



R.L. Stine on 20 Years of Goosebumps

With the beloved kids' horror series celebrating two decades of scary stories, Scholastic is rereleasing favorites like *The Haunted Mask*. The books' author, R.L. Stine, looks back at his creepy creations. —STEPHAN LEE



A lot of your Goosebumps fans from the '90s are in their 20s now. Do they still reach out? When I do signings now, I get 7- and 10-year-olds and I also get 20- and 25-year-olds. I'm on Twitter because it's a great way to stay in touch with my audience from the '90s, and all day long I get "You were my childhood," "I got into reading because of you." My wife has to insult me afterwards to keep me humble.



How did Goosebumps begin? Here's the embarrassing thing: I didn't want to do Goosebumps. [My young-adult series] Fear Street was doing great—

I was killing off a lot of teenagers, and it was really fun. My wife and her company are independent book producers, and they wanted me to try a scary series for 7- to 12-year-olds. I had my teenage audience and didn't want to go younger, but they kept after me. Finally I said if I could think of a good name, maybe we could try a couple. I saw an ad [in a magazine]: "It's Goosebumps Week on Channel 11."

And there was the word. **You got your start writing humor books. What's the link between humor and horror?** They're very closely

connected. When I go to a horror movie, they always make me laugh. When the shark comes up and chews up the girl, I'm the one laughing. Maybe that's just me! [Laughs] Especially with the Goosebumps books, there's a cliff-hanger at the end of every chapter, some kind of shock. I always saw that as the punchline.

Which do you think is the funniest Goosebumps?

The Cuckoo Clock of Doom always comes to mind. The idea that he's getting younger and younger until he turns into a baby and disappears—where did that idea come from?

Which is the scariest?

The Scarecrow Walks at Midnight. It takes place in a cornfield—all this

scratching around on the straw and these scarecrows roaming around. I don't know, farms are scary to me. I'm a New Yorker.

And the best? I think *The Haunted Mask*. It's got heart, and it has an image you can't get out of your mind—this mask sticking to a girl's face. Plus, it was the first episode of the Fox TV series.

Is there a formula for Goosebumps?

Everyone always asks that. I would love to have found it. But the books are always about ordinary kids, a girl and a boy, not especially talented or brilliant, and they have to use their wits and imagination to solve the problem they're facing. And the parents are always useless in my books. [Laughs]

After 20 years, what do you hope readers get from Goosebumps?

I try not to put any messages in my books. Really, I just want kids to say, "Gee, I can turn to a book just for entertainment!" The rule for children's books has always been that characters had to learn or grow in every book. I tried to break that rule. The kids [in my books] never learn. They just run away. ■