



Micol Ostow, the author of the Official 2019 Summer Scares YA selection *The Devil and Winnie Flynn*, answered six questions from committee member and bestselling author, Grady Hendrix. [This interview can be used by libraries with attribution to the Summer Scares program.](#)

**GH: What's wrong with you? Why do you write such disturbing and terrible books?**

**MO:** I wish I knew! It probably has something to do with the fact that I am a terribly anxious person by nature. I have many fears, ranging from existential (mortality) to banal (spiders). My mother was a horror fan, so I was exposed to horror early, and I think I latched onto horror novels (and other forms of storytelling) because it was a "safe" way to cope with my fears. FWIW, I'm still terrified of spiders. But not zombies or monsters or haunted houses, so I think that's a big win.

**GH: What's the first horror book or story that you remember reading? Why did it make such a big impact on you?**

**MO:** I vividly recall my mother's Stephen King addiction when I was growing up - she'd keep whatever his latest hardcover was on her bedside table, and I specifically recall those terrifying animal eyes from the original "Pet Sematary" cover peering out at me when I'd pass by her bedroom. She wouldn't let me read Stephen King when I was little, of course, but we'd go to the library on weekends, and soon I learned I could sneak out of the children's room when she wasn't looking. I found "The Shining" one day when I was about nine or so and began reading it in 20-minute weekly increments. I didn't tell my mother, but I think she might have eventually figured it out, as I went through a period of sleeping with the lights on. So Stephen King was always first and foremost for me, and as soon as I was outed as a "Shining" reader, she and I basically traded off our copies from the canon. I think King in particular does a great job of marrying human tragedy with external horror in a way that always feels very visceral and resonant.

**GH: What other horror writer blew you away? How did they change how you write?**

**MO:** I "discovered" Shirley Jackson rather late in life, given what an avid reader I am. I think I had been focused on contemporary stories, and Jackson felt a little musty and old-fashioned to me. When I finally took the time to read "We Have Always Lived in the Castle" and "The Haunting of Hill House" I was awe-struck. Somehow, I had naively assumed that horror writing was necessarily genre writing and that literary horror couldn't possibly be truly scary. The realization that I had been wildly myopic not only broadened my own reading list, it also encouraged me to take more stylistic risks in my own writing.

**GH: What's your favorite horror movie and why?**

**MO:** I probably have a favorite in every sub-genre: "The Others" is one of my favorite gothic horrors, "Nightmare on Elm Street" and "Halloween" are my favorite slashers/final girl stories, "The Shining" is my favorite adaptation, "Psycho" is my favorite classic horror... If they have anything in common I suppose it's that they're all master examples of their respective crafts.

**GH: Do people look at you differently because you write horror? How do you deal with it?**

**MO:** I actually came to horror writing somewhat late in my career, after I'd published a bunch of romances and contemporary fiction. People who know me well were more surprised that it took me so long to find my way to writing scary stuff. Of course, people who knew me from my light and fluffy romances were surprised to see this side of me, but it hasn't been an issue. I do sometimes write for younger audiences, so the only time it's really a sticking point is when I have to present to classrooms or at book festivals, and I work hard to be sure that the titles I bring with me and promote are appropriate for the audience. But it's nice to have such a broad range, and to be able to (hopefully!) find something different for every different reader, and I feel very fortunate that the industry has allowed me to follow these different paths as they unwind.

**GH: Is there a horror novel that you think should be better known? Now's your chance to make the case for why it should be considered a classic.**

**MO:** I don't think it's all that undiscovered, but Courtney Summers' "This Is Not A Test" is so spectacular. All of her usual grit and emotion and deftly-realized characters -- and also a zombie apocalypse? So good.