

Philip Anderson Talks to the Novelist, Dominic Took

At 22 Dominic (dyslexic) has aspired into an ambitious novelist producing 4 books in just 3 years as well as having written numerous short stories and poems cutting across humanism and the natural world, fantasy and darker elements buried beneath the fathoms of the human psyche.

"My dyslexia isn't dealt with, it deals with me," he says, "to give and offer me a view to contrast those around me, providing a different paradigm world view I know I will never be without."

Dominic has interests in personal development coaching and working with teenagers, as well as adults in furthering their confidence and goal setting. He also has an interest in physics and the science of the very small, quantum and string theory.

"I am currently looking into using Multi touch screen technology, much like the I-phone uses, to create new ways of interacting with design in Games."

He also derives immense pleasure from researching autism and the ASD spectrum which comprises Autism, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. (Possible addition: Due to his interests in how Dyslexia operates and how those disabilities within the ASD spectrum carry interestingly similar properties.)

Dominic's earliest memory is car journeys with his imaginary friend, Teapana, when he was just 4 or 5 years old.

"I cry or am sad at the suffering in the world," he says. "Right now Zimbabwe and the Congo bother me a lot, though I feel helpless to do anything at all. I endeavour in one ideal to dedicate any real money I ever make from my books, to the people at home and abroad who suffer like these do."

Dominic is currently studying for a Bachelor of Science and an Honours degree in Computer Games Design at Staffs University.

"In games there is the factor of story and its conveyance through a visual apparatus... this really harks back to my need for innovation and ultimately writing."

Philip: How would you categorise your writing?

Dominic: My novels tend to be fantasy, but they work to describe the human condition as much as possible, often by incorporating characters with values and traits that gravitate towards certain characteristics, like protecting the helpless, pulling back the curtains of mystique that veil truth from view and various others. That does make several of the core characters rather intense, but I always attempt to balance this with other characters who I imagine nearly anyone can identify with.

Philip: You are quoted as saying: "My writing allows me to exorcise a part of myself that otherwise would either diminish and die, or go unrivalled by anything else in my life." What do you mean by that, exactly?

Dominic: Fiction and books allow me a way of working through ideas, but I am NOT as intellectually motivated in fiction as I may sound. My characters are more important to me than anything and love and hate in some proportion line the larger segments of my emotional base when it comes to writing. I am also an organic writer, so if an idea does transpire, I generally have no idea about it until it does. That is not to say I don't know how the series will end, because I already have an ending in mind, but due to a very honest nature, I guess I deny to myself that it exists to keep all elements of it completely secret in the written process and a more personal one.

Philip: When did you first discover you had a talent for writing and what ensued thereafter?

Dominic: That's hard to define really, but my writing began when I was about six or seven. I couldn't write what's considered a "proper" story: I wrote stories of a contemporary fantastical nature that mixed myth and real people into a sort of short story. The first few stories were very bare bones, with sometimes very good description, but appalling dialogue and very bad pacing.

I guess the first time I saw that I had something, something worthwhile, was when my mother told me I was a writer. At that point a set of cogs turned and in my mind I said to myself "Hm, if I write all the time I must be.". It was at this point that I pursued the writing, especially of novels, with real determination. The first real novel I wrote before Storms was a science fiction book about an ancient ship of some unknown origin that comes to orbit the earth in the near future, carrying a message to be revealed, about a war that would transpire roughly a thousand years ahead of today. That book was too stereotypical when it was finished, but it was a sort of rite of passage in a way, clearing a lot of dead wood that might have otherwise transpired into other books.

Storms was therefore the first book that I seriously wrote, edited and of course published. I'm still in search of any writing talent I might have. In all honesty, I just write and know that one day my writing will be of a high enough excellence or a big enough audience, to be taken on by a major publisher.

Philip: Before we discuss Storms, I would just like to focus a little on your short works, which I understand you have written copious quantities, especially for one so young.

Dominic: I've written quite a few short stories, but the most prominent one for me has been my most recent, His Futile Guilt. This is about a man in his forties, learning that his father is in hospital with an ill condition. However the two haven't spoken for nearly twenty years and a series of very emotional events follow, throwing the son between many different emotions as he comes to face his father. I wrote this from personal experience and I felt it certainly bettered the fiction. However, over the years, I have aspired to write more and more in this fashion, with an adherence to contemporary characters and their emotional duplicity.

