Amber Bird

[Photo credit: Jesse Means]

About Amber

Bio

Amber Bird is a writer, a rockstar, and a sci-fi simulacrum. She is the author of science fiction book *Peace Fire*, the front of post-punk/post-glam band Varnish, and an unabashed geek. An Autistic introvert who found that music, books, and gaming saved her in many ways throughout her life, she writes (books, poems, lyrics, blogs) and makes music in hopes of adding to someone else's escape or rescue. And, yes, she was on that Magic card.

Visit her website for a longer bio and high res images.

Q&A

>Are you a hacker?
I wanted to be. And I had a promising start: In spite of living below the poverty line, my parents scrimped and saved to get a computer; they knew it was important. I took to the computer, learning a little bit of coding (which I loved). But Internet access would have meant more money, so I was saved from my own young criminal inclinations by our lack of funds. By the time we got Internet access, I found my focus too split (books, music, theatre, school, and relationships) and made peace with my non-hacker self.

>How does your love of music influence your writing?
When I write, I have soundtracks in my head (and usually on my speakers) that set the tone, and my first mental images of Peace Fire were more like music videos. I think music helped me build a sense of atmosphere, an idea of cool outside of what Hollywood tells me it is. Music, my own and others, also helped me accept that a non-stop, butterfly-filled utopia isn't actually the kind of place from which creations that connect with me tend to come. Not unless someone has at least been letting some moths in...

>What was it like writing *Peace Fire*?
It was a whirlwind, but not. My friend Ernie Cline gave me a warning of about a month to get a solid draft sorted before I needed to hand it off. I wrote a draft in 9 solid days, took a few days off, did a rewrite in 5 days, and then did one last rewrite in about 3 days once I had feedback from my beta readers. Insane, right? But the reason it worked, the reason it wasn't actually a whirlwind, was that the story had been growing in my head since I was a teenager. It started with one image and slowly expanded until I had something like a plot. It was a story I really enjoyed, so I told it to myself quite a few times. It was very ready to come out once I finally sat down to do it. Hopefully, the next books won't be massively harder. There are plenty of new elements, but also a few that have been minor stories I've told myself alongside *Peace Fire* for years now. (Don't worry; I'm good at work. If they're stubborn, it won't stop me!)

>Is the diversity of your characters meant to be a statement?
It's just meant to reflect the reality of the world I live in, of the people I know. I'm not averse to what I see treated as the "default" character (because he's also like people I know), I just don't see that sticking to that narrow character type serves people or is anything like "writing what I know." It might not have ruined my life to read mainly about straight, white, cis-gendered, able-bodied men, but I wonder what my life would have been like if I'd grown up on stories of people who were more like me. I'm an adult, a feminist, and in possession of serious self-esteem, but films like *Star Wars: the Force Awakens*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, and the latest *Ghostbusters* felt like revelations to me. Wee-Amber would have been a fiercer, brighter creature with that kind of media in her life. (I'm thrilled to know that I'm actually part of a growing wave of creators showing a more real spectrum of humanity.)

>Are there any other books in the works?
There are! I definitely have at least two more books in this series, for starters. But I've also got a stack of poetry, most written before I had my band and my "lyrical brain switch" flipped to lyrics instead, and I'm hoping to put together a collection of that. I've got a few other scifi ideas and at least one contemporary fantasy idea. And, of course, as I've been reading a lot about Autism since my own diagnosis in autumn 2014 and becoming more engaged with Autism acceptance and activism, I've been pondering whether that's the topic to satisfy my vague urge to do something non-fiction. (Starting at passion seems like a good start for anything, even non-fiction.) I was poking at short stories, but I haven't done enough to make a book (and haven't looked at them in ages, so might decide I have none at all worth publication). So, expect my list of published works to grow.

>Do you think the grim future you write in is fact or fiction?
Well, there's definitely plenty of fiction in there, but, yeah, I kind of think there's plenty of fact. I have hope for good things and believe humans have the capacity for good; however, it doesn't take more than a second of reading news to see that humanity seems, at best, inclined towards inaction and, at worst, strongly inclined towards being horrible to people, animals, and the world. Which is good for my creative fires, but...I'd happily give up creation in exchange for my hope being justifiably brighter.

Your brain needs a firewall

Peace Fire
(Peaceforgers: Book One)
Peace Fire released 11 October, 2016

In 2050, the world is a little denser, a little greyer, and a little more firmly under the corporate thumb. Wriggling carefully under that thumb, in their dimly lit flats, Katja and her friends have tended to walk the fine line between cyber criminals and cyber crusaders. For them, no physical reality compares to their lives built on lines of aggressive code.

But then somebody blows up the office where Katja is pretending to be a well-behaved wage slave and jolts them into the concrete and clouds of corporeal Seattle. Of brains infiltrated by a clandestine threat.

Can a handful of digital warriors win a war that stretches into the world on the flesh and blood side of their computer screens?

**"A smart, fun, fierce tale of geek revolution and high-stakes adventure."
—Ernest Cline, bestselling author of *Ready Player One* and *Armada***

Sample
I followed one of my dancing motions through, spinning myself a bit to the side, just enough to let me easily grab the man by the throat and then move back in. I took advantage of his proximity to push a gun into his chest as well, and moved my own lips dangerously near *his* ear. "I think this is a conversation we ought to have somewhere a bit more private, don't you?" I wished I felt as badass as I sounded.

I had stopped dancing. So had a lot of the people near us. I could hear my friends talking to those people over the music, surely explaining to those nearby that this was an ex-boyfriend and there wasn't a problem. He *liked* rough stuff. We'd used that line before. It must have made sense to most people, because they went back to dancing but kept an eye on me and the man I held. Maybe they'd get a show. They'd love that, and I might like to provide it. I was riding the adrenaline that comes when you do something brave (really fucking stupid) in the face of fear. I was starting to feel cocky. And angry.

I once read that anger is a secondary emotion. When we feel it, it's really just there as a protection against some more vulnerable emotion we're feeling. For instance, if you're afraid because someone just blew up your workplace and you're feeling vulnerable because that same someone seems to have hunted you down, tracked you to locations they shouldn't know to find you, you might feel anger. You might, when face-to-face with them, feel nauseated that you'd previously considered making eyes with them and, to cover that nausea, feel a tide of righteous anger rise in you.

And, by "you," I mean "me."

I leaned in until my nose almost touched the man's nose. My jaw was hard, my teeth clenched both in anger and to stop them chattering from the fear it was covering. I was grateful he wasn't fighting this, because I knew perfectly well that I wasn't half as physically strong as I was acting. This was pure adrenaline and rage. "Let's find a nice corner. That will give me two different walls to slam you against."