

Collision Course Interview

Mike Philbin and Nickolaus Pacione

PACIONE'S NOTE: I reformatted this one since Skullring.org took this down off the site and if you want this as a free read you can grab it off <http://npacione.wordpress.com> and since they do host pdf files I am going to upload it there. This is the interview that the masses don't want you to see unless they want you to read about every fail that I have.

This interview is one of the more controversial interviews that was done of myself and this is what happens when you get two editors that have anthologies out get together and have a conversation about the industry, editing anthologies and just being who we are in general. Everyone was foaming at the mouth when this interview was done. Those of you who don't want this interview seen – screw you I am posting it here. As Mike said on one message board, "This is the last taboo."

Harsh language from both authors towards the end so read at your own risk. Don't say I warned you. I did an interview with Mike Philbin preparing for this one. This was my fourth sit down interview in three years.

SKULLRING: Can you guys introduce yourselves to our readers?



PACIONE: Okay I will go first. The name is Nickolaus Albert Pacione (this is my name on the birth papers.) and I write predominately old school horror fiction, but sometimes pen non-fiction and Sci-Fi. I will publish horror and science fiction. Mike and I were talking about who would go first here with this one, since we're totally different authors and different styles of fiction. Philbin encouraged me to write a lot outside of the horror genre too.

I don't use a pen name when I write fiction, what you see is exactly what you get. What I will say online is exactly what I will say in person. When I am not writing horror, I will write science fiction or a non-fiction story. I have a younger sister who is 19 years younger than I am. I graduated from Glenbard East High School in 1994. One of my good friends is a comic book artist. I work closely with both the underground horror genre and the faith community.

I've been a writer since 1990, and a photographer since 1993. I am a sometimes publisher and editor who runs an imprint called Lake Fossil Press and helm the anthologies series Tabloid Purposes, and the natural disaster anthology, Quakes and Storms, is my brainchild. (That imprint started in August 2004, to run Collectives and Tabloid Purposes.)

My work isn't just limited to horror but I will always go back to writing the genre I love. I am born on August 3, 1976, and share a birthday with Metallica's James Hetfield. I grew up listening to heavy metal music, and thrash metal is the thing that got me reading horror – H.P. Lovecraft is who I am greatly influenced by as a writer. I pen edgy fiction which echoes a lot of the works of writers who are long before my time yet I have my own voice behind it. I am the editor of a magazine relative in size to Mike's Chimeraworld anthologies.

I am a sometimes interviewer – my first interview credit was Brigit Knox, editor of now defunct House of Pain E-zine. I sat in towards the end as the co-editor.

PHILBIN: I am several names – Cabbage Patch Doll, Hertzian Chimera, Jane Louxis, Michael

Paul Peter or Mike Philbin. But what's in a name, right? Well a writing 'name' is also a writing 'persona'.

In both content and theme, Pacione and I are polar opposites but Pacione isn't (as some have suggested) another of my writing personas, that would be too clever even for me.

I started writing to get my psycho-sexual paintings on the covers of books. My first book was released by Creation Press of London back in 1989 and I've continued writing and being published, in fits and starts, ever since. I've written ten or so 40,000 word novels, two thirds of which have been professionally published. I don't read horror, in fact I try to read as much as possible outside the genre. I like to (try to) bring something new and subversive to what I have considered for a long time to be a staunchly uncreative genre. The term 'genrelectic' came from my attempt to strip genre from my work and write purely from the heart (note: not the soul).



I started Chimericana Books in 2003 after the collapse of Cyber Pulp Press, the then publisher of the Chimeraworld anthology (which I edit) now in its fifth year.

I hate the mainstream but most of all I hate the reader. My books are an attempt to weed the chaff from the wheat.

SKULLRING: What is perhaps your most successful work commercially?

