost afraid to sell a piece of the *Okal Rel* Universe. The thought to being prohibited from self-publishing or publishing on the web, should print remain elusive, was frankly terrifying. This wasn't "just another novel" to me. It was my whole life as a writer. I had been writing stories in the *Okal Rel* Universe for over twenty years. The idea of a publisher buying a book—or worse, the whole series—and then sitting on it for an indefinite period of time, was frankly terrifying. So I was deliriously happy, and a nervous wreck, by turns.

And I learned tons as a writer. There is nothing like being published to make you a professional. I have recently started a writer's workshop group (in my home town of Prince George) to see if I can give back, in that regard. Having people read and critique your work is the next best thing.

If you could give one piece of advice to a would-be author, what would it be?

Know why you write. Don't let anyone undermine your real motives by confusing them with their own. You have a right to yours. Find where you belong and start there.

When did you first decide that you wanted to be an author?

I can't remember when I wasn't a story teller. I know I persisted with "make believe" well into my teens. I have an article about those days on my website, in the "Creative History" section. (See http://www.okalrel.org/saga/createhist/making_of/promised.html).

Then, when I met Alison at university, our worlds collided on paper instead of through dolls and play acting. Ever since then, with a few hiatuses here and there, Alison and I have been continuing the dialog by phone or e-mail or in person when that's possible. Alison wrote an article about that called "Collaborating across continents" that is online at <http://www.okalrel.org/saga/createhist/wriprice.html>.

Are you for or against e-books?

I am for e-books and self-publishing and putting stories online, as well. My husband buys e-books. I have downloaded some to my palm pilot but only public domain ones thus far. I prefer to buy and read books for pleasure. I love the feel of books and I like to have them heaped around me in big jumbled messes. At least I figure I must love that, because that's the way every place I spend time in winds up looking like, eventually. I believe that every writer has the right to seek his or her audience, and should do it any way that he or she finds emotionally satisfying.

I believe that everyone who asks an author whether he has made a million dollars yet, as if that is the only way someone could possibly justify writing, is missing the point in a bad way. Being able to put stories online mattered enough to me that when Windstorm Creative asked me for a first refusal contract on any *Okal Rel* Uni-

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verse stories not already committed to Edge, I insisted that stories I gave away on the web (or to non-profit causes) had to be exempt, and they kindly agreed to write that in. There's one I put on the web because it is about being an unpublished writer, in a way. Or someone who wakes up one day to the realization she is not "the top" in whatever field of endeavor is dear to her. If we can't figure out how to live with that situation, then an awful lot of us are going to have to drop dead or shrivel away! So where writing is concerned, in particular, substitute J.K. Rowling for "Sevolite" and read away. The story is online at <http://www.okalrel.org/saga/stories/backout.html>.

Are you a music fan? If so, what?

I love music. I like making it and I like listening to it, but I suspect the majority of people in the world would consider me a lost cause. I am not a very good musician. I played the flute well enough, at one point, to embarrass myself by getting into a performance I wasn't really competent to cope with. Now I like to mess around with the piano when I get the time, but will probably never get out of the beginner stage. I am Welsh, by ancestry, and so I sing—Whether or not I always should. My eldest daughter, who sings with a very good choir, often sings with me. She handles the high parts. We sing old ballads, things from musicals and Disney songs most often.

When it comes to listening, I like classical. I listen to CBC 2 on the radio, which is 100 per cent classical music programming. I have always liked Stravinsky a lot. Baroque and chambre music is popular with me at the moment. I like obscure things that other people haven't heard about, but then I can't remember the names of the composers. I know lots of lyrics to popular songs from all sorts of eras, but usually can't tell you who wrote them.

Why do you like SF/F/H?

I don't particularly like horror. I do like well thought out fantasy. And of course I like science fiction. Why? I like the size of it. I like to ask the big questions. I like to save the universe. I like to invent religions and think about how a society based on premises different from our own could work, or maybe even people based on modified biology.

Sometimes I just get a kick out of larger than life characters and situations. I like the potential of sf for allegory and metaphor. Maybe I look for hope in it sometimes, when the human race seems too scarily insane to survive its own cleverness. Often I am just looking for some entertainment. I like stretching my imagination. I like getting away from the mundane. And I like ideas about big changes to come dressed up in human behavior to see whether or not they make sense.

What book are you reading at the moment?

