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EXCERPTS OF TIM POWERS' INTERVIEW

We offer a tribute in this special L.A.con IV edition of our newsletter to Award-winning Science Fiction and dark Fantasy author Tim Powers. The following are excerpts of an interview held at the Other*Worlds*Café on June 16, 2000, where **Mr. Powers** appeared as **TTPMuscoy**. The full log of this interview can be found at www.other-worlds-cafe.com/chats/archives.php. Tim Powers' next book is **THREE DAYS TO NEVER**, to be published by William Morrow in August 2006. Be sure to get it!



HOST EBK Chip: Folks, we're pleased to welcome Tim Powers as our guest tonight. Tim Powers is the author of numerous works of dark fantasy and SF, including *THE ANUBIS GATES*, *ON STRANGER TIDES*, *THE STRESS OF HER REGARD*, *LAST CALL*, and *EXPIRATION DATE*. He has been nominated for the Nebula and received the Apollo Prix for the World Fantasy Award, and the Philip K. Dick Memorial Award.

HOST EBK Chip: Folks, you were IM'd as you entered with the rules for Protocol. Feel free to ? or ! at will.

El Dorobo: What was your fav work

TTPMuscoy: El, I think *LAST CALL* is my favorite. Either that, or this new one due in January, which is called *DECLARE*. It's about spies and genies. With every one, I think “THIS is the one that'll make me rich!”

Seraph23: Oh excellent.... First a comment...Tim, you're brilliant. Now, a question... if I may? In “Expiration Date” there's a scene regarding a former tenant of Sol and Johanna. They're remarking on how he always over acted to situations and they make fun of him with the remark “I heard a noise shovelled dirt into your mailbox..”

TTPMuscoy: Seraph, yes, I recall!

Seraph23: Tim, if you recall that....Okay... the question is: Was that based on a real occurrence, or are you a true genius and made up one of the funniest scenes in a book ever?

TTPMuscoy: Seraph, I'm not a true genius. That was a real neighbor of ours!

Seraph23: Good lord

TTPMuscoy: There's a lot of autobiography in these things!

T83BIRD: Tim, your fiction has been called a bit *dark.* Care to comment?

TTPMuscoy: T8, that always puzzles me! I think my books are real funny! And they generally have happy endings.

I mean, the bad guys get punched in the nose, and the good people wind up getting married or something!

HOST EBK Chip: I do want to comment that I appreciate you actually wrapping up things at the end. I hate books that leave you hangin'. :)

Athamor IX: Do you have any story ideas involving William Blake?

TTPMuscoy: Athamor, funny you should ask! The one I'm working on now involves him! Or at least his weirder poetry.

Athamor IX: Excellent.

Seraph23: Tim, you incorporate so many real people/places/companies in your work do you get permission or do you simply tempt fate?

TTPMuscoy: Well -- I guess I tempt fate!

Athamor IX: "The Twelve Hours of the Night" from *Anubis Gates*, was that by you or James Blaylock? And where might one read more of your poetry?

TTPMuscoy: We both wrote that! Over a lot of beers at a Long Beach bar. Actually, Subterranean Press wants to publish a bunch of *Ashbless!* It seems over-ambitious. A lot of it is pretty incoherent.

Shadowjakk: You've worked your way up the timeline, from the 18th, 19th, and mid-20th centuries until you stand in contemporary California in your most recent work. You're now on the threshold of the future. Is there any desire, on your part, to revisit mainstream science fiction? (such as *Deviant's palace* and *Forsake the Sky*)

TTPMuscoy: Well, not right away! My newest one is retro, takes place in 1963! I would like to write a real future thing, though. Like orbiting colonies, stuff like that.

Seraph23: (Since Shadow unknowingly stole my *Deviant* question) How do you prepare, research-wise for writing? Or is it all Athena from the head of Zeus stuff?

TTPMuscoy: Seraph, I spend about a year - or more! - just doing research. I don't even know what my plot or characters are going to be, before I read about a hundred books! And then

I outline the daylights out of a story before I start. Big calendars! And then I see a direction, and start to read up on that - with random stuff too, still. Hugely wasteful process!

Seraph23: Re: "hugely wasteful" - I respectfully disagree, my wife and I both feel "full" after reading your work...always comment "My god, what breadth!"

OWC Helio: Do you use a blend of SF/horror/fantasy?

TTPMuscoy: Yes - I try to write "hard fantasy" - not disregard any physics. Like, I'd never have an invisible man who could see by visible light, cause he wouldn't stop any. And I'm real careful about things like levitation. I mean, Einstein would be sceptical!

Shadowjakk: A "soft" fantasist would have used Aleister Crowley instead of Edison. :)

TTPMuscoy: I am real grateful for Asimov's non-fiction!

