

Eraserhead Press



Jennifer Mickow
Fiction Writers and Publishing
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Press Report

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What is Bizarro?

“The literary equivalent of a David Lynch or Tim Burton film ... A rising genre that functions like the cult movie section in your local video store.”

-Horror World

“Bizarro fiction is by turns repulsive, stupid, and crude. But at its best, it is also compelling, intelligent, and well-written. Any literary genre that can be both bad and good at the same time is worth reading.”

-The Guardian

Bizarro is an underground literary cult of outsiders. It's more realistic than fantasy, stranger than horror, and can be any genre that takes a turn for the truly weird and bizarre. Bizarro Central lays out a framework for what Bizarro is:

Bizarro, simply put, is the genre of the weird.

Like cult movies, Bizarro is sometimes surreal, sometimes avant-garde, sometimes goofy, sometimes bloody, sometimes borderline pornographic. And, almost always completely out there.

Bizarro strives not only to be strange, but fascinating, thought provoking, and above all: fun to read.

Bizarro often contains a certain cartoon logic that, when applied to the real world, creates an unstable universe where the bizarre becomes the norm and absurdities are made flesh.

Bizarro was created by a group of small press publishers in response to the increasing demand for (good) weird fiction and the increasing number of authors who specialize in it.

Bizarro is like:

Franz Kafka meets John Waters

Dr. Suess of the post-apocalypse

Takashi Miike meets William S. Burroughs

Alice in Wonderland for adults

Japanese animation directed by David Lynch

Fact Sheet

Website: www.eraserheadpress.com

Contact Information:

Eraserhead Press
205 NE Bryant St
Portland, OR. 97211

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Founded: 1999

Description of Press: Founded in 1999 in Portland, Oregon, Eraserhead Press is a small publisher of bizarro fiction. They aim to bring readers to the weirdest, most fun-to-read books they'll ever find. They also publish cult fiction under several imprints, including but not limited to Deadite Press, Fungasm Press, and Spunkgoblin Press.

What They Publish: They strictly publish bizarro fiction.

Staff:

Rose O'Keefe - Publisher

Kevin L. Donihe - Editor and New Bizarro Author Series

Kevin Shamel - New Bizarro Author Series

Carlton Mellick III - Graphic Designer

Submission Guidelines: The New Bizarro Author Series is designed to test the waters for new writers. Send a bizarro manuscript from 15,000-20,000 words to Kevin L. Donihe at Kevin.L.Donihe@eraserheadpress.com

Upcoming Publications:

Kill Ball by Carlton Mellick III

Die You Doughnut Bastards by Cameron Pierce

Unicorn Battle Squad by Kirsten Alene

Why Eraserhead Press

I first came across Eraserhead Press through Amazon, and fell into the trap of profiling them. I had been looking for genre horror - something different than Stephen King - and thought I'd found it with Carlton Mellick III's *Satan Burger*. It didn't live up to my preconceived notions, so I put it aside.

When time came to research small presses for class, there was nothing I was really thrilled with. A lot of what I like to read are classics and historical novels, and there's not much on my bookshelf that isn't from one of the major houses. But I remembered *Satan Burger*, and felt I had given up too soon and hadn't given it a fair chance. So I went back to them to see what I'd missed out on.

They seem like a cool group of people, the way misfits are in movies. It's a labor of love, with bizarro being a niche market. The majority of the staff has been around since the genre got its name, most of them having published their own bizarro novels. They're the ultimate outsiders, doing what they enjoy and trying share it with others. Ultimately, this is the reason why I chose them.

Interview



Kevin L. Donihe is the editor of Eraserhead Press and head of the New Bizarro Author Series, based out of Portland, Oregon. He has been with Eraserhead since its beginning, and has also published several of his own books with them. Shortly before BizarroCon 2012, I was able to contact him via email, where he answered a few questions about the press.

Jennifer Mickow: Eraserhead publishes a very specific genre with Bizarro fiction. How did you guys get started and find your niche?

Kevin L. Donihe: There's a real desire for weird literature. A shared love of writing work that was too odd to readily find a home brought Eraserhead Press together fourteen years ago. At that same time, we realized weird literature was difficult for readers to find. There's no Weird section at the bookstore, after all. Most who want such books must rely on word of mouth.

I believe it's best to think of Bizarro as the literary equivalent of the cult section at a video store. When one picks up a Bizarro book, one know he/she is getting something "weird," and "weird" comes in many flavors and styles. In that sense, I

consider Bizarro akin to an umbrella beneath which weird literature of all stripes might come to rest.