I am usually reading at least two books. So here goes: In the bag I carry around with me, I am reading *La Diva Nicotinea: The Story of How Tobacco Seduced the World* / Iain Gatley>. For casual "pick it up and read for two minutes" I am working on *Tom Brown's School Days* in a cheap, reprinted, and unabridged edition.

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Reading period books is a wonderful wake up call for grasping just how different cultural norms are even within “The West” of the last couple hundred years. The changes in both attitude and style are as interesting as the narratives that have stood the test of time. By my computer, I have a copy of *Photoshop 7 Down & Dirty Tricks* / Scott Kelby which I am working through bit by bit. I am not a graphic artist, but I like to dabble, and I sometimes find I need to be able to teach techniques to project workers, at work.

Do you have a scientific background?

Yes, but not exclusively. I keep switching back and forth. Studied Chemistry for three years, and have a masters degree in Computer Science. But my undergraduate degree is in Liberal Studies. Lucky to have Alison to advise on the medical science and other things.

Do you get inspiration from recent scientific discoveries and theories?

I get inspiration from Discover Magazine, quite often, but mostly for articles I would like to write for the “Research and Commentary” section of my web site (see: <http://www.okalrel.org/saga/reference/commentary/index.html>). But no, I think the *Okal Rel* Universe is more about people working out their problems than it is about the technology that makes or solves the problems. For that, I find more inspiration in history, lately.

But I read a lot of popular science at one time, and studied astronomy, physics and chemistry. Most recently I took one 2nd and one 3rd year Psychology course, out of interest. Always a temptation when one works at a university. Leaning towards social sciences these days. I read 1st year text books in nearly any science, for pleasure. Or at least leaf through them. Finally gave away some statistics books I realized I would never get around to reading.

Do you enjoy collaborating?

Yes, I do. I have always collaborated with someone in my story making. Seems to be how I developed as a writer. For a long time, of course, the *Okal Rel* Universe was more or less a private preserve of myself and Alison, and other demands allowing, I expect her to be writing many of the books in the main series with me. We have completed two, but the 2nd of those, *Far Arena*, is book 5 in the series and waiting for me to finish up the 2nd and 3rd novels. I also enjoy writing on my own, and consider myself unreasonably lucky to have a second publisher willing and eager to take novellas from me as they roll out, especially as these, too, are set in the *Okal Rel* Universe. I have always wanted to do an anthology to encourage others to discover if they can tell the story they want to tell in the *Okal Rel* Universe.

I am not entirely sure why. Partly, it is how I operate. I like to involve other people in a creative way, not just a passive one. I love it when people give me things to use on the website, invite me to discuss *Throne Price* at a book club, or talk about writing to an English class. My friend Kathy Plett made me *Okal Rel* Universe buttons. My mother financed T-Shirts with an embroidered rel symbol on them. Alison has done some amazing pictures of characters and scenes, lately, that she has posted on our blog “Reality Skimming”, and a couple of friends of

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the *Okal Rel* Universe, Virginia O'Dine and Sarah Trick, are collaborating with me on the *Guide to the Okal Rel Universe* for Windstorm Creative. I'm particularly pleased that my editor at Edge is submitting a story to the first *Okal Rel* Universe anthology, and was even more surprised when I heard that a well known local writer whom I know and respect as a poet is interested.

I am learning to get a bit tougher, in my "old age", however, about drawing lines. Where there is collaboration there is always the potential for conflict, whether that is over editing anxieties, plot directions or what have you. And I have come to realize that I need the *Okal Rel* Universe to live in. I cannot afford to let anyone spoil it for me. Characters that are simple transplants, mentally and emotionally, from our world into another world, are one of my pet peeves. People are affected by their culture. If they are going to be unusual, fine, but make them part of their world first.

I've recently decided that I am also uninterested in the three sins of science fiction problem solving that I summarize in the "themes" page for the story guidelines (<http://www.okalrel.org/contest/themes.htm>): bunker mentality, the arms race solution and nihilism. But growling aside, I think it is a mistake to presume writing is not a collaboration even if the only collaborators are one's readers. By reading a story, I become cast and crew of the drama as it plays out in my head.

That's why, for those of us with receptive heads, books will always be more powerful than movies.

Why do you think SF gets a bad press?

Maybe because so much of it is about adolescent wish full fillment and cheat tricks. The best sf is good literature. And good literature tackles tough questions.

