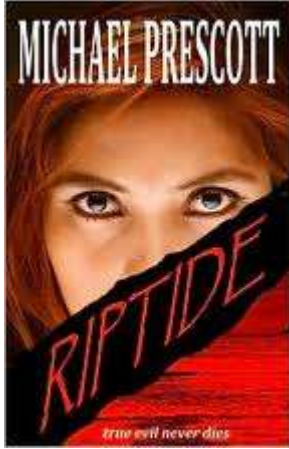# The 7 Question Interview with Michael Prescott

Michael Prescott attended Wesleyan University, majoring in Film Studies, then moved to Los Angeles, where he wrote scripts for several independent producers. He also worked as a magazine freelancer, archival researcher, and editor, and eventually started writing books. He wrote a few horror novels under a long-defunct name, then authored six titles under the pseudonym Brian Harper before switching to his new identity as Michael Prescott.

Some of his novels are:

- Dangerous Games
- Mortal Faults
- Final Sins
- Riptide

His official website can be accessed here: http://www.michaelprescott.net

The WritingRaw.com 7 Question Interview

Please let us know who you are and how we might know you:

I published my first book, a horror novel in the Stephen King vein, in 1988, and published roughly one novel a year for twenty years after that. Most of them were psychological thrillers involving serial killers and other nasty people. I seem to do better with strong female protagonists than with male heroes. My good guys can be kind of stiff, but the women–at least sometimes–come alive in interesting ways.

My career in traditional publishing petered out a few years ago when the mass-market paperback end of the industry began to unravel because of changes in the distribution setup. Publishers started letting their paperback writers go, and I was one of them. Since I couldn't get a deal, I started doing something else for a living, and only got into the e-book business about a year ago, as a sideline. I didn't expect it to take off the way it has, but for some reason the digital editions of my books have caught on and given me a whole new income stream. It's very surprising.

Readers can learn more at my website, www.michaelprescott.net , which includes contact info and a link to my Facebook page. I'm also on Twitter but, in what is probably a symptom of middle age, I can't figure out what to do with it...

Any news you would like to share concerning upcoming projects:

> At the moment I'm mainly concerned with digitizing my backlist one book at a time. This is a fairly time-consuming process, since I have to scan each printed book into my computer, convert the scanned text to editable text, proofread the conversion, format the file, create the cover art, and upload the whole thing on multiple platforms. There are quite a few books left to go.

> A movie version of my book Shiver is in postproduction now and should be released next year, possibly direct-to-video, since it's a pretty low-budget film. I thought they did a good job with it and captured the story very faithfully. There's also movie interest in my novel Stealing Faces.

> I've been noodling around with some new book ideas, but nothing has really gelled so far. I stopped writing back in 2009, and I'm finding it difficult to get back in the groove.

Thoughts concerning the current state of the literary world:

> It goes without saying that e-books are changing everything. It used to be the case that self-publishing was purely an act of vanity—if not an act of insanity. Self-published books almost never found an audience outside of the author's immediate family and any friends who could be shamed into purchasing a copy. Now, because of e-books, and especially because of Amazon's huge success with the Kindle, self-publishing has become a viable option and a perfectly reasonable alternative to traditional publishing. For the first time, authors can take control of their own destiny, at least to the extent of ensuring that their work is available to the public in exactly the form they intended, without having to go through a middleman or get approval from a corporate structure. It's a very interesting time.

> I expect that e-books will largely, even entirely, replace mass-market paperbacks within a few years. Hardcovers may be largely priced out of existence, which would leave only large-format trade paperbacks as far as printed books are concerned. And many of those trade paperbacks will be print-on-demand titles, which may also be self-published. So it's a whole new world.

Who is/are your favorite author/s and why?