JM: You've written several books, including *Traveling Dildo Salesman*, and *Shall We Gather at the Garden*? How have you grown as a writer since you've been with the press?

KLD: My writing has improved vastly over the 12 years I've spent with Eraserhead Press, due to the feedback I've received. I'm more dedicated to my work and am better able to set (and keep) realistic goals for myself.

JM: I've heard of Bizarrocon, and that you like your authors to be part of the community. How much is up to the author when marketing a book, and on the press' behalf?

KLD: Much is up to the author, as Eraserhead Press isn't a large house with a large promotional budget. We will, however, do what we can to aid an author. (For example, the New Bizarro Author Series authors have a private Facebook page where promotional ideas are hatched, and people like me and the publisher are there to guide them and offer feedback when required.)

JM: I've read *Help! A Bear is Eating Me!* by Mykle Hansen, who said Karen Townsend of Afterbirth Books helped him with the whole design of his novel. In terms of the layout and covers,

how much say does an author have, and what's the process like in deciding these things?

KLD: The author, generally, doesn't have much of a say in the layout and cover design. Ultimately, it's a decision of the press, and it's based upon what the press feels can best sell a certain book. That's different, however, with the New Bizarro Author Series. More on that later.

Q: Going off of that, what kind of covers generally sell?

KLD: Eye-catching covers. Arresting covers. Covers that make someone stop and take another look. Basically, a cover is the book's face. A face that, in some way, calls attention to itself will attract more attention than one that does not.

Q: *Help! a Bear is Eating Me!* is very internal, with most of the action inside Marv Pushkin's [the protagonist] head. Was that risky or limiting in any way by publishing it?

KLD: Bizarro is often about taking risks, so I would say no—that itself wasn't particularly risky.

Q: I recently purchased a copy of *Adolf in Wonderland* by Carlton Mellick III, which has a swastika and boobs on the cover. Does something like that—title, subject, and cover art—make it easy, or difficult to sell?

KLD: People say don't judge a book by its cover, but readers do... and—again—an eye-catching and/or attractive cover will sell better than the same book with a bland cover. Sometimes, it's even better that the cover be compelling rather than connect directly with the book in question. (The cover of *Satan Burger* by Carlton Mellick III, for example, has nothing to do with the content of the book). Though—back to *Adolf in Wonderland*—the swastika makes that particular book difficult to sell in Germany, due to laws enacted following the end of WWII that banned the sale of anything that features a Swastika, for almost any reason.

Q: Bizarro seems to be a fairly broad term. Do you think people have the wrong perception of what bizarro is?

KLD: Yes, a number of people think it's extreme horror (mostly due to Deadite Press, which is an imprint of Eraserhead Press, but an extreme horror imprint rather than a Bizarro imprint) or merely weird for the sake of being weird. Or that Bizarro and experimental fiction are one and the same. Characters and story are now and have always been very important to Bizarro.

Q: How much return do you get on a book and how do you pay yourselves and your authors?

KLD: For what I write, 50% profit. For what I edit for the New Bizarro Author Series, however, 25%.

Q: On your website, you have a post about Troy Chambers and how he helped the press come into the digital age by heading the creation of your e-books. What are the benefits and drawbacks of publishing e-books?

KLD: Benefits: It attracts readers who might otherwise not buy the physical book, due to the fact electronic versions of it are cheaper. Also, it expands the audience in that it brings in those who only purchase e-books.

Drawbacks: It might cut into the sales of the paperbound books, which are the focus of Eraserhead Press. Also, on an individual level, profits aren't as substantial with e-books.

Q: A lot of your novels are short - less than 200 pages - and I was wondering if there was a strategic reason behind that or do you generally receive submissions that are short and sweet?

KLD: My longest work is *Shall We Gather At The Garden?* at 81,000 words. An average might be 40,000 words.

I simply find that writing in novella to short-novel format is the most appealing for me. Also, the longer a book is, the more expensive it must be, and a shorter book will tend to sell better than one that is packed full of pages and, by necessity,

considerably pricier. (Also, POD—print on demand—has a higher price-point than traditional printing.)

Q: What's your acceptance rate for manuscripts?

KLD: For the NBAS [New Bizarro Author Series) imprint, it varies per year. Always less than 10% acceptance rate, however.

Eraserhead Press itself rarely takes unsolicited fiction. Its staple of new writers—for the most part—comes from the New Bizarro Author Series.

