

Authors — 1990

UP FRONT

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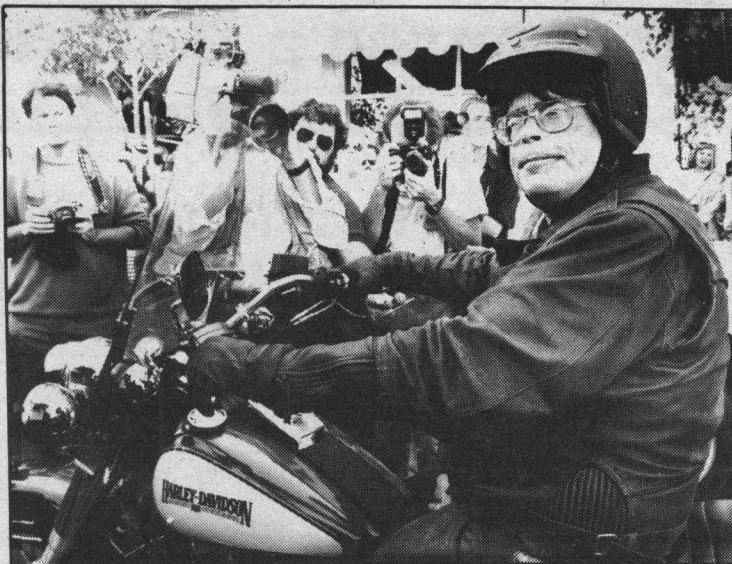
Architect of Horror

Santa Cruz is the end of the road for Steven King

ECCENTRIC AND DEFIANTLY independent, best-selling horror writer Steven King made the last stop of his 10-city book promotion tour on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle right here in Santa Cruz last Monday. After 4,690 miles in the saddle (door-to-door), King's final destination was Bookshop Santa Cruz, where a flurry of Bay Area reporters and TV cameramen jockeyed for position to get the star's attention.

King's mission was to publicize the plight of the independent bookseller, whose survival is jeopardized by chain stores. "The arrowhead gets narrower and sharper," says King, "and as a result, fewer good books are available. It's a dangerous philosophy that will reduce American literature to nothing more than Danielle Steele, Tom Clancy, Dean Koontz and Sidney Sheldon. Although many writers are homegrown, they're all harvested at Costco."

King believes that discount chains are responsible for the degradation of



JAN JAAP

Best-selling author Steven King roared into Santa Cruz on his Harley-Davidson motorcycle Oct. 24, stopping at Bookshop Santa Cruz and the Civic Auditorium.

American culture, whereas he also believes that libraries are the intellectual life of any community. Unfortunately, they're endangered, too.

Bookshop Santa Cruz was the last of 10 independents chosen from 350 who applied to King's publisher, Viking Press, for the privilege of hosting him. When Viking tried to pressure King to visit a few chains, King replied, "I'm paying for the gas. I'll do it my way."

Surprisingly, King does not believe that reading is a dying art. "Novelists have a cult following. Viking printed 1.5 million copies of

Insomnia (King's latest book). That's impressive even though Metallica sold 7 million copies of their last album." And what's King's desert-island music selection? AC/DC's *Greatest Hits*.

During the press conference, it was hard to ignore a conspicuous van that was parked outside Bookshop Santa Cruz and plastered with literature accusing King of assassinating John Lennon. When asked about the demonstrator, King replied, "Oh, that's Stephen Lightfoot. He follows me everywhere. He showed up in my home town back east, in San Fran-

cisco — and now here. . . . By the way, he's the same guy who says that the Department of Agriculture murdered River Phoenix for being a vegetarian. . . . And don't worry, I do have an alibi." After King dismissed the brief press conference, we walked back into the Indian summer afternoon just in time to see Lightfoot busted off in a squad car.

What's the future of horror as a genre? King thinks that its boom years are still ahead. "Vampires have become very chic," he said. "Just ask Tom Cruise."

— Virginia Lee