

*August, 2002. Los Angeles.*

It's been nearly 10 years since I first put pen to paper with the idea that eventually grew up to become *Control Freak*. That seems impossible and yet my life couldn't be more different now than it was then. For one thing, I no longer live in New York City, the city that raised me, the city which is as much a part of the vital meat of this book as Los Angeles is in the work of Raymond Chandler and New Orleans is in the work of Poppy Z. Brite. Not to mention the fact that when I first started dipping my toes into this project that might be a book, I could not even imagine what it would be like to have someone pay money for something I wrote. Now, on the other side of a mountain of calendar pages, I have chance to jump in the literary way-back machine and remember the gestation and birth of the paper creature you even now hold in your hot little hands.

This book went through a lot of changes in it's awkward teen phase. There was even one draft that had actual, supernatural elements. I crossed out and crumpled up and rewrote and banged my head against the keys and then once I finally had a draft I could live with I got to experience the fun of being rejected by editor after editor. Too graphic they said, too perverse. Of course it seemed funny to me because I had deliberately softened things, writing what I was foolishly hoping could be a mainstream novel. But after all, when you are dealing with kinky sexuality, you can't just cut to the blowing curtains and every one will automatically know what's happening. Most of what's going on is totally foreign to nearly everyone and I didn't want to write something

so exclusive that I'd wind up preaching to the converted and leaving everyone else in the dark. In a way I think it's a lot like writing a Michael Crichton novel. Writing about stuff that maybe a handful of people fully understand but presenting it in a way that makes it accessible and real to people who've never worked in a deep sea habitat or studied medieval Europe or tied someone up and flogged them.

In my case I think most of the problem I was having with people that were upset or offended by *Control Freak* was that I had made all these creepy, unnatural sex things a little too real. I didn't want to write about a wild edgy person who was into kinky sex. That would be too easy to dismiss as science fiction. I wanted to write about someone "ordinary", someone "just like you" who finds these curious, unconventional desires inside herself and makes peace with them. There, enlies the real problem. It's ok for villains to be into evil perverted sex. We can relish their naughty misadventures while clucking our tongues and disapproving and then cheering when they get their comeuppance at the end. It's even ok to have a "normal" person get sucked into naughty debauchery, like in a *Chick* comic or a high school anti-drug reel, as long as they suffer a righteous *Reefer Madness* crash and burn, leaving everyone with the simple kindergarten moral that anything but married hetero love will destroy you. The reader can enjoy the nasty stuff and come away feeling morally superior. What horror critic David J Skal refers to as the "Tsk Tsk Yum Yum" Syndrome. Americans love to watch bad guys do bad things. To relish the bizarre native rituals of alien tribes. To watch *COPS* and "reality" programs and these "Real Sex" shows they have now about every conceivable kink, but it's all just cheap vicarious thrills that the norms in Nebraska can disapprove of every week. Everyone loves to go to the freakshow and *ooh* and *aah* as long as there is a clear line between the audience and the freaks.

I was trying to blur that line. To let the reader see things through the eyes of a person discovering her kinky sexuality, to feel what she feels and maybe even see a little bit of themselves in her without the safe, reassuring punishment and return to normality at the end. This was a tough sell, not only because it was morally unconventional but because the protagonist was a strong, dominant female, a sexual aggressor who acted rather than being acted upon. This character was not a victim of desires that would eventually destroy her. She was not

the poor helpless heroine tied up in the trunk of a runaway car. She was behind the wheel, making her own choices and taking responsibility for her own actions, right or wrong or somewhere in-between. This was more than a lot of (mostly male) editors and agents were ready for.

In the end it was an “erotica” publisher who decided to give *Control Freak* a go. Considering that I had toned the manuscript down in hopes of mainstream publication, it’s kind of ironic that Masquerade Books, who’s various fiction lines included everything from romantic, girly erotica to balls-out pornography, was the only one who would take a chance on it. At the time it seemed like a good choice. My book was on newsstands, in Tower Records, everywhere. Of course I had no idea that once the first print run sold out that would be the end of that. There would be no second printing. They were far more interested in cranking out the next one and the one after that, sending them on down the conveyer belt like auto parts or fast food burgers. Obviously this concept didn’t do so well since I haven’t seen a new Masquerade book in ages. Meanwhile I get e-mails all the time asking where people can get a copy of *Control Freak*. I myself own only one dog-eared copy of the Masquerade edition. Hence, this book. Now, finally, I’ll have an answer to all those pesky emails.

Before I let you get on with it, here are a few things to keep in mind when reading this book:

This book was mostly written between 1993 and 1995. The internet was in its infancy. You could still smoke in restaurants. All the window dressing of pop culture and fashion was in and of that decade. So much has changed since then but I do sincerely hope that this book will stand the test of time. That it can be set in that past decade in the way anything period is set within the time of its conception without seeming dated. The flaw that renders many books and movies of the past dated and silly is a overreaching need to be “hip” and “with it”. To exploit whatever’s trendy at that very second be it 1930, 1966 or 1995. Stories that transcend their decade are not about how cool the characters (and by extension the writers) are for being into the latest hot trend, whatever it may be. They are about the story itself and the characters that inhabit it. I hope that the emotions and struggles of the characters in *Control Freak* will still have relevance in 20 or 50 or 100 years and that the decade in which the events take place will be nothing more than the

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stage on which the events play out, the set dressing that allows Constant Reader to travel through time and experience what the world was like in that moment through the eyes of someone not too different from themselves. I have no idea if it will or not. I've had to read through the damn thing so many times I can't even tell if it's any good anymore. I guess that's up to you.

So read on, Constant Reader. I want to tell you a story. It's about a woman in New York City in 1995. It goes a little something like this ...