

Speculative Fiction Genre Study

Horror Boot Camp

Glenview Public Library
August 4, 2016

[Horror.org](#) Discussion

- Note: The Horror Writer's Association is offering a \$37 membership until the end of the year.
 - All members can see and utilize the Stoker nomination process
 - Get a ton of eARCs – even if you don't ask for them
- Overall, many didn't like the way the pages were laid out
 - It was hard to find things, and too much text.
 - Becky said HWA knows these problems and is working to fix them.
- [Librarian page](#)
 - Gives a great history of genre
 - Forecasts how experts expect horror to evolve and devolve
 - What is scary and what isn't any more
 - Trying to make it better for librarians
- [YA section](#) is new and really good
- [New Diversity Initiative](#) also useful, and encouraging.

Horror Boot Camp

Becky had a wonderful [overview slide deck](#) with information from the boot camp portion. The notes aren't going to replicate the slides, but only attempt to capture discussion engendered. [Becky's post about the Boot Camp can be found here.](#)

If you remember nothing else:

- **PRIME POINT: Remember horror is about an emotion!**
- This is why in Joyce Saricks' **The Reader's Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction**, 2nd edition, Horror is listed with "Emotions Genres".
 - You may not think of Romance and Horror being similar, but at their roots they are. They are both about EMOTION.
 - See quote from Douglas E. Winters
- While Horror is a Speculative Fiction Genre, it is very different from SF and Fantasy because the major appeal point is understanding how the book makes you feel.
 - Saricks' lists SF as an Intellect Genre → Focus on making you think; engage the mind
 - Saricks' lists Fantasy as a Landscape Genre → Focus on creating a world; Setting, background, frame

Becky's Definition of Horror

- Spent 3 weeks to get everything in one sentence
- Worked with Joyce Saricks and Neal Wyatt

Bare Minimum

- Horror reader **wants to be scared!**
 - Big hurdle for some readers to get over
 - Goal is the emotion of fear
 - Mayhem is the norm

- From page one to last page
 - Goal is that emotional punch – terrify beginning to end.
 - Page one needs to start with sense of (unease if not terror)
 - In Joe Hill's [The Fireman](#), the first scene is watching a person burn to death. And saying, "I've seen that a lot on TV. This is just the first time in person."
 - In Joe Hill's [Horns](#), the first scene is waking up with a hangover, and finding horns growing from your head.
- Threat must be speculative
 - Monster
 - Science
 - Zombie Plague
 - However, some Horror Fans won't be happy if too much science is used to explain things (merging Horror with Science Fiction).
 - Better if "the virus is released", than detailed explanation of virology.
 - Magic
 - The threat from the speculative is a major different from paranormal
 - The speculative may be love interests or friends in paranormal.
 - In Horror, you don't fall in love with the monster!
 - If the threat is from our world, then the book is Psychological Suspense.
 - Serial Killers
 - However, some Horror Fans are also Psychological Suspense fans.
 - And some Horror can be enjoyed by Psychological Suspense fans.
- If you are not a fan of Horror, read [Danse Macabre](#) by Stephen King
 - Part personal memoir
 - Part psychological analysis of the appeal of Horror
 - Definitely a "love letter" to the genre
 - King is The Master who sells the most
 - Read by "non-horror" fans
 - Many people will read anything King writes, but won't try other Horror
- Really Non-Horror people?
 - May not read Horror, but
 - Remember popularity of haunted houses
 - [Ghost Ship](#) on Jersey Shore
 - Some people like to be scared, even if it's not scared by what they are reading
 - Also, increased popularity every 10-20 years
 - When economic or political strain

Appeal Terms:

- Intention to provoke terror
 - Tone & Mood most important
 - Distinguishes from SF & Fan
 - Subtle suggestion even more than shocking violence
 - Atmosphere above everything else
 - SPECULATIVE, but believable that speculative thing exists while reading them
- If you do not like the protagonist, won't care that monster is chasing them
 - Trend to spread Point-of-View around
 - Especially newer books

