

DEMYSTIFYING SUSPENSE

SIX SECRETS TO UNDERSTANDING FEAR

KEVIN HARRIS

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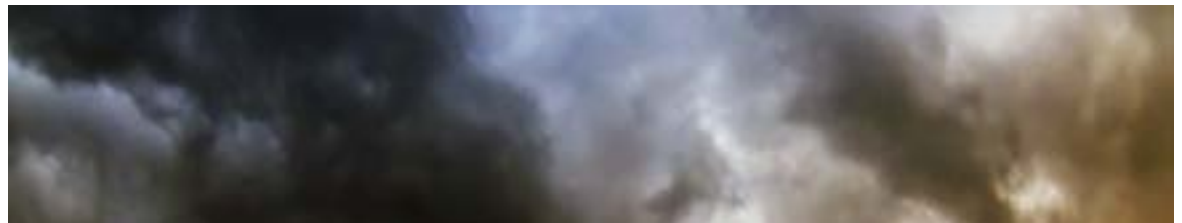
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PROLOGUE

THE BEAMS OF LIGHT CUT THROUGH THE EMPTINESS OF NIGHT SKY, DIVIDING THE EXPANSE INTO FOUR PARTS AND THEN CIRCLING AROUND EACH OTHER TO CHOOSE AGAIN. BACK AND FORTH THEY SWUNG, STRETCHING TOWARD THE STARS ON ONE END, BUT PINNED DOWN TO THE EARTH BY THEIR TAILS ON THE OTHER.

That place, the place where the light began (or ended), was the place where I was going. I had followed these lights many other cold autumn nights, but this one would be different. This night, though I didn't know it at the time, I would catch the tail of my own light and begin reeling it in.

Like many people, I had lots of fears



as a child. And like many people most fears dispelled as I grew up. The monsters under my bed moved out and the dark didn't have much more to offer than an occasional bruised shin. But unlike most people I found myself drawn year after year to this place where the lights pointed.

From up close the search light beams seemed to be made up of moth shaped pixels moving and fighting to follow the lamps. Below the beams a group of people had also congregated. I pulled into the dirt field parking lot across the way that had been growing corn only weeks before.

As I exited my now dust colored car I became very aware of the load generator used to power the make-shift

temporary lights. These strings of lights helped me pick out the several cloaked figures that stood between me and my destination. As I began to walk, one such figure approached me. His face, I could tell as he got closer, was half covered in what looked like blood. "Hey Kevin," he said eyeing my suit and tie, "they have already started letting people in."

I had grown used to people being surprised when I told them I worked at a haunted house at night. I now expected them to comment that I didn't seem like the type. But what I found strange was when other workers at "the haunt" also told me the same thing. I guess, in reality, I wasn't the type: A clean-cut religious kid that went to church on Sundays, and often wore colors

that...weren't black. I didn't even like slasher movies. But there I was, almost every night. And not only did I act in it, but I had been involved in the design, construction, and website development since planning began each spring.

I found out which area I was needed in and headed in that direction. As I hurried through secret doors and around motion sensors, I loosened my tie and rolled up my sleeves. I was late that night because I had been at an important church meeting on the other side of town. I didn't have time to change clothes, but I knew I could be scary regardless. A friend of mine who had also been at that same meeting was—coincidentally—to be working in the same area with me. He too was dressed up in his "Sunday best", but now disguised by thick stage makeup on his face.

"I had one of those life-changing moments where you step back from your life and see everything at once and with perfect clarity."

The meeting, from only minutes before, had been very uplifting and thought provoking, and so we naturally discussed the topics and speakers. As the screams of each group of paying customers would near our area, we would pause from our spiritual discussion, in order to assume the roles of psychopathic mad men until the group was safely out of ear-

shot, and then we would resume where we left off. We laughed about the irony of the situation and how not scary we would be if people knew the topic of our discussion.

As the night progressed, I had one of those life-changing moments where you step back from your life and see everything at once and with perfect clarity. I wondered what I was doing. Why I was living a seemingly paradoxical life with one foot in fear and one foot in faith. And yet I was not willing to give up either. I somehow, for some reason, needed both. I just didn't understand it... yet. But that night I was given my first clue (the tail of my own beam of light) and that clue has led me on a path of self-discovery and understanding of the interplay between fear and faith—what I call "The Six Secrets of Suspense". And this is what I am excited to share with you through the course of this book.

Some of the areas we will be exploring:

- 🌀 How studying a haunted house can help you understand yourself.
- 🌀 How fear affects our perception of time.
- 🌀 How to almost instantaneously alleviate your own fear?
- 🌀 What are the key differences between fear, suspense, & mystery?
- 🌀 How to figure out where your fear comes from?
- 🌀 How is fear used in film and novels?
- 🌀 How big of a role does fear play in our lives?
- 🌀 How does fear relate with dreams and nightmares?
- 🌀 Proven methods of insulating yourself from fear.
- 🌀 Are there any positive effects from fear?
- 🌀 How does understanding fear also help us understand faith, hope, courage, and love?
- 🌀 And much more...

