***Launch Speech by Janeen Brian***

Janeen Brian's Launch Speech for 'Across the Creek'
5 March 2004
Dymocks, Adelaide.

I know a little boy who loves a book in which the pages are cut in half so the heads and tails of different Australian animals and birds can be swapped about. They can be mixed and matched, so that on one page there's a koala head and a cod fish bottom; on the next, an emu head and an octopus bottom and so on. I watch him with interest and fascination as he changes heads and tails to make new animals. I also find it a creative stimulus: the result of placing two random images, or ideas together. It can bring hilarious, surprising,  intriguing, and sometimes mind-popping results.

This mottled red, spiky and potentially slavering character on the front cover of Rosanne Hawke's new fantasy book, 'Across the Creek', is just such an animal blend.

Look closely and you'll see identifiable features of a scaly, spiky dragon blended with very recognisable marsupial characteristics of the Australian of all animals – the kangaroo.

So we have the dragon and the kangaroo –thus has Rosanne created the dragaroo.

You might assume he's not going to be a very nice kind of guy and that he's going to cause major problems in the story, and you'd be right. And the dragajoey in the pouch, well, with those yellow glinting eyes, looks as if he's learning his lessons well from a very focussed parent.

Yet the character of the dragaroo, created by bringing together two aspects not normally connected, symbolised to me what Rosanne has done in her compelling story – and that is to take an idea from Cornish folklore - and with a little Cornish mining history - blend it straight into an identifiable modern day Australian setting.

Now a Cornish pasty couldn't have better ingredients.

All of you would have heard about Cornish pasties, and most likely have eaten one, but how many of you know that conservatively 20 -30% of the South Australian population is made up of people of Cornish descent. There's a Cornish saying that says, 'By Tre, Pol and Pen, you shall know the Cornishmen' – so surnames of Trefy, Tregengon, Tregothnan, Trelawly, Tremayne or Polglaze, Polwheel, Penrice, Penrose, Pentire, Penzance and so on, are all bloodlines back to a Cornish heritage.

If you look at Rosanne and I you'll notice another characteristic that we've inherited from our Cornish background – and that's our height, or rather lack of it. By and large, the Cornish folk, who came to Moonta, Wallaroo and Kadina in the their droves in the 1800's to work the copper mines, were not tall. It was said that 'Down every hole, you'll find a Cornishman.' Well, perhaps holes were discouragers of growth!

The Cornish were mostly of Methodist religion, who, ironically loved nothing better than a good wrestling match and watching cock-fighting. But I remember my mother telling me she used to be very embarrassed as a child, when my grandmother sang in church, because she, like all the Cornish, loved to sing loudly and heartily!

The Cornish were also superstitious breed and their folklore was peopled with fascinating creatures, many of whom Rosanne has included in her book. For example, there's Raff, the pesky piskey. Piskeys, Cornish type of fairies, were  tricksters, playful and at times, the joke tellers of today, yet one wasn't sure whether to believe them or not.

The Spriggan was a grotesquely ugly warrior fairy, and the knockers were creatures who lived deep down in the mines – and who could cause horrendous trouble  if they were not left morsels of food by the miners – perhaps a bit of pasty.

And there was Trebiggan, a Cornish giant who, it was said, fried young humans on a flat rock near his cave, and licked his fingers clean.

The world of the Cornish was filled with other superstitions: miners would not look back at their house after setting off for a shift in the mines in case it led to a cave-in. Burning egg-shells, sweeping dust from a house or putting shoes on the table were also Cornish recipes for disaster.

Yet it was not a real disaster that led the main character of the story, Aidan, into a land far across the creek. He was a regular boy, who liked his sport and playing with his mates, but when he suddenly entered the magical, fantastical world beyond the creek and discovered Jenice Trengove, a school mate, who had mysteriously disappeared a whole year ago, then he realised that the tremendous weight and responsibility of escaping, with Jenice, and returning to his usual life was not going to be easy. Far from it.

For, as Aidan discovered, nothing is simple in Trevalia, the fairyland across the creek. In fact, at times it was like a dream; where the possible is impossible and the impossible is possible. Like the time Aidan saw a tiny boat no bigger than his elbow and yet when he placed his foot in it, it simply expanded big enough to take him aboard.

Throughout the book, Aidan is full of questions, and rightly so; he is underground, in a strange and haunting, mysterious and confusing land - why wouldn't he be?  Why would he not want to know how it was that a boat could be bigger inside than out?
And who was the lady playing the haunting music, and why was she waiting for him?
And why hadn't anyone in town heard about this place across the creek?

After a delectable meal of fairy food and scrumptious fruit chocolate, Aidan discovers he had been selected to bring back the Human Children from the Dark Bush. It is the evil place. But when he finds the children, he is utterly bewildered. Why were they dressed so strangely? And why did they speak of unfamiliar places and events?

Time after time, Aidan is confronted with the most fearful creatures and happenings that threatens the escape, and it takes all his strength and courage to resist the melodies and music that has the power to lure him and the others, like sirens of the deep, into a certain time trap.

What Rosanne has done so movingly, tantilisingly and with such clear story-telling, is to provide us with some music of her own, to lure and entice us back into childhood, so we too remember the times when we crossed creeks, and wondered what would happen if . .

I'd like to read two small segments to tweak your curiosity further;

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Here then is a story with the sense of the fantastic. It is a book you can't put down and it fills that part of you that yearns to hold something within you that is more than that which can be seen, touched or felt in the everyday – it leaves you satisfied as if your soul has been nourished, like the Human Children felt when they ate of the sweetest fairy food.

Rosanne is one of our notable South Australian authors for children and young adults. She is not only a friend and fellow colleague of Ekidnas (SA Children's writers) but is a prolific writer. Her book, Re-entry was a Notable book for CBC Awards, and she has had other books shortlisted, including Wolfchild for the Aurealis Award. She has received two ArtsSA grants and a Varuna Fellowship. She is the author of The Keeper, Sailmaker, A Kiss in Every Wave, Zenna Dare, and Borderland. And there is Q, the Collector and Soraya, both new books, waiting in the wings to burst forth this year.

So let's now go  - across the creek – because Rosanne has her first picture book, Yardil, right there in front of her – and being Cornish, I'm sure there's a story behind that too.

Oh, but just before we take those steps, here is a joke that Raff told me to ask you: What did Raff, the piskey, say to Rosanne when she said she was coming here to have her book launched?

Fairynuff!

Janeen Brian's webpage

[**http://www.janeenbrian.com**](http://www.janeenbrian.com/)