- Makes you connect with multiple characters
- Still one true hero, often reluctant
 - Popular with YA
 - May include coming of age story
 - (Similarity to Fantasy)
- Pacing
 - Varies, until the last 1/3 of the book
 - Can't put it down!
 - Relentless
 - But can be intense throughout, or start with unease that leisurely builds
- Style & Language
 - Get 5 senses involved
 - Feel fear with all 5 senses
 - So the writing has a lot of adjectives whether writing background details or attack scenes
 - Not flowery, frank and colloquial
 - Accessible language
 - Flashbacks are common
 - Go back to time when things better
 - Scary parts are magnified
 - Break in bleak hopelessness or from tension
- Storyline
 - Coming of age
 - Battling personal demons – flawed protagonist, like us
 - Must overcome themselves to defeat the monster
 - YA appeal
 - If they can become sure of themselves, so can I
 - Voyeuristic Thrill
 - Safe, so easier to face own fears
 - As bad as things are going, it can't be as bad as...
 - Wickedness in yourself
 - Face own fears
 - Supernatural believes
 - Life after death
 - Even if zombies wreaking havoc
 - Frame & Setting
 - Setting rural to urban
 - Growth in African based horror
 - At some point, characters need to be isolated some way

Limiters

- Some people like speculative, but not “monsters”
 - Ghost stories or Haunted Houses, only please
 - Or, “I won't read about ghosts because they aren't real” – but love vampire novels.
 - Or may want only one kind of monster, and not be interested in the rest of Horror
 - I only read about Zombies
 - Think of these readers as the same as those who only read Tudor historical fiction. Neither is any “weirder”. Some people “specialize”.

- Whole subgenre of “Animals Gone Wild”
 - [Jaws](#), by Peter Benchley
 - Also see [The Beast](#) by Peter Benchley – giant squid
 - Check out [Meg](#) by Steve Alten – **Jaws** on steroids
 - Or Natural Gone Wild – [The Ruins](#) by Scott Smith
 - Newer favourite – [Pressure](#) by Brian Keene
 - Scientific basis
 - Creature from the ocean deeps
- Some people like to be scared, but don’t want too much blood (or gore)
 - At the other extreme is Splatter-punk Horror, popular in 1980s
 - Extreme violence
 - Extreme sex
 - Often no speculative elements.
 - Authors:
 - Jack Ketchum
 - Poppy Z. Brite
- Supernatural elements
 - Mention when moving Dystopian readers
 - May also be a limiter for Psychological Suspense fans
- However, for Horror fans, may be limiter if no Supernatural.
 - For example, [Misery](#) by Stephen King
 - Psychological suspense ← Serial killer novels have the fear, but not the supernatural
 - However, in general, it is easier to get Horror readers to read
 - Dystopia
 - Psychological suspense
 - Serial Killer crime novels
- Than vice versa
- No character safe – everyone may die
 - Especially recent titles
 - May upset some genre fans who assume hero will survive
- Generally resolved endings, but often still open ending
 - Life goes on, and the threat may come back
 - The door is open for more
 - Don’t know what future holds
 - **The Fireman**, by Joe Hill
 - *The Passage* trilogy by Justin Cronin

Make More Scary or Less Scary?

- Some genres of horror have rules
 - In daytime, you are safe
 - In some specific spaces/places, you are safe
- Then as a reader, you can decide how much you want to scare yourself
 - More intense:
 - Read by self
 - Read late at night
 - Listening to it
 - Less intense

