

# Book Review: Joe Hill's Horns

Even if you're not a fan of horror, you've heard of Stephen King. It's hard not to, as he has written more books than most any other three authors put together, and currently sits atop his own publishing house, scribbling away on napkins that somehow morph into bestsellers every few months.

But this is about the son of the King, Joe Hill. You might know that name because the TV show "NOS4A2," based on his book, has been filming here recently. He writes under a pseudonym to avoid cashing in on his father's success, but that's hard to do when your dad can point to a piece of paper and turn it into money.

I didn't read *NOS4A2* because I don't have an interest in the sudden swell of vampire fandom, since I've been burned before. I did, however, pick up a copy of one of Hill's earlier entries into the horror genre, *Horns*, and it is so much fun that Hill made me a fan.

The book begins with a simple premise — you know the story — boy meets girl, they fall in love, girl is brutally murdered, they blame boy and boy's life spirals downward into self-loathing, drinking and despair.

Then one day boy wakes up with a pair of horns growing from his head, and everyone around him seems compelled to speak their deepest, darkest secrets to him like they're having a casual conversation. This leads to the revelation of who killed said girl in the first place, making this book a supernatural horror murder mystery romance.

What I love about the book is how wonderfully complex it is. Instead of sticking to the usual cliché of pitting the forces of good against evil, the main character, Ig Perrish, is a lovable loser who, despite his supernatural powers, remains basically a bumbling, flawed and likeable protagonist.

What I especially love about *Horns* is how much it's *not* Stephen King. While I do have some Stephen King books I absolutely love, others I find to be slow, plodding and dull. *Horns* never feels like it's wasting my time, and the way it's structured and told in flashbacks is effective for those looking for elusive and unanswered questions just a page or two away.

Ig Perrish and his company of friends and enemies are all real, fully fleshed-out characters. No one is rushing in to save the day, and no one is the epitome of good, just a bunch of enjoyably written characters with their own drives, motives, goals and prejudices.

Hill's style almost is antithetical to his father's — it is very character driven with a consistent pace that never leaves one lost in a rambling description. Joe's writing is more tight, deliberate and focused.

But is it scary?

The answer is yes, but not because Ig Perrish is growing horns and supernatural powers. It's because (spoilers!) the person who killed his girlfriend is an ordinary person, someone who attends church, has a good job and lives just across town. He's the killer next door, but unlike the serial killer, this psychopath just sees killing as a means to an end, like taking a taxi. It's the horror of the threat waiting at home.

Now *that* is very like Stephen King, but Joe Hill does it with so much more subtle menace that you can't help but root for the guy slowly morphing into the Devil.