

Anakalian Whims

July 20, 2013 Interview by Andi Klem

Blog Interview



AW: Describe your book and its inception. What was your muse, so to speak?

GWP: I tend to question things about the world and our place in it. When I started writing *Spin-down* I wanted to explore the age-old topic of nature vs. nurture – Are we born who we are to become, or are we only the byproducts of our experiences? And what does it mean to be free? Believe it or not, I leaned heavily on Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* as a study of characters reacting individually and as a tribe with and against each other. I freely admit that the Draad flashlight is a version of the conch shell of authority that is found on the island in his book.

My writing style is that I tend to reverse engineer my stories. I start with the question and then work my way backwards filling in the holes until there's a logic for why things are as they are.

For example, I decided to start with characters that were blank canvases that I could expose to extreme situations and watch how they reacted to each other and solve problems.

For it to work I had to answer to myself why would these people would not have any emotional experiences and yet be full grown adults? The solution was make them have lives that were severely isolated – keeping them from each other as much as possible and when they were forced to interact with each other they would be drugged into a stupor.

Then the question arises how or who would do this – So by reverse engineering I realized that it must be an ore corporation behind it and to save money from sending people to Jupiter to mine, they use harvested clones to do the labor. That's just one example of how as I would walk through one door and answer a question, there'd be another waiting behind it. When all of the doors were opened (save the final one) the story was over.

AW: Your book has 'classic science fiction' all over it. What authors do you read and do you consider them heavy influences on your writing?

GWP: I've read a tremendous amount from the classic authors Asimov, Clarke, etc. (as a matter of fact, I recently finished *Foundation* again).

One thing that I've always appreciated about those writers is the level of authenticity in their stories. I spent many months building and rebuilding on paper the vast mining compound on Ganymede before I wrote a single word. It required a stupid amount of discipline to resist the urge to dive right in, but my deferred gratification paid off. When it came time to write the story, all that I had to do was to 'activate' the characters to run and follow them as if I were an imbedded reporter.

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I didn't set out to write a modern story in the classic sci-fi style; in fact I am humbled to have *Spindown* even compared to those great works. All that I can attest the results to be my exposure to their styles must have seeped through into my story. I feel like the character in *The Amazing Colossal Man* who accidentally wanders into a plutonium blast in the desert. The radiation transforms him due to his exposure to it, not through anything that he did. I was exposed to the radiation of many great storytellers.

AW: Just like when I read, when I write I find myself enjoying some characters more than others – regardless of their role in the story. Did you have a favorite in *Spindown*? Who was it? Why?

GWP: Wow. It's too difficult for me to pick just one – so I won't. (I'll do my best to avoid spoilers for the uninitiated.) I enjoyed watching Prall 4167 develop throughout the piece. Here's a guy that is used to being in control, and is faced with his entire world being turned inside out. Readers undoubtedly cast him as a villain, but when you clinically review what he does and why he does things, he sort of makes sense. He's the most practical one of the escaped clones and never displays a shred of self-doubt. Don't misunderstand, what he does/allows is reprehensible to say the least, but he doesn't see himself that way- he is only about one thing: Survival of Prall 4167. Can you blame him? His Machiavellian approach to situations intrigued me to the point that when it was time to assign the characters their suffix numbers, I gave him 4167 (my birthdate of 4/1/67).

Another part that was fun to write was the interactions between Martin and Buck. By the time we meet up with them again, they have been companions for a very long time. They remind me of an old married couple; they bicker with each other, but there's no mistaking the love that has developed between them over the years.

Ah... then there's Fowler and Sholve. I enjoyed how Fowler usually has his plans backfire on him or not go exactly how he thought things would work out. Often Sholve has to bail him out in some way. In all, they end up making a good team, with her problem-solving skills and his physical strength. One of my favorite exchanges between them is when they have opposing views on if they should 'contaminate' the Setter character with the knowledge of what is actually happening to clones on Marius 516. They come at the situation with polar opposite philosophies, forcing the reader to pick a side- Do we let him go on, and live blindly? Or do we confront him with the truth allowing him to decide for himself what to do?