Have you won any awards for your writing?

Throne Price was one of three finalists for the Benjamin Franklin Award, and one of seven for Foremost Magazine's award for science fiction. We didn't win either, but we came close twice. That was wonderful. So many people congratulated me on the article in our local weekly newspaper. That can't help but make you feel good. At the same time, it is perplexing that awards mean so much. We are as obsessed with ranking each other, in every human endeavor, as any Sevolite ever was about getting reborn at a higher birth rank.

Is there something you are particularly proud of?

Just surviving, day by day. Having enough grip to get from dock to dock, from a reality skimmer's perspective. Life is not for whimps.

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The following interview appears on www.greatwriting.co.uk website.



These days, many respected authors are climbing down from their ivory towers to open dialogues with their fans. Few however are taking things as far as Canadian author Lynda Williams. She's created the Okal Rel Universe; a world that blends science fiction and fantasy themes to explore the good, bad, and necessary of human existence, and a world she's inviting others to play in.

The universe exists through a series of novels written by Lynda (and sometimes co-author Alison Sinclair), and simultaneously through published short stories and novellas written by Lynda's 'votary authors'; a selection of Okal Rel fans approved to contribute to the official canon of work. At least that's the plan, and the forthcoming publication of the first Okal Rel Anthology

suggests that this bold experiment in publishing is starting to take flight. Lynda's debut Okal Rel novel, *Throne Price* was released in 2002 and like another sci-fi epic currently enjoying its last cinematic hurrah, the first book was actually Episode IV in the series. Next up is the first prequel *Courtesan Prince* (Episode I) published next month, which Lynda hopes will keep her from having to explain the saga's backstory to every person that asks.

Collaboration with votary authors is an essential element of Okal Rel, and it's one that Lynda's publisher has set up the Fandom Press imprint to accommodate. Any fan of the existing works can make contact with Lynda, chat through ideas, and perhaps be anointed as an official contributor to the ORU mythos. It's certainly one of the more unusual paths to publication, and an experiment that if successful could transform the relationship between authors, publishers, and readers.

Lynda shared with us the background to Okal Rel, and her hopes for its future. Read on for an insight into a unique publishing approach and how you, yes you, can be a part of it.

Great Writing: How did you come up with the Okal Rel universe? Did you intend from the start that this would be a shared universe project?

Lynda Williams: That's hard to answer, because I've been living and writing in some version of the Okal Rel Universe since childhood. Writing was how I played, as I was growing up, and I usually played with one other, special somebody. For the last 20 years that was mostly Alison Sinclair, co-author of *Throne Price* and its forthcoming sequel, *Far Arena*. So while I have always been passionate and sometimes even dogmatic about maintaining the ORU as a place I wanted to tell stories in, I've always been open to collaborating. I believe, in fact, that writing is a natural response to becoming a fan for creative and talented readers.

GW: What do you hope to accomplish by working in this way?

LW: Corny as it may sound in the cynical 21st century, I believe in my work and want it to touch as many people as it can, in as profound a way as possible. Including others in the writing process promotes that mission

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in a lot of complex ways. Naturally I hope that those who write for the ORU will be desperate to read everything I have already written, and everything written by other ORU authors. But that isn't essential (particularly as the number of works grows), and the point isn't to create a captive audience. The point is to provide a way "in" for talented people who love my universe. I'm a compulsive teacher. I've spent twenty years in the field, as a post-secondary classroom teacher, and now work as project leader for a Centre for Teaching and Learning, dealing primarily with e-learning initiatives but also with teaching as scholarship. Even writing is like teaching, for me, because it is all about the feelings created, the values endorsed and the questions raised. There ought to be a natural progression from being a reader to becoming a writer, for those who are so inclined. Instead, there are very high barriers, bristling with discouraging advice. I know. I've been there. And what I learned in going through the process of publishing, first with Circler Press and then with Edge, was worth more than any number of workshops.

It was an exciting, demanding but rewarding way to learn because there was a real prize at the end: publication. You can't learn to be a swimmer if you never get into the water. I don't see how anyone can become a professional writer, either, if he or she doesn't learn about the publishing cycle, with all its joys and agonies, not to mention the marketing experience at the other end. (For example, the title "Throne Price" was a big mistake. Nobody gets it right. I was told by book sellers that one should never begin a book title with the letters "TH" to start. And then the fact that both "Throne Prince" and "Thorn Price" seem more natural is a big headache. So, one lives and learns.)

