

THE TRENT WALTERS INTERVIEW

Q - Did you two become childhood Middlesex chums in 1964 through a penchant for horror? Or did one introduce the other to its pleasures? The night you laid claim to meeting over broken hearts and pints of Guinness and talking until 3:30 am... or was it, as you put it in another interview, 4:30. What happened during that missing hour and where is the body buried?

M&S – Mick, the older by a month (December 1952 opposed to Len's January 1953) moved to Enfield when he was four years old, having been born in South London, near where they film the TV series Only Fools And Horses. Len was born in Enfield. We went to separate junior schools and both passed the 11+ exam to gain places in Ambrose Fleming Technical Grammar School in Enfield. That's where we met.

We weren't close friends at school really, both more aware of the other rather than mixing closely. Len left at 16 to gain an apprenticeship in the lapidary trade in London and Mick stayed on to take Advanced level exams before leaving to join Lloyds Bank aged 18.

We had a mutual friend and through him we met up again as we were then part of a large and loosely linked group of boys and girls who were regulars at the Crown And Horseshoes pub in Enfield, as well as others, especially where live music was played. Len played bass in a band, and the friend played drums. Mick was a kind of roadie cum bloke who got the drinks in, being totally un-musical.

Where our friendship really took off was by dating the same girl, although at different times. Mick went out with her for a few months before the relationship ended and then Len and she started dating a while later. It proved a turbulent relationship and one night in the pub, after the relationship had ended for good this time, we began philosophising as pints of beer tend to encourage and one thing led to another and the next thing we knew it was about four in the morning and we had been walking the length and breadth of Enfield putting the world to rights. That's the night we credit with the start of the friendship. (You see, Trent, here we are hedging our bets and claiming it was between the two previously given times! Truth is it was thirty years ago, we had drunk some beer, so who knows what exact time it was? As for bodies, we've both had our share of deaths in life – if that makes sense, but none we can claim as a direct result of our actions – unless there is someone out there who has been so affected by reading us that...)

So where does horror fit in? At the same time we were both reading and discovering all manner of horror books in local shops and the excellent market in the Town Square. We would buy dozens. From those came a mutual interest in the subject. Mick can still remember his first horror book, it was Stories To Be Read After Midnight 'edited' by Alfred Hitchcock. Len is pretty sure his was one of the early Pan Books Of Horror.

Len was still playing in the band but was becoming a little disillusioned with it. One night in another pub in Enfield (drink is not an exclusive part of our story but life events do seem to occur with regularity in pubs!) The George, Len produced a hand written story. It was about 1000 words long and obviously pretty poor but from that start everything else led.

The next week when we met Mick had a critique of Len's and a story of his own. The pattern began. We would argue for hours about a single line, even a word in our stories, so passionate were we to make them right. We wrote horror, and then gradually we moved into the more gentle style of ghost stories. Inspiration was everywhere. In churchyards, dark lanes, moonlit nights, even sunny days had an aura about them that led to a story idea.

We were collecting books like crazy; Arkham House, the Hainings, Dalbys and of course the Lambs. We would regularly travel up to London to drag wearily back with bagfuls of books. All the second hand dealers knew us. G Ken Chapman, Fantasy Centre.

Gradually the thought of trying to get something published arrived. By now we were actually collaborating in all but name. One was writing the story but the other was finishing it, re-writing it. There were no actual individual stories but we hadn't yet recognised that. We were still calling a story a Len or a Mick story. At that stage we still had quite distinct styles, but found that each story was better once the other had improved it. Our first sale was a professional one to London Mystery Magazine for £7 in 1974. It was a Mick originated story so it appeared under his name. Later when the story was revised for the Sarob Shadows At Midnight we were able to correct that and have it under the M&S umbrella.

