

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES CHRISTIE

### AUTHOR OF *DEAR MISS LANDAU*



#### **How did you first get interested in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*?**

Without giving too much of Dear Miss Landau (DML) away, let's just say that Buffy's tales of knights, demons, redemption and quests, relocated from the green and pleasant fields of King Arthur's England and Hammer Films' Transylvania to the stucco and adobe-adorned small-town streets of Sunnydale struck a deep and abiding chord with me. The 'all for one and one for all' camaraderie of the Scoobies was a badly needed contrast to some of the nasty sides of human nature I was seeing at the time. *Buffy* really was a chink of light during a very dark time, and led to a real-life quest.

#### **What appealed to you about the character of Drusilla in particular?**

Despite being an insane demonic killer, underneath the mask of the vampire was a shy, sweet girl who was a lot more pleasant than the racist xenophobes myself and a black colleague had been putting up with at work. In a word, the demon was kinder than the human, and I loved her dearly for it. As people with autism are generally not that empathic, I would say that my abnormally strong emotional connection with my dear old Dru is worth some academic study.

#### **You went on to write a trilogy of novellas about Drusilla. Is this when you first made contact with Juliet Landau?**

When I began to write *Drusilla's Roses*, the first tale of the trilogy, I went on a complete creative bender. I wrote, I would say, not a story about Dru, but the story which should have been written for her at the time of *Buffy* but wasn't. In my opinion, the character of Drusilla had not been developed as fully as the other members of her vampire family – Spike, Angel and Darla – had been. It was as if Dru herself chose me to finish the job. I know how strange that sounds, but that's how it felt at the time. There are any number of technically proficient writers around, but she needed someone who also loved her passionately, with all his heart and soul, and would fight to the last drop of his blood to bring her back. She needed her noble knight, and she found him. Then, when it was all over, there was nothing else I could do except put Dru in the care of her creator. So I sent *Drusilla's Roses* to Hollywood, to an actress I did not know, whose middle name was Rose...

#### **You travelled alone across the US to meet her: what aspects of this did you, as an autistic man, find most difficult?**

Yes, despite being tired, damaged, middle-aged and autistic, I broke with my routines and travelled alone across America. I am a high-functioning autistic and I had travelled alone before, but that had been 20 years earlier: there's many a man who remembers the days of his youth and dreams he may return to them, but knows deep down they're gone for good. I mentioned quests before, and every moment I ground through the bureaucracy, the grudging return to shared dorms in backpacker

hostels, the long roads across the US and the crossing of the Mojave, the image of my lady was ahead of me. Drusilla was my guide along the way, but Juliet was my muse. And I told her, not long after, that I'd do it all again in a moment, even if I had to walk.

### **What was the best moment of your trip?**

The original aim of the trip was to see the Californian locations I'd used for *Drusilla's Roses* – Point Lobos and the house on Candlewood Drive – but in the end it was all for my dear Miss Landau. The best moment? Each and every time I saw her was the best moment.

### **When were you first diagnosed as autistic?**

2002.

### **What strengths do you think Autists possess that 'ordinary' people don't have?**

It is an irony of the modern world that the greatest achievements are often only achieved after 15 to 20 years of focused work, and often only by the minority who can achieve such focus. In general, neurologically typical people (known as neuro-typicals) tend to be less focused and more prone to multi-tasking than people with autism. The majority of people are therefore (and I do stress that this is a huge generalisation) less likely to achieve exceptional results in a single area of study. With my 'Asperger focus' (the name for the intense focus Autists can bring to bear on a single subject) helping me to develop my writing ability, it was perhaps more easy for me to reach the level I did than it would have been for a neuro-typical.

### **Have you always been interested in writing?**

Writing has always been my best asset, but I'm not always interested in it. I also like girls. Especially shy vampire brunettes. The latent ability, however, was always there. I won a *Daily Express* short story competition in my early teens, won College Colours as a result of something interesting I did in my creative writing course, and edited the script for a film which won Glasgow University's 1993 MacTaggart Prize. Then – after 15 years trying to write the Great Scottish Novel – came Dru.

### **Do you have a writing routine?**

I ought to stress to every young writer that they should be focused, diligent and practice every day; and that it is 95% perspiration and 5% inspiration. All of this is true, but I've grown increasingly tired of literary pretension, jargon and writers' groups over the years. Granted, my creative writing tutor was a great man, and I did do my 20 years' apprenticeship, but I broke every rule in the book writing *Drusilla's Roses* while Dru looked happily over my shoulder. I had no plan, did not do many drafts, and most of the time had no idea what I was going to write next. The primal beast got out: it was like Rocky Balboa going after Ivan Drago, and it was the greatest creative experience of my life.

### **What's your next project?**

After I finished *Drusilla's Roses*, Dru refused to allow herself to be pensioned off, so I then wrote *Drusilla's Redemption* and *Drusilla Revenant*. *Roses* and *Redemption* are in Drusilla's section of the *Buffy* writers' guild web site, *Charm School version: lessons in etiquette*, but *Drusilla Revenant* has

never been seen. This is because I think I found an unfinished story arc from the original TV series and, as well as incorporating Juliet Landau's two-part Drusilla tale from Angel 24-25, *Drusilla Revenant* developed this arc and ends with a twist which may well change fan perceptions of the Buffyverse. I also gave Dru a happy ending. I thought this time I'd finally managed to pension the old girl off, but yet again she found her way back. So once DML is published I intend to write a sequel to the trilogy, in which Spike and Dru go back into action again. There is a possibility the trilogy may be published and, at the risk of tilting recklessly at windmills, I think it (or elements from it) would be a better plot for the new *Buffy* movie than the current script which (due to a contractual stipulation) will probably just send the Slayer back to high school, without most of the beloved characters from the TV series. On a different tack, *Dear Miss Landau* was first conceived as a film as I was walking down the hill from Candlewood Drive. There is plot, theme, location and spectacle galore. Imagine *Rain Man* meeting *Notting Hill* via *84 Charing Cross Road*, punctuated by a poetic set of articles written while I was going across the US, running for L.A. to meet the best and most beautiful gal in all the world one Sunday morning in March, on a boulevard west of Sunset. Any film producers out there listening?

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