INTRODUCTION

THE FILM, *THE SIXTH SENSE*, MADE OVER 660 MILLION DOLLARS WORLDWIDE AS IT SCARED

AUDIENCE AFTER AUDIENCE. It is a disturbing movie about a young boy who, wherever he goes, sees ghosts – still maimed and bloodied from whatever caused their death. Even the walls of his own home cannot keep him safe from these unsettling apparitions. The boy lives in constant suspense as he tries to live a normal life, yet all the while anticipating the next alarming encounter. It sounds like a terrible thing for anyone to experience and yet people went over and over to see this movie.

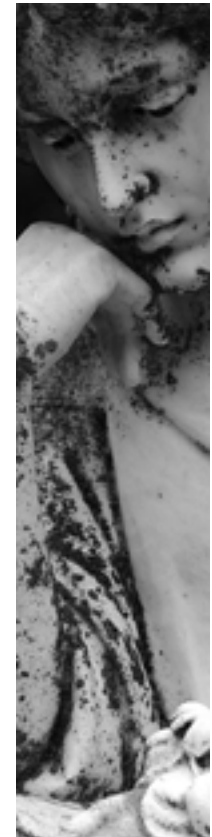
There must be something there that the general audience relates to. I know I related to it. No, I don't "see dead people," but I have as long as I can remember been drawn to two seemingly opposite things. Fear, darkness, and haunted houses, and at the same time faith, light, and God.

This surprises people when I first tell

them. It has sure perplexed me. For many years I couldn't understand my Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde look at the world. It wasn't until I started studying graphic design that I realized that every good artist or photographer must understand the light and the shadows to make a good composition.

As my need to express myself changed, it occurred to me that the haunted house I worked in was in some ways a metaphor for life: People are trying to move through it while problems and concerns pop up all around them. Many people are lost and scared, not knowing where they are headed or what the future brings. While others appear to have it all together no matter what comes their way. They seem to know exactly what to do and how to handle any situation quickly and effectively.

The haunted house turned into a kind of laboratory for me. No, not a mad scientist type of lab with beakers and test tubes, but a way for me to study people in different situations. While they were reacting to the contrived horrors around



them, I was observing and learning from them. I began reading every fear or suspense book I could get my hands on. I was also studying media in school and began to recognize the structure of and similarities between great films, books, and life. Because I had become friends with the owner of "the haunt," I was allowed to experiment with the layout and design of the haunt. I was constantly recommending new ideas (and variations on old ones) based on my research.

What I didn't expect was the understanding I would gain of myself. Through my research, I found I could more easily pick out my fears and understand what caused them. By comparing them to the haunted house, and the "six secrets" I was refining, I even knew how to eliminate them. I began to see myself as a house—one with many levels and rooms. Some of the areas were very well known to me, well lit, and well decorated. Other parts of the house I had yet to explore or I had intentionally stayed away from. Certain areas I had even locked in fear of what I might discover there.

Before you can eliminate suspense from your life, you must first understand it. This book is unique in that it looks at suspense from several different angles. It explores techniques used in film, haunted attractions, and writing, it looks at it through a scientific research point of view and even from a self-help approach. At some points I write as though I am teaching you a recipe for how to create suspense (I use a witch's cauldron metaphor—go figure). My

thinking is that if you understand how something is put together, it becomes easier to take it apart. Sun Tzu, the ancient Chinese strategist and philosopher once said, "If you know the enemy and know yourself you need not fear the results of a hundred battles." The way I see it, the more ways that suspense is demystified the more power we have to overcome it.

*"If you know the enemy
and know yourself
you need not fear the results
of a hundred battles."*

There are many people that I am indebted to in writing this book. First my friend, Jeff Pusey, who put up with me and my continuous stream of ideas as I turned his haunted attraction into my lab. To my friend, Ben Raty, who has listened patiently through the years as I have bounced thoughts and ideas off of him. To my dad who believed I could write a book. To my mom, who was the recipient of my earliest fear experiments (sometimes involving ketchup or rubber spiders on fishing line). To my religious leaders who assured me that I wasn't crazy. To my siblings and their spouses who inspire me to become a better person. And mostly I would like to thank my wife, Sharee, for helping me find the time and encouraging me in my goal of writing this book.

CHAPTER 1: WHY WE PAY TO SCREAM

Understanding Fear

Stop for a moment and think back to a time when you experienced fear. Perhaps you heard a noise when you thought you were alone, or had to give a speech in front of a big group of people. Often times these events are clearly burned into our memories. And thinking back to them we can feel our heart beating quickly, a cold sweat, the world slowing down, the rush of adrenaline, or a sick feeling in our stomach. Perhaps we found ourselves unable to move or maybe we had the sudden urge to run. These are all normal fear reactions.

