

[HARDCOVER: US]

King of horror reveals little of himself

Though she failed to land an interview with the novelist, Lisa Rogak does a thorough job of excavating Stephen King's life

BY ERICA NOONAN
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, BOSTON

While reading *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*, you may get the feeling that the book's subject is somewhere nearby, gently approving, but out of sight.

Your Spidey sense would be tingling for good reason. King never had a one-on-one interview with biographer Lisa Rogak. The author's closest encounter with King came during a 2007 interview in Bangor with his longtime assistant, Marsha DeFilippo, while "the man himself hovered just outside the doorway, listening in on our conversation but never once stepping inside," Rogak recalls in the book's introduction.

This makes *Haunted Heart* technically unauthorized, but in the most friendly of ways — King did give permission to his friends and family members to speak, and scores of them enthusiastically weigh in at length about one of America's most prolific and popular authors.

Rogak, the gatekeeper for this flood of information, cheerfully goes about her work, consolidating hundreds of hours of interviews and the millions of words written by and about King into a readable, well-researched character study.

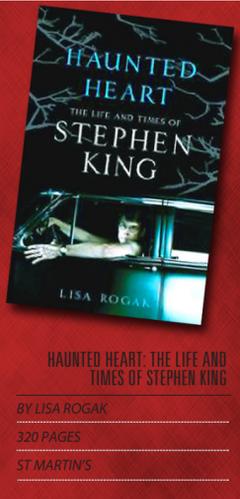
But without a fresh, groundbreaking interview with King, much of her analysis is limited to older interviews and his own 30-year body of work, including the heavily autobiographical *On Writing*.

Rogak — the author of 40 books, including biographies of *The Da Vinci Code* author Dan Brown and Shel Silverstein — certainly did her due diligence, unearthing ancient interviews, reading all of King's 60-plus books, and watching just about every movie version made of them.

Too many other writers have unfairly painted King as everything from nutcase to hack and shamelessly exploited his dark themes for maximum gross-out effect instead of thoughtful insight and analysis. In contrast, *Haunted Heart* is a thoroughly respectful overview of King's life, and a great starter biography for new fans.

Devotees, however, may not find much terribly new here. Most of the time Rogak is reworking territory King has already spoken or written about: his fatherlessness, childhood and early-adult poverty, sudden

Publication Notes



HAUNTED HEART: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF STEPHEN KING
BY LISA ROGAK
320 PAGES
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success with the novel and film *Carrie*, drug and alcohol abuse, recovery, and being struck by a car and almost killed in 1999. All of this is recounted and dissected thoughtfully, but not in any especially surprising or revelatory way for folks who are familiar with King's life.

Rogak does find fresh material with her exploration into the smaller, more obscure corners of King's life. His phobias — airline travel, spiders, and the number 13 — are also examined as is his obsessive work ethic, including a little-known anecdote in which King, during a writing session, had a surgical incision from a recent vasectomy burst and fill his lap with blood, yet refused to get up or seek help until he'd finished his chapter.

King's very normal family life finally gets its due in this biography, which details his marriage to a beloved wife, Tabitha, and his views on parenting his now-grown children: Owen and Joseph, both published authors, and Naomi, a minister.

Rogak, an experienced journalist, gripes a bit about King's factual inconsistencies; his mother's date of death is given incorrectly in *On Writing*, for example.

But her complaints are minor, and she does not seem to take personally her subject's lack of enthusiasm for her book. In fact, Rogak seems as fond of King on the last page of *Haunted Heart* as on the first.



Clockwise from above: John Lasseter, chief creative officer for Walt Disney and Pixar Animation Studios, at the premiere of *Bolt* in Hollywood in November; a scene from the Pixar's animated feature *Wall-E*; Lasseter with his wife, Nancy. PHOTOS: AGENCIES

John Lasseter, the man behind the marvel

A pioneer in computer animation, the Pixar co-founder is still pushing technological boundaries — this time in 3D

BY STUART O'CONNOR
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

You may not recognize his face, but you'd certainly recognize John Lasseter's work: *Toy Story*, *A Bug's Life*, *Cars*, *Ratatouille* and *Wall-E*, to name just some of his writing, directing and producing output.

Lasseter was a co-founder of Pixar Animation Studios, and a pioneer of computer animation. In fact, Pixar pretty much invented computer-animated movies — developing from scratch the process that almost every Hollywood studio now uses. It refined its craft with a series of award-winning short films throughout the 1980s, and broke into features with *Toy Story* in 1995 — the first full-length computer-animated movie.

"It began way back when I first started, in 1983, working with the Lucasfilm computer division, which became Pixar," Lasseter says. "There inevitably comes a time when they say: 'Hey, we have this new computer and it's 10 times faster than the ones you're using.' So everybody logically thinks: 'OK, that means you can do what you're doing, only 10 times faster.'"

"[But actually] what happens is that it takes the same amount of time, but it becomes 10 times more complex. We have more computer power than you can imagine now, and still our movies take the same amount of time to create."

