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## Close Up on FILM IS HELL, new memoir on the making of mega-bad movies

by [BLOGGER](#) [Jill\\_Dearman](#) on 07-08-2009 09:08 AM - last edited on 07-08-2009 09:35 AM by [ADMIN](#) [PaulH](#)

### About Unabashedly Bookish

Unabashedly Bookish features new articles every day from the Book Clubs staff, guest authors, and friends on hot topics in the world of books, language, writing, and publishing. From trends in the publishing business to updates on genre fiction fan communities, from fun lessons on grammar to reflections on literature in our personal lives, this blog is the best source for your daily dose of all things bookish.

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Who introduced you to reading? RIZZO'S WAR author Lou Manfredino thanks his dad. <http://bit.ly/1RZHRM> about 6 hours ago

A fantasy world where people's souls go down a spirit stream and end up on Earth when they

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Matt Howe is an uber-talented cinematographer who has worked in indie film for years. A talented storyteller whose fiction has been published in Hadosaur tales, Crossroads, Cthulhu Sex, Electric Spec, and Darkfire Fiction, he's also written an even 10 documentaries for The Discovery Channel and The History Channel. This week, Matt's new book, *Film Is Hell* comes out with Laurelton Media. The subtitle is *How I Sold My Soul to Make the Crappiest Movies in History*. How's that for foreshadowing? Below is my interview with the man who has seen it all. He knows where the bodies (and the outtakes) are buried!

JD: Matt, filmmaking is for the rugged and the strong, and your discipline in particular is legendary. Could you tell us frail prose writers what your writing process and practice are like?

MH: I'm a busy freelance cameraman, so writing has to be worked around my often chaotic "day job." That said, I was utterly committed to this book. I wrote much of it on airplanes and in hotel rooms while traveling for work. Any spare few hours I had in the day I would work on the book. Fortunately, I've gotten very good at writing in short bursts.

In the last to years, I've refined my process and now require an output of at least 500 words a day, no matter how hectic, crazy and long that day is. Thank God for laptops! I can't tell you how many times I've done my daily writing exercise in the cab of a grip truck, or sitting in a corner of a soundstage during lunch break.

JD: How long did it take you to write this book? And what were your biggest obstacles? Greatest rewards?

MH: The book took about 18 months to write. The first drafts were mostly anecdote-driven. It was a funny book, but lacked a real spine. The book needed my personal journey to be a stronger element, an arc that would guide the reader through the madness. That led to the hardest part of the whole process, finding the guts to open up and tell my story without flinching from any ugly truths. It wasn't easy to confront my true feelings about those days, and was even harder to reveal them to the world. But honestly confronting those feelings taught me a lot about myself. I learned about my strengths, (bullheaded determination for example,) and my failings (not standing up for myself).

JD: For you, how is writing different from working on films?

MH: One of the reasons I like to write is it allows me more control and creative expression. Film is a collaboration and a constant compromise. Even when writing a screenplay, you don't get the same charge out of it as you do a book. You know a director is going to change things, actors are going to change things, and (in the low budget world) you never have time to get things exactly right. Writing a book allows you the freedom of taking as long as you want, getting every detail right, and telling the story you want to tell the way you want to tell it. Of course, inevitably, you have to make compromises as well - publishing is a business - but the creative high that comes from writing a book is much stronger than you get writing a movie, shooting a movie, or worse, shooting a lame-ass infomercial.

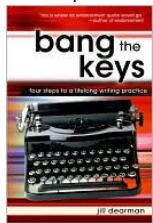
JD: Your book is SO funny. I've read your horror stories and they are often quite spooky/serious in tone. How did you find the voice for *Film is Hell*? And did fury over some of the real life situations ever cloud your sense of humor?

MH: Good question. When I'm writing, I hear the voice of the piece in my head. It varies depending on what I'm writing. Each thing I write seems to demand its own voice and finding that voice is a big step toward getting the thing written. Sometimes that voice is spooky and serious, sometimes it's profane and funny. The voice for *Film is Hell* is an amped up version of the way I talk to people. I wanted an intimate, "you are there" feel to the book, like we were all sitting around and I was just telling a story. This is the reason I wrote it in present tense, which is something I rarely do. My fury did cloud my judgment a couple of times, but I tried to work those issues through in later drafts. Once I had it written the way I wanted it, I tried as much as possible to disconnect it from my emotions, but I don't know if I was always successful.

JD: Well, having read your book, I think he did a Hellishly great job!

What about you folks out there --in writing from real life do you immerse yourself in the fury, and all the emotions, and then take a step back in later drafts? What works for you?

And as always, drop by <http://www.bangthekeys.com> for more writing related regalia. And you can find out more about *Film is Hell*, and Matthew Howe at <http://www.shotmonster.com>. And please check out my new book, a writing workshop in a book!



Bang the Keys

And if you are interested in being interviewed for this column, drop me a line at [Jill@JillDearman.com](mailto:Jill@JillDearman.com). Peace out!

Message Edited by PaulH on 07-08-2009 09:35 AM

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by [ADHIN](#) PaulH on 07-08-2009 09:42 AM - last edited on 07-08-2009 09:42 AM

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Great interview, Jill. Thanks to Matt for stopping by. I took some terrific courses at Purchase. It's an original and fun school that's nurtured a ton of talent.

Message Edited by PaulH on 07-08-2009 09:42 AM

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by [EricSusch](#) on 07-08-2009 10:23 AM

Options

Great interview. Looking forward to reading Matt's book.

(Your link to shotmonster is incorrect though, it goes to shotmaster.)

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by [Heather\\_Rolland](#) on 07-08-2009 12:13 PM

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Thank you, Jill and Matt, for an excellent piece! Although perhaps I should be complaining, as I now have to add yet another Must Read to add to my list.

Matt really hit the nail on the head for me with his comments about making the leap from an entertaining story to bravely telling the (sometimes ugly) truth. In fiction as well as in memoir writing, this bravery is key. A book can be entertaining, fun and a great read, but without that next step - the risk-taking that honesty requires - it just can't quite become a Great Book.

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by [Shotmonster](#) on 07-08-2009 12:19 PM

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Many thanks, Jill!

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by [Zoola](#) on 07-08-2009 07:27 PM

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Fantastic interview! Matt puts many of the rest of us to shame... 500 words per day no matter what, even if you've just worked on a 16 hour shoot! Still working on developing that level of discipline, but I don't know that I will ever get there.

Okay, now I have to admit that I have an advance copy of Film Is Hell, and I have to say it is one of the funniest books I've ever read. Matt is up there with Augusten Burroughs and David Sedaris for unbelievable-but-true stories of total insanity. And like Mr. B. and Mr. S., Mr. H.'s book really resonates because of the tremendous "heart" that is in it. I am so happy he found the "guts" (as he puts it) to lay it all on the line and reveal his personal tale within the hilarious madness of this story.

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by [blogger: Jill\\_Dearman](#) on 07-08-2009 09:36 PM

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Working in film by itself takes a lot of guts (who can get up that early?!!) but then to write about the Hell of it all -- truly gutsy. The insider stories are hilarious and make me glad I was NOT there!

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