

## NOCK LOOSE

PATRICK MARLBOROUGH

### ABOUT THE BOOK

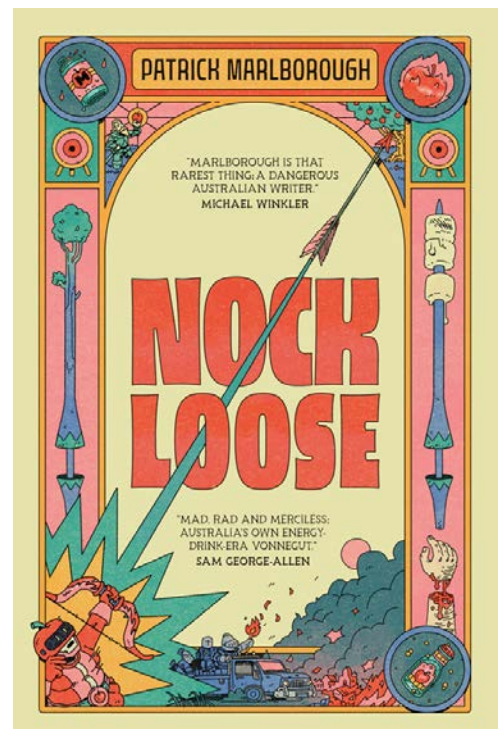
Joy is a gifted archer, a retired Olympian and a former stuntwoman. Raised by a feckless grifter, her home is Bodkins Point, a tiny country town which annually hosts a violent medieval festival called 'Agincourt'. In the aftermath of a terrible fire, Joy's past and the town's dark history are set on a collision course as she takes the furious road to revenge.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick Marlborough is an underemployed writer / comedian / musician / drongo living with their parents in Walyalup, Western Australia. They have been published in *Vice*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Guardian*, *The Saturday Paper*, *Slate*, *Gawker*, *Meanjin*, *Crikey*, *Kotaku*, *The Lifted Brow*, *Kill Your Darlings*, *Cordite*, *Going Down Swinging* and various other forgotten blogs, magazines and anthologies. The manuscript for their first novel, *A Horse Held at Gunpoint*, was shortlisted for the Fogarty Literary Award in 2021 and is still looking for a publisher. They are the founder and editor of *The Yeah Nah Review*, as well as Wharf Rat Press.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is this novel called *Nock Loose*?
2. What are some of its cultural touchpoints?
3. How would you describe its genre?
4. How effective are comedy and satire as modes for critiquing and commenting on Australian social, political and cultural life? What aspects in particular do you think that Marlborough is drawing our attention to?
5. How effective is cartoonish violence as another mode of critique?
6. What are the 'rules' of Agincourt?
7. Do you think the townsfolk of Bodkins Point are being more authentic when they are just being themselves in non-festival time, or when they are playing their characters at Agincourt?
8. Are there 'goodies' and 'baddies' in this novel?
9. How would you describe the system of (local) government at Bodkins Point, led by its succession of kings?
10. Who is Joy and why do you think she has returned to Bodkins Point?
11. What would you describe as the happiest period of her life?
12. How does her own childhood and her present-day interactions with the young people of Bodkins Point shed light on what it is like to grow up in such a town?
13. How would you describe Joy's father, Conway Robyn – both as a father and in his role as the Buggerin' Bugger Bandit? Do you think he loves his daughter?
14. What piece of art is Jeb Morgan working on through the novel? How does his creation offer a commentary on frontier interactions between white colonialists and First Nations people?
15. What project is Casca Morgan working on, and what role does her project have on the plot itself? Why do you think Marlborough has included this?
16. How does Marlborough use the festival to shed light on the frontier history of the South West?



17. Munter Beer also plays a central role in this story. Why is it so important, and why do you think Marlborough has used this particular beverage to pursue a plot line?
18. How do the lore and ephemera gathered in the appendices support the world created by the author?
19. If you had a question for Patrick Marlborough, what would it be?

## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

### ***Where did the idea of Agincourt come from?***

In 2016, I attended the Balingup Medieval Festival. I was covering it for *Vice*. I was struck by the comical anachronisms, specifically the mashup of medieval, nerd, and small bush-town culture. I took a lot of photos highlighting these ironic juxtapositions: guys in plate armour with Monster Energy caps smoking darts, knights wearing speed dealers, washer women playing games on their iPads. Yet when I began thinking about what became *Nock Loose*, I really just had 'revenge thriller starring Magda Szubanski set in a (normal enough) medieval festival in the bush'. All my novels are 'improvised' but. Agincourt came to me as I was writing the first chapter, which was when I realised I was incapable of writing anything other than a piss-take. With that in mind, Agincourt is really a satire of Australian mythmaking—how we retell our colonial past to fit a very banal, in my eyes very mediocre, present.

### ***Is it the characters or the festival itself that you used to drive the story?***

It is hard for me to discuss my process without giving away the game. The version you're reading is a much tidier, more 'consistent,' plot holes filled-in (kinda, hopefully, haha) version of the first draft—but otherwise what's there is what was there in that first Fogarty shortlisted run. I wrote (that version of) *Nock Loose* in 2 weeks, writing 12–14 hours a day in a little studio. I plan no characters, plot, setting, dialogue, or theme. They just appear to me as naturally as the mug of tea I'm looking at now. That said, I think my characters manipulate me. Take Conway for instance: in my first conception, he was a much more loathsome, unforgivable, abusive bastard. But he got to chatting to me, and convinced me otherwise—he is a rake and a charmer and yes, a dud, but ultimately, he's trying. Arthur, too, was originally the book's Big Bad. But I found his dry wit so enticing that he slowly became its secret hero. Pucker Puck began as a throwaway gag, then became the key to unlocking the book's secrets (reread it, haha). These people all arrived fully formed—if they change in the writing it's because they correct my initial perceptions of them. There's too many examples of this in *Nock Loose* to list.

