

Books – Spooky Ambiguous – born in Edinburgh

Spooky Edinburgh inspires Gothic story collection just perfect for Halloween reading.

Ghosts and ghouls are no stranger to the streets of Edinburgh on a moonlit night, and now a werewolf stalks the streets too – in new author Amaris Chase’s debut short story.

“It all happened by chance. I sent a sample of my work to a publisher and I was so happy when they wrote back to say that they loved it – I certainly wasn’t expecting to be told I’d inspired a whole collection. My editor at Crumps Barn Studio was so delighted with my submissions that she immediately sent out a call to other authors for a new anthology of Gothic tales.”

The result is *Spooky Ambiguous*, a new collection of ghost stories and poetry, fangs and fairy tales.

Amaris continued: “I supplied some of the fangs ... And a ghost story and a fairy tale poem written specifically for the anthology about a dark and dangerous meeting on Mahoun Tor.

(*Mahoun* is a medieval term for devil – found in 13th century Scottish texts – and perfectly fits a tale of coffin paths and haunted bothies.)

“I grew up in London, but Edinburgh is my home. Sometimes I take a random bus to its final destination just to see the scenery. I’ve taken lots of day trips to the Highlands and one of my favourite areas is Glencoe. It feels like it should be haunted with the imposing mountains and streams and waterfalls

and the whistling of the wind.”

But it was night-time walks around the gothic streets of her home city which inspired her first story – the piece which first set her on this path and which coincidentally opens the entire collection.

The author continued: “I was working away on a big engineering project and feeling really homesick. I started writing a short spooky story for my friends for Halloween, my favourite time of year – and so of course my first story is seeped in the atmosphere and mystery of Edinburgh at night.

“It’s a beautiful book, and it has been an incredible way to begin my career in print.”

[Spooky Ambiguous](#) is the collaborative effort of 15 authors and an illustrator, including three contributions by Amaris Chase.

Spooky Ambiguous is out now in paperback and ebook priced £8.99. www.crumpsbarnstudio.co.uk

The background is a dark, textured blue-grey color. In the upper right quadrant, there is a bright red circle representing a sun or moon, with a black silhouette of a bird flying across it. Another white silhouette of a bird is visible in the upper left, and a third is in the middle right. The overall mood is mysterious and atmospheric.

PENNY AYERS

MICHAEL BARTLETT

PATRICK BOOTH

AMARIS CHASE

HOLLY CRAWFORD

IVOR DANIEL

SPOOKY AMBIGUOUS

Ghost stories and poetry, fangs and fairy tales

AMANDA JANE DAVIES

DAPHNE DENLEY

J. J. DROVER

HARRIET HITCHEN

REBECCA MCDOWALL

JANE PHILLIPS

ANGELA REDDAWAY

JOE ROBSON

MARGARET ROYALL

Amaris Chase is a new name on the Edinburgh literary scene. Here is a little more about her.

I grew up in London and I was definitely more inclined towards the arts at school, but then I opted to pursue engineering, and currently work in the railway industry.

I had been to Edinburgh for a couple of short breaks and loved the history and architecture – it was my dream to live here. Amazingly, my employer was really supportive and I was able to finally take the plunge and move here in 2009. This city resonates with my artistic side. There is so much to do culturally, and so multicultural too. I feel I can be myself here and am not trying to fit into any mould.

We have countryside and beaches at our doorstep, and the history is fascinating. I feel part of a community as I know the local shop owners and frequent local cafes to work from. Like many people, I lost that connection in the pandemic. But there is a creative energy in the city that brings the best out of me.

I have of course been on all the ghost tours which are centred around the city centre! This and some of what I have learned about the history of Edinburgh is an important influence now that I am a writer.

How did the writing career begin?

I began writing seriously after a long project which involved working away in Denmark. I desperately missed Edinburgh and Scotland, and sometimes on my weekends at home I would take a random bus to its final destination just to see the Scottish scenery and see the Edinburgh architecture. Edinburgh city reminds me of Gotham city, it just feels gothic and the kind

of place ghosts would dwell. So quite genuinely, Edinburgh lies at the heart of everything for me.

Once I returned home permanently, I started writing. I enjoyed going for walks in the evening when there were less people about and this city offers some wonderful views of the moon. I have always been a night person and work at my best at 2am.

It was these night-time walks, which can be eerie in some parts of the city, which inspired *Blood Moon* – the first story I wrote, which also happens to open the book *Spooky Ambiguous*.

In February this year, I wrote to Crumps Barn Studio asking if they would consider publishing my work and as I didn't have much confidence, I said in my initial email that I would be happy for one of my pieces to be published in an anthology. Through our exchange of emails following that, I was really excited when they took up the gauntlet to produce an anthology.

What inspired you to write ghost stories and gothic tales?

When I was very young, I was banned from watching Grange Hill in case I picked up bad habits, but I was allowed to watch Hammer House of Horror dramas along with responsible adults. Go figure. And that's when I fell in love with vampires and ghosts! Fast forward 40 years and I started writing a short spooky story for my friends for Halloween, my favourite time of year. 'Blood Moon' was the first story that I wrote for sending out at Halloween. It was inspired by reading about the different full moon names and the superstitions around them. 'The Flood' was written a few years later also for Halloween.

Only 'Corpse Light' was written specifically for the anthology. I had been planning to write ghost stories about

coffin paths and haunted bothies, and when the call for submissions said poetry would be accepted, I challenged myself to write a poem with these themes.

Who is your target audience?

I prefer stories that rely on a lingering sense of creepiness rather than vivid descriptions of gore. So these are for people of all ages who like to be spooked but don't need graphic details of violence.

Mahoun is a Scottish term for devil. I did lots of day trips to the Highlands when I moved to Scotland and one of my favourite areas was Glencoe, it felt like it should be haunted with the imposing mountains and streams and waterfalls and the whistling of the wind. It felt like a very forbidding place and I couldn't imagine all those Highlanders living there. It is memories of Glencoe that I had in mind when I wrote Corpse Light.

What do you think about seeing your work along side others?

I loved the whole collection. I thought it was very well curated. There's a great variety of supernatural genres and I have learned a lot from the other authors, even if we have never communicated. On a practical level, I think anthologies are better for unknown authors as it gives them the opportunity to be published without the burden of producing a whole book on their own and it would help them publish more of their own works as they are already in print. It is also better for the readers as they can sample works from unknown authors and they are more likely to find stories they enjoy from a selection of authors rather than just one author who they have not heard of before.

Who or what are your sources of inspiration as a writer?

I have watched horror movies and read horror novels from a very young age, so have been influenced by many authors and films, with a special liking of gothic tales (Oliver Onions, Elizabeth Gaskell, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Mrs. JH Riddell, Amelia B Edwards, Charles Dickens, Edith Nesbit, EF Benson).

With contemporary authors I really enjoyed Kate Mosse's collection of ghost stories (Mistletoe Bride & Other Haunting Tales) and Sophie Hannah's short collection of supernatural tales 'The Visitor's Book'.

The creative process is a free form and the polar opposite to my day job as an engineer where I follow rules and processes. Some of my stories are based on things I learned on my travels, my personal experiences and also the experiences that other people have told me about.

Do you have any more books planned?

Whilst I have enjoyed participating in the anthology, I am working towards putting together a collection of my own stories.



