



Conor Corderoy

Interview

pdFanzine #1
Interview: Conor Corderoy

Conducted by Janus Andersen

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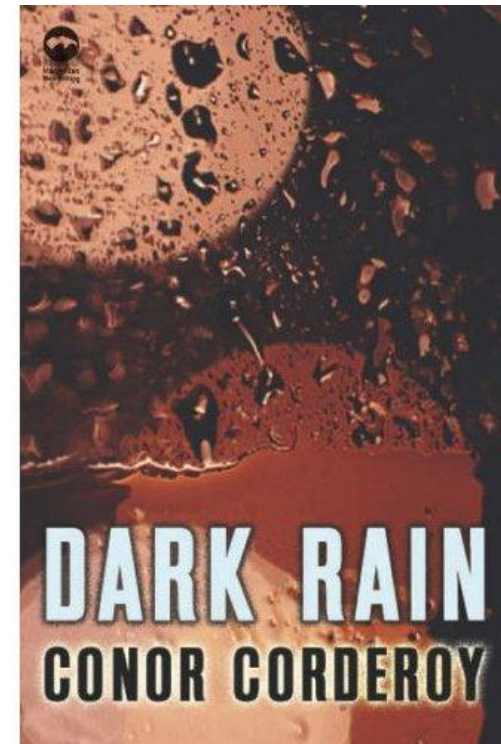
www.conorcorderoy.co.uk

Q: And just for inspiration: could you mention a couple of the books that have inspired you to become a writer - or just a couple of books that you think other people should read.

A: I think of all the prophetic, futuristic novels ever written, Huxley's *Brave New World* must be the most frightening. It is infinitely more accurate and disturbing than Orwell's *1984*. In detective fiction Dashiell Hammett's *Glass Key*, or his Continental Op stories, because of his spare, ruthless economy of prose. In space age Science Fiction Asimov's *End of Eternity* is fascinating – in fact any of the later Asimov – and of course the short stories of James Blish. Arthur C Clark is a legend of course, but I just think he's a better scientist than he is a writer.

"Dark Rain" is Conor Corderoy's 2006 debut novel, a mixture of noir crime novel and science fiction.

In a world ravaged by environmental collapse, inspector O'Neil is charged with solving the impossible murder of a Domer - one of the elite - and he soon finds out that a lot more than he could possibly have imagined is at stake.



*Conor Corderoy:
Dark Rain
Macmillan New Writing
Front jacket photograph: @Getty Images
Jacket design by Richard Evans*

Q: Dark Rain is your debut - could you tell us something about yourself and the novel?

A: Though Dark Rain is the first to get published, it isn't the first I've written, and in some ways Dark Rain is atypical of my writing. But then I suppose you could probably say that about all of them, because they are all quite different. If you were looking for a common, defining characteristic it would

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have to be a concern with the abuse of power, and in particular political power, and the ability of the individual achieve liberty – which is a relative, mutable condition – or even freedom, which is an absolute condition. Let me say that in Dark Rain I was above all having fun with a couple of genres which I love, but I was also trying to have a look at what happens in society when the government uses one or more external threats as a pretext to centralize power in its own hands. This is something I experienced as a child in Franco's Spain, and sometimes I think I see hints of its resurgence in modern Europe.

Q: I've been reading about Dark Rain on different websites and forums and there are several people talking about a code embedded within the novel. What is that about - fact, fiction or a clever marketing ploy?

A: Yes, I've seen some of those too. If it's a marketing ploy my PR people didn't tell me about it. Some of the equations that these guys have come up with are quite clever, and of course the number five is one of those numbers that crops up again and again in conspiracy theories. I wonder why? I used five chapters in Dark Rain because I wanted a feeling of darkness and density.

I am certain that there are government agencies in Britain, the USA and the EU whose purpose it is to prepare the way for climate change, and I am sure that a lot of their operations are covert and above, or beneath, the law. I do make reference to these agencies, briefly, in Dark Rain, and in a lot more detail in The Eden Cypher. Is there a code embedded in the text which gives details about these agencies? Well if there were I wouldn't tell, and if I said there wasn't you wouldn't believe me. So...

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Coming in a very close second must be the characters. The

best plot in the world, with thin, uninteresting characters would fail. If we are to penetrate the labyrinth, then we must be lead by strong, interesting characters.

As far as structure is concerned, provided you have a good plot and good characters, the structure will just fall naturally into place.

Q: What are your future plans? Your website mentions quite a lot of projects.

A: Well, The Eden Cypher, which is the prequel to Dark Rain, is awaiting the thumbs up from Macmillan and I am currently drawing up the notes and plans for The Tree of Life, the sequel to Dark Rain, set a thousand years in the future. This will be pure, mind-bending science fiction.

I also have a plan, which is still in its early stages, to sail, solo, round the world before the weather changes too dramatically (my Viking genes emerging), and write about my experiences as I go. That should be good.

Q: Reading your biography, it seems that you have lived in quite a lot of places. How has this influenced your writing - and has it played a role in your interest in science fiction? Even though you grew up in Ibiza, Dark Rain still takes place in England. Is that because of personal attachment or simply because science fiction is such a genre of the western world?

A: I have moved a lot, that's true. Has this influenced my writing? I guess it must have, though I always seem to write about London. Whether it influenced my interest in science fiction is a moot point. I used to lie under the pine trees on Formentera, surrounded by lazy goats and sleepy flies, reading Asimov and searching those perfect Mediterranean skies for UFOs. But I think if I had grown up in Finland or Alaska I would still have had that interest. But Dark Rain was a special case. I had just returned to Blair's Britain after living for three years in southern Spain. Suddenly I felt moved to write a novel about a place where it always rains, and the country is ruled by a gang of despotic, insane religious maniacs. Draw your own conclusions...