Perhaps I am just weird, but I find I can be a more assertive marketer of my own work when I can say to the writer who asks me about opportunities, "I don't control the rest of the world, but if you want to work with me, here's a way." I was struggling for a while, in fact, with how to honour my desire to share the writing experience when I knew I had to promote my own work more, and worry about other writers less. You see, I came to the conclusion before my own breakthrough, that there are a lot of good writers out there who just can't "break in". So when Windstorm Creative became my second publisher, I told them that I wanted to include other writers eventually, and they came back with the idea of Fandom Press.

GW: Is your publisher supportive of the multiple-author aspect of the project?

LW: Fandom Press, as it is currently formulated, is the brain child of Windstorm Creative's CEO, Jennifer DiMarco, and Windstorm remain 100% behind it. But agreeing to become one of the first guinea pigs was compatible with my own goals. As it turns out, it has worked very well for me. I used to feel half-guilty about promoting my own book when I encountered people like my earlier self, aching to become published writers.

Now I have a way to let the good ones "in" without getting distracted from my own mission. In fact, I find it easier to promote the ORU when it benefits others besides myself, and having some kind of honest invitation up my sleeve helps me to identify keenly with aspiring authors.

Publishing with the ORU also has the mutual benefit of shared marketing responsibilities. I help to sell the votary works, and I naturally hope that votary authors who are genuinely turned on by the ORU, will encourage their

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readers to explore the main series published by Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy, and the growing body of work coming out from Windstorm. Not to mention the background information on the web.

GW: So you're actually contracted to two different publishers?

LW: Yes. Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy, is the publisher of the ten novel series (in progress). They have accepted the role I play with Windstorm Creative but work solely with myself, or myself and Alison Sinclair, on the ten novel series. It is unusual, I know, for two publishers to be bringing out the same fictional series in different forms. But the ORU is something entirely different, and traditional publishing, both at the same time. It gets even better. The first ORU story ever published in print was actually sold to a third publisher, and there are a few of my stories on the web, also, that are part of Canon. It is truly bigger than any one medium it appears in, and even the publishers are sharing.

GW: When setting up a working universe, is there a lot of technical writing to set up the history, characters, maps etc., or does that stuff come as a by-product of each story?

LW: I have a lot more details set up, in advance, for the ORU than most authors ever create. My evolution as an author has been more in the mould of someone like Tolkien than most modern writers, at least with regard to the "tip of the iceberg" nature of what finally makes it into print. I have literally been writing and thinking and doodling things about the Okal Rel Universe since I was in high school, and I am now nearly fifty. I connect my writing to nearly everything I study or experience. I was studying special relativity, as a high school student, when I came up with the beginning of what would become reality skimming as a faster than light mode of travel. Which is not to say that rel-skimming could pass inspection for hard science, entirely, but the inspiration for it came from summer courses I took during my "I love physics" phase.

GW: Is there a danger of the details of the world getting in the way of telling a story?

LW: Always. But that is true of any truly new or different setting. It is no worse in a science fiction story than it is in good historical fiction. Throne Price had a particular problem, in that regard, at the beginning. It is actually book four of the main series, but due to the vagaries of fate was published first. There is a lot of background covered in the first chapter that would be easier to tolerate as a refresher, or a "catch up" review for people who had already read the first three novels. It speaks to the impact the ORU has on those who do manage to "get into it" that the book was short listed for the Benjamin Franklin best fiction of the year award despite that inhospitable beginning. Book number one of the series, Courtesan Prince, is coming out in the summer of 2005. There's nothing like starting a story at the beginning, and I am looking forward to having it in hand, as the ORU "ambassador" to the uninitiated.

But the very fact that the Okal Rel Universe is different and complex will always be both its strength and its weakness. If something is very easy to understand because there is very little in it that is new or different, it might

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be easier to get people's attention initially but hard to hold their interest or make a unique impression. I accept the hard work of getting across really different social systems and technology, in order to tell the stories predicated on them. Grand goals aside, however, details must contribute to the story in hand before they ought to be included. I think I've got clever about that, by leaving out any details that are unnecessary to the current story, without contradicting them, either. Nersallian fertility manners are not going to feature in a story about Demish trade wars, for example, but if a Nersallian is mentioned it should not be in a context where he or she behaves just the same way the Demish might, sexually.