When danger is triggered in our mind through one of our senses - our bodies automatically begin to anticipate the danger and search for ways to avoid it. "Simply put, fear is the body's way of anticipating and avoiding pain..." (Dozier, 1999). It is like a town alerted to a possible war. Suddenly the only thing important is avoiding the oncoming pain. Regular actions are dropped and everything goes into ready mode.

Depend upon it, Sir; when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.
Samuel Johnson

When frightened, your heart will immediately begin diverting blood to your legs for quick escape. This makes your skin look pale. Your mouth goes dry and your stomach contracts as the digestive system turns off. You freeze so that your eyes and ears—now extremely aware—can search for ways out of the possibly painful situation. This explains the vivid memories even years later. The world seems to move in slow motion, giving you more time to think things through. Adrenaline is pumped through you. The vocal cords tighten causing the pitch of your voice to go higher, so that a scream or call for help can occur.

Our Fascination with Fear

This sounds like a terrible experience, and indeed it can be. So why, then, is it that every year amusement parks,

movie theaters, and haunted attractions fill up with people wanting "a good scare"? We scream and yell, close our eyes, peek through our fingers, and hold onto each other. We come out laughing and joking about who was the most scared and what was the best part.



One answer comes from an automatic response of the body. As was explained above, when we sense possible pain our alert level raises and our body reacts. But if we make it through whatever fearful situation we are in—realizing that we are okay—then another automatic response reacts to push the fear

level back down to a normal level.

The reduction of fear and pain causes a feeling of pleasure. The stress level goes down and the pleasure level goes up. This is why many people scream when startled and then laugh when they realize that they are okay.

"Roller coasters and other thrill rides are one way we can increase our fear in a controlled setting. During the roller coaster ride our primitive fear system is going full tilt but our rational system knows that you are safe and keeps the primitive under control... Each burst of primal fear is followed by a quick reduction of fear to normal levels, a process we experience as pleasurable."(Dozier, 1999)

People going through a controlled thrill event are often heard saying things out loud like, "That's not scary", "That's dumb", or "That's not real" because they are scared and are trying to convince themselves rationally not to fear. I remember a time going through a "haunted" corn maze with someone who was acting completely petrified through the entire event, with her eyes closed and screaming for it to end. Then when it finally did end and the fear level dropped she said – to everyone's astonishment, "That was fun. Let's do that again."

"People like to experience fear...as in horror movies and haunted houses," says Bill Linkenheimer, president of

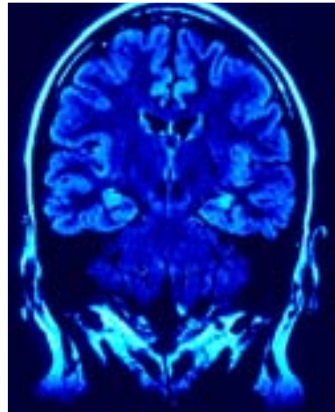
the American Coaster Enthusiasts. "Just as in those things, you know you aren't REALLY putting yourself in danger, but it's a way of going out of control at crazy speeds without risking your life."

Somewhere in the backs of our minds we know that we are safe— that what we are seeing or experiencing is under control. The creatures on the movie screen cannot get us, and the roller coaster ride has been checked and re-checked for safety. It is when we don't have that assurance—that hope—that all enjoyment goes out the window. That is the difference between entertainment and terror.

Sadly some people live in terror much of their lives. They live in abusive homes

where there is no movie screen that separates the monsters from reality. Hope is shattered like a glass doll against the wall. Others live without peace under the rule of a tyrannical government. They do not know from one day to the next if their homes will be invaded or if their loved ones will come home each night.

On the other hand, many people seek adventure—especially in our teen years when we have not yet discovered our limits—and so we drive fast cars, we climb treacherous mountains, we jump from airplanes, and we ride roller coasters. We read suspenseful books, watch scary movies, and tell scary stories. Excitement it seems can be found in many



places—but this is not really true. Excitement, thrills, suspense can really only be found in one place.

Fear is Internal

In Victor Frankel's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, he describes how he survived the atrocities of the Nazi concentration camps. Even while death and torture were happening on every side (including the deaths of his parents, brother, and wife) he was able to focus his mind and control his response. He said that he "found a way out in his mental life—an invaluable opportunity to dwell in the spiritual domain, the one that the SS were unable to destroy." This terrible yet amazing experience demonstrates how external events do not necessarily dictate our responses. Fear, hope, happiness, anger, etc are all a choice that come from inside. These emotional responses are really an internal freedom that no one else can control. We can choose whether to be angry, happy, or scared. For example, two people walking down a dark street can see and hear the exact same things, but one of the two may have her mind on some important event or pleasant memory while the other is imagining what could be lurking in the shadows.