AW: Did you learn anything from writing your book? What was it?

My inability to spell and use proper grammar is far worse than I could have ever imagined (even with spellcheck)

AW: Exactly how much research was needed to pull off this level of scientific expertise? What was that process like?

GWP: As I mentioned before, I probably spent way too much time on this. I found that my compulsiveness seems to require a ridiculous amount of backstory and detail for whatever I'm working on. An example of this is how an early draft of *Spindown* had the clones speak a hyper-restrictive tongue called Chone. I developed the entire language removing any 'hot words' from their vocabulary. The result would have made Orwell's writers of *NewSpeak* blush it was so limiting. It took a month of refining over and over. It was beautiful- and every bit of it ended up on the 'cutting room floor'. While readers likely will notice the absence of the personal pronoun of 'us/we' from the first half of the book, that is the only thing that remained! It became too cumbersome for the clones to speak – a month totally wasted! I also know more about Ganymede than any non-Nasa personnel is allowed.

My habit is to completely immerse myself in the research and the world building of the story. This is fine, but a good writer has to edit out the artifacts that do not advance the story – sorry, Chone language.

AW: How did you come across Grey Gecko Press? How has that relationship been for you?

GWP: I encountered the owner, Jason Aydelotte at a social gathering of other Houston area writers. He's the author of the acclaimed *Dying of the Light* Zombie series. He had just self-published his first novel in the trilogy and his enthusiasm about publishing was contagious. He told the people at the table that he was considering helping others learn how to do what he had done for their stories. Over time, his help and advice transformed into GGP. He left his day job to start Grey Gecko Press for authors who wanted to 'storm the castle' of traditional publishing with him. I was fortunate (and maybe crazy enough) to be counted among them. That was ten-thousand books ago. Since then, everyone there has been remarkable. Without Grey Gecko, there would be no *Spindown* because I likely would not have finished it. Jason's team was the mid-wife to my book.

AW: If *Spindown* were to be made into a movie, who would you want to tackle it? (JJ Abrams? Joss Whedon? Steven Moffat? Some unknown?)

GWP: Sid and Marty Krofft (Google it, kids).

Seriously, I am flattered that so many readers have said that they'd like to see *Spindown* on the big screen. I love movies, especially sci-fi, and my writing has been influenced by dozens of classic flicks, but at the end of the day, I'm just a storyteller, not a movie producer. It's fun to think of, but what do I know about any of that? I'd welcome it if someone felt they bring something to the story, but I'll leave it to the experts.

AW: Other than writing, what are your hobbies and talents?

GWP: I play jazz piano (under a different stage name), I do graphic design, and am neck-deep in writing the songs and script for a full-length musical.

AW: Do you listen to music while you write? If so, what were some of the musical influences you had while writing *Spindown*?

GWP: Music is a very important part of my life, so much a part of it that songs/genres that I listen to when not writing easily distract me when I'm 'working'. I do this kind of Pavlovian conditioning thing in which there are some classical and ambient selections that I ONLY listen to when writing. It helps to trigger my brain into knowing that 'It's time to write' when this music is played:

Philip Glass – Symphony No. 9, Low Symphony, Heroes Symphony

Vangelis – Antarctica

The soundtrack to 'Monster's Ball'

Brian Eno – Music for Airports

Anything from the band Pauseland and a minimalist band from Austin called 'Stars of the Lid'

(Listen to Philip Glass/No.9 and read any of the chase scenes from *Spindown*. You'll find that they match up perfectly

AW: If there was just one thing you would want your readers/ fans to know about you, what would it be?

GWP: I'm a big dork. Really I am (my wife and kids will attest to the fact). I don't allow myself to take myself too seriously, and I will do anything for a laugh (anything). I still feel and view myself as the 4th grader version of myself. Sure, I get to drive a car, I can order wine in a restaurant, and do 'big people' stuff like that, but after you pull back all the layers, I am still just as silly, needy, and unreservedly amazed with the universe as I was way back then. And for better or worse, if I haven't grown up by now, I think that I'm probably stuck this way – and I'm okay with that.

***Spindown* is available now from GreyGeckoPress.com
and other booksellers**