- Read with people around you
- Read during daylight
- Take breaks
- Horror is so personal because it is emotional based
 - Fans may intentionally try reading in scary places
 - One person, loved the book, but was so scared of it,
 - Put in draw, close it, lock it
 - Coworkers played a joke
 - Took book out of drawer and hid book
 - Then reader was even more scared!
 - Reader thought it was great
 - For these people, maybe given them a book depending on where they are going to read
 - Going to on honeymoon to Cancun
 - Gave **The Ruins**
 - Even scarier on the beach
 - Decide to visit Mayan ruins for maximum impact
- Open endings – cruelly senseless world
 - Want to decide for self
 - Life doesn't end perfectly tied up → these readers get annoyed by books where all the ends do get tied up (Crime, Romance, etc.)
- As the reader: How much do you want to be scared by it?
 - Some fans like sociological aspects better:
 - Zombies
 - **The Fireman**
Instead of intense fear
- Does how scary it is depend on your age?
 - Teens seem to love Horror
 - However, can be more scary when you read as an adult
 - Found **The Shining** more scary when had a child the same age as Danny than when read as a teenager

Difference between Dark Fantasy and Horror

- Focus on magic, not scaring you
- But is a dark world
- Good versus evil more clear than in horror
- Again, Fantasy exists on a continuum
 - Paranormal romance
 - Focus is relationship
 - Dark Fantasy
 - Want fantasy
 - Just darker
 - Need full continuum
 - Dark fantasy
 - Disgusting gore horror
- Horror
 - Some are books that are not going to fly in libraries
 - Too much sex, violence, et al.

- Can't justify if get complaint
- Self-published
 - Leisure Books collapse drove many to self-publishing or smaller presses
 - In 2000, Leisure was only American publisher with a horror line.
 - Starting September 2010, Leisure Books cancelled all print publications.
- No reviews
- Too small press – so they aren't reviewed in journals.
 - See Becky's blog for reviews of these titles
 - Has a list of appropriate for libraries

Stephen King

- King is really a good, smooth writer
 - Part of what makes him exceptional within Horror
 - All the elements of good writing are in there
- Read King now not only because he is a master of the craft, but
 - King influences all other modern writers
- Can't give a King Fan *any* scary book
 - Often looking for great writing along with fear
 - King excels the most at being a storyteller. Just most of his first stories were horror stories.
 - King defines Horror, but he is more than just Horror
 - Generally always a speculative element and fear/suspense/intensity
 - 11/22/63 – history/alternate history
 - *The Dark Tower* series – fantasy and western
 - Horror, Western, Fantasy
 - Going to be a movie – and expect it to be a big hit
 - So check the condition of the books you have in your collection
 - Going to reissue
 - King says everything he has ever written is explained within this series.
 - Some fans like *Dark Tower* the best, other fans don't like it at all.
 - *Mr. Mercedes* trilogy – crime

The Shining

- Didn't think would like it, because don't like being scared.
 - Avoided King in the past because don't like being scared
 - Maybe ghosts are real. Already scared of clowns.
- However, the story really sucks you in!
- He does a great job of taking you to the edge of too much fear, then pulling you back. The ramping it up again!
- Always felt "safe" while reading. Not as scary as was expecting. But thrilling and creepy.
- Book is so much better than movie, but movie is great.
 - Movie cuts out the question of was Jack evil or infected by evil?
- One King fan likes this work the least of all his works.
 - Limiters
 - The "Horror" felt too realistic. It isn't clear, especially at the outset, that the hotel is controlling Jack.
 - I would never give this to a victim of Spousal or Child abuse, because it feels too real.
 - [Background](#)

- King wrote this at a time when he was an alcoholic and a drug addict.
- He was a writer on the verge of failing as a writer
- So, parts of this came close to his own life
- If you are curious about King's life, read [On Writing](#) where he really opens up about his life
 - How he could be thinking all these "horrible" things, even though nice guy, member of community, good father
 - Horror writers are often some of the nicest people you will meet. (Get frustrations out in their writing.)
- Idea for the story came to him while he was at The Overlook Hotel
 - King said he saw ghost children while he was there.
 - Story also engages imagination of people who believe in ghosts.
- For many people, this was the first King book they read.
 - Some fans reread often
 - It's a great Haunted House story
 - Captures the creepiness of "did I really see that move or change"?
- Really struck by the psychological elements when in Torrent's POV
- Characters feel like very normal people, trapped in horror story
- Also, really good psychological suspense
 - Includes a lot of family dynamic
 - Interesting to explore abuse when discussing the book
 - Save guard of you can blame it on the hotel

