

Consumed in the fog: A metropolitan revenge fantasy

Erin Malley

Writer

malleypengerin@gmail.com

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I have revenge fantasies.

I usually keep these to myself.

My clients would be horrified if they knew.

I used to be preoccupied with Blues Point Tower, a monstrous, modernist lego block on the north shore of Sydney (*my* Sydney) harbour - Harry Seidler's unwelcome and incongruous raised middle finger to zoning regulations on the north shore: 25 storeys high, in a residential neighbourhood.

Sidebar.

Blues Point was named after Billy Blue.

A convict deported to the colony from England in 1801 after being convicted of stealing a bag of sugar.

The committee of dull, grey, chain-smoking men who approved Blues Point Tower's construction in 1960 were never convicted.

Now I fixate on Barangaroo (Crown) Tower(s)¹.

My imagination takes wings (like 'Q', Larry Cohen's winged, B-movie serpent.)

My clients would be horrified if they knew that along with well-worn copies of inspirational tomes such as Michael J. Lewis's *City of Refuge: Separatists and Utopian Town Planning*, Max Page's *The City's End* (2010) – informatively subtitled “Two centuries of fantasies, fears, and premonitions of New York's destruction” – sits on my bookshelf.

Max (I met him once, I can use his first name) writes about big events – meteors, bombs, aliens. (Think Matt Reaves' *Cloverfield* [2008], for instance).

I like New York but I get it.

¹ The building is variously referred to as Tower and Towers – I use the singular in this piece after this initial qualified reference.

My fantasies are smaller, neater and tidier. And nobody dies.
My fantasies involve concealment and erasure. My fantasies loom in the fog.

Another book sits on my office shelves. Christine Corton's *London Fog: The Biography* (2015).

I have been preoccupied (maybe 'haunted' is a better word) by the fogs of Victorian era London and by the menace and beauty that loomed within them.

Sidebar.

As I have been penning this slender text I've been peppered with emails and texts from my London friends who know of my obsession, telling me about the Walter Sickert exhibition currently on at the Tate. I read up on it. I'm glad I can't see it. The Jack the Ripper association is too visceral for me.² It's not my fog fantasy.

But my fantasies also involve concealment and erasure.

Fog often blankets Sydney Harbour in the autumn and winter. Its vaporous snow sits on the city in the mornings, making ferries anxiously sound their horns as they move into Circular Quay, wary of smaller watercraft hidden precariously in the gloom. The TV news regularly shows the upper reaches of the Harbour Bridge arching above the mist and tells us that early morning flights are delayed and the backlog at the airport will take time to dissipate.

Here's an image that often greets me walking to work.



Figure 1. Barandaroo Crown Casino Tower and harbour boardwalk April 2022 (author's photo).

² There have been rumours and theories that Sickert was variously preoccupied with, appreciative of or else *actually was* Jack the Ripper. The exhibition apparently explored this angle (Jones, 2022).

Staring up as the tower disappears into low cloud I'm always reminded of the murkiness that surrounds Crown Casino Tower's approval, financing and governance. It reminds me of a thorn. A thorn that has pushed up from the asphalt and sandstone of the foreshore, erect and hard-edged. Unrepentant. Money talks.

Mick Tsikas (2021) summarised it well:

Crown Towers Sydney, at 75 storeys, is now the city's tallest building. It should not exist, and certainly not where it is – in prime location on Sydney's famous harbour... It is a familiar story of a culture of wealthy mates and backroom deals. It is also a story about the novel use of an obscure infrastructure approvals mechanism called "unsolicited proposals" – or USPs for short – that circumvented established processes intended to protect the public interest.

It affronts me. USPs affront me.

I have revenge fantasies.

The image of the tower increasingly obscured by clouds activates my SciFi fandom. I cross-reference texts as I fantasise.

I've slipped in and out of *Doctor Who* over the years. I had a partner who was tediously pre-occupied with the old black and white episodes, their creaky sets and their low-rent, shuffling monsters. Me, I was particularly taken with a more modern episode entitled 'Planet of the Dead' (2010), which features a storm of metallic, flying stingray-type creatures that consume everything in their path, leaving only sand behind. This intrigued me. I fantasised about training the swarm, directing them, deploying them to erase structures in the 'clinical strikes' beloved of military rhetoric but rarely delivered by their technologies.

But I'd want to conceal them.

The cloud clinging to Crown Tower helps complete the fantasy.

One wet weekend I watched the luridly entitled *The Trollenberg Terror* (1958). While the execution was ropey, to say the least, the premise was fascinating. A small area of cloud is observed moving peculiarly in the Alps, as if directed and targeting particular locations, swooping on them and leaving destruction in its wake. The viewer and characters first are at first led to believe that the cloud is sentient and malevolent - a premise sharp enough to whet my interest³ - before finding out that it conceals murderous, one-eyed, octopus-like aliens.

I cross-reference texts as I fantasise.

Concealed in a curling ball of fog, my flock of metallic stingrays quickly gobbles up the peak of the tower. As the sun burns off the lingering cloud, the top of the building is revealed as a ragged shard, with rooms open to the elements.

Helicopters hover, the media is abuzz.

³ And also that of John Carpenter and his collaborator Debra Hill who were reputedly inspired to develop their own film project *The Fog* (1980) after watching *The Trollenberg Terror* (Cole, 2020).

The next morning the cloud is low again and my misty wrecking crew returns. It quietly erases more floors and visits again and again until a low sand hill is all that remains.

And then – but only then – it rolls across the glassy blue harbour and across Henry Lawson Reserve over to the Seidler Tower. In the fog, the stingrays make short work of the old concrete, leaving another low hill.

The New South Wales Government website has a page entitled ‘Unsolicited proposals’ that emphasises that it:

welcomes unsolicited proposals from the non-government sector that will deliver innovative ideas, places, services and infrastructure to the people of NSW.

Consider my stingrays in the fog an “unsolicited proposal” that seeks no approval and brooks no quarter.

I have revenge fantasies.

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Erin Malley is the nom de plume of a Sydney town planner who learned her trade in the United States. She is an urbanist, fantasist and inner-city flâneuse who occasionally engages in creative writing.