



COMMUNITY

INDEX



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Booking Deadlines

Tuesday's Edition

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Imaginative writing winner for Matthew

JENNY DENTON

IT is thanks to the vast size and distances between places in the Mallee that Matthew Barker started writing.

Around a decade ago when he was working as a counsellor for Northern District Community Health he started telling himself stories on the often long drives between appointments in different towns.

"Thinking of stories and imagining different tales and movies and stuff was something that I did as a sort of de-stressor - because that's really important in that kind of work," he says. "I would be driving between towns and that would be my way of zoning out, and then I sort of thought, 'Well, why not just start doing it?'"

Since then the Cohuna resident has taken up screenwriting seriously, produced a number of scripts for film and television and given counselling away in favour of a job in "quality and compliance" at the health service.

Last month he won an international award for a screenplay that could see the work picked up and produced as a feature film.

While his first love is horror, Matthew writes in various screen genres, and the script *Out of Nowhere*, which won the US-based LGBTQ Screenwriting Competition in March, is a romantic drama.

"It's about two guys that meet at physical rehab after accidents," he says. "One is on his bike and gets hit by a car and meets this other guy and they form a relationship, but the guy who was hit by the car is a bit of a book nerd and has no idea that the other guy is an AFL player."

"It's essentially about how even though in this day and age we have marriage equality and things like that, in Australia we do still have issues that make it hard for people to come out and be open and honest about themselves and their lives."

"There's still that fear there, and some of it for very good reason - that people aren't safe - either

they're not safe in their family or safe in their community, whether it's a rural community or a sporting community. There's this idea that we still do have to 'come out' and I guess sort of validate or justify ourselves."

The theme is a "challenging" one for a film, particularly in Australia's small film industry Matthew says, but the award will see the script distributed to producers and given to a script-writing specialist for professional feedback.

The same weekend he found out about the win, another of his screenplays was judged semi-finalist in the prestigious Edinburgh Screenwriting Competition.

That work, *Troy Town*, is a "psychological horror/thriller" which has placed highly in several other competitions.

"I've probably written more horror [than anything else]. But there are also very human stories there too," he says.

Growing up, there weren't many quality shows on TV to watch, but Mathew, who was born in Melbourne and moved to Cohuna with his family when he was five, was a huge fan of *The X-files*.

He has co-written a couple of TV series episodes - so far unproduced - that are heavily influenced by the series' genre-busting brand of science fiction.

"They're sort of psychological horror, with the odd serial killer or alien invasion thrown in for good measure," he says.

He has also recently finished another feature length script for a horror movie set in a remote country town in Australia.

"It feels really good, different to everything else getting produced," he says.

While his writing career is starting to heat up and he has a few irons in the fire, there is little chance the aspiring screenwriter will be leaving the health service for Hollywood.

"I like my job. And particularly in Australia it can take years to get a film made. And often you get paid little, unless it's a huge success, so you need work. Plus



Matthew Barker, writing at home in Cohuna, overseen by Coco the spoodle. **Picture — BRADLEY TARR**

as a writer it keeps you in touch with people."

Living in a rural community probably lends itself to being able to write about country characters and idiosyncrasies, he says, and in any case he has no intention of leaving home.

The young writer, who married his partner of 16 years, Brad, atop a mountain in New Zealand last

year, will continue working full time at NDCH and working at home on his film and television projects, keeping involved in the industry via Skype, online communities and competitions.

"Hopefully at some point I'll get a movie made," he says.

"Because it just takes forever. It can take years. And sometimes you still never get there."

Weather

Temperatures

Thursday: minimum 8.6 degrees, maximum 23.2 degrees.
Friday: 9.7, 18.0.
Saturday: 4.2, 18.0.
Sunday: 6.6, 19.8.
Monday: 4.7.

April minimums: lowest 4.2 degrees [27th], highest 18.4 degrees [17th] average 11.0 degrees [long-term average 9.9 degrees]. Lowest on record: 0.8 degrees [30th, 2009]. Highest on record: 22.1 degrees [3rd, 2005].

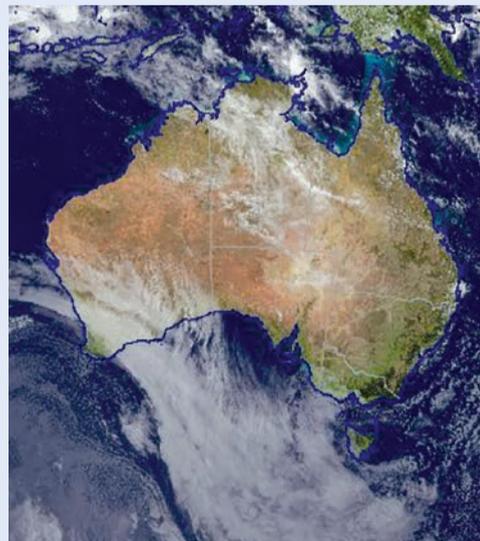
April maximums: lowest 18.0 degrees [26th, 27th], highest 33.2 degrees [17th], average 25.1 degrees [long-term average 23.0 degrees]. Highest on record: 37.0 degrees [10th, 2005]. Lowest on record: 12.8 degrees [7th, 1977].

Rainfall

Month to date: 0.0mm [long-term average 25.2mm].
Year to date: 14.8mm. [long-term January-April average: 99.1mm]. Last year to April 29: 36.8mm. Highest on record: 114.0mm [1891]. Lowest on record: 0.0mm [1906, 1910, 1945, 1975].

Evaporation

Weekly pan evaporation: 17.6mm.



Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

Forecast

Tuesday: Partly cloudy, 7-22
Wednesday: Showers increasing, 16-22
Thursday: Early rain, 10-19
Friday: Partly cloudy, 8-18
Saturday: Partly cloudy, 9-18
Sunday: Partly cloudy, 7-20

Daylight

Today sunrise 7.01am
sunset 5.43pm
Wednesday 7.01am, 5.42pm
Thursday 7.02am, 5.40pm
Friday 7.03am, 5.39pm
Saturday 7.04am, 5.38pm

Ultra-violet Index

Sun protection recommended between 10.20am and 2.10pm. UV Index predicted to reach 4 [moderate].

Fire danger

Mallee: Low-moderate. The Shire of Gannawarra is in the Mallee fire district.
Northern Country: Low-moderate. The Shire of Loddon is in the Northern Country fire district.
• Fire danger and restrictions information is available from www.cfa.vic.gov.au