TTPMuscoy: Shadow, right, good point!

T83BIRD: Have you considered doing TV or film scripts?

TTPMuscoy: No - I'm convinced they're separate skills, and the people who write them grew up wanting to write 'em, as I grew up wanting to write books. I don't think they would carry across!

Shadowjakk: Who was the Lamia in your life? I mean, generally, we all have one, but you portrayed her particularly vividly. :)

TTPMuscoy: Gee - I really think it would be like Cabell's "Ettarre," a kind of archetype, rather than any literal person. An aggregate, maybe!

T83BIRD: How do you and Blaylock go about collaborating?

TTPMuscoy: I write a few pages, then he rips 'em up and re-writes 'em, then I do the same to his result. Luckily we don't fight!

Shadowjakk: I would guess it's a mystical rite involving alcohol and imaginary Maenads. Collaboration, that is. :)

TTPMuscoy: Lots of mystical aspects to alcohol.

HOST EBK Chip: Yeah, and I have to say...DRAWING OF THE DARK is what got me hooked on beer.

HOST EBK Chip: One thing I've noticed about most of your supernatural creatures...they all seem to have "scientific" explanations (in the books) if you squint a little...

Shadowjakk: Have you mined the Victorians and Romantics for all they're worth, Tim?

HOST EBK Chip: Puts me in mind a bit of what Heinlein was doing in GLORY ROAD..."explaining" magic with science. Is that intentional?

TTPMuscoy: Chip, true. I do want it to sound scientifically plausible, as much as possible.

TTPMuscoy: Shadow, yes, I love the romantics. Again, if I had a time machine ...

TTPMuscoy: Chip, now that you mention it, I bet I DID get it from Glory Road, largely!

T83BIRD: Tim, Fritz Leiber's Time Wars put me in mind of quantum mechanics. What do you think?

HOST EBK Chip: That may be why your works are so easy for hard-core SF fans to swallow; we don't have to make too many leaps of faith. :)

TTPMuscoy: T, I do find Quantum Mechanics just fascinating. And I try to use it, in idiotically macro ways!

Seraph23: Tim..... example?

TTPMuscoy: Like, with a penny instead of an electron.

Way to big, but neat effects. You know, "not the same penny, didn't go from here to there," etc.

TTPMuscoy: Chip, true. I do want it to sound scientifically plausible, as much as possible.

Seraph23: Tim a question about editingWhen do you let folks read your work?

TTPMuscoy: I have my wife read it, and a couple of friends. It does seem like an imposition. But, it's a huge help to have a literate person read it! Lots of stuff seems okay to me, and my wife will say, "I thought they were still in the car."

HOST EBK Chip: One of the things that impresses me most about your writing is that you feed what seems like an infinite number of threads into a central theme. How do you manage to keep them all straight?

TTPMuscoy: Chip, I make graphs and calendars, and lots and lots of notes; and mainly I take two years to get it squared away!

Shadowjakk: Do you find your novels getting longer? Is that due to the complexity of theme, editorial license, or the particular requirements of your last several works?

TTPMuscoy: I think complexity of the stories, lately! The editors do hate it.

Shadowjakk: Please answer in 1000 pages or less. :)

TTPMuscoy: "Can't you lose 20,000 words somewhere?"

Shadowjakk: "Lose"? Is that the word? :)

TTPMuscoy: Editors like books about 120,000 words. You have to argue to get 'em longer. Shadow, they use a ruder verb.

Shadowjakk: I think that longer novels are becoming the norm. Maybe there will be less resistance.

T83BIRD: Mark Twain once said that a tale must be allowed to tell itself out.

Shadowjakk: I tried. But I only have 3 billion neurons, Tim. But...I read CRYPTOMICON recently, and really can't see Stephenson losing 20,000 words...or you losing them from EARTHQUAKE WEATHER.

HOST EBK Chip: Tim, you write about some fairly creepy creatures. When you're in the middle of writing that kind of book, do you eye dark corners nervously? :)

TTPMuscoy: Chip, true!

OWC Helio: That's scary, Tim. Do you write late at nights?

TTPMuscoy: Helio, yes, mostly! And sometimes I do think, "Oh my God, you've stumbled onto something real!"

TTPMuscoy: Kids, I should probably sign off. Can one drop in here anytime?

HOST EBK Chip: Please do, Tim! We'd love to have you. :)

Seraph23: Tim, been a real pleasure

OWC Helio: Nite, Tim, it was fabulous!

HOST EBK Chip: Thank you!!!

Shadowjakk: Thanks a lot for talking with us, Tim!

TTPMuscoy: See you all later!

OnlineHost: TTPMuscoy has left the room.

