

AVAST!

PIRATE STORIES from
TRANSGENDER AUTHORS

Edited by **MICHAEL EARP** and **ALISON EVANS**



FREMANTLE PRESS

Contents

Michael Earp and Alison Evans

Introduction7

Maddison Stoff

Catgrrls to the Front!..... 11

Madison Godfrey

The Underside Of A Boat Is The Part That Touches Water ...51

Michael Earp

An Ocean Bloom91

Vika Mana

Hunger135

Mia Nie

Baby Makes Three.....185

Alexander Te Pohe

What Are False Stars to a God?209

Alison Evans

CHANGELINGS259

Contributors301

INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL EARP & ALISON EVANS

ANY good resistance starts with making some noise. After Michael spoke out about transphobia on socials and the lack of representation in the Australian book industry, it was Fremantle Press who enthusiastically came to the party. ‘Have this ship!’ they may as well have said. ‘We want to be part of the solution.’

This anthology was the first time either of us had been commissioned in this way. Fremantle Press asked Michael if they would edit an anthology of trans writing, and Michael immediately brought Alison aboard, knowing a co-captain would make the adventure all the better.

Then we had to pick the crew! Our wishlist was longer than this foreword but, knowing that the format was to allow each writer an extended story to explore their worlds, we had to be selective. There are as many ways to be trans as there are trans people. In an industry where trans voices have been purposefully excluded, there is so much that any one of us would have to say. As you read, you will discover that each of the team has a strong and unique voice.

The variety of these stories leaves us breathless every time we revisit them. The cohesion of their wild difference is astounding, energising. They each hold threads of defiance, a healthy mistrust of authority figures, and disrespect for institutions that do not serve the people.

Underneath the rebellion, however, is a freedom that cannot be contained and the joy that comes with self-knowledge. In this anthology, you'll discover acts of resistance, of rage, of joy. Drone pilots in search of an outlawed android body. A film crew who discover more than the contract could have ever contemplated. A traveller looking for work who finds a family. Families coming together in the vastness of space. Space raiders getting clucky for a baby. Twins from a mining family arguing about knocking the elite out of the heavens. Friends ripping music from their day job while looking for aliens and connection.

There's something about pirates, and how they lived outside the law, that rings true to trans experiences. We can't ignore the cruelty associated with the acts of archetypal pirates, but they're not the only ones with blood on their hands. Monarchs, oligarchs and governments throughout history – not to mention the present – have performed heinous acts, which absolutely invite a pirate's resistance.

Policing bodies and genders is something that needs to be rallied against. If asking to exist wholly and without oppression is a piratical act, then bring on the galleons! We sail at dawn!

Alison and Michael

CATGRRLS TO THE FRONT!

MADDISON STOFF

THE last door in the bunker blows. We push through to the pulsing beat of industrial dance music pumping out of Edeline's internal speaker system. I reconfigure my plasma cannon from *ball* to *burst*. The red drone to my left fires a stream of EMP bullets into the head and torso of a heavily armed robot on tank tracks, decorated with the street-art inspired logo of a flash-in-the-pan mercenary company I've never heard of before today. The impacts from the bullets force it to shut down for an emergency reset, while the green drone to my right destroys it completely by soaking it with a corrosive goo. I fire off my plasma cannon at the last of the defenders: three mercenaries who barely have a chance to decide who they want to aim their weapons at before my trident of artificial sunlight smashes into the puny bubbles of energy projected from their force-field generators, microwaving their organs underneath the expensive-looking power armour that they most likely took this gig to get. The mercenaries explode into a shower of burning gore and metal shrapnel, covering the room.

We did it, nyah! Hayden says over their coms. They project an animated image of his emo cat-boy avatar from the holoprojector on their drone. The avatar towers over the smouldering gore piles of mercenaries and the half-melted remains of their combat robot, now splattered with their own blood. Hayden's avatar throws up a victory hand signal with a cutesy head tilt and his trademark grin, which they can't actually do outside of a

drone anymore since a respiratory virus robbed him of the ability to control half of their face. Above us, Phoebe's drone hovers over to inspect our latest booty.

We've got insulin, estrogen, testosterone, Phoebe says through the coms, reading off a list of drugs that show up on her scanner.

A good haul, I say. Any anti-virals too?

Loads of them. Looks like it's arcology stock, so you know the quality is as good as it gets.

I let out a disgusted *uwu*.

Rich kids again?

Looks like it.

I can't believe they always think that they can sell that shit to us when they get it for free for living in their towers, Hayden interjects.

They probably think they're doing us a favour, I say. Their parents would congratulate them on their business savvy, or whatever.

Fuck 'em, Phoebe says. *Fuck these mercenary fucks for working with them too. Fucken' traitors.*

Hey gang? Edeline says. I just thought you'd like to know we've got a swarm incoming!

Fae sends an ETA out to our overlays as we release our cargo grapplers and grab as many of the crates as we can carry. We stack them in the air above the anti-grav generators on the top of our drone's heads.

This is probably the time I feel most vulnerable while on a raid. It always makes me think about the *other body*. I feel her fingers twitching over the control pad. I see her pointed, royal blue nails carving beige stress lines through the black faux-leather recliner that she sits in to control me. I feel the weight of the VR-brain interface device like a crown of thorns against her head, and as I think of her, I feel *her pain* return to me.

The gnawing pain, the mundane agony that never leaves unless

she's being *me*. I don't hate her for it, but it still disgusts me for the way it taints her mind and limits her horizons. Being her is fear, awareness of the rot, and constant insecurity. I hate that I'm embarrassed by it too. She is my mother and I wish that I could love her in the unselfconscious way that she has always loved and cared for me.

