

WRITENOW! 2010

PRESENTED BY SYDNEY WRITERS' FESTIVAL AND THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

JOHN DANALIS

John Danalis (QLD) is a writer, illustrator and storyteller, who's recent non-fiction title, *Riding the Black Cockatoo*, recounts his extraordinary journey of discovery into the heart of Indigenous Australia. John shares an illustration and design studio with acclaimed illustrator, Stella Danalis. The pair recently celebrated their first ever collaboration with the release of the picture book, *Schumann the Shoeman*.

"I guess you could say I'm prolific," he said as he ushered me through the beaded curtains into the studio. Paintings – all of them portraits – covered every millimetre of wall space; they were even nailed to the ceiling. "I can knock out three or four each day, got a whole shed full of 'em out the back too."

These were not the works of a master. These were the sort of paintings people picked up at flea markets; the sort of paintings that new owners would gleefully kick the canvas from so that they could reuse the frames. Yet despite the amateurish quality of the brushwork and the deranged sense of colour, the portraits did possess an unnerving, hypnotic quality – it was impossible not to look at them! It was the eyes. Each pair possessed a bewildered look, as if they were trapped – entombed somehow – beneath the varnish.

The big man closed the single window, shutting out the sweet desert air and locking in the heavy scent of oil paint and turpentine. He closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. "I came out here for the solitude, but finding subjects is a problem. Lucky you saw my sign by the highway."

He patted the top of a paint-splattered stool. "Now perch yourself up here and get comfortable."

The painter took up his pallet and chose three brushes from an old coffee tin. He jabbed one behind an ear, clenched one between his teeth, and swirled the third through a moist lump of burnt sienna.

"Just relax my young friend," he whispered, dabbing the second brush into a splotch of vermilion red, "painting is a journey where *anything* can happen."

ANTHONY EATON

Anthony Eaton (ACT) is the award-winning author of 11 books for children, young adult and adult readers, including *The Darkness*, *Fireshadow* and *The Darklands Trilogy*. In 2008, Anthony won an Aurealis award for *Skyfall*, the second book in his *Darklands Trilogy* and, in 2009, his horror novel *Into White Silence* was named a CBCA honour book and shortlisted in the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards. *Daywards*, the third and final book in *The Darklands Trilogy*, will be published in March 2010.

Fifteen minutes before sunset the sirens sounded, just like every night. The clamour echoed through the emptying streets, the last citizens scurried quickly home to the protection of heavy shutters and electrolock doors and Sophie looked up from her work, surprised.

"Already?"

The afternoon had slipped away – time sliding past unnoticed as she and Greg put the final pieces into place.

"I guess." Greg didn't look nervous. Not even a little. "Doesn't matter, though. We're ready."

Somewhere in the distance a mother shouted for her kids – the desperate edge in her voice obvious, even from this far away. Sophie listened for a moment and then turned her attention back to the project. Greg didn't even

lift his eyes from the monitor.

"If this works," He said, "We'll be heroes. The most famous fourteen-year-olds in the world."

"What if it doesn't?"

At that, finally, he lifted his eyes, tearing his gaze away from the body they'd spent the previous month working on – rearranging it again and again until it looked nothing at all like the little old lady they'd dug up.

"If it doesn't work, then we're dead."

Sophie shrugged. There wasn't anything more to say. Somewhere a dog started howling.

"It's time."

MELINA MARCHETTA

Melina Marchetta's (NSW) first novel, *Looking for Alibrandi*, was an instant success with young adults and in 2000 it was released as a major Australian film. Melina has since published a number of award-winning novels including *Saving Francesca*, *On the Jellicoe Road* and *Finnikin of the Rock*, winning the prestigious American Library Association's Michael LPrintz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature in 2009 for *On the Jellicoe Road*. Melina's next novel, *The Piper's Son*, will be published in March 2010.

The castle had been carved out of rock and overlooked what seemed like a bottomless ravine. Dafar knew that if he lost his footing, he'd join those said to have been plunged into oblivion from its windows over the years. But for the time being he was safe. Until the Provincaro of Sebastapol stepped outside his chamber and stared up to where Dafar was balanced perilously on a thin piece of granite that jutted out between the two balconies.

Dafar turned quickly to leap back towards the first chamber, but a girl stood there leaning against the trellis, carefully studying him.

"Sir Gargarin," she called out to the Provincaro, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for someone to be stuck onto the outer walls of the palace between their rooms. "You don't think he's one of those tiresome assassins sent to kill my father, do you?"

Before the Provincaro could reply, a knock sounded from both chambers and without a word, the Provincaro and the girl disappeared inside their rooms.

"Did I not say I was to be left in peace?" Dafar heard the Provincaro bark.

"An assassin on the loose, Sir," the guard explained.

"And where do you suppose he's hiding?" the girl asked her guard. "Do you think the fool is perched out on my balconette?"

"No Princess. Sorry Princess. Won't disturb you again."

The Provincaro and the Princess stepped back outside at the exact moment.

"So where were we?" they both asked Dafar.