In a lot of ways, The Captain took the book from me. He appeared as soon as I began writing about what Agincourt 'was', exactly. His stupid sets the tone, haha.

In terms of the festival, it allowed me structure to do what I love best: create meta-histories and parallel fictions. It's a joke vehicle, and an alt-universe builder. The key to Agincourt—a trap I laid for nitpicking nerds and pedants, really—is that it's inconsistent. Even the people who live and breathe it can't really settle on the 'rules', or its origins, or what it *means* exactly. Remind you of anywhere?

### ***Which character did you enjoy writing most?***

Ok, I'll try not to ramble, but ultimately, Conway. I love a liar. I love a deadbeat. I love a grifter who never learns his lesson—someone who cannot help themselves. There is too much of my worst self in Conway, but his energy, his language, his duality—I have bipolar, so make of that what you will—is all very fun to try to get a hold on. As I said above, the book dictates me, not the other way around. Conway literally led me by the nose down a version of his story that maybe isn't even true—who am I to say?

But! I loved writing Arthur also, because it's always fun to write a straight man. He is the only Bodkinite who sees Agincourt in its awful totality, yet his cynicism and indifference (at least his performance of it) ultimately binds him to it. He is very loosely based on Paul Keating's appearances on *The 7.30 Report* in the 2000s,

where he loved to bitch about everything and everyone, while still being a fool for the system that doomed him.

But! If I'm being totally honest, my favourite characters to write in *Nock Loose* were the Bodkinites themselves. Having the town operate as a ping-ponging chorus of whiney psychos was/is very fun. They bring the world to life, maybe begrudgingly, but it's all they know how to do.

That said! I love the twins. They arrived very whole and organically. Constable Rinds was originally a villain, but he won me over by being a dog. The Panzers/Coyotes felt like they'd already existed, and do appear in my other novels. Big Ron—who seems to be everyone's favourite—is heavily based on a man who has been our family friend for literally 75 years; he is a loving tribute to him.

I am a huge nerd for minor characters in fiction (Stubbs in *Moby Dick*, Simon (Stephen's father) Daedalus in *Ulysses*, Gamling). The texts (especially *Lord of the Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*) that *Nock Loose* is drawing from/satirising are full of them, so this book is too. Woody Barr and Bill Chuffed (can you tell I was raised in a household where Ben Chiffley is considered a minor deity?) are good examples.

Pucker Puck (*PUCKER PUCK!*) is me in 40 years, sadly.

***This novel is both very graphic and very entertaining. As a stand-up comic, did you bring your understanding from that world into your writing when it came to thinking about how to grab the attention of readers?***

There is little separation between my fiction, my comedy, my music, my non-fic/journalism, etc. in my mind. Being capital F 'Funny'—not *New Yorker* or *Chaser* or Leuing 'funny'—is a cardinal sin in Australian literature/art, which is why it's so lifeless, for the most part. We are a very humourless, self-serious people, despite somehow convincing ourselves otherwise (much like Yanks think they love 'freedom', when they essentially loathe it).

One thing I can't stand as a comedian is boring my audience. My live shows are complex, confronting, nasty, and challenging—but you will never be bored, and you *will* laugh. It's a guarantee I try to bring to my novels. I am a top-shelf impressionist and improviser—these two knacks probably define/fuel my fiction more than any others.

I do think it's rather shameful how dull most Australian fiction dares to be. I like slow, difficult, plotless novels (believe it or not). But what I'm talking about is the 'Stan Original' vein of Australian writing that makes me feel like I'm reading hallmark cards in a children's oncology ward. Just die already, it's sunny outside, I wanna have fun!

I think what a lot of writers *and* comedians forget, or unlearn, or have hammered out of them by our desperately conservative and cowardly arts industry, is this: you can do and say *anything*. They can't stop ya. Go hog wild!

***What is next for Patrick Marlborough?***

Long-term underemployment.

Beyond that, I am sitting on 4 finished novels: *A Horse Held at Gunpoint* (shortlisted for The Fogarty Literary Award in 2021, probably the best), *Craigie: A Reckoning* (which I wrote with the intention to self-publish; it's very funny but quite evil), *FIFO Bebop* (retelling of *Dante's Inferno*, but about an older FIFO taking a younger FIFO out for a hellish night on the town at the peak of Perth's mining boom), and *Wagger Champloo* (4 schoolboys wag school to enter a video game contest in 2002, my assault on the Howard years). I have 20 more planned, 5 more begun, and could sit writing a novel a month if life and this turgid industry would just get out of my way/stop bumming me out so much/forward me a loan.

My plan is to start my own small press that publishes *exciting* Australian literature, that is literature that isn't bound to the middle-brow tastes of creative writing program coordinators, state-funded writer orgs (notice how none of these guys ever publish anything? weird!), and donors with the politics and morals of German expats living in Argentina in the 1970s.

But I'm poor and autistic and kinda rude, so it's a struggle (this biz loves a suckhole, and I am tragically neurologically incapable). If you're reading this and you're rich, please send me money. Despite what I said above, I don't care if you're evil if your money does good.

Until then, I am and have been for almost 20 years, a working writer. My stuff is all over. It'll continue to be all over. There will be more live shows, books, albums, and articles, unless Trump ups the cost of my meds by 300%. Then you might see me standing at the intersection with my pants around my ankles, holding up a sign that reads 'will let you call me the next Tim Winton for \$50'.

However, I prefer the path of The Buggerin' Bandit when it comes to supporting the arts: *your money, or your life!*



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