Each feature is a four-year process, and the animators have to lock down the technology about two years before completion. "That's when you have to say: 'We don't know how to do this, or the movie really requires us to do this,'" he says. "In *Cars*, it was the reflections on the cars and windows; in *Monsters Inc*, it was the fur; and there's the underwater stuff in

[Finding] Nemo. There was a tremendous amount of complexity in *Wall-E*.

"But what we've always done, since the very beginning, is we have studied what is that unique limitation of the way things look, and we've modeled that into the computer."

"That's why Pixar films have always had this movie feeling about them. For instance, we invented motion blur for computer animation. This was on the first short I created in 1984, *The Adventures of Andre and Wally B*. It looked so real, even to myself. But it's not real because our eyes don't see motion blur. It's a limitation of the [film camera's] lens."

"This understanding of the limitations of how films are actually made, and then modeling that within the computer, is classic Pixar. In live action, you get that for free, but we had to create it."

Pixar's visual creativity has developed over the years, from the simple geometric shapes used in early shorts such as *Luxo Jr* (the lamp that became Pixar's mascot) and the Oscar-winning *Tin Toy*, to the more advanced character renderings in *Toy Story*, *Monsters Inc* and *Ratatouille*.

Yet, as computers become more powerful, and Hollywood relies more on CGI special effects, does the technology ever get in the way of telling the story? Lasseter thinks that sometimes, it does — but for others, not for Pixar.

"One of the things from the beginning that we recognized is that these are just tools," he says. "That the technology never entertains an audience by itself. And for us, since we invented much of computer animation, we have a pretty good sense of what our tools can do."

"Like *Toy Story* — we couldn't do humans very well, so we kept them in the background, you just see feet and hands and stuff like that. But we could do plastic well, so making a film where the main characters were made of plastic was perfect."

The next film technology with which Pixar is leading the way is 3D, which has seen a huge resurgence in the past 18 months. Pixar's next release, *Up*, has been made in 3D — as will all its features from now on — and there will be 3D versions of the first two *Toy Story* films in advance of next year's sequel.

"We've been interested in 3D for a very long time," Lasseter says. "In 1989, Pixar made a short film called *Knick Knack* in 3D. I realized very early on that what you're creating inside the computer is a three-dimensional environment. And I've always felt sad that you could only see a two-dimensional window into that three-dimensional space."

"We did quite a bit of research in holography, in lenticular imagery, to try to get a true three-dimensional view of the world and objects we were creating. I was doing a lot of amateur 3D photography — in 1988, when I got married to my wife Nancy, we took 3D wedding pictures. But there were no theaters you could see 3D in — you have to do a special setup with a silver screen and polarized projectors and all that stuff — and it was a pain that no one got to see [*Knick Knack*] in 3D."

"Theaters started recognizing that with digital they could do 3D far more easily than with film. And what's exciting about that right now is that you can't get it at home. That's why theater owners have

been investing heavily in it."

Bolt was made from the beginning as a 3D film. It's also the first computer-animated film from Walt Disney Animation Studios, of which Lasseter was appointed chief creative officer in 2006, when Disney bought Pixar.

"There's one technological advance in *Bolt* that Pixar's never done before: there is a softness and an interesting quality to the backgrounds," he says. "The artists at Disney said: 'Is there a way in computer animation that we can make the backgrounds look more like they've been painted?'"

"This new technology in *Bolt* makes the world believable — not really real, but believable. When you stop a frame and study the backgrounds, you realize wow, that's pretty painterly — and you have never seen that before in computer animation. There is a beautiful, rich quality to *Bolt* that no one's seen before in computer animation."

With technology still advancing, what does Lasseter think Pixar will be able to do five or 10 years from now?

"It's hard to say," he says. "It's getting to the point where the limitation is in the imagination of the filmmaker: if he can imagine it, chances are that he can make it. Which early on in computer animation was not the case."

"Clearly, the most difficult thing to create is a human being. That's why, when we've created human characters such as those in *The Incredibles*, we've kept them fairly stylized. To create a character that's totally believable and realistic is always going to be the challenge. But it depends on the story you're trying to tell."

[HARDCOVER: US]

'Bob of Arabia' explores the ills of our troubled times

In a timely collection of essays, veteran reporter Robert Fisk of the 'Independent' casts an unsparring look at the people and institutions who define our reality

BY J. MICHAEL COLE
STAFF REPORTER

How does one review a book by a man who has spent the past three decades reporting on the world's bloodiest conflicts, who has interviewed Osama bin Laden and who, by Air France calculations, travels more frequently than any Air France crew member? Robert Fisk's journalistic resume is impressive, from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to Israel's own invasion of Lebanon, Iran after the overthrow of the Shah to the US-led invasion of Iraq, as well as the killing fields of Algeria, Syria, the Occupied Territories and other trouble spots in the Arab world.

The sum total of his death-defying forays into the Middle East is contained in his excellent *Pity the Nation*, which covers the Lebanese civil war, and *The Great War for Civilization*, a monumental, 1,300-plus page catalogue of man's inhumanity to man which, Fisk tells us, will eventually be followed by a second volume.