Q: What makes a manuscript stand out from the so-called slush pile?

KLD: Ideally: A good command of the language. A strong voice. A unique, high-concept idea (that, of course, is fundamentally weird). Also, I'd like to come to the conclusion that the weird elements in a manuscript come naturally and are not forced.

Usually, I can tell if someone's manuscript is genuinely Bizarro, or if the writer is attempting to force the weirdness.

Q: What do you do if you find a piece you really like but isn't quite ready for publication yet?

KLD: If I feel that the author has good ideas, but some problem with the prose, I will work with that author, showing the author his/her problem points and helping to improve them.

If I feel that the author has a good writing style, but his/her ideas could be more interesting—and only if I find more than just a shard of interest to begin with—I will work with that author to see if he/or she can't rethink certain elements of the book to make the whole more appealing.

Q: On Eraserhead's submissions page, you strictly ask for bizarre fiction. What are the benefits and drawbacks of publishing only one genre?

KLD: Benefits: We brand and define ourselves; we stand out.

Limitations: I don't consider it very limiting because a Bizarro book can be weirdly romantic, weirdly horrific, weirdly comedic, weirdly satirical—or a combination of any of those (and more). In fact, the only thing we cannot publish is something that is not weird.

Q: How did the New Bizarro Author Series come about and how is working on that different from publishing novels?

KLD: The publisher wished to expand the number of writers in its stable—especially to bring in new blood—but wanted to do so in an economical way. To save money, the author is assigned the task of acquiring his or her own artwork for the book.

(Oftentimes, acquiring custom-made art is the most expensive part of getting a book together.) Also, the page count is kept

low so the cover price will not be too expensive. (The thought being that someone will be more likely to take a chance on a cheaper book by an untested author than a more expensive one—and being a part of an existing series improves the marketability of a book by an unknown and untested writer.)

Review

Help! A Bear is Eating Me!
Mykle Hansen
Eraserhead Press
ISBN: 978-1-933929-69-9
129 Pages
\$10.95 Paperback

A Bizarro Good Time

Help! A Bear is Eating Me by Mykle Hansen is a plainspoken bizarro novel told in first person. It heavily resides in Marv Pushkin's internal point of view during a company team-building retreat. Taking place in the Alaskan wilderness, Marv, an executive at a marketing firm, decides to go off on his own, leaving his deadbeat employees behind, and ends up running into Mr. Bear. He spends three days hiding under his car as he waits for rescue.

Marv is the kind of conceited character (something you'd imagine an executive being) that says, "I'm Marv Pushkin, and I'm stunningly important." He only cares about himself, and blames everyone else for getting trapped under his car by a hungry bear. Originally, dragging his wife along with him to Alaska, Marv's main goal is to have her believe he's been killed in a hunting accident, eaten by a bear, or takes a fall off a cliff and into a ravine, so he can continue sleeping with Marcia from Product Dialogue. The twist: his wife is the one who ends

up saving him from Mr. Bear. It isn't until later on in the novel that we find out how Marv became the way that he is and it is then that he turns into a sympathetic character.

Hansen uses humor and a little grit and grotesque to make the novel—a mere 129 pages—enjoyable for all readers. From hunger, blood loss, and unknown pills (assumed to be OxySnufix), it is hard not to find the absurdness of the story and Marv's wild imagination, highly amusing. Hansen moves seamlessly from reality to Marv's delirious induced fantasies about Alaskan Bear Wars. "...ex-Marine looking SWAT ranger Jock Thrustworth—ten year veteran of the Alaskan Bear Wars [replied]. 'We've tried to live in balance with nature long enough...I'm calling in an air strike to napalm this whole forest.' I agreed it was the humane thing to do." Or when Marv thinks about his feet that the bear has eaten, "A white male college basketball player died of food poisoning in Anchorage just a few hours ago. They're saving his feet just for you."

The writing is conversational, Marv addresses the imaginary reader constantly. "If you were real, if you were here, and if you were a decent person, I'm sure you would be right now summoning HELP." It is through moments such as this, and his fantasies about the Alaskan Bear Wars that gives us an inkling that he is slowly losing his mind. He becomes more sympathetic, while still being the same, repugnant Marv that he always has

been. *Help! A Bear is Eating Me* is internal, with our perceptions of the other characters and the outside world seen through Marv's eyes. It is utterly consistent in tone. It's a great read for anyone - from high schoolers to adults.