GW: With the doors open to other writers, how organic are the 'rules' of the universe? Are you the sole arbiter of what can be done?

LW: It is safest to say that I am the sole arbiter, just to avoid misunderstanding about how far flexibility might extend. I am not giving away the farm, here. I have spend my whole life establishing the settings in which the stories of my main series will play out, and have far more to lose than anyone who takes a casual interest in working with me. I am, and will remain, "god" for the foreseeable future. This is not a trivial restriction and I refuse to apologize for it. For one thing, I will not tolerate nihilism in ORU works. And I won't accept a story that undermines the established order of things using a trick that begs the question, "If this guy could do that, why can't anyone else". People out for cheap thrills will not want to play. I will, however, entertain any idea and work with people collaboratively to explore those I am able to embrace. People who want to work with me, and share at least some of my main goals thematically, will not encounter obnoxious interference. But I have learned my lessons, in life, about being too generous, as well.

Let's just say the bigger the change, the harder a votary author will have to work to establish that change. And that may mean research of the history books or popular science kind. It will certainly mean starting from a sound and thorough understanding of the ORU as I have established it, and developing a convincing representation of that starting point before diverging from it. On the other hand, since the ORU spans 1,000 years of history and many, many cultures, there are opportunities for doing many, many things. It's a question of multiple infinities. Are there an infinite number of compatible stories? Yes. Does that mean anything goes? No.

My best advice would be, if you are irked by the whole set up, and long to do away with reality skimming, or overturn Sevildom in a short story that invalidates the rest of the main novel series, or want to prove that Reetions arbiters can be corrupted, then you are better off doing your own thing elsewhere. To be part of the ORU, officially, there will be restrictions. Absolutely. But nothing worth doing is ever without constraints.

GW: How do you work with other writers of Okal Rel stories?

LW: I don't take submissions from authors so much as create a relationship with them. Anyone who can write and is willing to work with a coach on the ORU side of things will succeed, at least for the time being.

Authors come to the project prepared to respect my authority on matters of ORU integrity, and with a generally like-minded attitude to literature. Compatibility is a major concern. That's why I say people ought to like the

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books in order to work as votary writers. The first step for an author is to find out if he or she likes the books and sees potential for stories in the background information available on the web.

Contact, either in person or by e-mail, is the next step. If we reach an understanding, the author is added to my mailing list and is "in the loop" on works in progress and other news. Exactly how I work with an author depends on the person. If she has an idea of what she wants to write, but needs an appropriate settings and background details, I will give her suggestions. If he knows where and when he wants to set the story, I might get involved at the stage of the first draft, as an editor. Or I might ask as ORU "historian" and provide names, dates and other details for the author to use as background material. How I work with each author is, to date, pretty individual.

The end product, however, becomes part of the ORU canon and future authors writing in the same period or working with the same details, have to be consistent with all ORU canon that is applicable to their work. The contributions are authorised and officially accepted as contributing to the greater whole. That is not the case in fan fiction. Fan fiction authors have no restrictions. I have no problem with fan fiction. I hope and expect to see some of it spring up around the ORU, eventually. I expect I will like some of it, and really wish some of it had never been written. But it won't be part of the Okal Rel Universe story, only a reaction to it. Votary authorship is authorship in the traditional sense, with the primary difference being that it is done with the origin author as editorial advisor on what can and cannot fit into the existing scheme of things. Votary authors get paid. In the case of anthology stories there is a flat fee, which is normal for anthologies in general. If an author goes on to write an approved novella, then the author gets the royalties for that work, less a small percentage that goes to me as the origin author.

Basically, I want the Okal Rel Universe to be about living my values as well as succeeding commercially. Being willing to engage other authors, creatively, in one of those values, provided it can be done in a way that contributes to the whole.

GW: How does your collaboration with Alison Sinclair work? Do you prefer to write collaboratively?

LW: Alison and I go way back. We met in our first year of university and between us, we've written our way through four post secondary degrees. For most of those years, the Okal Rel Universe was our private playground. We wrote Throne Price first because it was the book, in the ten novel series, where her main character joins the series. At that time, Alison was already published and I was the newbie, writing and re-writing what has since become the material for the first three novels. (Only the first one, Courtesan Prince, is finished. The next one is close and the hope is that it will be out in 2006. The third one is sketchier except for chunks that are already completed.) The fifth book in the series, Far Arena, is once again by Alison and myself, and is already written. Edge is waiting for me to get #2 and #3 done before they publish #5.