Q - Early on you named the traditional ghost tale as an influence. Though critics commonly named M.R. James as one, you disagreed, not enjoying his work. Why not? What writers did influence you? You wrote, “_Shadows At Midnight_ was as much homage to the writers such as RH Malden, Andrew Caldecott, ANL Munby, as it was our own interpretation of the supernatural feelings and inspirations we had experienced since boyhood.” How did these writers influence you? What in your interpretation of the supernatural? Have the influential writers changed over the years? “There is as much to learn from Dick Francis and Ed McBain as there is from John Fowles and John Barth.” What, for instance, have you learned from such writers?

M&S – We found James a little static in style, and nowadays quite prosaic in structure. Strangely he was a little too good when we were beginning. We found writers such as Malden and the others had a looser style that suited our mood much more. There was a rough edge to them that James lacked, a kind of raw quality that appealed.

With the others we felt they had more belief in the supernatural and so had a greater awareness about them. There was a distinct lack of pretension about these writers that added to our own youthful love of the supernatural emotion. By comparison James was sterile, his story telling stiff compared to the less polished writing of the others.

Len's favourite writer has always been Jack Higgins and Mick's Ed McBain though we have never tried anything remotely similar to either. Just goes to show that what you read doesn't always influence how or what you write.

For us the supernatural is an event in the story, usually obviously the pivotal event that has its basis in something that cannot be explained rather than in any earth based reality. So by that token some of our more recent, and unpublished stories are not supernatural but are horror. The bulk of our work though does feature plots that feature the unknown, the unexplained, the strange. We were influenced early on by stories that didn't have a pat explanation at the end, that didn't have reality at their

core. So with our early stories we faced the criticism of being too vague, of not explaining enough. That was one of the revisions in the *Shadows At Midnight* book; not to explain away but to lose the vagueness.

From the mainstream authors we have learned by reading them the basics of writing; plot, story, pacing, character...

Q - How did you first begin collaborating? What is your process for collaboration? Does it change for every story or evolved gradually as you matured? Has the advent of email improved the relation? Mick published a solo effort in the anthology, *The Third Book of After Midnight Stories*, back in 1987. Do you write much separately? Maynard used to be the idea man while Sims fleshed it out. Is this still true? You've said that one begins a story, the other finishes and revises some while the former has final revisions and artistic control. [Incidentally a musician friend of mine said that Lennon/McCartney writing duo was supposedly a myth.]

M&S – Gradually we realised we would only ever be competing against one another if we tried to get published alone. That and the fact that no single authored story was as good without interference from the other!

At first the process was quite painful. There was a lot of ego; the writer defended each story vigorously when the reviser suggested changes. As we said there were arguments and long silences about single words sometimes. We were both quite fiery in those days and we ended up with an agreement that if one of us walked out when it got too heated we had a place where we would invariably meet – by the river near the local pub. See this is the story of pubs really...

Eventually Len had given up playing in the band. He was married and the father of a young child. Mick was engaged to be married. Things were apparently settling down. We were working on some ghost stories, the ones that would eventually be published by William Kimber. Len had a story he couldn't finish at all. Mick, notoriously slow at beginnings, took it and finished it. A pattern was built. Len was very good at beginnings; Mick better at endings. Most of the first version of *Shadows At Midnight* was written like this. The exceptions being the excellent *Border End* novella a very personal story from Len, and *Benjamin's Shadow* a story based on a miscarriage event in Mick's life. (This is why this story first appeared under Mick's name alone in the Hugh Lamb anthology *Taste Of Fear*)

After *Shadows* Kimber wanted more but foolishly we decided we wanted to move away from traditional ghosts and experiment more. We did so in mainstream stories – we nearly had a Penguin contract once but fell at the last hurdle – and more slipstream horror stories, probably before the term had even been thought of. Some of these were published – again often under our individual names because we still hadn't fully realised we were better together. Our writing was always plagued by huge doubts. Were we good enough? What did we want to write?

We wrote a great many stories after *Shadows*, and some were published, but most languished in drawers because we lacked the conviction of our ability. We didn't think we had what people wanted. It is partly a testimony to the kind of lives we had then that we had no belief in ourselves. We also wrote novels but the all went unpublished.

