

Terror

What was the first movie or book or television show which scared you?

This is so silly I can't believe I'm admitting to it. The earliest one I remember is a Little Golden Book I had when I was 3 or 4, called *The Christmas ABC*. There was a drawing of a doll in it that had me seriously freaked. I imagined her coming to life and whizzing around the outside of the house, looking in at me through the windows.

Amusingly, it's not been that many years ago that I was visiting my parents shortly after Thanksgiving, and my mother had dug this book out of storage to use for seasonal décor. I found the drawing and couldn't believe how innocuous it was. "This is *it*? This cute little thing?" I have no idea what triggered that kind of extrapolation.

In literature, which do you find more scary, supernatural forces, like vengeful ghosts pulling you into the TV, or manmade dangers, like serial killers with specific tastes?

Neither. What hits me most is something I've played around with in a lot of different forms, and that's the concept of process. Forces going on under the surface of, say, city life or spiritual devotion or everyday existence. You don't see *it*, per se, you just sense it, just see eruptions of it, or the agents it works through. Yeah, it's more nebulous, but to me that's what makes it frightening. There's no defeating it, you can only hope to survive. You could kill 10,000 of its agents, but it's still there. It's like a river. It has to run its course.

Does a storyline seem more or less frightening to you, when BDSM themes are included, such as those in *Hellraiser* or *Ichi the Killer*?

For me, it doesn't alter the fright level one direction or another — that's purely a factor of execution. But it does make it more intriguing, because there's this entire additional level of transgression going on, and it can add a deep level of ritual or initiation to the story. That's what really struck me about *Hellraiser*, in particular. It seemed much less about damnation per se than initiation, with the Cenobites serving as these incredibly stately elders.

Do you find fear -- in yourself or in others -- erotic? If so, how would you describe or explain the connection?

It's not a given, by any means, but it can be. There are fear faces that are very close to orgasm faces; fear sounds that are the same as ecstasy sounds. Sex and death, eros and thanatos ... these have been linked since time immemorial, so we must be hardwired that way.

In his book *War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning*, Chris Hedges spends some time exploring the fact that in war-ravaged areas, especially when you get to these grinding levels of almost institutionalized brutality as a part of everyday life, with constant fear, constant threat, you invariably find these frantic levels of sexuality going on, as well. Although it very often mirrors the callous, perverse nature of everything else that's happening. But ultimately, however twisted around it can get, sex is a life impulse, the most potent one you can spit back in the face of death.

Genre

Do you feel noir is more a subgenre of horror or mystery? Why?

It's tough to make a blanket statement about that one. Noir seems to have a foot on both shores. Its plot structure tends to be more akin to mystery, but that heart-of-darkness plunge and the aesthetic sense feel more aligned with horror. Actually, you know what? Noir goes farther than a lot of horror is willing to. So much horror is just about defeating the Big Bad, so the status quo can return to normal ASAP. Noir almost always goes out on a downer. It always steers for the worst-case scenario.

Do you prefer extreme gore or psychological horror?

No preference, really. It always comes down to the execution of the story, the degree to which it draws me in. A lot of people use splatter as a crutch, and think it does the job alone. Sorry, nope. That usually gets boring with nothing much else going on underneath. And it seems like this almost invariably gets posited as an either/or choice, but it doesn't have to be. Take the French film *Martyrs*. It's extreme, all right, but it's a serious mindfuck, too, and a compelling mystery. That's one of those movies I can say I'm glad I saw, but don't want to see again.

e-Publishing

Do you own an e-book reader such as a Kindle or Nook or iPad?

Not yet. But I'm a big Apple geek, and an iPad is on my short-list. Right now, though, they're still in first-gen, and I figure it won't be much longer before new models come out that will probably have double the storage capacity, more features, and cost \$100 less.

Do you like reading in e-book format, such as PDF, on your computer or e-book reader such as Kindle or Nook or iPad?

I don't mind it if that's how I've ended up with something. And I certainly don't castigate it as this horrible end-of-literate-civilization thing. It's a good adjunct. More options are always a good thing.

How do you feel e-books compare to printed ones?

It depends on the prism you're looking through. Thinking strictly of the reading experience, I don't prefer them to the epicurean comforts of a printed book, and don't know anyone who does, but we'll see. Anything people grow up with, or are exposed to long enough, becomes the new normal. On the other hand, I love the distribution possibilities. All of a sudden, your book doesn't have to go out of print and you can reach anyone in the connected world. The reader in Prague, say, who e-mails you wondering where she can possibly find your work, now there's an easy way for her to get it.

What do you think of Twitter, its current role, and its future?

I don't use it, but can't deny it's a great way to disseminate information in real time, and crowd-source things like quick research requests. Because the messages are so short, I question how much practical value it really has for most fiction writers, but I'm sure there are some people who've found a way.

Lifestyle

What are your favorite soundtracks for horror? Specific bands, performers, genres, types of mood evoked?

Bands ... I've gotten a lot of mileage out of Fields of the Nephilim, Skinny Puppy, and Nine Inch Nails. Lots of the earlier artists on Projekt, too, Lycia especially. Overall, though, I'd rather work to something without lyric content, so I've got tons of ambient music, dark ambient in particular. I love most everything on the Cold Meat Industry and Cyclic Law labels. Still, I work more to Steve Roach than anyone. He's so prolific and varied. I have dozens of his releases, and practically all his work has this knack for avoiding being obtrusive while still resonating inside your head and soul. He's the one artist who never leaves my CD carousel.

