

*Suspense, Mystery, Horror and Thriller Fiction*

# SUSPENSE MAGAZINE

JUNE 2013

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# Horror's new Voice

# JOHN MULHALL

By CK Webb for *Suspense Magazine*  
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I am often on the prowl for my next “favorite” book. I sift through bins at every store I come to, hoping to stumble across that little diamond in the rough. So, you can imagine my joy when one of my new favorites landed squarely in my lap via a book review request.

When I met John Mulhall just two short months ago, his novel, “Geddy’s Moon” had fewer than forty reviews. It has quite a few more now and 130 of those are five-stars! I suspect this writer will be around for quite some time and that readers will quickly add the book and writer to their list of favs.

I caught up with John recently and we sat down to discuss his debut novel, “Geddy’s Moon.”

Here’s what he had to say.

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.): How long did it take you to write “Geddy’s Moon” from concept to publication?

John Mulhall (J.M.): *This is always a fun question. I started writing “Geddy’s Moon” when I was eighteen or nineteen years old, so if we include that stretch, then it took well over twenty years! [laughs] More than that, actually...I took nearly a twenty-year hiatus from the book! I returned to the idea in 2012, and began writing in earnest on June 24 (2012). I started with the old outlines and chapters, but quickly realized that, while many of the ideas were solid, most everything would have to be re-written. So, I set a fairly aggressive writing schedule and finished the first draft of the book in seventy-seven days on September 9, 2012. The editing phase then took several months. I ultimately utilized four different editors, who all added something invaluable to the process; however, it was somewhat painful at times, not to mention time-consuming. We finally went to print (in Kindle format first) on February 20, 2013. So let’s see, it’s either twenty-two years (give or take), or almost*

*eight months.*

S. MAG.: The book has been received by readers with open arms. What is it about “Geddy’s Moon” that stands out from other horror novels?

J.M.: *Well, maybe it’s because I admire the genre so much, but I like to think of “Geddy’s Moon” as a novel that actively embraces the things I love about horror, rather than standing apart from them.*

*Now, I think if you talk to readers who’ve embraced the book—and bless them, by the way—they might say it stands out because it’s got a lot of heart. I’ve had many people approach me and say something to that effect; “I don’t like horror, but I love your book.” I thank them, of course, and I’m truly gratified when people respond to the book in any way. However, there’s a part of me that secretly wants to challenge their position. See, I think horror has gotten a bad rap. I just don’t think people know horror. They’ve come to think of it as being synonymous with B-movie slasher films or torture porn or schlock.*

*But I was raised on horror. I grew up relishing stories told by master writers like Matheson and King and Bradbury. And the things I absolutely adore about well-written horror are the nuances, the textures, and most definitely the heart. Horror isn't synonymous with nihilism, or the bleak. Often you're talking about stories where average people face extraordinary situations, and you get to find out, as the reader, if they have the strength not only to endure but to overcome and prevail. Those are my favorite kinds of stories.*

*Yes, I love the macabre. Yes, I love irony. And yes, I definitely love a good chill down my spine. But I also enjoy seeing the little guy facing down all of the things that go bump in the night. I like to think "Geddy's Moon" is a small part of a grand tradition of horror, and it makes me smile to think that some people may be discovering or rediscovering horror by way of the book.*

S. MAG.: In your opinion, what is the most difficult part of writing good horror?

J.M.: *I think it depends on what kind of horror story you're writing, but for me it's simply maintaining balance. For one, I strive to keep things realistic enough to keep the reader invested, while giving them enough of the "fantastic" to keep them intrigued. So, that's a balancing act. But I also endeavor to walk the fine line between slowly building suspense, arriving at terror, and then eventually sliding into the horrifying. That's a huge balancing act.*

*It's kind of like good sex, in my opinion; prolonged foreplay builds into a tension that, at a certain point, begs to be released. In horror, I want the reader to be at that point, practically begging for a respite. And as the author, when I grant that release, I know it's time to start building again. Ever-heightening peaks and valleys. That's the most difficult part, in my opinion. To do that, I have to be in the moment, in the world I'm writing, going on the journey with the reader.*

S. MAG.: If you could take any classic horror tale and rewrite it, making it your own, which tale would you choose and why?

J.M.: *That's a very interesting question to answer, because I typically don't like to tell stories that have been told before. I do enjoy taking little pieces of the stories I like—character archetypes, motifs, themes—and incorporating them into something new. I think of building a story kind of like creating a Frankenstein's monster, cherry-picking the very best little tidbits of what's come before in the service of something new. Even as a child, when I'd play with my brother or with friends, it was rarely reenacting movies or TV shows or pre-existing stories, it was always taking familiar elements—war-torn soldier, quest for treasure, salty ship captain, robot companions—and making something new out of it. Maybe I should just say Frankenstein, huh? [laughs]*

*But, for the sake of giving you an actual answer to this question, let's say "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," simply because I love the idea that something as complex as the duality of man could be explored in a really creepy and fascinating way. Or perhaps "The Time Machine"? The idea of the Eloi versus the Morlocks—the pampered ineffectual "haves" versus the working-class tunnel-dwelling "have-nots"—would take on a renewed and frightening relevance, wouldn't it?*



S. MAG.: As children, we are often frightened of things we cannot see or that simply do not exist. What was the thing that made you tuck your feet in tight beneath the covers?

