

RJ: The Pretend Interview

Why ghost stories and horror? Just writing about all the terrible things in the world would be boring (what Ursula K. Le Guin refers to as the *banality of evil*), but when you add a supernatural or fantasy element to your story, you force the reader to believe in something beyond this world. I'm pretty sure that's a fundamental requirement for escaping reality, isn't it? It's kind of like faith, I suppose, but a bit more twisted.

Why so dark? What gives? Everyone has demons. Some of us are just willing to put it out there for everyone else to poke and prod. I still remember how the shadows on the wall of my bedroom came alive when I saw the movie *Poltergeist* as a kid. Such a rush! That's my goal. I want to get in your head and kick around for a bit.

What are your favorite genres? If it has a ghost, something dead that is somehow still alive, or involves unlocking the mysteries of the universe, I'm there. For the record, I'm afraid of pretty much every monster ever created. Except witches. Witches are my people.

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What kind of reader were you as a child? The kind that read for five minutes, lied about how much they read (sorry, mom), and then went outside to play. I think reading is an important life skill, but my heroes are the kids that get off the couch, burn some calories, and use their imagination. I'm pretty sure that I have some reading medals in a box somewhere. You know, the ones you get as a kid that are based on how many minutes you spent reading during your summer vacation? In my case, they're just shiny plastic reminders of my web of lies. I'm not alone. You know who you are.



That's a picture of me. Of course, in real life, I'm in color... and I'm not wearing a shirt and I look more like David Beckham.

Photo by Shawna Johnson Haid

Least favorite? I'm not a big fan of zombies or the myriad romantic spins of witches, vampires and werewolves. I've also outgrown stories that blame the person with mental illness for everything. As in, 'Oh, the serial killer killed everyone with a chainsaw because he's *crazy* – that explains *everything!*' Fucking dumb.

Robert James

Everyone has demons
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What do you do for fun? My free time is precious, but I love to play guitar and I'm always listening to music - anything from bluegrass and Irish folk to death metal. Music heals and inspires me. I love weaving music into my stories. I'm also a gamer and a huge fan of open-world RPGs. They're a great way to gain 20 pounds and escape reality for a couple...months.

I'm like a happy drunk with a grumpy pet monkey sitting on his shoulder.

— Robert James
#FuckStigma

So, you have a mental illness? Yep. Depression. My therapist told me that sad things make people sad, and well, life really kicked my ass for a while. I tell ignorant people who don't understand mental illness that I 'lived a lot of life.' Even though the trauma is long gone, depression will always be part of who I am. I'm not going to outgrow it or magically snap my fingers and make it disappear. If you have a problem with that, you can get fucked and go away.

Are all crazy people as touchy as you? Fuck you.

Has your depression influenced your writing? Yeah, of course. I'm kind of a walking cliché (*seriously*, another middle-aged, white male with depression?), but my characters aren't just thinly veiled versions of me. Even though my dance with depression has opened my eyes to the darkness, I've always been an easy-going guy who was quick with a joke, willing to make fun of myself to get other people to laugh. That part of me hasn't changed either (like calling myself crazy in a fake interview). I guess I'm like a happy drunk with a grumpy pet monkey sitting on his shoulder.

EDITOR'S NOTE: To help you better understand stigma and the multi-layered sarcasm of the past few questions, read this [blog](#) from TheMighty.com.

Speaking of which, what's with the monkey on your website? My monkey is not code, he's not sexual innuendo, and most definitely not a racial slur (I'm talking to you, ghost of Howard Cosell). His name is Edgar, a small homage to one of my literary heroes (yes, I know Poe's was an orangutan). Mostly, he's just a light-hearted attempt to cover my ass.

Everyone has a playlist for those times when they need a little extra motivation. What's in yours? *Relentless* (Walls Of Jericho), *Sweet Things* (The Pretty Reckless), *Nightmare* (Avenged Sevenfold), *Bawitdaba* (Kid Rock), *Red Cold River* (Breaking Benjamin), *Desire* (Meg Myers), *Bullets* (Creed), *Hang 'em High* (Dropkick Murphys), *Control* (Puddle Of Mudd), *I Stand Alone* (Godsmack), and *Whiskey In The Jar* (Metallica). If that doesn't get me going, there's always tomorrow.

What's the most played song in your iTunes right now? *Annie's Song* by John Denver. Wait, what?

If you could meet any writer, living or dead, who would it be, and why? Edgar Allan Poe, because he is a notoriously bad drunk. I'd love to have a few drinks with him and then push record as the drama unfolds.

Finally, who would you want to write your biography? Stephen King and Will Ferrell.

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