As we matured as people, and certainly by 1997 when we really took off in terms of activity, the collaboration had developed perfectly. It is different for each story. Often now one writes and the other revises, but that might mean only a tidy for

grammar and/or syntax. Occasionally now one starts and the other finishes, but you won't see the join! With longer stories, the current novel for instance, one will write completely before handing over to the other for a complete rewrite if needed, or as is more likely, a mere tarring up. We never argue now, and the style is a definite M&S one rather than two separate ones. The rule is always that one voice has ownership of the story; usually the person who first had the idea or started the story.

Email helps communication and the speed of collaboration certainly. We always meet once a week for a story conference, and that is where we bounce ideas off one another, map out stories and revise stories already written. You won't be surprised to learn we do that down the pub.

While in Chicago at WHC 2002 Mick was on a panel about collaborating, with William Nolan, Michael Slade and Mark McLaughlin, amongst others. That was great experience. And working together has been a wonderful experience as well. It had definitely enhanced our lives. We once said that we would stop if it affected our friendship, but so far, it has been only beneficial.

Everything we have read and all the people we have spoken to, including people in the music industry, say the Beatles collabs were totally genuine. They wrote separately but joined together to make the songs a whole.

Q - You advise potential collaborators to "Ask themselves why they want to bother with such an added discipline when the business of writing is already so difficult." Are your methods too tied up in collaboration to do otherwise? With such difficulties, do you ever wish you could?

M&S – We love it so much, and it is such an integral part of our lives that we wouldn't write separately now. There is so much freedom in how we do it these days, with a minimal of revision by the non-writer of each story, that we have the best of both worlds. We write what we want but yet it forms part of a reasonably established name.

Whether a novel could be successful with a dual author name is another matter. Michael Slade was adopted to prevent that and others have done the same. Whether we have to adopt a pen name if we have novels accepted is something we shall have to see about if and when it happens.

There is no wishing we could do it differently – only be more successful and actually make some real money at it! Neither of us is a frustrated solo artist – we have enough freedom in our current system.

Q - What was your process in writing *The Hidden Language of Demons*? What was the original inspiration behind *The Hidden Language of Demons*?

M&S - *The Hidden Language Of Demons* is actually quite an unusual one for us. Back in 1984 Len had a complex idea. We tossed it over and realised it was a novel length idea. So we story boarded it and had very detailed chapters laid out. It took us weeks. By the time we were finished – a novel called *The Web* – we felt we had written the blooming thing already. The creativity had gone. It languished in the bottom drawer for a while before, as we don't like wasting anything, we resurrected it. Mick, who was going through a divorce at the time and needed a distraction, wrote it at about 80000 words. As was our practice Len then revised and added another 10000 words. We still weren't happy so we cut and pasted to change the pacing. We

deleted characters and added new ones. We still weren't happy so that old drawer opened up again.

In 2000 Mick was off work with a double hernia and got the ms out and stripped it down to the 33000-word novella you can read today. Len of course revised and improved before we sent it off for publication.

Q - Is a sequel to The Hidden Language of Demons in the planning or works?

M&S – Not a sequel as such but we do intend to re-write it as the novel it probably should be. Your perceptive review makes note of the number of characters and the unresolved issues, not to mention the under-developed themes. There is plenty of scope for expansion, and with the critical success it is receiving we have the confidence this time to make it work.

We are currently working on a novel *Shelter*, and have two more in half completed stages, *Seminar* and *Stronghold*. We are also working on 3 crime thriller novels that are laying in the bottom drawer, having been written and discarded. We have actually been pretty prolific even during our quiet years and have a lot of material that, with our renewed confidence and vigour should see us busy for a while yet.

Incantations is our third original story collection, out in May 2002 (*Selling Dark Miracles* and *The Secret Geography Of Nightmare* being retrospectives that take the story of our writing up to the end of 2000) and *Falling Into Heaven* is our fourth and due out May 2003. Both these collections contain stories that take our writing onward and upward.

Q - In another interview, you wrote, "No matter how 'invented' the fiction is, as a writer you are always drawing from real life, even though it may be subconscious. Characters you meet in everyday life have a habit of appearing on the page; likewise with situations." What parts of The Hidden Language of Demons derived from real life? Do you feel that such additions create verisimilitude?