PACIONE: The most circulated stories I wrote are *House of Spiders*, *Lake Fossil*, *Spectral Exile*, *HOUSE OF SPIDERS 3* (co-written with Barbara Marjanovic.) We're far from being corporate horror writers. Mike described himself as being genrelectic, doing anthologies that mix a lot of genres in on story and invites other authors to step into this fucked up world he envisions. Being a small press writer it is hard to really measure that aspect yet because my career as a published writer in print is just starting. I've been published online since I was twenty. I'm pulling thirty-one right now.

Success to me is actually having authors who are able to cite you as an influence, I am not a best selling author. I self-published most of my books because I wanted to feature my photography with the writing too. I will get e-mail from various Gothic personalities in Chicago offering to put me on the guest lists of their events. So right now I am getting noticed more locally but yet to be published locally by other small presses.

PHILBIN: 'commercially successful' doesn't make sense to the sort of writing I do. Commercially offensive? Subversively successful? Those would be more fitting seals of approval. Although, while we're talking about collaboration, my 2002 book *BoyFistGirlSuck* (co-written with female writer Alex Severin) was a Shocklines Distribution #1 bestseller.

SKULLRING: What about your personal best?

PACIONE: Shit - a few. Personal best for me *BLOOD CONTENDER* which is going to be coming out on *SINISTER TALES*. *House of Spiders 3* was my biggest, and not only that it became the first novella sale for both Marjanovic and I to Donna Burgess' *Naked Snake Press*. The other one has to be *The Pattern of Diagnosis* which one of the editors from *ATOMIC JACK MAGAZINE* liked. That editor is Adicus Garton.

He read a story I wrote too called PASSENGER which told me when he rejected it and it read like a work of non-fiction in a Goth magazine. I laughed because I was fresh off one of my non-fiction writing binges at the time. He thought the ending was the strongest I've written and disturbed him a bit that I did a suspending of belief.

What I saw that really is circulated the most in print though is "Ghosts In The Tornado" which was published last year in *Insomnia Magazine* July/August 2006 edition. I also saw publication twice with *Tales of the Talisman*. I think when I saw my work in *Tales of the Talisman* with an artist who could match the story head on was what got me going "Oh my god, Oh my god!"

Getting noticed by Jyrki 69 of *The 69 Eyes* when I was at their show in Chicago, one of my then room mates gave him a copy of my first short story collection. I read his comic book that they brought home from the show he was at in Wisconsin earlier this year, So we were comparing notes. One of the most surreal experiences that had to be. When I introduced myself to him, "oh by the way. I am the author of the book that she gave you."

PHILBIN: Personal best? The book that kills the reader. I've predicted the end of the horror industry in 2010. I'm no Nostrodamus but I am working on a cum-smear novel called *Bukkakeworld*, and I'll blame it all on the horror genre for being so booring.

SKULLRING: Where do you guys live? How much does your sense of "place" play into the development of your fiction?

PACIONE: I've lived in Illinois all my life, but I lived in Iowa a year and a half. Then spent time in the area where Mike's current collaborator lives. I grew up in the Chicago area so a lot of the Chicago area will be a setting for my works, I've toyed with Joliet as a setting too for my work. But my trademark has to be I don't use erotic content and write using real haunted places as the settings.

My horror fiction uses Chicago as a setting for most of the time, but the science fiction I write will use the entire 10 county area as a setting too. *House of Spiders 3* was set in DuPage County, Illinois, the previous installment was set in Grundy County, Illinois, and DeKalb, Illinois.

PHILBIN: since I was a young 'un, I've lived all over England; north, south, east and west. I've been in Oxford for six years now and I've written plenty of stories that have been inspired by this town. Most of them unpublishable in the conventional horror markets because of their subversive twist and slide off-genre into something like Hell. It's like with my 2000 collection *Animal Instincts* (which was published by Double Dragon Press in fully-illustrated oversized format, expertly illustrated by South African artist Mitch Phillips), I'll have to find a non-horror publisher soon to put all these nasty little stories out as one collection.

SKULLRING:A lot of horror readers and writers visit skullring.org, and I always ask them - what is the allure of the genre? What is it that got you into it, and why do you continue to work in it?