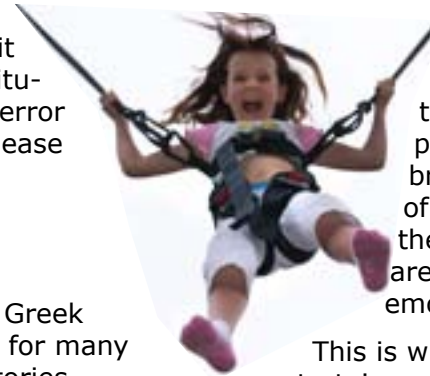
A simple experiment can demonstrate this. As you are reading this, perhaps you can imagine that there is some deranged murderer watching you through your window, or worse standing right behind you, breathing slowly, his cold hands hanging near the back of your chair—waiting for you to turn and see that deranged face. If you imagine it completely—the face, the clothes, the hands—it is possible to get to the point where even the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. This odd experiment can be done at any time of the day in just about any location—well lit, well populated, etc. It is only dependant on your imagination. This demonstrates that fear does not come from any external source. Fear comes from inside of us. If you open a movie projector that is showing a scary movie, you aren't going to find fear in the form of some kind of green ooze. You can't go to the store and purchase a bottle of fear. "Scary" books, films, etc aren't scary, if we, like Victor Frankel, don't allow our minds to become overtaken by it. If we instead have hope that the "good guy" is going to

win, or that we can make it safely through whatever situation we encounter, then terror turns into a thrill as we release our stress.

Catharsis

In describing and defining Greek theatre, which is the basis for many of our modern films and stories, Aristotle said that it should contain elements "arousing pity and fear, where-with to accomplish the catharsis of these emotions."

"Catharsis," has been defined as "a release of emotional tension, as after an overwhelming experience, that restores or refreshes the spirit." In theater and film we can find ourselves laughing and crying alongside the characters in the story. I've found that if I watch a comedy after I have had a stressful day then I will laugh a lot more than on a typical day. And that is because I have that stress inside of me that needs to be released.



"Fun fairs mean a break in the daily routine, in the exacting discipline of working life. They bring about an easing-off of the strict rules governing the life of society... Fun fairs are safety valves for pent up emotions"(Balint, 1959)

This is why almost every form of entertainment has some sort of suspense—some uncertainty as to the outcome. A carnival game, for example, will allow you to throw a ball at some stacked cups. What is the joy in that? You can do that at home for free. But the challenge of the pitchman, the stuffed animal reward if successful, and the cheer of the crowd set up the suspense. You could go buy a stuffed animal for cheaper than most people spend on the game, and you will most likely never see the pitchman again or the people in the crowd. But the challenge, and the possibility of overcoming that challenge and becoming a hero for a small moment, is what makes it seem worth the price.



Hope & Fear

Fear can be a very negative thing, if not coupled with hope. (Without hope we call it terror.) Wars, violence, hatred, etc can destroy nations, families, and individuals. But a release of fear through controlled or vicarious thrills can be healthy. The thrill of suspense is a competing mixture of hope and fear. Good stories, and even sporting events, will keep the audience involved as death



and life, failure and success interlock and take turns temporarily pinning each other down. The best games are not the ones where one time annihilates the other (even if your team wins). The best games are the ones that are neck and neck until the very end. Many films will have false endings that will suspend our hope for a time. The audience member thinks by buying a ticket, and entering in through those magic theater doors, that she leaves her problems outside. When in reality, it is not until she relates to the struggles and triumphs being performed on screen that she is able to separate herself from the demons that bog her down and, as a means of catharsis, figuratively sacrifice them on an invisible altar.

Viggo Mortensen once said, "Seeing a film is not something to be looked down on in comparison with reading a book. There can be millions of identical

copies of a book, and yet the copy you hold and read is your personal doorway. It is the same when you go to the movie theater: you and the movie have a secret. It might even be a god-awful movie and you could still walk out with this little secret—or big secret—inside you: a discovery that might stay with you for a day, for a month or two, even years. In those secrets we touch myth and confront universal issues, perhaps even draw new strength for our own lives"

The media we read or experience can bring about a cathartic, even religious, experience. But it is important to realize the true origin of those experiences. Suspense is not stored in a movie projector, a book, or a hard drive. Suspense is an internal mixture of hope and fear.

*Secret #1
Suspense is an internal mixture of
hope and fear.*

Thermostat

Even outside of carnivals and corn mazes, fear is a major player in our normal day-to-day lives. We often don't realize it until something forces us out of our comfort zone, but the hope and fear battle is going on inside of us everyday. As some positive thought occurs to us—that maybe we could change something or accomplish some goal or dream that we value—we begin to have hope.