Q: Dark Rain is quite bleak - is your outlook on humanity and the future really that negative?

A: That's a tricky one. Optimism without realism is stupidity. I believe in the human being's ability to overcome adversity and survive. However, a writer is a camera, and must describe the truth that he sees, and the fact is that we, as a society, have never been closer to catastrophic extinction than we are now. The fact is that it is too late to save our environment. The climate is going to change, and it will change suddenly and catastrophically, and millions, maybe billions of people will die in the space of a few months. This will not happen in a hundred years, or at some distant point in the future. It will happen in a matter of decades. My interest and my energy are focused on how we are going to negotiate this change. What are we going to carry with us into the new world? Shall we save fascist central control and territorial disputes, or democratic dialogue and ancient liberties? Shall we save the libraries at Oxford and Århus, or the stockpiled weapons of NATO? Whom do we want to be in this new world? In the ability of the thinking individual to ask these questions and think rationally, I believe there is a glimmer of hope in a bleak future.

But in the end, I have to say, genre is one of those human inventions designed to try and categorize and pigeonhole life. In reality space, love, death, detectives, exploration, revenge, envy, cowboys, travel gardening and pets are all mixed up together in our wonderful, infinite universe. Genre should never be more than a medium, and fun. Mix away!

Q: You've used the structure of a crime novel, and the ideas and perspective of a science fiction novel. But what part of the narrative is most important to you: plot, structure, character...?

A: If you are using the structure of a crime novel, then what you are doing is sending your hero through a labyrinth in search of an answer. Where he starts, what he encounters along the way, and how he finds the answer, are all parts of the plot. If you use the structure of a crime novel, then the plot is absolutely essential, otherwise you have no story in any meaningful sense of the word. Paul Auster tried this in his New York trilogy and it was pretty disastrous. A crime novel without a plot would be like alcohol-free beer. A pointless exercise missing the essential ingredient.

A: That's a good point. In *Dark Rain* the science fiction elements are there to create the mystery which the reader wants to explore. The purpose of these elements, both in the book and in the society that it portrays, is to create a pervasive doubt and uncertainty about life, the future, our safety as a species. This is a deeper, darker mystery than could ever be evoked in a simple crime story. The crime elements of the story – in particular the American 'dime thriller' elements – are there to enable O'Neil to hunt down and find the answer to the mystery. The theme of the book is hope, and so we need to be able to believe that our hero can solve the mystery. It is perhaps inevitable that these two elements together would create a third, which is the element of conspiracy.

There were no problems reconciling the two. They make a very happy marriage. As to the pros and cons of mixing genres, on the whole I think it is a positive thing. It throws up a multitude of possibilities. What restrictions there are, are imposed by the need to stay within the style of the genre. O'Neil, for example, could not possibly have been a vegetarian lesbian in a wheelchair. He had to be a tough, hard drinking, smoking Man (capital 'M'). Equally, the girl had to play a minor part and be beautiful, strong and vulnerable. She could not have been a wise-cracking martial arts expert. That would be unfaithful to the genre.

Q: The world described in *Dark Rain* is very much on the brink - on the brink of war, on the brink of ecological collapse, on the brink of first contact. Which on of these do you consider most likely - and which one would have the greatest impact on mankind?

A: Well, most likely has to be ecological collapse, because that is actually inevitable. Even if the environmental cooling systems hadn't already locked into an irreversible positive feedback, the steps necessary to avoid environmental collapse would bring about the collapse of the world economy, with the consequent death of billions of people. The only way forward here is a 'managed decline'. My pet, unsubstantiated theory is that the governments of the Western World have been engaged in this managed decline for at least thirty years, because it must have been clear to them back then that they had an insoluble problem, and it was back then that the first reports were commissioned on the effects of pollution on the environment. But that is another story.

War is an intrinsic part of human life. It is as old as a species and possibly older. But a major war is very unlikely at the moment because the balance of power is so massively in

favour of the Anglo-American axis. Until and unless that balance of power changes we will see no more than expeditionary wars into the Middle East.

First contact is the great enigma. I spent much of my youth chasing UFOs, and I saw a number of inexplicable aerial phenomena. I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that there is life in our solar system, and intelligent life in our galaxy. Is this intelligent life behind UFO sightings? Shall we ever make contact with this intelligent life? Have we made contact already? Would we know if we had? And if we do make contact, when is that likely to happen? These are questions we simply cannot answer because we haven't the necessary data. The questions associated with alien intelligence are practically infinite, and the UFO enigma seems to raise more questions than it ever answers. And as I am sure you know, many claim this is the very purpose of the enigma.

Of these three events climatic change is going to have the greatest impact on Mankind. By the middle of this century we will see a catastrophic change to the physical face of our planet, and also to our society. Might intelligent life from space come to try and save us? Well, you know what I think

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about that...

Q: Dark Rain combines the science fiction and the crime novel – a time honoured tradition. Could you tell us about your inspiration - is it mainly from science fiction or crime novels? And do you consider yourself a writer of science fiction or crime novels?

A: I was hugely influenced by Asimov, but also by Hammett and Chandler; but having said that I was also influenced by Orwell, Joyce, Greene and Waugh. And LeCarré. I don't really consider myself a genre writer at all. I think that the genre should never be more than a medium for the story you want to tell. Having said that, there is, by definition, a freedom afforded by science fiction that you simply can't get in other genres. That appeals to me.

Q: It seems to me that the two genres are very much alike: they're both built upon a mystery. But sf is about exploring the mystery, where crime novels want to solve the mystery. Have you had any problems with reconciling the two? And what are the pros and cons of using the two genres?