Dr. Sleep

- Sequel to **The Shining**
 - Tells story of Danny's life
 - He becomes the adult helping child who has the Shine
- Fixes the "Limiters" above
 - Makes it clear why hotel was so evil and that that evil infects and controls people
 - Jack was REALLY affected by evil
 - However, may never be able to go to a rest area and see people in an RV again
- Even scarier than **The Shining**
- Shows how smooth and talented of a writer King is
 - Smoother than Joe Hill
 - (Not really fair to compare King now to Hill now. Compare King's 2nd or 3rd novel to Hill now.)

Book Discussion Groups

- Some of the groups were kind of snobby about the idea of doing a Horror author
- Then they were shocked that King was such a good writer and storyteller
 - Groups have successfully done:
 - [The Body](#)
 - [Shawshank Redemption](#)
 - Movie is actually excellently accurate with the book
 - **The Shining**

New Heads of Horror

- Reigning Kings of Terror
 - Joe Hill
 - Jonathan Maberry
- Their works define the current state of Horror

Joe Hill

- Has written Short Stories, Graphic Novels, and Novels
- Most recognizable name of the new authors
 - Stephen King's son
 - Also a good read-alike for King
- Writes extremely flawed heroes who are forced to face their fears.
- Mines modern lives for our fears – while retaining the best of time tested horror traditions, just with a shot of new
 - Stories are varied and different.
 - May be better for younger people than King.
 - More including of modern tech and attitudes
 - [Heart-Shaped Box](#)
 - Buys a ghost off internet
 - *Locke & Key* series
 - Father's death
 - Mother's alcoholism
 - Supernatural following family for generations
 - [See the picture which explains the mind of a 5-year-old boy](#)
- Used to start people with **Heart-Shaped Box** – now start with [NOS4A2](#)
- Tom Piccarelle (and Stephen King) are good read-alikes for Joe Hill fans

Heart Shaped Box

- Was scary, so if you don't like being scared, read during the day
 - Ghost with them entire time
 - More frightening as got into it
 - Found it less scary than some of his other works, because didn't like Jude
 - It's easier to watch jerks being terrified
 - No point at which you feel safe
 - No backing off, no breaks
 - Especially if you listen to it
- Likeable, but very flawed hero
- Liked girlfriend

Fireman

- Much less a Horror story than an Post-apocalyptic, or Plague, or Family story
- Loved because writing and the great characters
- Reminded of King's best storytelling novels – even without Horror
- Took ideas from every author and other sources Hill likes
 - Hiding references to a lot of other works/authors – including his own and King's
- Is it Horror?
 - Start worrying about being near trees while you are reading
 - Plague outbreak is "interesting"

- Finds Scientific Horror more interesting than scary
- Doesn't keep you awake at night afraid to go to sleep.
 - Keeps you awake because of what people do and become
 - Similar to the Zombie books
 - Society devolves
- Harper is a great female lead
 - Starts out weak, but gets stronger
 - Both (later) King and Hill do a good job of writing female leads
 - Hill may be even better than King

NOS4A2

- Charlie Manx (villain) versus Vic (heroine)
 - Vic is such a great female lead
 - Find it hard to believe a male wrote Vic
 - Librarian was also a great female character
- Both can access “inscapes” – secret hidden places accessible through mental effort
 - However, science and real world left behind
- Every detail is there for a reason
- Graphic Novel [Wraith](#) is a prequel
 - Does a great job of telling the backstory of Charlie Manx
- Trivia: **Dr. Sleep** was versus **NOS4A2** for 2013 Stoker
 - **Dr. Sleep** won