As children, we had lots of dreams and lots of hope. We were going to conquer the world. Our future was not restricted by fear. But as life came along and "beat us up", we started to eliminate those dreams or at least box them up with the words "some day" scribbled on the lid. Now when we consider lifting that lid just a little bit, fear jumps in pushing our lid back down telling us to be "realistic", and saying "who are you to do or be those things?". It is a bit like a thermostat. When the room begins to get a little bit warmer than it should, the thermostat kicks the air conditioner into gear and cools everything back down to a predetermined comfort level. So, instead of heading out to accomplish our dreams, we take our shoes off, hang our coat back up and settle in for some more of the same—suspended in our comfort zone. Ironically, all of the great movies we watch, from the comfort of our comfort zone, are about someone who ventured or was pushed out of their comfort zone and struggled until they overcame their fears and accomplished some great victory. But until we decide to make a concerted effort to become the hero

of our own story—it is like swimming upstream—fear won't let hope out of the house.

But that is the key: we have a choice. We can choose to take back control of our life. By understanding how hope and fear interact with each other, we can begin to see how suspended we have been. It is like a job that we hate, but continue to go to day after day for fear of getting fired. Most people will initially deny that fear has any influence on them at all. It took me years to realize how much my life was run by fear. But the more honest we are, the more we can see the walls we have built around ourselves and how fear is shaping our lives—slowing and limiting us.

Receiving Power

Knowledge is power. Just being aware of what is going on inside of us gives us so much power. How can you fix a problem that you don't know exists? Once you start to recognize the obstacles and realize that they are self-inflicted, little by little our ability is widened.

In *The Last Battle*, the final book of C. S. Lewis' classic *Chronicles of*



Narnia the heroes find themselves in a beautiful place filled with flowers, green grass, delicious fruit trees all around, and crystal clear blue skies. As they are wandering over the beauty of this Edenic place they discover a group of dwarves sitting in a circle in the grass that don't seem to see all of the wonderful things around them. Come to find out, the dwarves think they are sitting in a dark smelly little animal stable.

"Are you blind?" said Tirian.

"Ain't we all blind in the dark!" said Diggie.

"But it isn't dark, you poor stupid Dwarfs," said Lucy. "Can't you see? Look up! Look round! Can't you see the sky and the trees and the flower? Can't you see me?"

"How in the name of all Humbug can I see what ain't there? And how can I see you any more than you can see me in this pitch darkness?"

They continue to try to convince these dwarfs to see what is really around them until finally Tirian, out of frustration, grabs one of them and swings him out of their imagined little room. The dwarf screams out in pain as he—in his mind—is slammed into the wall.

Our self-imposed boundaries can be very difficult—and painful—to escape. Usually, honesty with ourselves, and hope—the antithesis of fear—is what finally gets us

Exercise:

Part A

Discovering what our limits are is a major step. On a piece of paper write down as many times as you can think of when you experienced fear, both as a child and as an adult (Don't worry you won't have to share this with anyone). Just write a brief sentence or a few words for each time—just enough so you know what you are referring to. Write everything down.

Part B

Now look through your list and see if you notice any similarities or patterns. They may change over the years or stay relatively the same.

You are trying to discover any self imposed boundaries that you may have. It may be difficult to spot them the first time you look at it, but refer back to your list as you continue to read. Some things may already be obvious to you, but often times our obvious fears may in fact be caused by other less obvious fears.

to break free.

Just being aware that we have limits can help us to overcome them. It gives us the power to choose when the moment arrives instead of just reacting—or becoming suspended—like we have in the past. We cannot always control the situations we find ourselves in or the people we interact with but we can control our responses to them. We are “response-able” for our thoughts, beliefs, and emotions. You are in control of your life. If you don’t like the way your life is going, you may be tempted to play the victim—to blame other people, bad luck, the government, etc. But that does not help you. By blaming others you are giving away your power to change things. Even if you were wronged—even terribly wronged—the sooner you can get your focus off of blaming others and on to

A suspended life is overcome from within.

what things you can actually control, the better it is for you. Many of the imagined limitations we have built up around ourselves are in response to something that others have said or done. The truth may hurt, but the truth is also the only thing that you can change.

When we are honest with ourselves we become powerful. We can see what needs to be done and we have hope that we can accomplish it. Other people’s lies and accusations and the lies that we have been telling ourselves seem to slide off of us like water off of a duck’s back.



The truth is that the world is full of opportunities and you are in charge of your life. Yes, your fears may have limited you thus far, but once you start to understand them you can eliminate them one by one. A suspended life is overcome from within. Imagine the freedom you will enjoy once your imagined walls disappear—when you are not held back anymore by suspense.

