



One small step for Mand . . .

Never before in my life have I had the time, the space and the funds to allow me to even consider a venture such as this. I have had ideas in the past, and therefore the inclination, but never the opportunity. I have perhaps had the money, but not the space. The space, but not the time. But now, with all 3 (though funds are tight), this opportunity has not so much evolved as fallen into my lap, and after a certain sequence of events/coincidences/fate, I felt it would have been criminal not to run with it given my current circumstances. This is why I wanted to document how it all started.

It starts with a little dose of irony. Anyone who knows me well will be aware of my revulsion towards all things Swarovski, but Swarovski are actually responsible for kicking it all off. My contempt for bad taste has always been with me, from over-glazed Royal Doulton figurines (most animals ain't shiny, so why make them that way? What's the point in decorating the centre of plates when you are going to cover them with food? Oh, yes – so you can put them on the wall. I expect, therefore, to see framed paintings on the table. And don't start me on toby jugs), to other pointless dust collectors such as over-ornate vases that you can't even put flowers in, but it was a certain bookshop in Bath that really fuelled my fire. They stocked the nadir of all bad things . . . animals fashioned out of crystal. Ironic again because this gave way to my crystal turd (rendered in Photoshop), starting as a joke, then a bet, but that landed me a job (you CAN polish a turd) as certain people found it vaguely amusing. But this bookshop became my mecca for crystal animals. If I'd had a stressful day at work, I would cycle home via the shop and ogle at the delights on the rotating stand in the window, trying to decide which I would have to smash first (with a glass/crystal hammer they must also have made), the unicorn with the golden horn, or the dolphin which inexplicably had a hole in the middle of it for another hanging crystal, in tasteful baby pink, of course. I'm sure it made sense to the designer, but I needed a manual for it. Delicious.

So anyway, I now had my favourite thing to hate, and it filled me with joy as hate and love are two sides of the same coin, really, aren't they? My reason for such vitriolic contempt? Animals, particularly with fur, are fluffy, warm, soft, cuddly and opaque. So why in the name of all that is good and true opt for the polar opposite to this and fashion them out of something that's smooth, cold, hard, transparent, and just for good measure, sparkly too . . . I know, crystal! 'We can even facet it for ultimate effect!' Okay people, let's not waste any more time, it's genius!

Now here's the kicker that exposes me as a dirty hypocrite. Though I hate Swarovski for all crystal crimes, from hideous hedgehogs to tasteless teddies, I hate them more for producing something inoffensive. This 'thing' wasn't guilty of masquerading as anything other than what it was. It wasn't an animal, and it just so happened to be my favourite colour. It was small, but chunky, and I liked it. I actually liked something they made. Damn you to hell, Swarovski! But I was strong. I resisted. For years in fact. I decided it was too expensive for what it was years ago. £160+ for a crystal ring was too much. Then one day shortly before my birthday in 2013, I decided I deserved a treat. Life was still proving to be a bit of a challenge, so I needed cheering up. I remembered the ring. I figured they probably didn't make it anymore, but if they did, it might be cheaper. I took the bit between both teeth and went to their website. There it was, right there on the homepage, winking at me. The purple one. The chosen one, and it was now less than half price. I investigated further and not only did they only have my size, they also only had one left. This has to be fate, I thought. I gave in . . .

So I waited for this thing with eager anticipation and trepidation at the same time. I felt I had betrayed my people in some way by batting for the other side, when all I had really done was let myself down. I waited, and waited. A week passed. I can't remember how long it took to arrive, but when it did, I was delighted, and it came with a small gift. I didn't know if they sent this out with every order but I assumed it must have been because there was a delay in processing mine. They sent me a little organza bag of crystals in all different colours. I then spent hours separating them all, thinking they would look beautiful in some sort of vial, if I could find such a thing for a pendant on the internet. My friend Mel was coming up to stay with me that month so I'd have a look after that and do her one too . . . and it was her visit that was to plant the seed for Spacejunk . . .

We basically became craft fair bunnies for 3 days. I can't remember how many returns we made to the same one, and I, personally, find all hand-made things fascinating, but there was one particular type of stall that seemed to be a theme as there were lots of them, doing more or less the same thing. Now, I had heard of steampunk, knew what sort of style it was but didn't realise how prevalent and popular it still was. It was only later that I learned on the internet that it's been going for decades, and there still seems to be a massive market for it.

