

Spotlight on: Daniel Keohane

April 2017

Biography



Daniel G. Keohane is the Bram Stoker-nominated author of *Margaret's Ark*, *Solomon's Grave*, and *Plague of Darkness*. Writing as G. Daniel Gunn, he has published *Destroyer of Worlds* and the novella *Nightmare in Greasepaint* (with L.L. Soares). He is one of the founding members of the [New England Horror Writers](#), and has had dozens of short stories published in such venues as [Cemetery Dance Magazine](#), [Apex Digest](#), [Borderlands 6](#), [Fantastic Stories of the Imagination](#), and many more. Dan is also co-editor of the horror anthologies *Wicked Tales* and *Wicked Witches*, and the upcoming *Wicked Hauntings* from the New England

Horror Writers, and is an occasional film reviewer for the website [Cinema Knife Fight](#). He and his family live in Massachusetts. More information is available at www.dankeohane.com.

[Find Daniel's work at the Sharon Public Library!](#)

Interview

1. As noted in your bio, you do a lot of writing—novels, short stories, novellas, and film reviews. Of these, do you have a favorite form, or do you just like working with a variety of lengths and scopes? Has writing in one focus helped you with the others?

I think these days I prefer novels. They're a much longer-term investment than my shorter work, of course, but (aside from being the method to, perhaps, provide a longer term income/career with writing) I love watching characters develop, building worlds around them then throwing in something... outside, for lack of a better word at the moment... to see how they handle it. I started with writing short stories, however, and there are definite pluses for beginning with this form. Less time is invested; you get more immediate gratification. Editing one's work is the biggest tool a writer has, and learning this with short stories is more manageable, because editing a 90,000-word novel takes much, much more time and patience. Especially when you do it 6 or more times at least. Film reviews are simply a for-the-love endeavor for me. I've been a movie-phile (if that's even a word, probably misusing that suffix...) all my life and have wanted to write film reviews for some time.

2. How did you first break into writing film reviews? What's the best film you've reviewed so far? What about the worst?

*Friends and fellow writers [L.L. Soares](#) and [Michael Arruda](#) have done *Cinema Knife Fight* as a head-to-head review first as a regular column (I think it began with HWA organization but not sure), then eventually it moved to its own website. I began contributing*

reviews of science fiction films, mostly. Mike and Lauran tend to do the reviews for the blockbusters, so mine invariably covered lesser known films, which have been a joy to discover (sometimes). Hmm. Best film I've reviewed... there have been quite a lot, but [Ink](#) (2009) is one of my favorites. The film I probably lambasted the most was [Case 39](#) (2011).

3. What inspires you to write horror? Within the genre, what do you think makes for a truly excellent story?

I grew up watching [Creature Double Feature](#) on Channel 56 as a kid, all those old monster movies, so they were some of my earliest memories of what got my blood going fiction-wise. I wasn't a big reader as a young 'un, I have to admit. But I remember discovering a stack of old second-hand magazines in the back of the local convenience store (Towne Grocery in Burlington, MA), when I was young and they ended up being old [Famous Monsters of Filmland](#) and other such genre trade magazines. My mom was a closet horror/sci-fi fan, and she turned me on to a lot of those movies. I didn't get into books in this genre as much until I was a little older, in my 20s. But I also remember fondly my 8th grade reading teacher, Mrs. Dalton, would have us read [H.P. Lovecraft](#), [Richard Matheson](#), and other writers of this genre one year in Reading class. It was the most enjoyable class—ever—at least through high school.

When I first began writing (read: When I first got the nerve to actually give it a go), I tried various genres, and one day the folks in my writing group tasked each other to try a horror story. I wrote a piece called "Basement" which (24 years later) was the original draft of a much larger novella, co-written with L.L. Soares called [Nightmare in Greasepaint](#). (Published by Samhain Publishing, until they recently went out of business so it's in a publishing limbo at the moment until we find a new home for it.) Anyway, that story got me excited, to write and evoke some cool emotions. Over the years I've tried to write more non-genre work, but in the end I find it enjoyable to write things that are a little left-of-normal.

Oh, didn't answer the second part—what makes an excellent story. Aside from good writing, which should be a given: real characters. The writer needs to lose control of these people and let them be just that—people. Real ones. When you read, you need to be vested in these people, good or bad, be in their heads and definitely care about what happens to them. If you like a character, then the fear of what might happen to them becomes a real thing. This is one reason King's books have done so well: his characters are very real people to the readers. Another point, not as critical but I think still important—and this is my own opinion—you can't just kill off all your major characters. There has to be a happy—or at least a not-as-bad-as-it-could-be—ending for some of them. The reader should breathe a sigh of relief afterwards, for someone. (One reason so many modern horror movies fail is because they kill everyone off by the end—where's the win in that for the viewer?)

4. I noticed in your bio—and again in your previous answer—that you've co-written and -edited a few works. Can you talk a little about the process of working with another author? What advice would you give to other authors who are thinking of collaborating on something?

Yes, I've co-written a few stories with other authors (such as L.L. Soares, [Paul Tremblay](#), Steven Dorato, and Michael Arruda). It does vary but the best approach that's

worked for me is to start something, then hand it off to the other person (or they start and hand it off to me), then let them do whatever—maybe tweak what I wrote and add something new, or simply add new material and leave the rest alone. In many ways, aside from the novella Nightmare in Greasepaint, which was a little more structured in design, co-written stories came out very much free-form; neither of us knew where the piece was going until it was finished. When it was, a few emails back and forth work out what this first draft story is about. Once we agree what we're saying, we each take turns hacking and slashing (aka, editing) the story until it's done. This makes for a strongly-written piece, and very importantly blends two varied writing styles into a hybrid voice. In other words, when someone reads the story, you don't want them to notice when one author is writing or another—it should be seamless. Of course, there's plenty of arguing over what should stay/go, artistic differences, but the key is to know when to bend and when to stand your ground, and do it NICELY so you're still speaking to the person afterwards. Working out how you'll do this, what the "rules" are ahead of time is key.

