

The Weird Interview: Cody Goodfellow

written by Gabino Iglesias | June 17, 2014



Sometimes people use “madman” to describe their somewhat eccentric friends. If they happen to consider them intellectually gifted, they’ll use “madman genius” or some such nonsense. I don’t utter, or write, those words often, but in the case of author, performer, hierophant, and mastermind Cody Goodfellow, there’s really no better way to describe him. Reading Goodfellow’s prose is like cracking your skull open against a marble statue and then having that statue pour acid into your brain as it feeds you grapes. His work is smart, sharp, and really weird. In fact, his novels and short stories are so amazing, he’s one of a handful of authors with the capacity to turn me into a literary snob: “What? You haven’t read Cody Goodfellow? Fuck it, I’m not talking books with you.” In any case, he has a new novel out with Broken River Books, *Repo Shark*, and I figured that would make this a good time to email him some questions.

Gabino Iglesias: From tentacled shirts and an affinity for cosmic horror to your recent role as Grand Hierophant of the World Horror Convention’s Cthulhu Prayer Breakfast and your story in Ross E. Lockhart’s *The Children of Old Leech*, we could safely say you’re a tad Lovecraftian. As such, maybe you can answer this: what do we have to do to make untalented authors stop throwing tentacles into every story they want to make weird or scary?

Cody Goodfellow: Early exposure to Lovecraft helped me to make sense of the changes my body was going through in puberty; the process of becoming a man can be especially upsetting if you were born, as so many authors are, as a flatworm.

It’s become such a cult phenomenon right now because the boom in niche-publishing has linked together all those misbegotten two-legged flatworms as a targetable demographic, but also because we’ve finally run off the binge-purge cycle that the American economy pursued for the last century and change, which had created a microcosmic boom-bust cycle in reactionary horror entertainment.

So yeah, poseurs. There’s a lot of them, but they’ll move on and their shit-fingered efforts will be easily forgotten, many leaving not so much as a single printed copy. But quite often, those of us who love it the most sincerely, as August Derleth and Brian Lumley did, are the ones loving it to death. Filling in every corner of a mythos that must needs suggest more than it shows, and squashing out every last atom of mystery.

Somehow, bad Mythos fiction is the most egregiously awful and yet not funny, because the so-bad-it’s-great margin is practically nonexistent for a subgenre that takes itself so seriously. (Those reactionary assholes who hopefully declared irony was dead after 9/11 got it exactly backwards. It

only hastened the overdue demise in Western culture of intentional comedy.) The once-monumental visions of Lovecraft are worn down to unremarkable nubs by generations of groping hands copping an adolescent feel to fill in the gap where their own twisted visions of reality are supposed to go, chiseled to bits by souvenir-seekers and systematizing transpotters. And what's so frustrating is that it remains such a potent, ready-made vocabulary for post-supernatural horror. And some of our best are still doing such fucking balls-out beautiful stuff within it. And so many editors and publishers are looking with greedy eyes at a wellspring they once couldn't be bothered to piss in...

(And they pay in dollars)

GI: You write some of the wildest and most intelligent prose out there and then stuff it all into a funky, pulpy dress. Do you ever sit back, laugh at authors who think they write unique fiction, and think "Haha, you silly monkeys!"?

CG: No, but I do laugh uproariously when they become huge successes.

I don't write about what frightens me, and I try not to just respond to what I'm reading. All too much of even the better small press horror and weird fiction is at best a second- or third-hand treatment on real experiential fear or weirdness.

I quickly get exhausted reading abstract or obscurantist "experimental" fiction that hides shopworn, familiar bullshit behind a weird approach. So the weirder the thing I'm trying to get across, the plainer and more transparent the prose. And as linear as prose is, I try to cultivate a ripe atmosphere for accidents, for the kind of paranoid associations that only come with deep immersion in the text. That's why I always break into my neighbors' houses while they're away to get my serious work done.



GI: Speaking of monkeys, what's your favorite kaiju and why?

CG: My heart belongs to Gigan. He's like a dinosaur who solved the Lament Configuration: a Saurobite. And his handlers are giant cockroaches who hypnotize people into thinking they're handsome Japanese salarymen.

He's my favorite, but my spirit animal is the green Gargantua. The Gargantua suits were so much less constrictive, they let the monsters really lose their shit. And the green one is a perfect monster. Just humanoid enough that every gesture conveys his baffled fury, that he's just smart enough to know the world wants him never to have existed.



GI: I have *Repo Shark*, but I hear others might not have it yet. What can you tell them about the misadventures of Zef DeGroot and the ghost-god son of the King of All Sharks?

CG: Well, it's about a repo man who goes to Honolulu to repossess a classic

Harley from a were-shark. If you've ever enjoyed the quirky detective novels of Charles Willeford, Joe Gores or Elmore Leonard while flying on mushrooms, then this will come as a sensible value. Zef DeGroot is a tarnished White Knight private eye in the classic Spade-Marlowe tradition, but with black belts in karaoke and auto-fellatio.