J.M.: *Oh, I was very easily frightened as a child. And I'd have to say the thing I was most afraid of was simply the dark. My imagination has always been very fertile, and so when it was dark, my mind would fill in the blackness with all manner of unpleasant things. Any scary book or movie was fantastic source material for my imagination.*

*I remember watching this '70s vampire film called Count Yorga with my mom in the middle of the night once when I couldn't sleep. I remember thinking I was ready for it at the time; I must've been in the first or second grade. Needless to say, I wasn't. And I used to have a book of poems by James Whitcomb Riley, and many of them are quite creepy; "Little Orphan Annie," for example, was about goblins coming to get you if you were a bad kid. All of these little seeds would plant themselves in my imagination and take root, and then come to the surface in the dark.*

S. MAG.: What are the author and titles of the three books closest to you right now?

J.M.: *Answer 1 (closest in proximity): "The Great Book of Amber" by Roger Zelazny; "The Five" by Robert McCammon; and "Intaglio" by Danika Stone.*

*Answer 2 (closest to my heart): This is an ever-revolving list, as you might imagine. [laughs] Currently, I'm going to say "Lord of the Flies" by William Golding; "Something"*

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*Wicked This Way Comes* by Ray Bradbury; and *Boy’s Life* by Robert McCammon. I reserve the right to change that completely come tomorrow.

S. MAG.: What is horror for you? Is it gore and disturbing images or is something more?

J.M.: *In my opinion, gore is the basest level of horror. It’s visceral. It definitely serves a purpose and is a powerful tool, but it’s easy too, and it shouldn’t be overused. It’s akin to a “jump scare” in a movie. But gore isn’t really innately scary, if you think about it. The stories that I like are the ones that keep you wondering, using your own imagination, for as long as possible. A creaky noise can be so much more frightening than a gaping wound, given the right atmosphere. And so, I try to dwell in suspense for as long as possible, then terror, and then maybe just a pinch of gore, especially if I’m trying to achieve some instinctive reaction.*

S. MAG.: How do you scare your readers?

J.M.: *My hope is that I scare my readers honestly. By that I mean that I take the time to set the stage, to introduce the characters and develop them a bit, and then to introduce “the threat.” Once there is a credible threat that places characters—whom you believe in and identify with—in peril, then the scares should come naturally. I’d rather my readers get goose bumps at something that grows out of the story organically, than to scream and throw the book at something that comes out of left field, that isn’t earned. My hope is that I’m always serving the story faithfully, and in doing so, I’m serving the reader. And yes, hopefully scaring them from time to time, as well. [laughs]*

S. MAG.: If you could co-write a book with any two writers, dead or alive, who would you choose and why?

J.M.: *Man, that’s a hard one. Not only in narrowing down the writers I’d choose, but in thinking about enmeshing my will and style with writers who are like legends to me. I think I’d rather just go back in time and watch them work; that would be such a fascinating thing for me. But since that’s not your question [laughs], I’d have to say Hemingway, just for the experience. You have to figure that would be awful and amazing. And also, Dr. Seuss. I think I’d learn a lot from him, how his mind worked. I’d walk away richer from that collaboration, no doubt.*

S. MAG.: What is the greatest horror book-to-film adaptation?

J.M.: *This may be controversial, given Stephen King’s own loathing of the adaptation, but I’m going to say *The Shining*. Both book and film are utterly fascinating to me, and for entirely different reasons. I’m a lover of books and of film, and I also understand that they are two totally different mediums. It’s almost impossible for a director to make a completely faithful movie adaptation and also make a brilliant film. I think *The Shining* is about as close as you can get to both movie and book standing on their own as art. Whether you like one or the other is incidental, really.*

S. MAG.: If “Geddy’s Moon” was adapted for film, who would be featured on the soundtrack?

J.M.: *Oh that would be a fun soundtrack, actually, given that a part of the book takes place in 1983. There are so much fun, classic early-80’s tracks to mine. A couple tracks are mentioned in the book, notably “I Know What Boys Like,” by The Waitresses, and “Leave in Silence,” by Depeche Mode. But I can definitely see that being fun; I can picture some Madness, maybe, and some Psychedelic Furs. For the more contemporary parts of the book, I can see the music being a little darker in tone. Maybe Portishead, or Massive Attack?*

S. MAG.: What is the one thing, in your opinion, that is most important for new writers starting out?

J.M.: *A sense of humor? [laughs] No, in all seriousness, they need tenacity. The tenacity to continue writing, and to fail, and to write some more, and fail some more. And the tenacity to get their stories read. To persevere, and push, and be their own advocate, again and again, until someone takes notice, sits down and reads and finally says, “hey, you know what, this ain’t half bad.”*

Suspense Magazine would like to thank John Mulhall for sitting down with us and letting us get a glimpse into the mind of one of horror’s newest allies. Thanks to his incredible publicist as well! You can learn more about John Mulhall by visiting his website at [www.johnmulhall.com](http://www.johnmulhall.com). ■