The Age of the Warrior departs from the blood-soaked pages of his previous books and offers more personal insights into Fisk the man. In it we find the ponderings,

through a decade or so of editorials he wrote for the *Independent*, of a man who probably has seen more dead bodies than any reporter alive today. The 116 entries can be read as hiatuses, "a foreign correspondent's thoughts amid war, a corner of the journalist's brain that usually goes unrecorded," recorded here for our benefit.

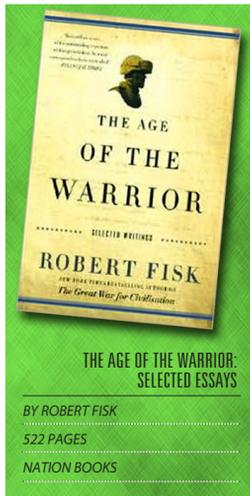
Some entries, such as "The forgotten art of handwriting" or "The cat who ate missile wire for breakfast" — a true story, by the way — are light in tone, but underlying the whole volume is the same anger we have come to expect from Fisk in the face of injustice, double standards and Western complicity in the suffering that finds such fertile ground throughout the Middle East.

As in his reporting, Fisk spares no one, and his cast of characters is a rogues' gallery of the architects of catastrophe — former US president George W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, former British prime minister Tony "Kut al-Amara" Blair, Jack Straw, Ariel Sharon and other symbols of the West at its worst. Equally targeted are "our" dictators, ally-turned-foe Saddam Hussein, Hosni Mubarak,

Pervez Musharraf, Yasser Arafat, Hafez al-Assad, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Muammar Qaddafi and King Abdullah of Jordan. His skewering of these individuals will be nothing new to anyone who has followed Fisk's reporting over the past three decades or has waded through his immense *The Great War for Civilization*. But here Fisk, aware of the failings and limitations of his own profession, takes a step back and turns to equally important subjects such as our collective forgetting of history and how movies have come to define reality.

Especially useful is the section "Words, words, words," a modern-day version of George Orwell's famous essay *Politics and the English Language*, in which Fisk confronts the insidious manipulation of language (starting from his own training as a journalist) that characterizes most reporting — especially when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Here Fisk draws our attention to the catchwords, euphemisms and "hygienic metaphors" used to distort reality, how illegal Jewish settlements become "Jewish neighborhoods,"

Publication Notes



occupied land becomes "disputed," Palestinian attacks invariably "terrorist" while Israeli "retaliation" is self-defense, "killed civilians become 'collateral damage' and Palestinians who blow themselves

to bits while making a bomb as dying from "work accidents." And so on, language that once again reared its ugly head during Israel's 22-day pounding of Gaza in December and January.

Later, Fisk explains why journalists should not be forced to testify at war crimes tribunals, at least not until courts abandon their double standards and become equally intent on trying war criminals in the Middle East, the perpetrators of Sabra and Chatila, Hama and the countless other massacres that have written the history of the region in blood. Until then, journalists testifying in court or providing evidence would risk being **complicit in that system** of double standards, he argues.

Fisk, who makes Lebanon his home, has often been accused by Western media and various Israeli groups of sympathizing too much with Muslims, criticism that has bordered on accusations he suffers from Stockholm syndrome — especially after he was attacked by Afghan refugees in Pakistan on Dec. 10, 2001, whose anger at Westerners he said could be rationalized. Such accusations, however, are nonsense, and anyone

who has paid attention to his long career will know that Fisk sides with justice, which in our world often means siding with those who ended up on the wrong side of history. In fact, his detractors (Zionists and others) will find in this volume many instances of Fisk at his most unsparring in his criticism of Holocaust revisionists or individuals, such as Maurice Papon, Marshal Philippe Petain and Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who had a hand in it. He is equally implacable in his call for recognition of the Armenian Genocide and his criticism of the Turkish government, which to this day continues to deny it took place.

History conveniently distorted or altogether effaced by opinion makers and governments, Fisk argues, is a dangerous instrument that, over time, will come back to haunt us, as it did on Sept. 11, 2001. Though Fisk clearly calls the attacks a "crime against humanity," he insists that they did not occur in isolation, that they were a result of our actions in the Middle East. There is no doubt, he argues, that the London bombings of July 7, 2005, would not have happened

had the UK not participated in the invasion of Iraq. And yet, to this day, an unrepentant Blair (a favorite villain of Fisk) and a complicit media claim there was no connection between the two events, as will those who continue to argue, against all evidence, that 9/11 was the result of Muslim "hated" for Western democracy, that it had nothing to do with racism, support for or indifference to the Apartheid-like conditions Israel imposes on Palestinians, catastrophic sanctions against Iraq that resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths, support for Saddam as he used poison gas against Iran and support for repressive regimes that are allies in the "war on terrorism."

There is much, much more to Fisk's rich volume, which, as with his other publications, should come with the warning "danger, no light subjects therein." But then again, what should we expect from a book that concludes on such a note: "I wake each morning in Beirut and hear the wind in the palm trees outside my bedroom window and ask myself what we all ask ourselves these days — or should ask ourselves: what horror waits for us today?"