



Mike McCollum

Author Stephen King arrived in Santa Cruz on his Harley yesterday at the conclusion of a tour to promote his new novel.

Author says horror back in fashion

People getting 'worked up' about ghosts, vampires

By STEVE PALOPOLI
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Stephen King thinks horror is coming back into fashion. In books, on television and in theaters, people are getting worked up again about ghosts, monsters and vampires.

Especially vampires.

"Next thing you know, Tom Cruise will be playing one," said King, who stopped by Bookshop Santa Cruz for a press conference before addressing hundreds of fans at the Santa Cruz Civic.

King was in town promoting his new novel, "Insomnia," and making a final stop on his first book tour in 10 years. He covered the distance from his home in Bangor, Maine, to Santa Cruz in 20 days on his Harley-Davidson motorcycle, stopping

at 10 independent bookstores along the way.

If King's reception in Santa Cruz is any indication, the horrormeister's predictions about the genre are right on target.

King was mobbed by televi-

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sion cameras and microphones as he arrived for the press conference, and the crowd at the Civic treated him like nothing less than a rock star. Most of the audience rose to its feet when he took the podium — a few people even mobbed the stage — and went wild whenever he mentioned one of his book titles.

"Somebody in the back's gonna say 'Play Freebird!'" joked King, who actually does play in a rock band. All in all, King seemed genuinely amazed by his fans' enthusiasm.

In fact, his sincerity may have been the most disarming thing about him. Anyone who has read one of his introductions to his books knows he has a great sense of humor, but his charming New England accent and ability to launch into a spontaneous stand-up act seemed straightforward, while the public image he often tries to generate of an average, even dopey, "working man's man" usually seems like a put-on.

After all, he is raking in millions, even if he does think AC/DC is the world's greatest band.

King kept everyone laughing at the press conference, but stayed pretty low-key. It was at his Civic appearance, where he also read from "Insomnia," that he really let loose. He was not afraid to be crass, and occasion-

ally went for what he calls in "Danse Macabre" "the gross-out factor."

As he related the gory particulars of his mother's experience biting into a moth, he joked, "I don't want to go into detail, but I have to."

One subject about which King remained mostly serious was the hard times of independent booksellers across the country. Though he admits that throughout the '80s his books were a financial boon to discount chain stores and price clubs which squeezed out many small bookstores, he says he wants to turn that around by encouraging fans to buy his books at independents.

Part of the debt he feels to smaller bookstores comes from the fact that they were responsible for the success of his first book, which had an initial printing of 2500 books in 1974. In contrast, "The Dead Zone," his first bestseller, had a first run of 444,000 books, and "Insomnia" is in the millions.

If King is getting back to his roots by supporting the "diversity" small booksellers offer, it has not gone unnoticed by the chain store bigwigs, who are fuming.

But King knows they're unlikely to retaliate, and now he's looking to see if other authors with publishing muscle will join him in his fight for the independents.

"I'll wait 'til I see James Mitchner on a Harley," said King. "That'd be cool."