



Books that Go Bump in the Night

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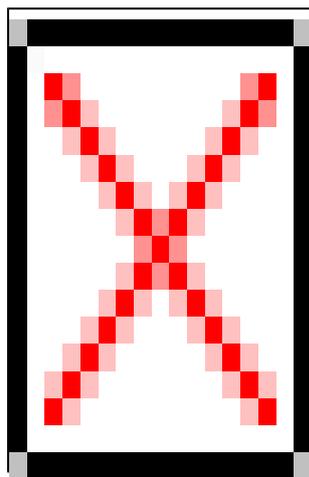
Imogen Russell Williams on the new wave of teen horror

Point Horror dominated the bestseller lists in the early nineties, sending thrills down the spine of a generation of readers. **Imogen Russell Williams**, former **Point Horror** devotee, appraises the new wave of horror stalking the bookshelves.

The Babysitter, The Perfume, The Girlfriend; most **Point Horror** titles of the early nineties sounded thoroughly unwholesome, and along with red-dripping fingernails on the covers, and portentous taglines, there was a general sense that within their pages, everything that could was about to go seriously awry. Like most of my contemporaries though, I was queasily addicted to these stories ? usually involving teen crushes, doomed dates or previous misbehaviour coming home to roost, with horrific consequences ? when I was about nine or ten.

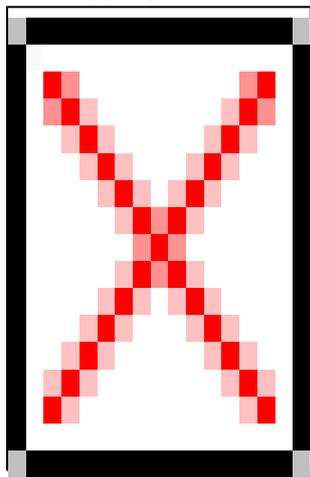
Teen horror was then considered a debased, junk-food reading genre. English teachers? lips curled in disapproval as we huddled round our Points; and in retrospect, I can see why. The books? interchangeable, often cataclysmically stupid female characters, formulaic plots and repetitive scare-devices don?t usually stand up to close scrutiny (although they remained required reading for us until we graduated to the stronger meat of Stephen King and George Herbert).

Today, though, there?s a wealth of better horror options available for young teens ? well written, nuanced, and drawing on deeper adolescent preoccupations to give them more satisfying heft and subtlety than their fore-runners.



The king of this resurgence is James Dawson, himself a **Point Horror** fan who?s drawn on years of teaching experience to create wholly believable teen voices in titles from **Hollow Pike** to **Say Her Name**. His latest, **Under My Skin**, is the story of Sally, a good girl who breaks out; when Sally gets an outrageous tattoo of an American pin-up girl, it begins, terrifyingly, to talk to her, pushing her to act on her darkest impulses. 2013?s **Cruel Summer** features a cast of student friends, reunited for a group holiday a year after one of their number, Janey, committed suicide. But when a gatecrasher turns up, insisting that Janey was murdered, and then winds up floating face-down in the pool herself, things take an increasingly sinister turn ? Careful character development, biting humour, diverse casts, and a mastery of scary suspense and misdirection make Dawson?s new brand of horror look like Kobe beef next to battery chicken.

Also tapping into this trend is the [Red Eye](#) [3] series from Stripes Publishing, a group of YA horror stand-alones



featuring both new and established authors. For me, Alex Bell's [Frozen Charlotte](#) [4] is the pick of the crop: when recently bereaved Sophie is sent to stay with family in an old Scottish girls' school, she finds a strange, alarming set-up awaiting her. One of her cousins, little Lillias, is pathologically terrified of bones; and scarred, brooding Cameron barely speaks. Piper is over-friendly and there seems to be another girl, who shouldn't be there at all. Throughout the book, the superlatively creepy Frozen Charlotte figures are used to great effect, guaranteed to terrify anyone who (like me) suffers from pediophobia (fear of dolls).

Another **Red Eye**, Lou Morgan's **Sleepless**, follows a cast of kids at a pressurised, prestigious school, who knock back a mysterious pill to help them focus on their studies and find that the side effects are more than they bargained for. And there's a chilling Stepford resonance to Simon Cheshire's **Flesh and Blood**, in which the new boy in town discovers the stuff of nightmares behind his new home's sleek, respectable façade.

Renowned film-maker Guillermo del Toro has also recently collaborated with author Daniel Kraus on a first YA novel, **Trollhunters**, coming out in July – a darkly comic fantasy, with definite elements of the horrific. Jim Sturges's uncle was abducted when his dad was a small boy. Now Jim lives behind a battery of locks, and his dad calls the police if he's home one minute after dark. But it's starting to look as though Jim's dad had a point – there's something out there that likes nothing better than to eat human meat.

I might still get a nostalgic thrill from the covers of old Points (and feel a sneaking urge to reread them), but I'm jealous of the superior fare on offer to today's teens. Rather than throwaway, schlocky terror, this is the sort of stuff that keeps the reader up all night and resonates intriguingly long after it's been finished.

Imogen Russell Williams is a journalist and editorial consultant specialising in children's literature and YA. She writes a trend-spotting biog for the **Guardian Online**, and seasonal round-ups for **The Metro**.

Books mentioned:

Hollow Pike, James Dawson, Orion Children's Books, 978-1-78062-128-9, £6.99

Say Her Name, James Dawson, Hot Key Books, 978-1-47140-244-9, £5.99

Under My Skin, James Dawson, Hot Key Books, 978-1-47140-296-8, £6.99

Cruel Summer, James Dawson, Orion Children's Books, 978-1-78062-175-3, £7.99

Frozen Charlotte (Red Eye), Alex Bell, Stripes Publishing, 978-1-84715-453-8, £6.99

Sleepless (Red Eye), Lou Morgan, Stripes Publishing, 978-1-84715-455-2, £6.99

Flesh and Blood (Red Eye)

, Simon Cheshire, Stripes Publishing, 978-1-84715-456-9, £6.99

Trollhunters, Guillermo del Toro and Daniel Kraus, Hot Key Books, 978-1-47140-519-8, £12.99

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