

# New Writers Unearthed

## An Interview with the Garcia Sisters

...Eugen Bacon

I embarked as a roving reporter from *Andromeda Spaceways Magazine* on an odyssey to unravel insights into the process of writing speculative fiction.

I came across the Garcia Sisters who live in Melbourne and write collaboratively, and have recently independently published their first book in a series titled *The Night Owl Chronicles* through Amazon's CreateSpace.

Information on *The Door Vol 1* is available on their website: [www.thenightowlchronicles.com](http://www.thenightowlchronicles.com).

Collaborative practice comes with its own trials. Aware of these challenges, and the implications of self-publishing in a highly competitive publishing world, I sought an inner gaze at Allison and Samantha's world.

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### Are you really sisters?

Yes! We're definitively sisters and best friends. We're three years apart.

### What makes it rough collaborating with a sibling?

Respecting each other's space when we're not writing. One of us may have an idea about a chapter or a future book, and the other may want some quiet time. We both have little patience so waiting on each other is a challenge! Sometimes one of us might want to get rid of a character and we debate why they should stay or go which means huge re-writes that may impact the entire story.

But being siblings, we can be truly honest with each other. As the story progresses we feed off each other's ideas, making the whole writing experience easier. Our family supports us one hundred percent and they're amazed at how two people can write a book together.

### Are you comfortable with a dual identity as Garcia Sisters?

From the beginning, we agreed that we didn't want to be known as individual writers. We originally had the idea of having the initials of S A .G—meaning Samantha Allison Garcia, but it didn't feel right. As time went on we noticed that there were many brands out in the market with the word "brother," for example: Brown Brothers, Warner Brothers, Grimm Brothers, just to name a few. There



Samantha (left) and Allison

weren't many brands out in the market with the word "sisters." Garcia Sisters is easy to remember and represents our strong partnership.

### Where do you write?

Our writing sanctuary is in the study, away from noise, especially the barking of our dogs!

### Tell our readers about the first book of your series.

Intense. *The Door* is a young adult novel that explores the dark elements that hide in our busy world, especially those that are not from *this* world. There's another place beneath us, a much darker place. Josh Riley's girlfriend Emma, should have listened to him when he said to never open the door. Our favourite character is Amanda Wolf, unconventional and mysterious. She's the type of girl that people stare at and talk about, the emo punk girl at school with a bad attitude. You will love her or hate her because she's unapologetically honest and stays true to herself. She plays an important role in future books. Her character reveals a big secret towards the end.

### Whose brainchild was the collaboration?

We both had similar ideas for a story—hearing a knock in the middle of the night, exploring deep fear, or a girl who found herself alone in a big shopping centre with no way out. One night we put our ideas together and *The Night Owl Chronicles* was born.

We are very structured. Before we begin a chapter, we do a lot of pre-planning: bullet points. We come together and think of things we want to explore, such as ghosts, demons and aliens. We construct character profiles and carefully consider future books and how they connect. Once we are happy with the plot, chapter outlines and characters profiles, we begin writing. We send drafts to each other with comments and track changes. Because everything is planned so well, we made a rule that if one is going to make changes, we must first discuss them as a team.

**What advice would you give someone who is planning to write collaboratively?**

We would ask them, “Do you both have the same vision and passion?” This is extremely important because if the parties share extremely different visions this could be problematic. We’d ask: “How well do you take constructive criticism?” It’s important to know if you can be open to one another. If you plan to write together, plot, be committed to each other and the rest will take care of itself.

**Have you been previously published?**

Allison’s first two books, *Nothing North* and *All the Owls Cry* were published by Horizon Publishing Group. It took her two years until someone finally said yes. It was simply a matter of not giving up and not giving in to the rejections.

**Why Amazon CreateSpace now?**

We approached many publishers and literary agents before deciding to publish ourselves. We didn’t want to delay our story any more. We believe that agents or traditional publishers didn’t understand our idea, so we decided to take matters into our own hands and we’ve never looked back since. If an opportunity with a traditional publisher comes along, we’d be open to it.

With Amazon, we had the chance to control every aspect of our book and what *The Night Owl Chronicles* represents. There are many elements that come into play when making a book and marketing it. Amazon understood our vision and supported us through every step. Having a strong brand behind us gave us a solid platform to reach out to other writers and connect with our readers.

**What are your tips to other writers on marketing your work?**

Get on social media, be consistent with your content and don’t be afraid to connect with your audience. The right followers will find you and support you. We started off with only 12 followers, now we have over 26,000 on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Not every platform works: our weakest is Google Plus; we are virtually invisible there. Having a professional website and social media platform is a great way to spread the word. Get out of your comfort zone and reach out to the media; show them you are proud of your work and don’t underestimate the power of family and friends.

**If you could rewrite *The Door*, what would you do differently?**

We are happy with it, but we are critical of our work and Samantha often says certain scenes could have been better. We’re always wondering if the story is scary enough or if we could have done improved a scene. But that’s a struggle we know most writers go through.

**What might a harsh critic say about *The Door*?**

They may question why certain characters are in the book in the first place. For example, Josh Riley has a neighbour called Isabelle. She makes only two appearances in the book and has no connection to Josh and his problems. In fact, she adds little to the story. However, Isabelle is the main character for the next book, *Cinema 4*. There are other characters in *The Door* that make appearances in subsequent books. Critics might question why some characters come and go. We’re foreshadowing to our readers for future books, but not everybody might like that. Some might say *The Door* is too dark and sombre (our first editor pointed that out) but we know that we cannot please everyone.

**Briefly, what is your idea behind the second book in the series?**

*Cinema 4* is much darker than *The Door*. It charts the story of Isabelle—she’s about to graduate from high school, but she’s angry at life and everyone. Her father remarried not long after the death of her mother and she must keep a happy face for her demanding and nasty step-mother, Evelyn. On top of that, Isabelle must put up with her step-brother, Jason, the favourite child in the house.

One day, her step-mother orders Isabelle to take Jason to the cinema to watch his favourite cartoon on the big screen. As they sit inside the cinema that’s full of children (and she’s nursing her nasty hangover) Isabelle falls asleep. When she wakes, she is alone. There’s no trace of anybody, including Jason. She walks out of the cinema and finds she’s completely abandoned in the world’s largest mall. Along the way, she finds others left behind, but there’s no sign of the missing people. They cannot leave the mall, and communication to the outside world is impossible. Together, they find that an evil force is at play for a specific reason and Isabelle is the key to ending it all.

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Wrapping up, it was fascinating to isolate the sisters from their integrated writerly persona.

Where Sammy reads a lot for recreation, Ally researches ghost tours and makes scrapbooks. Sammy has a penchant for Neil Gaiman and his novel *Coraline*, and is enamoured by English writer Susan Hill for *The Woman in Black*. Allison will take R L Stine any time, blown away by his imagination and excellent storytelling, and—of course—Stephen King, master of horror whose books are nothing but awesome.

On film, where Samantha has the hots for *The Ring* and *Aliens*, you can't drag Allison out of *Ghostbusters*! Why? "It never gets old," says Ally. "The idea to combine comedy, ghosts and classic actors was genius and how can you ignore the theme song? Plus, it was made in 1984—the year I was born."

The success of multi-authored work relies on the participants' ability to negotiate their diversity, to adopt each other's creativity and engender uniqueness to an artistic formation that is singular and seamless to the reader. Collaborative practice highlights the importance of what literary theorist Roland Barthes might have had in mind with his notion of "death of the author", a divorcing of the self from the other to achieve a text's unity in its destination, empowering the reader.

Ultimately, the reader decides: is the product of this multiplicity a success?

