

# ON WRITING, COMMUNITY, AND ASPIRATION

*for The Midnight Society*



*presented by*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

4

INTRODUCTION

5

ON WRITING, COMMUNITY, AND ASPIRATION

8

PUBLICATION DETAILS

9

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

# INTRODUCTION

Being in the market of writing dark fiction, it follows that much of my time is spent mired in the shadowy stuff. What you have in front of you is the results of my efforts researching, documenting, and dallying in everything from the arcane to the supernatural.

I've been writing fiction for several years, and have acted as a contributor for a number of online publications in the same timespan. Where possible, articles have been researched and referenced with citations.

You're holding a sampling of the the fun stuff that fuels my practice that other institutions, organizations, communities, and blogs were kind enough to publish.

If you'd like to work with me, make a suggestion for future articles, or alert me that the world is ending and I ought to backup my hard drive, feel free to send a note.

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# ON WRITING, COMMUNITY, AND ASPIRATION

*for The Midnight Society*

Hello fellow horror fans. Today we're visiting the deep end of the swimming pool. Let's shimmy up to the edge, our toes curling around the lip of cement that separates us from the water, and peer down into the murk and what lingers there.

It's been some time since I've tried to put one of these posts together, and there's a good reason for that. Let's call it the separation of church and state; art and presentation; craft and identity.

I'm at DragonCon this weekend, surrounded by a hoard of seventy thousand like-minded individuals who are, cumulatively, wilder and more intense and outgoing than I am accustomed to at any fan convention in my home town. This is a first for me. Not my first con, but a first con of this magnitude. 70,000 people. In Atlanta. Many of them are dressed up as Pokemon characters.

On a personal level this is a challenge because I suffer from a fabulous breed of social anxiety that allows me to separate and distance myself from most people on most occasions, even online, because I recognize that I'm a bit of a weirdo and I spent entirely too much time writing about people but away from them. (I told you this was going to be real talk, eh? I'm just getting warmed up.) I am a writer and it's a lonely sport: I plug away at my work without anything to show for it for years, and occasionally I bump into people with similar interests or predispositions towards similar interests, and there's a glorious moment of mutual understanding where we bond, and then I go back to work. I disappear, but I keep tabs. Sometimes I forget conversations. But I'm checking your blogs and your twitter accounts and I'm making sure you're okay — mostly hoping you're doing better than okay — because chances are you're doing the same thing as me: you're writing horror. You're making



up worlds. You're killing your characters, and then re-killing them to find ways of doing it better. Mostly I'm toiling away behind my keyboard trying to find a kernel of happiness that reminds me why I come home after day-job work and get back to writing work for another few hours, forsaking social interaction. I'm trying to find a meaning behind the madness; ensuring that this is all going to be worth it some day. This is a lonely, obsessive preoccupation: you're doing what you love with an opportunity cost, and I recognize it daily, and I try to figure out what the best way to do more is. I haven't figured it out yet. But I know there needs to be more. More than three novels a year. More than an occasional hangout once a year at convention where I feel connected.

I'm pre-query. Pre-contract. Pre-anything. I'm in the work stage, and the work stage is taking me for-fucking-ever. And I'm so frustrated. And there's no one to tell it to because there's no one in my immediate vicinity who willingly does this to themselves — but you. I know you're out there. And I know I've passed you in the halls of the Hyatt or the Marriott or you were sitting beside me, listening to the same panel, and because I know you had the same pained look on your face when something rang true. And I know that you're reading this now, and maybe, if you've gotten this far, you get a similar sense of displacement from the world when you tell people you write, and that you want more.

I swallowed my nerves to thank someone today after they gave a great talk about the horror industry and the state of publishing, after candidly telling a room of forty people what they've endured to deal with the business side of things, and I told that person their talk was more terrifying than the last (really amazing) horror novel I read (which was fiction.) That person asked me where I was at with respect to my process, and I was blunt: third draft of my book child that has no place in today's market, two outlines on deck because I need to understand the scope of the whole story and what's at stake, short story project being flung about with wild abandon because I could because no one's paying attention to me anyway. Still scared shitless. Oh, P.S. I write YA horror. I am the sliver. I am the 1% of the slush that is ever even sniffed at.

I am the Godless Child of Absent Hope for a Traditional Publishing Contract. Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.

That person told me to get back to work. He also told me not to write to the market (but with a much more colourful vocabulary.)



He also told me to add him on Facebook, because the horror community is tight AF and we need to stick together. And you know what? We really do. So I did.

Everyone I've met that is tied to this particular genre are amazing: kind, generous, compassionate, smart mofos with distinctive voices, who are welcoming and far too kind to accept my trembling fingers when I shake their hands or offer them a business card (I did that too! I was freaking out! Look at these exclamation points!!!) And I'm a jerk because I forget that often when I'm down in my little oubliette of work, I'm not actually alone. There are hundreds of thousands of people out there doing the same sort of work — Creative work. Writing work. Character work. Plot work. Blog post work. Book review work. Work work work. I think to myself, the more work I do, the less I feel like a fraud, so I keep at it.

We have dark little dreams (or dark big dreams, as it may be) and the only way to support each other is to recognize that the horror community is a fan convention unto itself: we're a diverse group of people who, when you start paying attention, have a lot to offer by way of support, inspiration, and resources who can and probably will recognize the bizarre stuff you talk about when you delve into the obscure topics that everyone else thinks is strange.

My takeaway from all this is that if you need a reminder that you're not alone in the universe, maybe try a convention with a horror track. Maybe try DragonCon. Maybe poke more people on twitter who are doing the kind of things you find admirable. Maybe tell them you think they're cool and gush a bit, because we're all fans at heart and the things that are important to us need to be highlighted sometimes. Maybe be brave and throw yourself into the deep end, if you can manage it, because you probably won't find yourself swimming alone.



# ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

*The Midnight Society*

“Real Talk: On Writing, Community, and Aspiration” was written by Kira Butler, and appeared at *The Midnight Society* on September 3, 2016.

<http://midnightsocietytales.com/2016/09/03/real-talk-writing-community-horror-aspiration/>



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kira Butler writes speculative fiction for adults, new adults, and young adult readers. She especially appreciates dark urban fantasy and low key horror, and likes to write about everything in between. She lives in Montreal, where she is working towards the completion of her first young adult horror novel.



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