M&S – Many scenes, believe it or not, from *Demons* did come from real life. The party scene is an amalgam of several we attended in our younger days during the 60's and 70's where weird dreams inside the goldmine wasn't just a line from the hi fi. The gig at the Las Vegas club is a mixture of numerous comics and variety acts seen over the years at some often seedy venues.

As far as emotions go, the deaths are taken from real emotions. Mick's father died aged 59 from a heart attack and Mick was there in the hospital as the staff tried to resuscitate him. Mick's mother died in his arms aged 71 and having suffered from Alzheimer's for more than 15 years. Len's dad died when Len was just a child. The emotion that you feel as you start to write a scene about death can be so strong that it often takes you by surprise. He you write a scene and make yourself cry you know something is working all right. Now as for the sex scenes – all fictional of course...

The characters – well how many writers get asked whether you've 'used me in anything?' Sure, bits of people's mannerisms and funny little ways get used – mostly it is subconsciously. If we deliberately wrote in a complete known person it wouldn't feel right at all. It works the same with names. If we use one of a person we know then the character tends to begin to be the friend or whoever it may be.

Q - You wrote, "With supernatural we are working on the whole to an ending where the supernatural element is revealed and the reason behind what occurs has some logic." When writers who write more of the development of a horror than a character, what becomes the organizing principle behind a story's beginning, middle and ending? In other words, how does a writer develop the horror conceit tale? You go on to say, "Often we read a story, which starts well with an atmospheric beginning, unreal situations being explored, but the ending lets it all down. This is because the writer has only the thread of an idea, an impression if you like. The stories that work have to have believability factor or else they are just too incredible to work as horror stories." What makes a story believable? Is believability the crucial factor in saleability, in your opinion?

M&S – Logic but not an explanation that merely wraps it all up neatly and concisely. The ending has to crown the rest of the story. So many stories we read for the anthologies are great up to the end where they fall away. The balance has to be just right.

The ending has to come from the rest of the story and be a part of it. It has to be a conclusion, but as in life that conclusion does not always have to neat and tidy. There are times when the story is told, and the final full stop does not give the whole game away. Here is a remaining mystery and that is where the narrative has been leading all along. Now, some people find that unsatisfactory, they want the ending to explain and tuck them up in bed. It doesn't always work like that, especially in this genre.

The plot dictates the beginning middle and end and the story unfolds around that. The narrative might be meandering, or linear, it depends on the subject matter, on the atmosphere being developed or even on the choice of character. Some stories unfold like a peeled onion while others are more up front and in your face. With each story the horror is developed and revealed slowly, almost slyly, until the full terror is shown at the end. That terror might be seen, or it might merely be the realisation of what has been going on all along.

A story is believable if the characters seem real or at least appeal to the reader. The setting can be surreal but ideally, for us, has to be recognisable, even if not named and described fully. To make a reader believe in a story we believe we have to write characters who seem real or sympathetic, settings that are atmospheric or real, and have a logical sequence of events that leads to an unreal ending. That makes it believable or not but whether that makes it saleable depends on lots of other things. If saleability means people buy it then you are in the marketing and promotions territory and that's a whole new can of worms.

Q - Your writing has been moving "onward and upward" on the whole. Do you take criticism seriously? What role do reviews play in the evaluation of your work?

M&S – as we have got older so our confidence in our ability has grown. We feel we are far better writers than even four or five years ago. Each story we write now we feel is better than anything we have done – and that is a good feeling but it hasn't always been there.

That is certainly what we mean by up and on. The themes are more adult, the writing more real, and the characters more full and emotional. We have taken criticism far too seriously in the past, to the extent that one rejection letter was the end of a story and it was consigned to that old bottom drawer. Nowadays we have a far

more balanced view. We do take all criticism seriously but not to the extent that we crumble at the slightest knock. All views are subjective – editing has helped us learn that. One person’s rejection is another’s glowing acceptance. Stories with Honourable Mentions and even Stoker nominations against them have been rejected at one stage – our stories we mean.