PACIONE: Horror for me was drawn to the realistic type - what can happen, writing supernatural horror is my specialization. True ghost stories I've been writing a lot these days, then something I will write too are real-life horror stories.

PHILBIN: I used to be a big fan of the Hammer House of Horror films – from being a kid, I'd watch these nasty little blood-spattered B-movies every week on TV. The older I got, the more I could turn the sound up, it was always the sound of these films that was the most horrific aspect.

SKULLRING: What really says "horror" for you?

PACIONE: Surviving a car accident, surviving a stabbing, being accused of child abuse just because I dress in black and write dark fiction. Reality is what says horror, real life. I am writing a non-fiction book about my high school years with myself of now as the observer. Seeing how far some would go to ruin someone's name and reputation. I was hit by a car on December 4, 1996. Being homeless for three months in a state and city you know nothing about, and hardly anyone who were able to help you. This was during August to November of 1998 living in Mason City, Iowa.

PHILBIN: Horror, for me, has to be offensive. Not a cute little skulls'n'monsters funfair ride with bells and whistles and some goofy college kid being paid \$3.45 an hour to tickle your face as you ride by. Horror, for me, has to grab the reader and take him to a place he doesn't want to visit, ever again. In an ideal world, the reader will already have heard about your book and will be filled with such dread, he'll never even dare to read it. He'll be too scared. He'll resort to his safe little horror goofiness. Others will seek out the genrelectic material I write.

SKULLRING: What's the most personally terrifying thing you can think of?

PACIONE: See above answer to that one. Being sick for three weeks with bronchitis and the flu, and living with a room mate who made off with my money just because she didn't have a job then not keeping her promise to make sure I got to the doctor. Being diagnosed with Bipolar Type II. So I draw a lot from my illness for the horrors I write, and coming from a Pentecostal upbringing. The way that the church saw people with a mental illness is frightening. As Mike wrote as a subtitle for Chimeraworld #5, "You're All On Your Own Fuckers!"

I've seen people slain in the spirit and speak in tongues. Not exactly scary but something that got me thinking, "damn!"

PHILBIN: I've not served in Vietnam. I've not witnessed my parents killed at Daccau or Buchenwald. I've not survived the ethnic cleansing of Yugoslavia. I've never been in an earthquake, towering inferno or tsunami. In fact, I need to get out more.

SKULLRING: I understand that you guys are collaborating on some work together?

PACIONE: We don't collaborate. But I interviewed Philbin for another magazine, in preparation for this interview. Our styles are so damn different that it is oil and water – I respect what he does with the surrealistic aspect. I wouldn't personally write that style he writes because of my upbringing, I had a hell of a time doing a story for Chimeraworld. I didn't make the cut with the story but I sent it to AtomicJack – they gave me a funny rejection that I enjoyed to this day. Saying I wasn't weird enough.

The closest thing to collaborating is swapping authors on our anthologies. The thing that Mike and I have in common is we appeared on the House of Pain E-zine. We tried to collaborate but I could never keep up with his interval, I write longer paragraph blocks without batting an eye. I know authors who did and one author he wrote with was under my suggestion. But what Mike inspired me to do is play around with surrealism in other forms, I've been doing a lot of photography that used surrealism.

PHILBIN: Pacione and I did try a collaboration - it was an obvious progression, just like this interview, with supernatural forces pushing us together in the cramped confines of fate. I've done loads of collaborations, in fact Cyber Pulp Press published two collections of mine (collaborating on each story with eight male and eight female writers respectively - there were even some 'threesome' and 'group' stories) books called CHIM+HIM and CHIM+HER. The thing about collaboration is it's about two writers (or more) gelling. And that's not always an easy act to pull off. Several collaborative combinations I've tried haven't worked and each writer has held up their hands in surrender.

But when they work, boy do they work.

SKULLRING: How much of a history do you have doing this kind of thing?

