Pandemic Swine & Fiction Prediction in Novels

600 words by Hazel Edwards

Today the swine flu pandemic is major news. That's a <u>fact.</u> Three years ago, I wrote about a pandemic threat to Darwin, via feral pigs. That was <u>fiction.</u> But so close to this week's real life swine flu.

In my novel 'Outback Ferals' (the ferals were the pigs, not the locals!) infection details were carefully researched with quarantine authorities. The implications of a pandemic threat were woven into the plot. My facts were right, but the story about Kyle the young undercover, eco-scientist sleuth was fiction.

Why is my fiction prediction becoming nightly news? Perhaps it's the fiction writer's tendency to research, look at the possible conflicts and then say What if? It's a reasoned guess based on possibilities.

Authors are often asked how they 'predict' events in their fiction, and how close they write to life. I've had a few literary co-incidences.

While plotting the 'Antarctica's Frozen Chosen' novel, I discarded my former anthrax plot as inappropriate after Sept 11 But now the bio-political issues of immunisation, quarantine and possible infertility are getting very close to the mutated bio contraception from animal to human in my novel of a rogue scientist and a quarantined Antarctic base.

I did my homework. As recipient of the Antarctic Division Humanities berth, I went on an expedition because I believe in participant-observer research. I consulted 'boffins' and 'tradies' on board and the medical 'Doc' filled me in on all the possible complications while the scientists told me about genetic crossovers. I had an 'expert' plot.

Now, It's a bit alarming how fiction becomes fact. Literary coincidences have occured before, where life has mirrored my fiction, but none as extreme as recent pandemic news.

In the novel 'Fake ID' (which has many hits on my website for the wrong reasons) on the day of Zoe's grandmother's funeral, Zoe discovers her grandmother had fake ID for years. I've had four people approach me since the book's publication saying the same thing had happened in their family, but from different warzones, not Hungary as in my novel. That research I did with State Trustee genealogists during the first draft.

The fiction writer's role is to entertain, but also to provide a different perspective. Maybe in their plots, authors gamble with probabilities rather than possibilities?

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