We use comments about stories objectively and always look at the element of the story being examined and see if the comments are right. We might alter the story or we might not. Our confidence is high enough and sound and resilient enough now that we can make our own final decision on whether we change or not. We use the criticism again when writing a new story. If someone has said for instance – and for example – that we use the word ‘had’ too much, we will be conscious of that and revise accordingly. If we think they have a point of course.

Q - When you say that your first two collections tell your story up to 2000, do you consider that a dividing line between periods?

M&S – Most definitely. The two Cosmos books contain all the stories, with the exception of the separately published Moths, from *Shadows At Midnight* and from *Echoes Of Darkness* as well as all the stories published in the UK small press between 1998 and 2000 – most of which were the earlier stories revised and edited. (They also contain two earlier interviews, with William P Simmons, and the essays that appeared on *At The Worlds End* which was Mark Chadbourn’s website, now evolved into *Alien Online*.)

These stories are more or less the content of our traditional ghosts story output. The stories in *Incantations - Due* from prime Books USA in hardback \$29.95 and paperback \$15 in May 2002 pre-order from Michael@micksims.f9.co.uk) are the start of our more modern approach. The range of themes is wider, the style a little harder, the characters having to deal with different types of problems.

Incantations, and the collection due out in 2003, *Falling Into Heaven*, have stories about just about every aspect of our own lives that we have fictionalised into stories. Because a lot of them are so personal we feel the work on a much deeper level than the earlier stories. There is more emotion in them, more depth.

Q - How has editing the magazine *_Enigmatic Tales_* and the International Horrors Guild-nominated anthology, *Darkness Rising*, affected your own writing--whether adversely, advantageous or both? Have your publishing goals for *_Darkness Rising_* altered since the *EnigmaticPress* publications?

M&S – Reading other people’s work worried us at first because we thought we were bound to plagiarise, albeit unconsciously. That hasn’t happened at all. It has been only a positive experience. What it has done is give us a whole new discipline.

As you read hundreds of submissions you see mistakes you know you have made in your own work. You see ways to pace better, to create better characters, to write better dialogue. As you then write you do so with a whole new teacher on your shoulder, nagging you not to accept 95% right but to go for the 100% each time. It has definitely honed and improved our writing.

The downside undoubtedly the loss of time. If *Enigmatic* hadn’t closed when it did we would have had nervous breakdowns for sure with all the work we were

trying to do. Darkness Rising is better as we only edit, but then we've done Cold Touch and Best Of Enigmatic Tales this year as well, and two years of F20.

Editing is great and it has helped us become better writers. Other editors I spoke with at WHC in Chicago said pretty much the same. The balance has to be not to try to take too much on. We are lucky because there are two of us so we more or less keep on top of things most of the time.

Enigmatic had ended of course before we took up Darkness Rising. The beauty of editing for another publisher is that all we do now is the best bit of reading loads of stories and accepting or rejecting them. The hard work of marketing, selling, posting, and all the financial control is someone else's baby. That someone happens to be the excellent Sean Wallace of Cosmos and Prime Books. Sean, whom Mick met in April, is a great bloke to work with. He gives us full editorial control but is interested and perceptive enough to offer very valid comment on the contents of each volume as we deliver them to him. He usually tells us off for missed typos, but then he is very very good at proof reading, and what he misses his excellent colleagues, Garry, Gord, Monica and Jared, pick up on. Prime has a great future. We are delighted to be involved.

Q - What caused the lag between your work appearing in the eighties and nineties? In the interim between *_Shadows at Midnight_* and the nineties, you turned to mainstream work and a dozen novels of horror and crime. Have you any plans on revising these? Any bites from publishers?

M&S – You've touched on our biggest regret for sure. Had we been as prolific during that time as we have for the past five years...well who knows?