CHAPTER 2: THE TIME MACHINE

YOU HAVE MOST LIKELY SEEN AN OLD BLACK AND WHITE FILM where the speed was slightly off and the people looked funny because they moved unusually fast. This occurs because the old cameras had to be hand cranked while they were filming the movie, and if the camera operator didn't crank it at just the right speed it was noticeable when viewed later by an audience.

I bring this up because old-fashioned hand crank movie cameras can give us an important clue as to why we experience suspense. Let me explain: If, for example, you were using a hand crank camera, and you wanted to film someone walking across a room and you cranked the film through the camera really fast, then there would be lots of frames of film showing the person walking across the room. When you put that film on a projector to watch it, the person would appear to walk really slowly because of the extra frames. Or conversely, if the camera operator was trying to save film (as they often did because it was expensive), he might

crank the camera a little slower so that less frames are filled up of the person walking across the room. So, then the actor gets from one side of the room to the other in only a few frames, which makes her look really quick.

There is an inverse relationship between the cranking speed and the speed of the action caught on film: the faster the camera operator cranks the camera, the slower the action appears on film, and vice versa.



Our minds are a bit like those old-fashioned movie cameras. The more thoughts we crank through our heads the slower that time seems to go. You've heard the expression "Time flies when you are having fun." When you are enjoying life, your mind is at ease; and so the time seems to go by quickly. But when you have a lot on your mind it makes it feel as though the day is going slower. People will often say they are having a "long day" or comment that it feels like it should be later in the week.

This phenomenon is even more intense when it comes to fear. When we are in danger our minds crank up to full speed—desperately trying to figure out a way to prevent injury. Time can seem to move in slow motion as, for example, a car spins out of control. Time does not change, of course, but our perception of time does.

Sped up movement in movies is not seen as often anymore (except for comedy effect), but slowing things down is still used frequently. Slow motion is a technique often used in movies to

stretch out an exciting moment. For example, the hero gets knocked off of a high ledge and seems to fall in slow motion as he or she works out what to do. This slowing technique doesn't seem strange in movies because it is true to life. We have all had moments where time seemed to slow down—when our mind was racing to find a way to safety.

I remember as a child climbing to a high place and then being too scared to come back down. My friends were all going up and down with no problems, but I suddenly froze up and wouldn't move from the spot where I was. I sat there for what seemed like forever. The other boys tried to help me by showing me exactly how to climb down, but I just became more scared as time seemed to drag on.



The word "suspense" means "to suspend". And time—or at least our perception of it—is what is being suspended. Like a tight wire performer we are suspended in mid air, with death looking imminent and only a thin hope of reaching safety. Our thoughts speed up and time seems to stretch out.

As I sat scared that day as a child—suspended by my own mind—in the place that I had climbed to, my fears became increasingly irrational to the point where I thought I would never be able to get down again. It wasn't until an older brother whom I loved and trusted climbed up and reassured me

that I was okay and that he wouldn't let me fall, that my suspense was finally broken. The faith I had in him and the trust I put in his words was enough to reverse the fear and uncertainty I had been consumed with. My fear had begun with uncertainty about my own abilities, and it had ended with faith in my older brother's abilities. Suspense is always based on uncertainty, while faith is always based on knowledge.

I can clearly remember being on road trips with my family when we found

*Time—
or at least our perception of it—
is what is being suspended.*

ourselves uncertain as to which road to take. The atmosphere would suddenly become very serious as my father slowed the car down to search for signs directing us where to go. I learned early on that you didn't make a peep until my father found the road or turn off he was looking for. Sometimes, we would have to stop completely to study a map, or worse—ask for directions. Our journey had been suspended as uncertainty entered into the picture.

Mystery vs. Suspense

In the example above, the road that we needed to take was unknown to us. Some might have said the right road to take was a mystery, but as we shall see, a mystery is something altogether different.



Alfred Hitchcock, the great movie director of thrillers like *Psycho* and *The Birds*, would often get annoyed when people would ask him about "his mysteries". He would explain that he has never made a mystery, and would then explain the difference between a mystery and a suspense film.

"The most simple example, the elementary example, is if four men are seated around a table and they're having a discussion about baseball, anything you like. Suddenly a bomb goes off and blows everyone to smithereens. Now, the audience get from that fifteen seconds of shock. But up to that time you've spent five minutes on a conversation about baseball. And the audience are without any knowledge that that bomb is under the table."

At this point a mystery would spend the rest of the movie trying to figure out who put the bomb there and why they did it. But there wasn't any suspense in that scene and the rest of the movie will be spent trying to unravel clues.

"Now let's take it the other way around. We show the bomb under the table, and let the audience know it's going to go off in five minutes. Now

you go on with your conversation.

Now the conversation becomes very potent, with the audience saying, "Stop talking about baseball, there's a bomb under there.'... So now you know there's a bomb under there and at the end of five minutes it's about to go off. You've driven the audience to the point of anxiety."