At this particular craft fair, I did my usual . . . I always look at things as inspiration. I don't want to plagiarise anyone or any thing, but I always wonder if I could make something I see myself (or better!) so I rarely buy, just browse. There was one case in point that stood out over all the others. One of the largest stalls, mostly steampunk style jewellery, but a little

over-priced for what it was, in my opinion. I picked up a simple pendant with a wing and two other trinkets on it, just slung on a simple pewter chain. She was asking £25 for it. I wondered at the time what these “charms” actually cost her, because there was no apparent labour or creativity involved, so was curious about her mark-up . . . note to self . . . must investigate, methinks.

I get straight on the internet after Mel leaves, looking for a “vial” of some sort for the free Swarovski crystals, and it’s not long before the wonder that is the internet bears fruit. The perfect glass vessel for teeny tiny crystals. Just what I’m after. But what’s that? I spot a steampunk category for metal charms, so I click on it. There they are. The exact same wing and trinkets that were on the pendant that I saw at the craft fair. I looked for chains and found the same style chain. Total cost for elements: less than £3. She wanted £25. That’s theft, I thought! What’s the mark-up on that? 500%+?! Holy cannoli! If I did similar trinkets myself there’s no way I would mark-up anything by more than 300% . . .

Anyway, this sort of set the wheels in motion, though I didn’t realise the seed had been planted at the time. I spent every day for the next month researching other costume stuff and looking at similar sites, favouring certain bits and pieces, figuring out what they would cost to put together, what would work and what wouldn’t. Then I had my eureka moment. On one site I noticed they categorised their stock by colour/type of metal (copper, antique gold, silver etc.) and made little suggestions at the top of each page saying “these silver charms work best on our silver trace chain, click here” . . . Now, hold on there! I don’t like to be ‘told’ or even suggested to about anything. I am stubborn at the best of times and have different wiring to most people (not always a good thing) as I tend to think not just outside the box but in a different postcode, so nobody tells me I can’t cycle along an empty pavement or through a park, and nobody is going to tell me that you can only use silver with silver, so there it was. Mix it right up, I thought. I ordered a whole plethora of elements and chains, links and bells in all metal finishes with only one rule . . . no rules. Except for one . . . or two . . . okay, three; I will never do cute, naff or gothic. Okay, I broke the last one, but it was only once as it was a very nice burning crucifix, but I will not do ‘charm bracelet style’ stuff such as the Eiffel Tower (what’s that about, unless you’ve been there and bought one?), teddy bears (yuk), fairies (yawn), though whimsical is permitted, just not girlie whimsy. Fantasy is okay. Pegasus is cool as that horse was in one of my favourite Ray Harryhausen movies (which also gave me a penchant for owls: nerd alert . . . owl’s name “Bubo” in film is: “magic owl” in Greek Mythology, or in Medieval Latin from Ancient Greek: “an inflamed swelling of a lymph node, usually in the groin caused by the bubonic plague, gonorrhoea or syphilis.”). Yum.

I digress, again. But there it was . . . what would perhaps become a USP. I had been inspired by steampunk, but I think I'd arrived at my own style, or vision at this stage. Once I got my bits, I got to work. My first piece was a bracelet. It later became my signature one as it is insane. When I'd finished it, I wore it for the whole evening, doing normal stuff like cooking and tidying. I figured it had to be too impractical to market. It wasn't. The only time any element snagged on anything was on a loose-knit scarf I walked past. That happens with many bracelets I already have. I didn't know it then but in just a few months, all my initial collections would be finished, and all I needed now was a name . . .

So after the bracelet somehow designed itself, the name was also a given . . . another gift from above. The name 'steampunk' stuck in my mind as I was playing with the word 'junk' which implies random, and non-precious metal which would fit with what I was doing. Then it dawned on me. I was only able to consider this whole idea as a concept due to the existence of the internet, and another word for the internet is cyberspace. I got all my bits in cyberspace. Junk in space – spacejunk. The fact that it sounds like 'steampunk' is just another delicious coincidence. Cosmic . . .

So that's how Spacejunk began. Some tiny coloured crystals I hadn't even ordered, an over-priced pendant at a craft fair and advice on a website suggesting what goes with what are all responsible for this madness. But the best part . . . I always believed in it given my research into what sells, but it seems other people do now too, and I never imagined I would have people calling and emailing me saying how stunning and amazing they think my pieces (and website) are . . . it's like a dream. Just eight months ago, I was still having to perhaps face the fact that my career as a creative may be over, but now, not only has it been recognised again, it actually looks like it may not just keep me in hob-nobs, it may actually be plausible as a potential living. I will always be a graphic designer, but now I am just a graphic designer who designs and makes jewellery too, and I will design and make it until people don't like it anymore, or until I drop, whichever happens first.

*Spacejunkie*

(a.k.a.: Mand)