5. I've noted this before, but New England seems to have an especially high concentration of horror authors; and I love hearing theories about why. So what do you think accounts for it—the history, the literary traditions, the geography and climate, or something else entirely?

I think the history, the Salem witch trials being one of the biggest of course, has a lot to do with it. And who knows, could even be the weather—or the seasons. We have joyous, warm sunny days with green grass and swimming pools, then wonderful foliage... which soon dies, falls off the trees as the days grow shorter, and colder, and the bare, skeletal arms of the trees reach up to heavy gray skies which pour snow down on us as we shiver in our homes, trapped there. The land around is hard to navigate—when we walk through snow it's like running in a nightmare, it holds us back, and the dark falls on us so quickly... oh, sorry. Got carried away. Yeah, the weather. That's my final answer.

6. You've written some of your works under a pseudonym. Is there a reason for that? How did you select the name (or is it not really significant)?

My early publications were short stories, all mostly horror, under my Daniel G. Keohane name. When I began writing novels, I began to incorporate biblical themes into the stories. For example, Solomon's Grave deals with the ark of the covenant (think [Raiders of the Lost Ark](#)), Margaret's Ark asks the question of what would happen if there was a Great Flood today, and Plague of Darkness is, in some ways, a haunted house story using one of the biblical plagues of Egypt from Exodus. As these were published, I was also writing pure horror novels and stories (ie, no biblical themes), but the idea of branding became important. Many readers of these books who enjoyed them, enjoyed the religious themes blended with modern suspense/horror. They were an audience who might not read pure horror. These books also, because of the theme and/or audience, had less cursing and sex (though there was some, to varying extent)—in a way, edgier Christian novels. So when Destroyer of Worlds was released, I did not want to alienate a large chunk of readership for these other novels, and so published them under the name G. Daniel Gunn (took a long time to find a name no one else was using). Nightmare in Greasepaint is another Gunn book.

So, at the moment, I have two completed novels in the can I'm beginning to market: Plague of Locusts by Daniel G. Keohane, a futuristic sci-fi novel which, among the usual sci-fi themes, deals also with where the church (including Islam and other religions) might be 200 years in the future as mankind expands into the universe; and Lost in the Woods, a wild, fun horror romp by my evil twin, G. Daniel Gunn.

7. Of your own writing, do you have a favorite work? (And if so, why that one?)

Favorite work... wow, that's like asking who my favorite child is. But, though each process of writing and building a novel is unique, I do have a special place in my heart for Margaret's Ark, because—though Solomon's Grave was written first, that was also a big learning process—I wrote Ark, in many ways, for myself. I'd written a short story called "Lavish" (published eventually in the sci-fi magazine Fantastic Stories), and it's basically the last chapter of what the eventual novel became. I liked the concept of a modern great flood, which has so many story possibilities, and wanted to know how the main character Margaret got to the point where she was in the short story, so I decided to find out by writing a novel version. So I backed up 60 days and started writing (and researching, lots of that in this book, and a lot of help from a lot of generous people who are smarter than me when it comes to ship building and various locations) and honestly enjoyed every moment. I recently finished the final manuscripts of two novels: a sci-fi novel called Plague of Locusts, and a horror novel, Lost in the Woods (the latter I think is also pretty funny), and those were also very fun to write and research as well, but yes, Margaret's Ark was the first time I wrote something that was truly for me, and devoured the whole process. In fact, since then, that's been my focus: Writing books I would like to read, myself. Makes the act of creating them much more special, and rewarding.

6 Books Daniel Recommends (& Why)

Some non-fiction I would highly recommend for writers:

[Zen in the Art of Writing](#) by Ray Bradbury – *This is my go to book for inspiration. It's a collection of essays Bradbury had published over the years of his career, and every one is full of the joy, excitement and wonder of a writer who found all of this in the act of writing every day. Always, it lifts me up and gets my thoughts beyond the mundane and into the "why" of why I started writing in the first place.*

[Organizing for the Creative Person](#) by Dorothy Lehmkuhl and Dolores Cotter Lamping – *When I was starting out, I wasn't very good at organizing my life, or goals, and as such wasn't moving forward very well in my writing dream. I came across this book and – being a right-brained, creative/chaotic thinker myself – it changed my life. If you're the same way, and need some great tools to get organized in your goal setting (and laundry, and cleaning your desk!), buy this book. I read it again twenty-plus years later and it was still just as good.*

As far as fiction, it is really hard to narrow it down to just a few, but here are three or so books which highlight various aspects of what makes a good book (in my opinion),

both in plot, dialogue, characters. These are some of my favorites, some throughout the years, some more recent:

Any book by [Monica Wood](#) – *For simple, real characterization—she makes real people with just a few strokes of the written brush. I discovered her a few years back and fall in love with everyone she introduces me to.*

[Stephen King](#), of course, is master of telling a good (and scary) story, especially building suspense. Some of his books scared me more than others, but his writing is always stellar. His best example of a simple story which will have you gripping the edges of your book is probably [Misery](#) (or, of his earlier books, [The Shining](#) – for a slower build but very atmospheric story). For a more non-traditional King read which kept me on the edge of my seat all the way through (though this book isn't for everyone), try [Gerald's Game](#).

A recent book which scared me to no end (not to mention scared Stephen King, which should tell you something), and which has been getting a lot of accolades this past year is local writer Paul Tremblay's [A Head Full of Ghosts](#). Brilliant book. Gave me nightmares.