So instead of looking to the past and trying to figure out "who dunnit?", the audience is looking to the future and worrying about impending danger. Mystery looks backward and suspense looks forward. A reader of a mystery novel will be filled with curiosity as they read. They will be trying to figure things out in their head and put the clues together to solve the crime that already took place. The reader of a suspense novel will be enjoying that mixture of hope and fear as each page slowly advances them closer to expected doom.

Some mysteries will turn into suspense stories near the end as the killer comes after the hero. Much like the audience knowing about the bomb under the table, we are shown the impending danger, and so the mystery ends and suspense takes the reins as we gallop to the end.

Never Ending Story

Alfred Hitchcock's classic *The Birds* teaches another important aspect of suspense. In that film a group of people end up hiding in a house while hundreds of birds are trying to get in and kill them. Through out the film we wonder why the birds are doing this, how



the people are going to escape them, and what will ultimately make these monstrous birds stop.

The story climaxes with the people getting in their car and driving slowly down the lane. Everywhere you look are these menacing birds—shoulder to shoulder—blanketing the ground in every direction. It looks dire for the people; and we are anticipating another attack when the movie abruptly ends.

There has been much speculation on why Hitchcock ended the movie in this way. Perhaps being "the master of suspense" he wanted the suspense to continue on in people's minds indefinitely. But whatever the reason, we learn this lesson: Suspense is not based on future events. Our suspense was building even though there were no more scenes in the movie. Whether the people lived or died in the future doesn't change the amount of suspense we were feeling in the present.

Audience members can become frustrated when their suspense is not relieved. Some would rather know that the people got killed, then to be left in suspense forever. As soon as we know the outcome—whether good or bad—the suspense is gone. It is like the tight wire analogy. It doesn't matter which side of the wire is disconnected; the performer falls either way. The suspense is relieved—catharsis—and we can move forward with the story.

Nothing to Fear, but Fear itself

In the book, *Psycho Cybernetics*, the idea is presented that a person seeing what they think is danger, would act the same whether it was really a dangerous situation or not. It is not about the truth, it is about what is going on in the mind.

When I am home alone and I hear a noise that sounds like someone is in the house, my brain begins to crank

quickly and I become highly alert. The amount of suspense I am feeling at that moment would be the same whether there is a madman in the next room or the house was just creaking. Future events do not cause suspense. The possibility of negative future outcomes—if dwelled on—can cause suspense.

Now if I discovered that there was a madman in my house, my emotions would, at that point, probably turn to terror or anger. But my point is that the uncertainty I had been experiencing was no longer suspended. It was relieved (if you can call it that) and would be replaced immediately with some other emotion. Now, the new emotion might even be suspense again, but it will be a new suspense, based on the discovery of this new dilemma.

One year around Halloween I decided to go with some friends to visit a haunted house in the area that I had never been to. As I waited in line, I found myself excited and nervous as I anticipated what fears I would face inside. My mind was racing as I imagined my nightmares brought to life, and I visualized what my reactions would be.

Once inside, however, none of this was to be, for the whole thing was done quite poorly and my excitement quickly left. There was nothing to extend my suspense or to create new suspense. Looking back, I realized that the best part of the experience had been waiting in line—being literally suspended from moving forward—and feeling the dread of imagined, yet never actualized events.

Many creators of haunted attractions find that the room people talk about the most, is not the one with the best gadgets and effects, but where the suspense has the longest amount of time to build. Once a performer jumps out and startles them, they are somewhat relieved. One haunted attraction owner reported that his best reviews were on nights that he was understaffed, because there wasn't someone around every corner jumping out, and the suspense had longer to build up in people's minds.

Secret #2
A perceived suspension of time in the present is based on concern for the unseen future.

To eliminate suspense in our lives we need to not focus on possible bad things that could happen in the future. We should create our desired future in our mind and set goals to reach it. If I say don't think about the color red, our minds almost immediately think of something red. It is not enough to try to not think about something but we must fill that void with something else—like a goal.

The light switch

I knew a girl in high school who when asked her favorite color would say that black was her favorite "absence of light." Her clever response made me think. When it comes to light and darkness, all darkness really is is a lack of light. When

you flip a light switch you don't turn the dark on and off—you turn the light on and off. The dark is nothing. It is merely a deficit—a negative. Our minds work similarly. If we don't constantly fill our minds with light (positive thoughts) then we are left suspended in the dark and our imagination has to try and work with a deficit. It makes up stuff to try and fill the void. And fear is our imagination working with the only thing it has—nothing.

Have you ever been in a room when the motion sensor lights turn out on you for lack of movement? If we are not constantly moving forward, utilizing the light in our minds then the light can leave us. If we set positive goals and are constantly working toward those goals then



the light will stay on, keeping our fears at bay. Our goals will propel us out of suspense.

