

= PJ Haarsma =

Philip @-@ Jon Haarsma / ?h??rzm?? / , more commonly known as PJ Haarsma , is a Canadian born science fiction author best known for his creation of the Rings of Orbis universe , which encompasses The Softwire series of books . Haarsma created a free , online role @-@ playing game , also called the Rings of Orbis , set in the same universe . Both the book @-@ series and the game target young , often reluctant readers in an attempt to encourage them by rewarding them for reading .

Haarsma developed a school presentation program in which he discusses The Softwire books , astronomy , and other science fiction and science fact topics . He is also one of the co @-@ founders of Kids Need to Read , a United States Internal Revenue Code 501 ( c ) ( 3 ) tax exempt public charity that purchases books to donate to underfunded schools and libraries .

= = Personal life = =

Philip @-@ Jon Haarsma was born on June 5 , 1964 , in Georgetown , Ontario . Though he was named after his grandfathers , Philip and Jon , he went simply by " Jon " while growing up . Later , while attending McMaster University in Hamilton , Ontario , where he received a Bachelor of Science degree , he began to use his initials , " PJ " , and his books are published under the name " PJ Haarsma " .

After he moved to the United States in 1989 , Haarsma worked as a fashion and commercial photographer in New York City and Miami . He received many photography awards , including an honorable mention at the Cannes Lion Awards in 1996 . Haarsma owned a small production company called Redbear Films , Inc . The company produced one movie ( Devious Beings , 2002 ) , and a digital series called Con Man starring Alan Tudyk and Nathan Fillion and several corporate ads for clients such as Hewlett Packard and Nokia . For 15 years , Redbear Films focused on the production of advertisements .

Haarsma lives in Los Angeles with his wife , sci @-@ fi fantasy artist Marisa Grieco , and their daughters Skylar and Zoe .

= = Con Man ( web series ) = =

PJ Haarsma is the producer of the Con Man created by Alan Tudyk and co @-@ produced by Nathan Fillion .

= = Rings of Orbis = =

At the age of 38 , Haarsma was not satisfied with his professional life . He began to keep a daily journal , writing about anything ( and everything ) that came to his mind ? until eventually " Johnny T came onto [ his ] page . " Johnny T is the main character , Johnny Turnbull , of Haarsma 's The Softwire series . Haarsma chose to give The Softwire a sci @-@ fi setting due to a love of science fiction , and to target a young adult audience with his novels so that children could discover and learn to enjoy the genre .

The Softwire is actually a story that Haarsma began imagining in his childhood . As a teenager , he worked at his parents ' ceramic factory during the summers , hauling fifty pound molds around in the extreme heat of a kiln room . To Haarsma , it felt similar to what the children of his books might feel as slaves . In addition to these experiences , there is a more prominent influence on the premise of The Softwire ? that is , there is a mystery of a journey to a new , unknown place to start a new life . Growing up , Haarsma dreamed of moving to the United States ; and in his twenties , he actually did . While there , living in New York , Miami , San Francisco and Los Angeles , Haarsma witnessed immigrants struggling to get by . He tried to imagine what caused them to risk everything , and to move to another country , and to have a chance at something better . It is this journey ( and struggle ) that is prevalent in The Softwire .

In The Softwire , a group of human children are orphaned in outer space . They are forced into indentured servitude on the Rings of Orbis , four planet @-@ like rings around a wormhole . They must spend four years as slaves or knudniks before they are eligible to become Citizens . Each year they are the property of a new owner on a separate ring : Orbis 1 , Orbis 2 , Orbis 3 , and Orbis 4 . They are forced into labor to do whatever task their new owner requires .

When the children arrive , they soon discover that thirteen @-@ year @-@ old Johnny Turnbull ( JT ) , is the first human softwire , a boy who has the ability to enter any computer with just his mind . To the older Citizens , a slave who can enter at will the massive computer which controls the Rings of Orbis makes JT very valuable and drives the Rings to the brink of war . As the central computer begins to malfunction , the Citizens connive , conspire , and even kill to own JT and his sister .

While there are other humans besides the children on the Rings , the majority of the inhabitants are of alien species . The Keepers are an intelligent species of two @-@ headed beings who act as the overseers . Other species encountered include Belarans , Choi , Solinns , and Trefaldoors , all of which become interesting roles for young players to choose from in the game , Rings of Orbis .

= = = Rings of Orbis game = = =

Haarsma 's novels are accompanied by a free , online , role @-@ playing game called Rings of Orbis which acts as a visual companion to the books and is set in the same universe . Players are sometimes required to use information from the books in order to solve puzzles and to unlock areas within the game . Pairing a video game with a novel for young readers , Haarsma says , ? brings the book into their world , as opposed to going the other way around . ?

Haarsma and a team of artists also created many different alien races specifically for the game . The team includes Haarsma 's wife Marisa Grieco , Igor Knezevic , Stephan Martinière , Dwayne Harris , and Neil Blevins .

