

## Book-related questions, writing-life questions and fun questions with author Vyvyan Evans:

### Please tell us about your current release.

VE: The Babel Apocalypse imagines a future in which we stream language directly to neural implants in our heads. When a global language outage strikes, civilization is thrown into chaos as most of the world's population can no longer communicate.

Today, we stream anything from movies, to books, to music, to our 'smart' devices, and consume that content. Smart devices use streaming signals—data encoded in IP data packets—encoded and distributed via wi-fi internet. Language streaming would work, in principle, in the same way. With a 'language chip' implanted in our brains, we will be able to 'stream' language from internet-in-space on demand, 24/7. This is not as far-fetched as it sounds—research on neuro-prosthetic brain implants is underway. By the end of the century, I predict the technology will exist that could, in principle, render language learning obsolete.

### What inspired you to write this book?

VE: I in 2015, many of the world's leading scientists, warned, in an Open Letter and accompanying report, against the new dangers of AI. This Open Letter was issued in response to new breakthroughs in AI that, without adequate control, might pose short and long-term existential threats to humans.

But potential dangers come not just from the use of AI, in the sense of, for instance, The Terminator series of movies, in which AI seeks to wage war and destroy the human race. New implantable devices, that will enhance how we as humans can interact with our new tech-landscape, will also give rise to potential dangers. Language is, arguably, the single trait that is the hallmark of what it is to be human. And yet, in the near-future, language-chipped humans, or the 'transhuman', will have enhanced abilities that bring new opportunities, as well as ethical challenges and even threats.

I wrote The Babel Apocalypse to serve as a warning against some of these new dangers. Imagine having ChatGPT in your head. This would render language learning obsolete and give powerful tech corporations a monopoly over language, even down to selecting the very words we can stream and use.

### [Excerpt]:

The opening lines from the Prologue, to The Babel Apocalypse:

It wasn't her cold beauty that marked out Ebba Black as unique—her *chilling looks*, as she called them—although her looks invariably made an impression on all who met her. Rather, it was the fact that she was the last nate in the automated world. That made her famous. Undoubtedly she was celebrated for other things too—Ebba Black the Babelist, the heiress, the conspiracy theorist, the charismatic professor. Maybe even the oddity. After all, Ebba was the last speaker of languages that would die with her. With Elias's passing five years prior, she had no one left to speak them with. And Ebba Black would not marry. Commitment of that sort wasn't her thing, and she would certainly never have children. You could say she wasn't the maternal type.

Ebba knew she was unique in other, ineffable ways, too. For one, she listed things to herself, silently, in her head. *Reasons to know me. Reasons not to know me. Reasons to hate me, to admire me.* But not *reasons to love me*. Never that. That was forbidden. Ebba never allowed anyone to get that

close. Sometimes Ebba even indulged in one of her trademark waspish grins. To no one in particular, while she mentally scrolled through one list: *reasons to kill*. The list with the names. Her *list of lists*. The grin was the only outward sign she was performing a mental stock-take. It wasn't good to be on that particular list. Ebba Black was neither the forgiving nor the tolerant type.

Ebba was all too aware that she was viewed as an anomaly by pretty much everyone; she was neither feral nor out-soc. So, some of her students—especially those from outside the Republic, such as the Grand Union, and other places too—thought she must be breaking the law. It was a common misconception. She had even once been reported to the authorities by one of those types. For being an unchipped *ghost*, as they called her. That made her laugh; a dark laugh at the irony of it. The *muties*, she called them. Those who had been fitted with Universal Grammar tech.

But while she officially resided in the Nordic Republic, and as long as she remained there, Ebba wasn't doing anything illegal. The Republic was something of a curiosity even among Tier One states, never having passed a lang-law. Yet this singular absence was offset by the special requirements of Nordic birth licenses. To have one granted, prospective parents had to consent to their newborn being fitted with Universal Grammar tech. So everyone got a language chip at birth anyway, together with an ear implant transceiver. Which meant that voice command tech was, for all intents and purposes, *de rigueur* even without a lang-law. But that was the Scandinavian way. In the Nordic Republic, they organized freedom.

For her part, Ebba knew it wasn't her. It was everyone else who had the problem. "That's what you *would* think," her braver, typically male students told her. "You're Ebba Black." *Ha! Whatever that means. How do they know what Ebba Black would think anyway?*

And despite all the false idols—intelligence, wealth, beauty—that others admired and envied in her, they didn't know the things that had made her the woman she was. No one knew that her will of steel was, in fact, forged from sorrow. But Ebba knew. And she knew that her losses were more than any ordinary person could bear. What sustained the blackness of her sorrow was vengeance. Vengeance past and vengeance yet to be dealt. Ebba nurtured it in the dark palace of her mind—the innermost, most private mental shrine where she kept the one list, the list that was actualized and ritualized. The list of lists. There remained three names. They were the toughest ones. Especially his, at the very summit.

But something preternatural happened that Ebba knew would change everything. She was witness to an apparition, unheralded early one morning. And it brought with it a warning, a prophecy, and a gift.

### **What exciting project are you working on next?**

VE: The Babel Apocalypse is the first book in the Songs of the Sage series. There are six projected books in the series which, in increasing turns, examine the role and nature of language, and communication. The thematic premise is that, in the wrong hands, language can serve as a weapon of mass destruction. This overarching motif is explored, across the six books, both from Earth-bound and galaxies-wide bases.

As language involves symbol use and processing, the book series, perhaps naturally, also dwells on other aspects of human imagination and symbolic behavior, including religious experience and belief systems, themselves made possible by language.

The second book in the series, The Dark Court, is set five years after the events of the great language outage depicted in The Babel Apocalypse. It explores how the language chips in people's heads can themselves be hacked, leading to a global insomnia pandemic. The Dark Court will be

published in 2024, as book 2 in the series.

### **Writing-life-related questions:**

#### **When did you first consider yourself a writer?**

VE: Aged nine, when I won a local newspaper poetry competition.

#### **Do you write full-time? If so, what's your workday like? If not, what do you do other than write and how do you find time to write?**

VE: I now work as a language and communication consultant (I was formerly for many years a university professor of linguistics. I divide my time being my research-based advice and writing for companies I consult to, and my science fiction writing.

### **Fun questions:**

#### **What would you say is your interesting writing quirk?**

VE: My best ideas invariably arrive when I am without anything to write them down with, typically when I'm in the shower, or out on a long run. Then's it's a race to find a writing implement, to avoid losing them.

#### **As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?**

VE: I knew from the age of nine I wanted to be a writer.

#### **Anything additional you want to share with the readers?**

VE: The Babel Apocalypse predicts a near-future era of language-as-commodity. In such a future, it is inevitable that whether a language lives or dies would be based on economics. In other words, those languages with little demand on streaming services would cease to exist.

Language is the hallmark of what it means to be human. When we lose language, we all lose.