Why do you think it is the case that more subculture-identified people (gothic, punk, etc.) appear in horror literature than any other genre?

For one thing, there's a predisposition there to either fully acknowledge or even identify with the darker sides of existence. For another, horror often takes place on the margins, in the shadows, and subculture folk are by definition fringe dwellers. So it's kind of the same principle as when they asked John Dillinger why he robbed banks: "That's where the money is."

What do you do over the course of a typical average day?

Bearing in mind that most writers' days aren't exactly fodder for a camera crew? I work, of course. Sometimes fiction, sometimes nonfiction, sometimes both. If the stars align right, I get to devote some time to photography or working on music — synths, piano, didgeridoos. Working out is essential. I train in Krav Maga, and am usually there three times a week. Off days, I'm doing kettlebells and other stuff. From spring planting to fall harvest, the garden needs tending. Reading at night. I'm also devoted to ongoing learning. Last year I began setting up semester-length self-study on topics of interest, an approach I call DIY University. And there's everything that goes along with being part of a devoted couple ... but that, as Maximus said in *Gladiator*, is none of your concern. ☺

Does your mode of dress come across dark?

Anymore, only when I put on the headgear, shin guards, and 16-ounce gloves.

Where do you live now and where are you originally from?

We live in Boulder, CO, but I'm from a town in Illinois that reminds me of

Hemingway's line about St. Louis: "It's a good place to be from" ... with *from* being the operative word. I hasten to add that I've always loved St. Louis.

Writing

What are some of your published credits?

So far, I've done 10 novels. My last one from the Dell/ Abyss years, *Prototype*, occasionally gets referred to as among the bleakest or most depressing novels ever written. My first crime novel, *Wild Horses*, sold at a four-publisher auction. Another, *On Earth As It Is In Hell*, came about when Hellboy creator Mike Mignola thought I'd be a good match to do a Hellboy novel, on the basis of an earlier story.

And out of close to 100 shorter pieces, I've put together four collections, the latest of which is forthcoming. The first one, *The Convulsion Factory*, earned a slot in critic Stanley Wiater's list of the 113 best books of modern horror.

What genres do you write in?

Mostly I've done horror and crime, various flavors of each, and among all the short fiction there's some stuff that's harder to classify. The current novel in progress is more historical than anything, but it draws some from what I've learned in other areas.

At what age did you know you wanted to write?

It goes so far back that I have difficulty thinking about it in terms of a beginning. The illustration I always default to is that even before I started school and had learned the alphabet, I felt such an urge to communicate in a written form that I would scribble with a pencil on scraps of wood and tack these signs onto trees. I tried my first written stories in second grade.

That seems to demonstrate a powerfully ingrained compulsion at work, at an age when you're still mostly motoring along on instinct. So I've always taken for granted that it was there all along. It wasn't a later add-on, like, "I want to take up this musical instrument," or "I'd like to try this martial art." It was more like eye color. There was never a day when I looked in the mirror and thought, "Huh. I've got blue eyes. When did that happen?" It

was just a given. Same thing with writing.

What is your educational background and do you feel it informs your writing?

I have a BS in Advertising. Really. BS in Advertising. No degree was ever more appropriately named. It's always informed my writing by making me never want to work for anyone but myself ever again.

What do you do to find new things to write about (reading, education, travel, contemplation, etc.)?

All of the above. However it emerges, however you indulge it, a relentless curiosity about the world is crucial if you don't want to stagnate.

How often do you write and how do you find the discipline and time to write? Tips?

I'm working on something every day, just about, but that's often nonfiction, as well. You have to set up block time and make it a priority, treat it as sacrosanct. Guard it, if necessary. For most people it's far less effective to pick at something in small chunks of time during the day or night, because you never really sink into that state of flow.

Here's an excerpt from a blog post I did about a year ago: "Damage estimates vary, but the most recent I've seen is this: Jolt yourself out of the zone when you're productively engaged in a demanding project, and it can take up to 45 minutes to bring yourself back up to speed. Keep the interruptions and focus-shifts coming, and you may *never* get there. It's one more damning indictment against the myth of multitasking."

So carve out an hour or three and undistract yourself. Pull the router plug or turn off the wi-fi. Leave Facebook closed. Refuse to behave like a lab rat pumping a lever for random e-mail rewards. Become a born-again unitasker.

Do you think it is valuable for fiction writers to blog? Why?

I've been persuaded of it. But you have to be striving to give value, and not defaulting to diary mode, or just droning on to pimp your work. In part, it's because it's one more activity you can leverage to connect with people. I've heard the case made that, with the world having gone to an always-

online model, readers, and potential readers, now essentially expect to find you available for a certain level of engagement. And that publishers prefer to see you willing to put yourself out there.

But I can't explain it any better, and probably much worse, than Justine Musk, at her blog (www.tribalwriter.com). She really has a handle on it. Look up everything she has to say about brand and platform, while I just sit back and nod mutely.

Any new or upcoming releases or anything you are currently working on which you would like to tell our readers about? Depending on what you have going on, we may also use your answer here as a jumping off point to follow up for future feature interviews. Thanks again!

My fourth story collection, *Picking The Bones*, will be coming out from Cemetery Dance Publications soon. Late winter, early spring, around then. As I answer this, it just went up for preorder within the last hour or two. I'm also working on a couple pieces, one of which should be a combination limited edition print plus digital release, and another I hope to plant in the latest anthology that John Skipp is editing. Then there's novel #11, which I've taken to saying that I'm locked in a cage match with, and only one of us can emerge victorious.