An odd conspiracy of circumstances made it possible for me to go to Hawaii a lot, but only on the most tourist-infested parts of it. How indigenous cultures deal with or clown colonial interlopers is one of my pet obsessions, from cargo cults and the Tasaday hoax to Waikiki and the lounge exotica of Arthur Lyman and Martin Denny.

GI: What's the worst thing that's happened to you lately?

CG: Motherfucking mallards mated and nested in my backyard and raised their brood of guano-grinders (twelve! Except by the end, eleven, and I still haven't found the adorable corpse of #12) in our swimming pool. I know, I know, first world problems... but whether you're a recreational suburbanite or a subsistence fisherman of the Cinta Larga tribe on the mighty Orinoco, you know that a high phosphate count is a shitty situation.

GI: Last year you won the Wonderland Book Award for All-Monster Action! After the dinner/awards/performance, I went looking for you. We've never had a conversation, so I wanted to have a beer and talk books. I was wearing a fake beard on my chest. I couldn't find you. Where were you, man?

CG: Our beards must have had like polarity and repelled each other. Post-award time is a weird bubble... You'd think you just receive your chunk of glass, and then embark on your duties of touring prisons and fighting literacy, but a lot goes on behind the scenes that no one sees. Right after the awards ceremony, we were whisked away to an undisclosed location to be sworn in, but the judge was paralyzed by a blowgun dart shot and so we had to find a replacement. Then (fellow Wonderland Book Award recipient and noted futurist) Kevin Donihe turned out to be a glandroid and had to be destroyed. Then the real Donihe had to be rescued. After that, I remember topping off my ether rag in the secret winner's lounge under the swimming pool and paying a couple of the hotel staff to kiss each other and wrestle, and then shit got out of control. My lawyer has instructed me to leave it at that, I blame Johnson.

GI: You've worked with two very talented authors/editors, Jeremy Robert Johnson and J. David Osborne. If we threw them naked in a cage and chanted "Two men enter, one man leaves!" who do you think would walk out of there alive?

CG: The real question is, how long before the grappling turns into groping.

I love both of them, and I worked with both of them because of their commitment to craftsmanship. They get that when all you've got are your words, they've got to be impeccable. It goes deeper than just rigorously proofing your shit; you're the ad and the product, the sizzle and the steak, and you're trying to seduce the reader away from everything meaningful and

rewarding and good in their lives, to settle for you describing something you just made up. So you'd better never give them a chance to check their watch.

Perhaps most valuably, they also have no sensitivity whatsoever. I always thought, with everybody born after 1980 having Aspergers and autism and ADHD and shit, that we'd see a spike in ruthless, minutiae-obsessed editors on the scene, but for the most part, editors seem to think doing an book's like inviting people to a party. If they fit the dress code, thumbs-up, they're in, and the host just hopes nobody pisses or pukes where they won't find it until the thing comes back from the printer.

These guys will dig into your shit and make you feel as stupid as you ought to feel for wasting the reader's time or insulting their intelligence. If you want to get big and tough, nobody kicks sand in your face with more love.

But to tell the truth, since Jeremy went over to Smithosophy (Will Smith's totally original, not-a-ripoff-of-scientology school of human optimization), he's been impossible to get hold of, and Osborne's turned into such a squiffy little Huggalo since he moved up to Portland, I have to crank call his dog and badmouth Dr. Who to his wife daily for a couple weeks just to get him in the mood before I send manuscripts over, lately...



GI: How much of your time do you spend moisturizing?

CG: Not much lately... The doctors said I had to stop making my own gravy, but I still spend at least an hour a day in the pool.

GI: You live in LA. You're simultaneously the least LA person ever and the most LA person ever. What role does the city play, if any, on your creative process?

CG: I know I belong here because of how much I hate it here. LA's like one of the lunatic cities in Clans Of The Alphane Moon, because the crappy, solipsistic entertainment products and relentless media focus on celebrity culture attract all the megalomaniacs, narcissists and sociopaths like a bug zapper.

I've lived here off and on since 1989. I grew up in San Diego, just a hundred miles away, and a very lazy, reactionary beach town. Everybody with any gumption is free to hit the road to LA, I went to UCLA to study film, but by the time I finally got into film classes, exposure to the industry had turned me off the whole thing.

The process is still fascinating to watch, but it's one of those things I don't chase, to preserve some enjoyment of the product. Nothing rekindles one's love of the simple purity of the writing process like trying to make even a simple short motion picture. It's waging war on reality.

I'm able to put up with LA only because I get it really good at home.

GI: I read somewhere (or dreamed, whatever) that you're only writing alt lit

and Buffy fan fiction from now on. Is this true?

CG: No, but I just did a Rocketeer story ("[Sky Pirates Of Rangoon](#)") that'll bedknob your broomstick.

GI: On September 5, 1991, doctors pulled 37 feet of dead tapeworm out of the mouth of a woman named Sally Mae Wallace. That's a hell of a performance piece. Do you think you could come up with something better than that?

CG: It's going to take a lot of Michael Roses to pull me out of Ms. Wallace, but I think they're up to it.

GI: What two movies should I watch tonight and why?

CG: If you're going to the cinema, try *The Dance Of Reality* and *Cold In July*. At home, try *Straight To Hell* and *The 5,000 Fingers Of Dr. T*.