



## Life-changing Literature

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I'VE ALWAYS LOVED monsters and ghosts and everything scary.

For me, that love is not a choice, but a natural, instinctive attraction. Between the ages of five and nine I lived in Hong Kong, and I vividly remember regular visits to a little supermarket called Dairy Lane with my mum. The reason I remember these visits is because Dairy Lane sold a magazine called *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, each issue of which would feature a different movie monster on the cover — Frankenstein, the Wolfman, the Creature from the Black Lagoon. The paintings, which were usually the work of celebrated artist Basil Gogos, were vivid, colourful and stunningly irresistible. The magazine itself was full of thrillingly lurid stills from horror movies — nothing too extreme, but at the time they seemed like tantalising images from some dark, forbidden realm. My mum never bought the magazine for me – I don't think she even liked me looking at it in case it gave me nightmares – so I had to content myself with a surreptitious flick-through while her back was turned.

When we returned to England in 1972 my voracious hunger for all things spooky led to me borrowing and devouring dozens of ghost and horror story anthologies from the local library. I was still too young to watch horror movies, but every Saturday evening I was allowed to watch *Doctor Who*, which had traumatised me – in what I still maintain was a good and healthy way – since the age of four.

Back in Hong Kong, aged seven, I'd seen a *Doctor Who* story featuring



plastic shop mannequins which came to life. That story scared me like no other — the blank, shiny pink faces of the creatures as they casually killed their victims was the most profoundly terrifying thing I had ever seen. Four years later, on Saturday January 11th 1975, clutching my weekly pocket money and eager to buy a new paperback, I accompanied my dad on a shopping trip. Calling in at the local post office, I saw one of those wonderful revolving book racks you don't tend to see anymore. Perusing the rack, a couple of books grabbed my attention — and at that moment, although I didn't know it then, my life changed. One of the books was called *Doctor Who and the Auton Invasion* and the other *Doctor Who and the Day of the Daleks*.

I still remember the thrill of excitement that went through me. Here was my favourite TV programme in book form! It was like a dream come true. I wanted both books, but opted for the non-Dalek one because it had a green, multi-tentacled creature on the cover. I didn't read the back-cover blurb until I was in the car on my way home, whereupon I was doubly thrilled to discover that this was the very story that had terrified me as a seven-year-old — the one with the living plastic mannequins!

I read *Doctor Who and the Auton Invasion* two or three times that week, and the next Saturday I went back to the post office and bought the Dalek book. Over the next few years I read and devoured dozens of *Doctor Who* books. They fed my imagination, and encouraged me to write my own stories of monsters, ghosts, aliens and spaceships.

And I'm still doing it today. In 1997, with several novels under my belt, I even contributed my own *Doctor Who* book to the range, and over the next few years I followed that one up with three more. I'd always loved reading and writing stories, but finding *Doctor Who and the Auton Invasion* in that little post office changed a childish pleasure into a life-long vocation.