

60 SECONDS WITH

# Joanne Reay



Self-harm and suicide are incredibly sensitive subjects, and they're at the core of *Romeo Spikes*. What inspired you to explore this subject matter, and did you do any research or

**background reading?**

A colleague of mine who works for a Hollywood film company told me that three times a year they do a poll among young adults to see what's on their mind. For the most part they are looking for new trends, fashions and crazes. But one year she was shocked to find that self-harm and suicide were leading themes. This prompted me to look deeper, and I discovered that suicide among young adults was escalating so quickly that the World Health Organisation now rates it as an epidemic. I found this saddening, but also somehow mysterious – suspicious even. And it gripped me. So I guess you could say that *Lo'Life* is the supernatural side of suicide.

**Louisiana has a great supernatural cache, from its real-world history through to the likes of Anne Rice and Charlaine Harris. Was it difficult settling on a portrayal of the location you were comfortable with, and didn't feel too contrived or romanticised?**

The voodoo tradition will always have allure, and Louisiana is the heart and dark soul of this cult. But it was more the character of Dali that decided the location. As I created this one-time demon, he became ever more a product of Louisiana's faded grandeur. Added to which, there is a real place called Swamp Gravy not far from New Orleans, and that just had to be the home of Fan Fan Bohica.

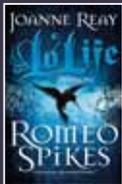
**The second book is due in 2013. How far into it are you, and what can we expect from the rest of the *Lo'Life* trilogy?**

In *Romeo Spikes*, Detective Bianco is taken deep into the supernatural world of Lola. In the next book, the roles are reversed and Lola becomes locked into the search for a bizarre and brutal serial killer. As the two worlds of humans and Tormenta once again collide, the investigation takes an unexpected twist into the realm of quantum theory.

**There has been an incredible amount of world building involved in *Lo'Life* so far, plenty of factions and characters to play around with. Do you think you'd return to the setting after the trilogy is concluded?**

I have so much story left untold, I have no doubt I'll be back here. Like most writers, I have come to love my characters, and it won't be easy to let them go. Dali, Fan Fan, Grotteschi, Mo'Zart. To go back to the sniper analogy, I'd take any of these guys with me on a kill.

*Romeo Spikes* is out now.

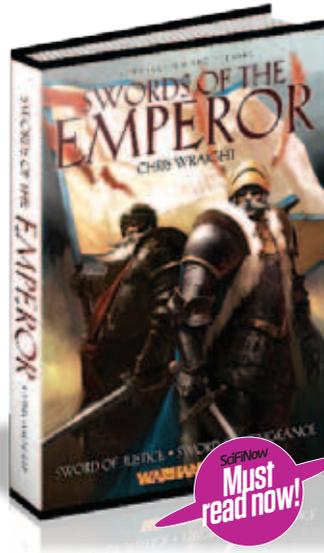


**Details** Author: Chris Wraight Publisher: Black Library Price: £12.99

# SWORDS OF THE EMPEROR

The sword in the tome

**Harking back to** Jack Yeovil's *Beasts In Velvet* and the first, faltering baby steps of *Warhammer* fiction, *Swords Of The Emperor* – collecting 2010's *Sword Of Justice* and 2011's *Sword Of Vengeance*



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– creeps through the Germanic Renaissance-era sprawl of the Empire and the rivalry between two hoary old generals: austere, lowborn Ludwig Schwarzhelm and statesman-like Kurt Helborg, as a nefarious plot, an empty throne and dark forces push the rural province of Averland to the brink of ruin.

Meeting this convincing tale of intrigue and deception halfway – it's not George RR Martin-complex, but it's still damn good – are the pages of combat the core fanbase of tabletop wargamers crave like no other drug. Neatly woven into the plot through the extended cast, who can be relied upon to shepherd regiments of soldiers around while others stick to the shadows – a dichotomy deftly achieved by essentially having three POV characters in the first half: Schwarzhelm himself, his spy/advisor/fixer Verstohlen

(German for 'furtive', which is pretty poor cover for a spy really), and gruff halberdier captain Bloch. Immensely preferable to the weakest Black Library model, which uses dialogue simply to link up pages of people killing each other – but hey, that has a following, too.

It's a satisfying collusion of traditional *Warhammer* skulduggery, ideal for those who still treasure their battered first edition *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* expansion packs, and new school *Warhammer* battlefield bombast for those looking to kill time while their basecoats dry.

James Hoare

**VERDICT** ★★★★★



**IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...**

**Legend**  
David Gemmell  
Epic fantasy's leading warhorse comes out of retirement for one last adventure.

**Details** Author: Iain M Banks Publisher: Orbit Price: £20

# THE HYDROGEN SONATA

Just hum along if you don't know the words

**As it's the** tenth book in Iain M Banks' Culture series of far-future space opera, some would have you believe you're well past the jumping on point, and maybe you should go back to watching *The Clone Wars* while hungover or whatever it is people who read 'SF' think people who watch 'sci-fi' are doing with their time.

Don't be alarmed; the Culture is more of a setting than an ongoing story, and although cause from earlier volumes is well and truly effected, it's not sequential in any vital way. Nonetheless, *The Hydrogen Sonata* goes some way to fulfilling that aforementioned philosophy by throwing you into the deep end with some pretty core players and ideas.

A cousin-civilisation of the Culture – basically another bunch of smug, hyper-advanced near-humans – about to ascend from this tired old plane of existence with all the detached dignity and sophistication of a Golden Jubilee street party, scavenging rights are being squabbled over by some bottom feeders, and a cluster of busybody Culture AIs get involved in an obvious conspiracy. There's a lot to take in, especially compared to Banks' previous book, *Surface Detail*, but he's such a breezy, entertaining voice that you can't help but be dragged along.

It's fantastically good fun that throws in some big ideas about life, the universe and everything, and like the unabashed leftie



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that he is, Banks manages to get in there a few sizeable shots at unthinking, dogmatic religiosity for good measure.

James Hoare

**VERDICT** ★★★★★



**IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...**

**Gridlinked**  
Neal Asher  
Asher's debut follows a slick superspy as he gets deeper into a galaxy-wide conspiracy.