I tear my mind back to my more important body. The drone's movement seems noticeably slower now, not just because my commands are received with a slight delay, but also, because of the way the air around the drone has gotten heavier and seems to fight against me. I can feel the crates swaying precariously up above my head. My crew and I keep tight formation, looking out for movement in the wreckage as we fly together back to Edeline. I duck under a busted metal pipe that's spitting out what my scanners say is oxygen over another clump of mercenary bodies. I feel my mother smiling at the carnage we've created.

It's all repairable of course. The corporate bunker's easy. The people too if they're contracted right, and frankly, fuck them if they're not. That's what they deserve for selfishly betraying other cyberpunks in their naive choice to put their bodies on the line for rich assholes instead. We leave the building and arrive at the back door of our truck as the ETA that Edeline projected to our HUDs is ticking down to single figures. I catch an eerie glimpse of mother's hands controlling me before I turn away and use my cargo grapppler to put my crates inside the cargo racks, beside the other crates the crew have placed behind the chairs that hold our sleeping bodies. Edeline guns the truck's accelerator as we cluster by the door to meet the swarm.

Are we ready? Phoebe says.

Doesn't matter, I reply. *We're moving out in three, two, one ...*

We fly out of the back of our vehicle as the ripper drone-swarm

buzzes like a cloud of angry wasps around us. Edeline keeps faer body low as the rippers shatter into puffs of burning shrapnel on the broken asphalt passing underneath it, never touching. The others tell me that I absolutely shouldn't be, but I'm jealous of the tight control that fae gets with faer mind most-likely permanently fused with the computer in the formerly self-driving truck.

If I lived in a more civilised country I'd have a fucking android body of my own by now, for sure. But with the war that never stops continuing to make international travel impossible, and the fascist, anti-android government prohibiting the free import of 'communist technology' while telling me my hatred of my flesh prison is a mental illness, I don't expect I'll be able to be more than a drone anytime soon. If it wasn't for the people that we help by doing this ...

Eat shit, fascists! Phoebe shouts, unloading a wave of fluoroantimonic acid from her chemical thrower into a dense cloud of the ripper drones that melt before they get a chance to build themselves again. Hayden protects her flank with a steady thump of rapidly regenerating EMP-tipped bullets.

All we ever have to do is hold them off for long enough that the money they're losing fighting us comes close enough to eclipsing the cost of what we stole.

These dumb robots have got nothing on us, Hayden says.

He laughs as they dive out of the way of a surge of drones that suddenly converge on him, before a second wave of whirling sawblades comes to reinforce the first. I cleave a bot in front of me and fire off my plasma cannon at a rapidly approaching cloud of several others, watching as the artificial sunlight streaking from my drone liquefies the robots and ignites the surrounding air.

We didn't only choose our weapons for their tactical utility.

The awe and terror they inspire is part of the point. Our fleshy bodies – shielded by Edeline’s layers of armour from the radioactive output of every discharge from my overclocked plasma cannon and the caustic fumes from Phoebe’s acid sprayer – are protected from the localised environmental damage that our drones’ equipment was intentionally designed to cause.

The idea is to damage the property of the corporates we fight as much as possible. We not only try to avoid killing too many people, or causing too much damage to our drones, but also to make sure our enemies are too afraid of the cost of fighting us to track us down and seek revenge. We learned this strategy from the stories of the pirates of the past, like the way that Blackbeard lit his beard on fire to avoid bloodshed during naval engagements. There’s a lot to learn from history when it comes to stuff like that.

Finally, the ripper swarm dies down and Edeline tells us to return to the truck. Phoebe and Hayden project the image of their avatars above the buildings: the emo cat boy and an Elegant Lolita cat girl embrace under a starlit sky in a celebration of our victory. It can be seen from blocks away. I project my cat-eared punk to punch the sky behind them.

The outfits of our avatars are strictly colour-coded: emerald for Phoebe, ruby for Hayden, and sapphire for me. The same colours we’ve used to paint our drones. We got the idea from a group of self-described ‘communist magical girls’ who used to stream their raids on workfare bunkers and broadcast it on *Freenet* back when we were growing up. I’m told they’re still out there somewhere, fermenting revolution quietly behind the scenes.

But the drones and our nomadic lifestyle give my group a level of security that those girls lacked. While having a cohesive image can be motivating and inspiring, it also puts a target on your back.

They couldn't carry on their raids in public once their identities were revealed, even if they found a loophole to escape the legal consequences of their vigilante work. They ultimately remained privileged women, limited by their ties to outside society in a way that my comrades and I never even got a chance to be.

We return our drones to Edeline and my vision starts to fade as I wake up again inside the woman's body. Her pain returns to my awareness in a wave, alongside a familiar sense of heaviness. It's worse than the lumbering awkwardness of piloting a freighted drone and mixed up with an exhaustion that seems baked into her bones, no matter how frequently she sleeps. It causes her to grumble as she opens up her eyes.

She rubs her forehead first, then back over her cleanly shaven head. The prickling sensation of her pointed nails against her scalp helps to ground her and remind her who and where she is again.

'How's my body looking?' she immediately asks, picking up her cane and leaning on it heavily as she rises up out of her chair.

'Scanning now,' the disembodied voice of Edeline responds.

She reaches into the pocket of her sleeveless denim-patch vest for a cigarette, holds it in between her lips and lights it one-handed while she limps towards the place where her drone rests, their slumbering blue body lit up with bright green fluorescent light from Edeline's internal cargo scanners. The sight of it reminds her of the ocean, always creeping ever closer to the top of the cracked sea wall that's been the only thing between this city and destruction for as long as anyone she knows has been alive ...

'Only minor structural damage,' Edeline says, switching off the music as the woman's comrades wake and celebrate their victory behind her. 'You don't need to check in immediately every time. You're a better pilot than you think.'