> These days I read mainly nonfiction, historical fiction, and classics. I'm a little burned out on reading thrillers, having written so many. I do still like the work of John Sandford, who has been remarkably consistent over the years. Otherwise, I like the ancient Roman mystery novels of Lindsey Davis and Stephen Saylor, and I was very impressed with Stephen Pressfield's novel of the Battle of Thermopylae, Gates of Fire. That's one of the best historical novels I've read. As far as classics are concerned, Tolstoy is the greatest novelist I've read, and Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist. Nothing very controversial about either of those opinions, obviously! In both cases you

can return to the work again and again and always find new insights and new levels of meaning. Incidentally, I'm one of those eccentric types who think that the works attributed to Shakespeare were actually written by the 17th Earl of Oxford, Edward de Vere. An excellent book on this subject, "Shakespeare" By Another Name, by Mark Anderson, is coming out in new e-book and print editions in October.

Have you written a book you love that you have not been able to publish?

Actually, the reason I got into self-publishing was to publish an unsold novel of mine called Riptide. It had been submitted to two dozen traditional publishers back around 2008, but at that time it was just about impossible to sell any fiction unless it was a knockoff of The Da Vinci Code. Maybe I should have called the book The Ripper Code!

I liked certain things about Riptide very much. It concerns a woman who discovers an old diary that apparently was written by Jack the Ripper; the discovery suggests a family connection with the Ripper that could have modern-day repercussions. Most of the book is set in the present day, but I included some scenes written from Red Jack's point of view in the 19th century. Those were the scenes I liked best, and those scenes were the main reason I wanted to get the book into print in some form, even if only in a limited way. As I said, I like historical fiction, so it was a treat to write from the point of view of a historical figure, even though, in this case, it's a historical figure we know almost nothing about–not even his name.

I have another unsold novel, and I'm in negotiations with a publisher now about bringing that one out. It's not one of the Big Six traditional publishers, though.

Do you have anything specific that you want to say to your readers?

Mainly: thank you! I always appreciate it when somebody buys–and reads–one of my books. I've enjoyed something of a second wind in my writing career thanks to e-books, and since I did very little promotion of my own, I have to assume that word-of-mouth among readers is mainly responsible for my sales, which are approaching half a million units after just a few months. You can't buy word-of-mouth, you can only hope it develops on its own, so I'd say a special thank-you to anyone who has recommended one of my books to a friend or mentioned it online, etc.

How do you feel about what WritingRaw.com and other literary sharing sites are attempting to do for new writers?

New writers need all the help they can get, now more than ever, since traditional mechanisms of promotion and publicity are breaking down. Not that the traditional houses ever did a whole lot for most of their writers in that regard, anyway. Their resources were mainly concentrated on two or three superstars, while the rest of their list was essentially cannon fodder. It wasn't a very efficient system. Digital distribution

works better.

But since many new writers will go the self-publishing route and will not have an agent or an editor to mentor them, they need to be part of a community that can provide support, encouragement, advice, and feedback.

* Bonus Question – Required reading:

Well, that's a tough one. I guess it's cheating to say the Complete Works of Shakespeare… If it's just one book, maybe War and Peace. You can't go wrong with that one, or with Anna Karenina.

From a practical standpoint, it might be better if everyone read a basic book about economics and money management. That kind of knowledge can help you through some rough times. The Millionaire Next Door is a good one.

One book I might suggest staying away from is Writing the Breakout Novel by Donald Maas. Many people swear by this book, but I found that it made me so self-conscious about my writing, it actually inhibited me as a writer and probably contributed to writer's block, which is still persisting to some extent. Sometimes it's better just to find your own way, without any self-help books to guide you.

I'm also skeptical of The Writer's Journey, by Christopher Vogler, which reduces narrative patterns to a standard mythic structure. Again, many people find this helpful, but I'm afraid it can lead to rather predictable and formulaic storytelling, as we see in many Hollywood blockbusters today. I guess I'm more in favor of making your own rules. And self-publishing—e-books and POD—will only encourage more writers to take that attitude.

WritingRaw.com would like to thank Michael Prescott
for taking the time out of his busy schedule for this interview.