'His Futile Guilt' An extract:

'Are you all right?' A female nurse asked me.

I saw her as a clouded image moved out of my vision and I had not noticed at first that my hand was gripping one arm tightly whilst short intermittent breaths hindered my breathing; heart racing with the sound of a deafening silence. For had that not been his own response to such things?

'I think your having a panic attack.' She waited for a response, but I gave none. I then felt her hands guide me to a nearby bed. 'Sit down here with me and try to relax.'

My chest tightened and then relaxed, heart fluttering like the broken wings of a butterfly. For a moment I sat there thinking about all those words that had gone between us before, of how it had panned out and what had become of it and a naïve part of the self wondered if it would still be so bad.

But I wouldn't let him take my feeling of well being, it had been his life to lead and all I had done was shown him another way. 'It's ok, I won't let him do this.' I said and breathing slowly in shorter breaths I stood up to survey the war room. I saw him now, an old man sat alone.

Philip: Do you have the same passion for writing poetry?

Dominic: I've always written poetry, but not in a professional manner, that is I do not consider myself a poet and I don't take it particularly seriously. I've written poems about 9/11, about the holocaust and various others to do with age and the trappings that time has. I find that poetry is a good outlet when you wish to overwrite something, because you can, instead of writing an overwritten piece of fiction, write a poem which has a twisting spiral or hap hazard path of obligatory or non-obligatory metaphors and similes, splicing and pining away into something of formidable quality. See what I did there?

Philip: Turning our attention to your novel, 'The Storms of Acias' which I understand is aimed at early teenage children or very advanced primary minors, has, I believe, been likened to Harry potter. Briefly talk us through the plot.

Dominic: The Storms of Acias and The Path of Gracious are a series of roughly five books, currently dubbed The Acias Series. This series is about the life of Gracious, but it is also about the characters that he meets and then loses over time. Many characters however are not so much lost as re-directed through a complicated background of sub plots and loose ends. However to the reader, unless I want them to, most sub plots are easily identified and understood, but I really have a thing about loose ends.

I like to create tension and suspense and I love to play mind games with the characters and hence the reader. There is more to this process, mainly to convey the sinister nature of the opposite of a morally and ethically sound individual. There are dark and light facets in the human psyche and human nature. The Storm in the Acias series, is a transpiring of these darker facets and they really do get even darker in the sequel.

Philip: Can you cite one or two examples?

Dominic: The Storm is an extension of the darker facets because it displays how something that only wishes to turn you against yourself and hurt those around you, will stop at no time to consider what it is doing; and even if you forgive it for its actions, it will still come back again. This relentless conviction that the Storm has, is revealed in the second book as a much more human connection and hence complication. But up until the sequel, the Storm is merely a transpiration of this relentlessly bitter and vengeful thing, that will stop at nothing.

Philip: Storms has been described by critics as both complex and simple. Can you Elucidate?

Dominic: You are correct. Storms is a complicated and yet a simple book; Simple in that it doesn't go into copious amounts of detail when it comes to the back fiction and what's really going on behind the scenes. And complicated in as far that there are layers within the book. This is a style choice, but also a plot choice. I don't want to make out that Storms is some sort of masterpiece. Far from it! I merely cite the opinions of readers, who have labelled it multi faceted and multi layered. My belief is it depends how much you enjoy the book and read into it, that dictates how many layers you want to See. (Removed the last sentence here, as I felt it was unimportant and also a little arrogant.)

Philip: I understand that you self-published Storms. Why did you choose this option instead of trying to pitch your work to an author agent?

Dominic: I chose to self publish because I was turned down by agents and publishers. Agents and publishers liked the story, but basically said it wasn't pitched correctly for the current market. Bare in mind of course they only read the first three chapters. Ultimately I agree, it wasn't pitched or poised at that time for a publisher to take it on.

Philip: Was self-publishing a complex process?

Dominic: It's not complex, but it is time consuming and does require patience as well as persistence. I knew I had the skills in IT and computers, I had a thirst for learning and I will still put my mind to anything and learn everything I need to learn to make that thing work. I intend to self publish again even if I get rejected with the sequel. I have tried other methods and approaches to write other structured novels, which at the end of the day, just didn't have the same layering that the Acias series has for me. I see so many areas for other books in this series too. It's like a sprawling mass of tangents, you could say the way life itself plays out and for me it's really important to portray life as accurately as possible. This is where I work the hardest and combat my dyslexia, to hone dialogue and narrative sequences to create accurate depictions of real human connection.