20th Century Ghosts

- Scarier when you are older
 - Misogynistic
 - Violence against women
- Kept thinking “this isn't horror, this is the news”
- Not as speculative
 - Some serial killers

Horns

- Didn't like knowing what Ig was thinking
- Normal, flawed lead at the start
 - But then things start going weird
- True horror to hear what everyone is actually thinking – especially about you
- Have lead a book group on it

Jonathan Maberry

- Most famous currently for Supernatural Thrillers of *Joe Ledger* series
- Intensity of Horror from Teen to Adult
 - *Benny Imura* series for Teen
 - *Night* series for Adult versions
- Also has
 - Comics
 - Nonfiction about supernatural
 - Martial arts – was instructor for many years

Ghost Road Blues

- *Pine Deep* Trilogy – written for Adults
 - Trilogy was written as one big book
 - Editor broke into 3 pieces
 - Some found trilogy too long and wished editor had cut instead
 - So each novel literally cuts off in the middle of action – *intense* cliff hangers
- Started his march to Horror Master
- His first novel
 - Won Stoker for best 1st novel
- Set around the Halloween season, in a small rural town
 - Pine Deep had killed serial killer 30 years before
 - After serial killer dies, seems town is filled with an evil force
 - Now considered to be the “most haunted town in America”
 - A lot of gore – Maberry good at tapping all the senses
 - Visual
 - Aura
 - Scent
- Actually, a lot of humour, which was unexpected
- Lots of POV
 - Reader stays ahead of the hero
- More pulp horror style than Joe Hill
 - However, very lyrical for horror
 - Great action & Great chase scene
 - Very fast paced
 - Lots of fight scenes – which are accurate based upon Maberry’s martial arts knowledge
 - Great monsters
 - Maberry excels at bad guys
 - Also good at flawed protagonists
 - Clear cut who is good and who is bad

Rot & Ruin

- Teen
 - Not as scary because YA
 - Dystopian
 - World has stabilized after apocalypse
 - Great for younger teen who wanted zombies
 - No sex
 - Award winning
 - “Walking Dead, Jr.”
 - Great for Zombie fans – of all ages
 - Great spin with scientific explanation
 - Not a lot of science, because don’t understand
 - High action, with lots of fight scenes
 - Everyone over 16 has a job in this world
 - Benny wants to do his brother’s job, but he doesn’t really understand what that job is

- Find the zombie versions of people's loved ones and kill the zombies
 - Provide closure
- More lyrical than some of this other works, and more than expected
 - Writing is beautiful, about terrible things
- Kind of feels like Fantasy novel
 - Good versus evil
 - What does it mean to be human
 - World transformed
 - Already in established wasteland
 - Everyone has PTSD
 - Kids don't remember 1st night
 - Kids view world as can improve
 - Kids don't know another world, so not hopeless
- Benny does get less annoying over series

Dead of Night

- Literally a mad scientist
 - A death row doctor decides to get revenge by creating a drug so that serial killer does remains conscious after death – so he can experience his body rotting and trapped in grave forever.
- Get POV of the “master zombie”, zombies, heroes, et al.
- Beginning of series
- *Much* scarier than the YA Zombie series

Joe Ledger series

- NY times best selling
- Supernatural thrillers
 - Not horror
- A little science, but lots of action
 - Think Jason Bourne or Clive Cussler

Becky's Picks

If you want to know more, go to [Becky's Horror blog](#)

- Blog serves as an update to [The Reader's Advisory Guide to Horror](#), 2nd edition
- Also, August *Booklist* is spotlight on SpecFic
 - Interview with Brian Keene
- Zombies made a huge comeback
 - All within a month of each other these three were release
 1. [The Rising](#) by Keene
 2. *28 Days Later* (movie)
 3. 1st issue of **The Walking Dead**, by Robert Kirkman
 - Beginning of new zombie trend
 - All three use a virus
 - All were worked on independently
- Other books to know
 - Recent good books
 - Paul Tremblay