After 1979 saw *Shadows At Midnight* published we got a bit egotistical. We told Kimber we wanted to do different stuff from ghost stories and they were polite but the didn't want our more modern stories. We had a few published in their anthologies and elsewhere but we were directionless for a long while. We didn't know if horror was for us so we tried mainstream and we tried crime and we tried novels. We wrote eleven horror novels and ditched every one; well no we kept the novel that became *The Hidden Language Of Demons* and another one we intend to re-write. We wrote several crime novels and we kept three that will be re-written.

Apart from writing we were also going through some very stormy times in real life. Len's marriage was on the rocks and divorce followed. He then met someone else and a new life had to be built. Karen, his new partner and now wife, lost her father. Len's son from the marriage had to be guided through these changes, and then there were various changes at work that distracted. Mick lost his father, his mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and his marriage ended. He met someone else but her family were devout Catholics who disapproved of a divorcee. Years of discussions with the Catholic legal system followed before Mick and Clare could be married. Miscarriages were a regular feature before (and after) dear Emily was born. Mick's work was always changing with twenty different locations of work during a twenty-five year period. We both had house moves, health issues from time to time. Hell where did all the time go?

It was in 1997, and it just happened out of the blue, that we were sitting together – do I have to say it was in a pub? – we started talking about writing again. We had never stopped talking about it of course, but this time we started doing

something about it. Our lives were nicely settled, we were happy and stable, it just seemed the right thing to do.

We are writing one horror novel now, *Shelter*, and that will be finished in June. Then we have two more, *Seminar* and *Stronghold* that we will write. At the same time, more or less, we will write three crime thrillers, *Mere Mortals*, *Killing Room*, *Through The Sad Heart*. Then there is the re-writing of *Demons*. All these are failures from the past that we now recognise were not total failures just first drafts.

We have spoken to a few publishers and the stage we are at is to send the first three chapters with a synopsis and see what happens. We have never used an agent, and may not even now, so we will have to be patient.

Q - Why did you revise your first collection, *_Shadows at Midnight_*? What do you revise for in a work

M&S - With the excitement of this 1997 conversation and a new determination to write we looked at what we could do. Len, as always, was full of new story ideas and wanted to write them. Mick, also as usual didn't have any ideas. It was natural then for us to look at what stories we had in our voluminous bottom drawer and dust them off. At this time we became introduced to the quite blossoming UK small press and a whole batch of stories we had that didn't work at 6/7/8000 words and set in USA were revised to under 3000 and moved to UK. They all worked much better, and in fact this was probably the seeds of our editing – on ourselves.

With Len writing new – including completely new versions of old stories we had destroyed – and Mick re-writing old stories we soon had enough for a new collection, and that eventually came out from Sarob as *Echoes Of Darkness*. When we had finished the revising of all the old stories, and while still writing brand new ones, it seemed natural to revise *Shadows*.

We loved the stories in that book but felt they could have been written more capably. Some were revised for grammar and syntax, some for dialogue as well, and a few underwent plot changes and a few new scenes. We included that first ever sale story, revised of course, and included one new one and the collection was reborn. It was a great opportunity and we are eternally grateful to Robert Morgan for his faith in us.

At the same time we had the mad idea that we could run a small press ourselves. We started *Enigmatic Tales* in 1998, quickly followed by *Enigmatic Novellas*, *Enigmatic Variations* and latter *Enigmatic Electronic*. That ended in 2000 during which time we had also co-edited and published two issues of *F20* for the British Fantasy Society. As we said earlier it was draining trying to run *Enigmatic Press* while writing as well. How we managed to write so much is difficult now to comprehend. But write we did. As we also mentioned earlier if only we had always been this prolific.

Q - In an interview, you wrote, “We find the normal, fairly slow paced, narrative works best, as our stories are all reasonable lengths. If we started off in a weird setting, with a faster pace, the story for us would undoubtedly be shorter.” You go on to tell about the need for normal people to contrast the weird and supernatural. Yet you go against all of this in *_The Hidden Language of Demons_*. Why? Do you feel this worked? Have your views changed?

M&S – Well, Demons is reasonable length unless you feel it could be even better as the planned novel! Demons is exceptional so far in our body of work, but watch Incantations – there are some weird and fast paced stories in there for sure.