Alison may or may not be available and willing to work with me on numbers 6 through 10, but we are still in contact every other week or so, by phone, and good friends. If she isn't game when the time comes, I will work on the rest of the books alone. If she is, I'll work with her.

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My preferences regarding collaboration depend entirely on the collaborator, and the project. I like working with votary authors as an editor and advisor on ORU matters. I loved working with Alison on Throne Price and Far Arena. I would probably enjoy doing joint works of some kinds, with some people. Great ideas can come from "role playing" your way though a story on the telephone, over coffee or by e-mail, before shaping it into a complete story. But I also like the greater potential for artistic control that comes with being the sole author of a work, when that is most meaningful to me. I suppose it depends on what I am out to accomplish and how much respect and trust I have for my co-author.

GW: Is the shared universe model something that particularly suits science-fiction, or would you hope to see it expand to other genres?

LW: Good question. I feel inclined to argue that every universe is a shared one. Take detective literature. Someone created the hard-boiled private eye in the big city, as a sub-genre. Everyone who writes a story that makes use of that stock figure is writing in the same universe, more or less. Science Fiction makes the whole affair more explicit because the trappings are not shared with the real world and can become disproportionately significant because they are so visible. So if you replace "shared universe" with "style" or "trend", sharing happens all the time in other forms of literature. In one sense, it is our determination to draw lines around things and attribute any single work to one person, entirely, that is unnatural, because we are all inheritors of other people's "worlds". But that's waxing a bit philosophical. There does seem to be something about science fiction and fantasy that lends itself to working with shared universes. One reason might be the powerful appeal to the imagination. I believe shared universe authorship could be meaningful wherever there is a genre that inspires people to imagine themselves becoming part of an adventure.

Whether I want to see more or less of that in the world, I don't know yet. The key question for me, personally, is how votary authorship in the ORU will develop as literature. Can it be satisfying for authors and readers, without diverging in directions that I cannot tolerate? Will it generate greater value, as a whole, or distract me from getting my own magnum opus completed? I just don't know yet, for sure. But I do know that science fiction is participation literature. And I think that's a lively and positive thing.

GW: What's next for Lynda Williams?

LW: Courtesan Prince is coming out this summer. Once that happens, I will have the first book of the main series in hand, and be able to get on with the job of promoting it without bumbling through an explanation of how the book in hand is actually book number four of a series. Don't get me wrong! I love Throne Price. I would be gravely disappointed if people who enjoy Courtesan Prince didn't buy Throne Price immediately, because they can't wait for books two and three to be published. But I am finally in a position to start at the beginning, which is hugely empowering.

The first anthology of stories set in the Okal Rel Universe will also be out by the end of the year, all going well with the process at Windstorm Creative. Having that in hand will be a big help in explaining the Fandom Press

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opportunity to votary authors. With those two books, and the Windstorm novellas Kath and Mekan'stan as well, filling out the promise that works from both publishers will be integrated, I am looking forward to quite a nice little growth curve of progress. And I have the work in progress to establish a small, but steady stream of new books each year, for the next five to ten years.

I've been asked if I will ever write anything except Okal Rel Universe novels and I do, already, write some other fiction. I have a story in the latest edition of the Dandelion literary journal, in Canada, for example. I publish non-fiction as well, most recently two chapters in Dr. Dee Horne's LitCan Project publication on the role of information technology in the publication of literary journals, in Canada. But the ORU will keep me pretty busy for a while, yet.

For the full primer to the Okal Rel universe, visit the Okal Rel website. Throne Price by Lynda and Alison Sinclair is available directly from Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing (whose website also features extracts from Courtesan Prince) or from Amazon UK, who helpfully list it as being written by 'Lynda William and Alastair Sinclair'. The shorter-form ORU stuff is from Windstorm Creative.

If all this sounds like your cup of tea, you're in luck. Lynda is looking to widen the circle of ORU writers, and submissions are open for the next Okal Rel Anthology. Start by devouring the stuff on the Okal Rel site and if it feels like a world you could write in, then email Lynda and say hi.

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The

Part One of the Okal Rel Saga

COURTESAN PRINCE



a novel by

Lynda Williams

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