The game works to encourage reluctant readers , especially boys , by giving them an interactive game through which to relate to the mysteries found within the books themselves . Players complete quests and earn in @-@ game currency which they can then spend on in @-@ game items designed by Haarsma , all the while they compete to become the best Citizen of the Rings of Orbis . In 2008 , the game was featured in a front page New York Times article about encouraging reluctant readers with video games .

= = Promotion of literacy = =

= = = Kids Need to Read = = =

While speaking at schools across the United States , Haarsma noticed how some school librarians were having trouble finding funds to purchase The Softwire books after a demand had been created by Haarsma 's visit . Many of the librarians were struggling to fill their shelves with books . In June 2007 , Haarsma and a friend , actor Nathan Fillion , approached a group of Fillion 's fans with the idea for a project that would work to purchase books for underfunded schools , as well as nonprofit institutions which gave books directly to children . The group took to the idea and focused their energies into getting the project off the ground . The Kids Need to Read project went public in August 2007 .

In January 2008 , the process to transform the project into a legal foundation began , and the fan group was separated from the developing organization . On May 22 , 2008 , The Kids Need to Read Foundation ( KNTR ) was incorporated in the state of California . KNTR became an Internal Revenue Code 501 ( c ) ( 3 ) tax exempt public charity on September 18 , 2008 , with a retroactive exemption date of May 22 , 2008 . The organization is supported by a global volunteer base .

Funds were initially raised through eBay auctions of Firefly and Serenity autographed memorabilia , and The Softwire books and items , and other science fiction and literary themed items . Fundraising efforts have since expanded and all funds are used to purchase books from the foundation 's official

book list , a list which is continually updated by a professional children 's book buyer . The titles chosen are well @-@ reviewed and many are recommended for children who are reluctant readers .

KNTR has made book donations to forty @-@ one schools and libraries in addition to three multiple library systems . KNTR facilitated a substantial donation of three thousand books by the Phoenix Book Company to the Friends of the New Orleans Public Library , to help with recuperation after Hurricane Katrina . The Odessa Brown Children 's Clinic in Seattle was the recipient of a donation amounting to four hundred forty books in February 2008 . This clinic , as well as the North Public Health Clinic in Seattle , have received recurring donations from KNTR .

Haarsma remains on the KNTR Advisory Board as founder and consultant for literacy @-@ based activities . By using his position as a young @-@ adult fiction author , Haarsma helps bring attention , support , and funds to the organization .

= = = School visits = = =

PJ captures any audience with his energy . He begins a presentation on Earth and everyone in the audience lands on Orbis with him . Students and teachers continue to ask questions long afterwards . Priceless reading motivation !

Haarsma takes part in school visits to promote his book and encourage imagination and reading in the school children . His presentation lasts fifty minutes , and discussions center around space travel , exploration , The Rings of Orbis universe , and other interactive topics , thus allowing for questions from the students at the conclusion . To help illustrate the scientific topics , NASA supplied Haarsma with space related information to present . " PJ Haarsma was inspirational . He visited my school and made my imagination soar . I 've already filled up a couple notebooks of stories thanks to him ! " Says one child whose school Haarsma visited .

During his presentation , Haarsma involves the children in various interactive activities . These include a Hollywood @-@ style acting audition , an alien ghost story , and a demonstration of the vast distances in space . The activities are designed to engage the children 's imaginations and to make them feel a part of the presentation .

The responses to his visits from both students and teachers are positive . The majority of the feedback involves praise and thanks . Haarsma has received many stories of previously reluctant readers being observed reading The Softwire books during school recess .

The author visit by PJ Haarsma was a lot of fun . He knows astronomy , technology , and how to get young adults interested in what he ? s talking about . Librarians , a warning ? you ? Il need to order more books . Mine are all checked out and on hold .

= = Awards = =

The Softwire series : ABC ( Association of Booksellers for Children ) New Voices in Children 's Literature Award 2008

Virus on Orbis 1 : 2006 Cybil Award nominee , Flamingnet Top Choice Award , SCASL Junior Book Award nominee , ALA ( American Library Association ) Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers Nomination 2008 , Great Stone Face Children ? s Book Award Nomination ( Children 's Librarians of New Hampshire ) 2008 @-@ 2009 , Hal Clement Award for Young Adult Finalist 2007

Betrayal on Orbis 2 : 2008 Cybil Award nominee , ALA ( American Library Association ) Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers Nomination 2009

= = Works = =

Books in The Softwire series scheduled for publication by Candlewick Press ( Each book corresponds to one year on each ring that the children must endure as slaves ) .

The Softwire Series

Virus on Orbis 1 , Candlewick Press , 2006 hardcover ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 7636 @-@ 2709

@-@ 6 paperback ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 7636 @-@ 3638 @-@ 8

Betrayal on Orbis 2 , Candlewick Press , 2008 hardcover ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 7636 @-@ 2710 @-@ 2

Wormhole Pirates on Orbis 3 , Candlewick Press , 2009 hardcover ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 7636 @-@ 2711 @-@ 9

Awakening on Orbis 4 , Candlewick Press , March 2010 hardcover ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 7636 @-@ 2712 @-@ 6