PACIONE: Mike has a lot of experience working with other writers. I've toyed with the idea as a collaborator with Aaron G. Saunders - a story he wrote inspired off a true crime story I penned. I attempted to co-write *Bill of Health* with Philbin, but it was too different to work with each other. He's more surreal while I tend to take more after the early writers in the Gothic Horror genre.

He actually told me to loose the Poe which I thought was really hilarious. The story I wrote that I showed him was Halloween Girl. I collaborated with Marjanovic to expand a story that was a sequel to a story I wrote and a prequel on an anthology I appeared in.

The story was lost on my old computer. I wrote something later on that will echo the work of fiction except one difference - it was true.

PHILBIN: The whole horror genre hates writers who forget to toe the party line.

PACIONE: ::laughing:: Ain't that the muthafucking truth. It is always the prick in the mass market the fucks it up for everyone. Just because you refuse to bend over and take it from them or eat the peanuts from their ass.

Have you collaborated before with each other?

PACIONE: We haven't collaborated. The only thing we do is compare notes about authors both of us published. Sometimes he gets the writer first and I had no idea what they write like so I would e-mail him to see what kind of insight he can give me on a writer. Then I got a writer first with *Tabloid Purposes 2* then I sent him over to Philbin because I thought he would be a perfect fit for what he does.

PHILBIN: What Pacione said, technically speaking.

SKULLRING: What's the most difficult part of collaboration? What's the best part?

PACIONE: Collaborations are hard because trying to get the pacing right of the other writer. My collaborators and I write in 500-600 word bursts - I am writing a collaboration right now with a writer who appeared on the Read by Dawn anthology series. I first published him on my magazine too.

PHILBIN: There is no difficult part of collaboration. You do it. It works or it doesn't work. But the best part, the only part, is to do it. Writers should collaborate more. Apparently, Severin and I have just found a publisher for the totally reworked *BoyFistGirlSuck* - yeah, breaking news.

PACIONE: Part two of that answer coming from me - when an author can beef up the story and make it much more brutal than the original concept. When you come up with something so shocking your collaborator is winching in total disgust, you know when you're onto something.

SKULLRING: Off the topic of books, I wanted to know what you thought of the current wave of what's being called "torture porn." Is this a valid label?

PACIONE: I've seen two movies that were in this genre. My ex-room mate rented *Hostel* and *Feast*. Those two films were sick and reminded me of something that would fit of *The House of Pain E-Zine* like a glove. *Feast* was similar to this, *Hostel* was more accurate to this description and it was the only movie I've seen of this kind.

What do you think about these kinds of movies? I know that there has been a longstanding tradition of "extreme" horror in literature. Do you think that these two mediums have anything in common? Do they inspire each other?

PACIONE: Mike and I will have different answers on this one. I will say it does in some ways because the extreme horror genre as a genre is 100 years old. There will always be movies that will influence these kind of stories, and stories that are written that will. It's the youngest of a genre that's a few centuries old. The English counterpart of the genre is much older than ours.

The more extreme version of the genre is much younger than the written genre. Much of the credit to film version of the genre belongs to the Hammer Horror films, but I was a kid during the time when they put out *Dead Ringers* and some of Cronenberg's films.

PHILBIN: The only torture porn film worth watching (because of it's beautifully surreal foreplay) is David Cronenberg's stunning *VIDEODROME*. All that other Eli Roth / Tarantino bullshit can go hang by the throat. *Nekromantik* rocks though, heh heh.

PACIONE: Mike - I've seen *The Fly* and *Dead Ringers* by him, I agree [Cronenberg] he's a sick fuck. I will also have to add that David is good at the surreal stuff too. I liked the crime noir film *Se7en*. That still scares me about the idea that the serial killer forced a guy to fuck a girl with a knife.

SKULLRING: Writing is a very self-centered activity. How do you keep yourself inspired? What do you do to keep from being distracted? Are you a "people person" and do you miss

being social in order to get some writing done, or are you more of a loner?