Philip: How would you argue the claim of potential critics that 22 is far too young to be a novelist, perhaps even believing you lack empiricism and worldly sagacity to write a best seller that mirrors established writers such as Susan Hill and Simon Brett, for example?

Dominic: They might well say that behind my back; I've never had anyone say it to my

face at least. we all had to start somewhere and I do not for a moment put forward that my writing is fantastic and spotless. But if Rowling and GP Taylor can have their work ridiculed for not being "Very well written" then I think there may be a few well regarded opinions out there in the public sphere, that are worth discounting.

I could quite have easily taken an English degree and studied all those authors that I love and maybe learnt a few things here and there, but my style might not be better off for it. Yet one question to ask is, from where does originality stem? Does it stem from honing your abilities? Yes in part. Does it come from listening to others? Possibly. All in all originality comes from deliverance. To believe and to justify that you (In this case our voice), has something worth fighting for and delivering to readers. And I pursue originality wherever possible, because in my mind I believe if you do not pursue your true voice and aspire to be different in some way, you might as well not bother. That isn't to say I don't think there's a place for books that ascribe to certain demo graphs, but in a decade where the movement of ideas is the slowest it has been in a very long time, I feel this pursuit is a must to get the cogs of true inspiration turning again.

Philip: Writing is often considered a 'lonely business'. Is this the case for you and if so, how do you deal with these periods of isolation?

Dominic: Ah, that is a good question. You see I am a lonely recluse, I never leave my house...it suits me just fine! Haha

Sorry, I couldn't resist. In all seriousness I do not mind time alone but I do like to go out with friends as well and in this past year I have learned that family as well as friends and the more important moments in a person's life should be cherished more than any other. As a good friend once said to me, "Cherish yourself and cherish those around you". I can't say I'm perfect, I just do my best, but these values come above anything and I don't care how young I am, they are as important when you are twenty two as they are when you are seventy odd, to not acknowledge how important those moments are is to ignore your very self.

But to answer your question properly I think the lack of input is lonely. Remember I started writing very young, so I didn't have a lot of social or environmental conditioning when it came to writing. I wrote, I shared it with family and I'd share it with friends where appropriate. But what I ultimately learned was that the input of certain people wasn't as good as others and seeing as I consider myself to be a fairly principled sort of person, with my mind set, I will only go about something one way. So now I'd rather wrestle with my own conscience, being as objective as possible and then show the writing to people who I know will give me an honest answer, before making any other changes.

I think the best way a part from that, for me to answer this, is to say that the composition of a person is what can ultimately make the path lonely. If you realise what's important in life, you won't be as lonely, because you "Make time" for those things. As I think Stephen King said, "writers are very selfish people". That was something I understood, but didn't fully understand. I take it to mean that they are selfish because they live those hermit like lives, where the fiction is more important than anything else. So I guess like some people would put their family and children above everything else in their lives, my writing is second to all the things I know are important and at my age that includes having fun and enjoying myself every so often (Not sure how long that will last post University though haha).

Philip: I guess that brings me nicely to your hobbies and interests.

Dominic: Running is a major hobby, I have been injured for quite some time, but expect to be building back up to full fitness. For me that's usually 16 miles a week, two runs per week of 8 to 9 miles and if I remember correctly I run at about a 7 minute mile. Due to injury I've missed recent competitive events. But I have ran a Half Marathon at Wilmslow in 2006 and the Cheddleton 10k in Staffordshire in the past.

I also cycle to University three times a week - roughly 12 miles each time. It keeps me fit which is good and also acts as an excellent buffer for my injury incurred through 'running'.

Philip: Finally, what are your plans for 2009?

Dominic: To get Path published, to go through the rejection process first ;) To have another look at possible avenues for honing my writing skills - though the best remedy is to write - it really is as simple as that. I know there is an argument against that, isolation causes stagnation. Well if you keep your eyes open to what is around you, you can still learn. I am fairly self critical, so I like to think I can at least see the majority of my errors (Not all obviously, as all writers have the same problem of 'selective blindness' when it comes to being able to edit their work effectively);

To set up a financially successful company in 09 (That should be fun in this economy).

But really more than anything: to continue pursuing my novels, regardless of the outcome and to have belief in myself, that one day it will all be worth it.

Philip: Thank you for sharing a few of your creative thoughts with us. Good luck with 'Storms' and all the best for 2009.