Demons has its share of normal (whatever that is of course) characters and even more its share of weird ones. The pace is fast from the start, or near the start, and yes it does continue throughout, so it does differ from our normal style. Why? The desire to do something different, the need to spread our wings a bit. We can't and don't want to stand still, we want to stretch ourselves. With ghost stories we reached a stage when we found there were only so many ways to describe a shadow in a corner in a menacing way and that applies to slow paced stories. There are times when you want something completely different and Demons helped us with that.

It works in Demons, at least we think so. The story is fast and furious but there is enough depth in there to satisfy most readers.

Q - S.T. Joshi feels that much of the modern weird tale has lost the taste of its original flavor. Do you agree? What is the purpose of a horror story? How has it changed--whether for the better or worse--with the present age?

M&S – Everything evolves. For the better? It depends on your point of view. Good story now or better one from 100 years ago? It has to be a subjective view. What was the original flavour? Surely the stories of years ago were as diverse as now. The subject matter may be more inclusive nowadays as society is more open about issues that were not mentioned even forty years ago, but the horror stories are as varied.

If we kept the flavour the same for decades eventually people would tire of it even if it was a great taste. There has to be variety. It isn't better now, just different. Because of stylistic changes now some of the older classics read a little creakingly today. One has to hold judgement on style of language and enjoy the other qualities. The modern reader will be more familiar with so many other media than the reader of old and that is bound to affect judgement. Plots and subjects used successfully fifty years ago may not stand the test of time today by the average reader, who will have used it on their PlayStation, or seen it on Buffy or the latest movie.

Ultimately good fiction will rise to the top because the elements all combine to make an individual story work. That applies to old stories and new ones. Which would we rather read? Both, just as we love old black and white movies but still enjoy good new ones.

Q - Is your goal still to write full time and how close are you to achieving it?

M&S – We believe we are good enough, so yes that is still the aim. It has been for thirty years, but too often we have lacked the conviction and settled for second best. Too often we have done anything we could not to write because we didn't think we had it in us to succeed, as we wanted. Now that belief is there and it's not going to go away.

We are both 50 in the next six months or so and that is a significant watershed in anyone's life. We are relaxed, happy, and eager, more so than we have ever been, to make a success out of our writing. The editing is a diversion, a pleasant one, and we enjoy it, and it does seem to be well received, but to be totally honest it is our writing that takes the front and centre of stage for us.

The editing is the bass and drums, but it is our writing that is the lead singer and lead guitar. The real driving force is our wish to have people say, 'yes, M & S are good writers – they are on my list of the want to read writers'.

Q - Do you feel there's a difference between how genre work is perceived in England as opposed to the U.S., Canada or elsewhere?

M&S – Several American friends have said the English writers seem to take more trouble over syntax and grammar but I can't say this is wholly true. Certainly we see more Stephen King wannabe's from USA than UK but then King is American so that follows.

In UK the genre is perceived as second rate and looked down on by serious critics and readers. Mick found he was apologising to colleagues for attending WHC, justifying attendance with comic comments to show he didn't take horror too seriously. That's daft of course but horror is perceived as a bit juvenile, something you'll grow out of in time.

In USA, by our limited experience, the genre seems to be taken a bit more seriously and ranked equal to other genres. That seems the case in Canada as well.

Q – So, the future?

M&S – Incantations out by the end of May. Promote that, and make it as successful as Shadows and as Echoes.

Finish the novel Shelter. Get it accepted. Write the first three chapters to Seminar and the same on Stronghold. Write the synopsis of all three novels. Get a deal on them.

Write the synopsis and first three chapters on the three crime thrillers, Mere Mortals, Killing Room, and Through The Sad Heart. Get a deal on them.

Write Demons the novel...

See Falling Into Heaven published next year and promote it to be even more successful than Incantations.

See Darkness Rising continue to rise; see Best Of Enigmatic Tales and Cold Touch out this year. (The latter is a great looking anthology edited by us and with the excellent William P Simmons – due out from prime in November 2002.)

Relax, be happy...