PACIONE: I am a photographer too so I do photography to keep me inspired. What I see in a photograph can be an illustration for a nightmare or have a nightmare at the time of doing the photo - example here will be a short story I penned called *Among Shadows*. I am a recluse in nature, and it allows me to become more disturbed with it. As a writer I am a recluse, but when I am a photographer it allows me to go out and talk to people.

PHILBIN: I love people ... but I couldn't eat a whole one.

SKULLRING: Do you read outside of the genre? Can you recommend a few books to read? What are you reading right now? How varied are your tastes?

PACIONE: Outside of the genre. I've read *Twelve Days of Terror* by Dr. Richard Fernicola which was my source material for the closing story in *Tabloid Purposes One*. I read a lot of anthologies too, I am planning to read Isaac's *Storm*. My tastes in reading patterns range from mystery and true crime to science fiction.

PHILBIN: Anybody who hasn't read Japanese author Haruki Murakami needs their head seeing to. For those who like a different twist on science fiction, try Octavia E Butler's *XENOGENESIS* series. I'm gonna say David L Tamarin just one more time - maybe some day people will wake up to his genius.

SKULLRING: Where can I learn more about both of you?

PACIONE: We're both on AuthorsDen. Punch our names up and you will find us. But if you want more information about our respective projects check out our imprints on lulu.com.

PHILBIN: Wow, Author's Den, I haven't been on that site for years. They started out as a free service where writers could set up a page and upload some stories, sorta like free (and very limited) web space for creatives who wanna share their vision with readers. Then it went pay only (gold account and stuff) and I didn't bother subscribing. Then Author's Den offer me free trial periods, so I bite the hook again. Then they pester you with reminders like "Don't forget to Log Into Your Account" all the time. I think I spam foldered them in the end. You can learn more about me by typing "Mike Philbin" or "Hertzan Chimera" into Google.com - last time I tried this, thirty or forty pages of unique hits went by, a sure sign of the Apocalypse. Remember, horror is dead - long live horror.

SKULLRING: Do you have websites that we can check out?

PACIONE: Sure - <http://books.lulu.com/lakefossilpress>. And I will put the link to the fifth issue of the magazine. Since I gave you that as a .pdf, you can have an idea of the authors I published on the magazine - I was kind of rushed early on with issue five because of a family emergency. But some of my free work can be looked up on the site I just joined up which reminds me greatly of AuthorsDen when I first joined in 2002, <http://www.writerscafe.org/writers/nickolauspacione>.

That will give you information on the *Tabloid Purposes* series or the *Ethereal Gazette*.

Lake Fossil Press: Ground Zero is my official imprint site. You can grab House of Spiders 3 from <http://books.lulu.com/nakedsnakepress>. My blog is on [MySpace.com](http://www.myspace.com) - I had several blogs over the years and due to snarky dipshits I lost a lot of them because they got offended by my un-pc and rants that are not work safe.

PHILBIN: Try <http://www.mikephilbin.com> or <http://www.chimericanabooks.com> or you can read my blog, it's very interesting and not at all egotistical or dull or arbitrary <http://mikephilbin.blogspot.com> (comments always welcome).

SKULLRING: Final question: what kind of advice can you give other writers who are just starting out?

PACIONE: Don't limit yourself to one genre when you're writing. Read as much as you can and get to know a lot of the authors in the small press because you might never know you may end up in an anthology with them. Send off to as many anthologies as possible before you send to a magazine. Make them look up the anthology first then they will have a knowledge who you are. Be prepared to stir up a few hornet's nests.

Be careful of the writers who hate your guts - they are quick to start a feud if they find out you're on the roster with them then some crazy cuckold try to hold the publisher at gunpoint figuratively speaking. Saying to drop the author or else. If the publisher keeps you and drops that author, give her the lead slot on your anthology.

PHILBIN: Don't do it. Unless you want to sell your soul to the agents and the pr guys and the marketing people. Unless you want to "suck saten's cock" to get where you don't deserve to be stay away from the writing game