- Up for Stoker for Best Book 2015 – [A Head Full of Ghosts](#)
 - Exorcist plus reality TV
 - Let's you decide what really happened
 - Pays homage to a lot of the current trends
- Best British Horror Award
- One of the judges for the Shirley Jackson award
 - Well respected in community
- [Children of the Dark](#), by Jonathan Janz
 - Janz's break out book
 - [Stand By Me](#) meets serious horror story
 - Summer watched 14 close people die
 - Escaped serial killer
 - Drug addicted mother
 - Ancient evil in woods
 - Old school feel
 - Like older King
 - Totally open end
- [I am Providence](#), by Nick Mamata
 - Play on Lovecraft
 - Great for anyone who has ever been in a fandom of any kind,
 - Fan Convention turned on its head.
 - Two leads
 - Past his prime horror author, narrating from morgue
 - New upcoming author who goes into "Nancy Drew mode" trying to solve murder
 - Mixes in Mystery
 - Was this a Lovecraft tale?
 - Is she actually solving murder?
- LJ Column – Debuts
 - [Roses and Rot](#), by Kat Howard
 - A lot of buzz
 - Blurbed by Neil Gaiman
 - Set at artist retreat
 - Feels like Dark Fantasy
 - Neil Gaiman read-alike
 - [Mayan Blue](#), by Michelle Garza and Melissa Lason
 - Authors are "Sisters of Slaughter"
 - Very big in short story world
 - Academic setting
 - Time Travel
 - Violent Mayans
 - [Hatching](#), by Ezekiel Boone
 - Think Zombie apocalypse, but with spiders
 - Spiders from primordial times
 - Not sentient. They don't have their own POV.
 - Watch the apocalypse happening in real time
 - Reads like a science thriller, or [The Passage](#) by Justin Cronin
 - Planned trilogy

- Second one coming out next summer
- Crowd pleaser

Final Fears

- NovelList
 - New trends
 - Newest titles first on keeping up page
- Podcasts
 - Most people's 1st encounter with horror is hearing ghost stories, so podcasts are natural
 - [Three Guys with Beards](#)
 - Pop culture
 - Any SpecFic author interview – multiple formats
 - Talk about being writers
 - Always talk about what they are currently reading, so great source of new information
 - [Horror Show with Brian Keene](#)
 - About news of horror industry
 - Reports all the bad stuff going on
 - Publishers
 - Sexual abuse at conventions
 - If you want to know the nitty gritty details of industry
 - Classic authors & new authors
 - Tapped to write the next **On Writing** memoir type book
 - [Nightmare Magazine](#)
 - Podcast of stories being read
 - Content pulled from lots of horror magazines
 - John Joseph Adams is editor of [The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy 2016](#)
 - [Lore](#)
 - 30 min episodes
 - Takes folklore or creatures, haunted houses & objects
 - Tells stories
 - Well researched
 - Why are we fascinated with these things
 - True Horror
 - Ties to something real

Final Quote: Brian K Vaughan

- Speaks to today
- Versus 1st quote
 - What was scary in the past not scary today
- Make sense of cruelly senseless world

The next genre study will be
October 6th
 at
Lisle Public Library

where we will start be our first Doorway Session

Setting

Our first Doorway Meeting after the Boot Camps.

- Hope feel comfortable with genres
- Now moving to appeal factors (not subgenres)
- Specifically picked titles from SF, Fantasy, and Horror – as well as multiple subgenres
- Will have more discussion, and less lecture

Try to pick authors from [the assignment](#) that are new to you

World-building – Setting

- While reading, think about
 - What draws fans?
 - Who would I give these books too
- Setting most important
 - See **The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction**, 2nd edition, by Joyce Saricks
- Think genre and subgenre of book
 - Write down additional appeal factors

Resource: [Tor.com](#)

- Check out
 - Talk about books, even if not published by them
 - Find Short Stories that are released only on the website
 - Bloggers
 - Re-reads