Earlier we said that suspense looks forward through an eye of fear and mystery looks backward with a "whodunnit" state of mind. When we set clear goals that we commit ourselves to, we are now able to look forward with an eye of

vision. Vision sees where we are headed and it also sees where we have been. Vision is believing in something not yet seen with your eyes but seen so completely in your mind that it compels you to action. Where suspense seems to close in around you like a fog, vision expands your view, as if you are standing on a tall mountain—you can see the big picture.

It is in your moments of decision that your destiny is shaped.

Tony Robbins

There was a time recently when I felt very deprived of time. I was working every day and what felt like every hour. I could never catch up and I never had time to do anything I wanted to do. My life seemed to be falling apart. I rarely spent time with my wife or my children. I missed things that I felt were important. I was becoming irritable and cynical. It got so bad that I found myself frequently dreaming about being able to stop time so I could catch up.

During a good discussion with my wife I realized that many of the things “forcing me” to work so many hours were actually limitations I had fabricated or exaggerated in my mind. When I realized this, I felt hope that maybe there was a way that I could get at least one day back. I set a goal to get all of my work done by Saturday night so I could spend Sunday with my family. I reviewed my goal throughout the week and prayed for it with my wife each day. Amazingly, I was able to get everything done by

late Saturday night and that first Sunday together as a family was wonderful. The memory of that Sunday propelled me to be even more efficient and get my work done even sooner the next week. Soon after, I found that I had time in the mornings and in the evenings to work on my personal projects, as well as spend time with my family. I have even decided that having both Saturday and Sunday off is a possibility as well.

I try to avoid making important decisions when my judgment is clouded with self-doubt. When I am filled with vision and not fear I have found that I make decisions that I can have faith in. I have also learned that it is extremely important to write down my thoughts and goals when I am in that positive state, otherwise it all too quickly passes and the light soon fades away into the past. Reviewing a goal daily—either through praying about it or just reading it helps to keep it at the front of your mind. Every time you read a written goal it can lift you back up



to the same visionary level where you were when you first made it. Nothing was ever created without first envisioning it in your mind. Your conviction to your goal is proof of the reality that will soon exist outside of your mind.

It is reported that soon after Disney World was completed someone said, “Isn’t it too bad that Walt Disney didn’t live to see this!” Mike Vance, creative director of Disney Studios replied. “He did see it—that’s why it’s here.”

Another thing with goals is to remember to be flexible in your methods. Life constantly changes and curve balls can get thrown at you everyday. If your methods for achieving your goals are too rigid then they may break when changes occur. I’m not saying our goals should change. No, our goals should remain solid but our methods of getting there should be flexible so we won’t become discouraged as we are forced to take detours and adjustments along the way. The key is to keep your vision of the future while being flexible in the present. We control our time with the thoughts that we pass through our heads.

CHAPTER 3: THE INCITING MOMENT

IN THE FIRST CHAPTER WE LEARNED THAT THE INGREDIENTS OF SUSPENSE ARE ONE PART HOPE TO ONE PART FEAR. WE TOSSED THOSE INGREDIENTS INTO A CAULDRON IN CHAPTER TWO AND GAVE THEM SOME TIME TO SOAK FOR A WHILE IN UNCERTAINTY. Now, to get

suspense going this “cauldron of uncertainty” needs a fire lit underneath it, so that things can get cooking. Chapter three is all about the moment when suspense is ignited or first enters into our thoughts and what causes that moment.

People pay a lot of money to feel the intoxication of suspense. It can be very exciting and even seductive if wooed correctly. But how is something as abstract as suspense generated? What moves our mind from our routine thinking to the “What if...” thinking? As we discussed before, suspense is internal, so there has to be a mind shift. There has to be a moment when we look

around and say, “Wow it is really dark and kind of creepy out here. What if something were to happen to me?”, etc. This moment has been called “the inciting moment”. All of the fear that follows can be traced back to this point.

No Surprise Here

The most common mistake people make when trying to create fear is mistaking surprise for suspense. Have you ever had someone jump out and startle you then laugh about how “scared” you were? It is true that our bodies reflexively react to sudden noises and motions but as soon as your mind has a chance to process what has happened, the “fear”—if it can be called that—is over. If our fear level could be graphed, this would appear as a spike with nothing before or after. Surprise in some ways is the opposite of suspense. Surprise as demonstrated by the bomb under the table example doesn’t give you time to allow suspense to build. If graphed, suspense would be a line starting at the zero point (the inciting moment) and



slowly climbing over time until something relieved that suspense.

Like I mentioned before, the worst haunted house I ever went to was full of “surprises” and had zero suspense. Literally, every few feet you could expect someone to jump out at you. Once the initial startle is over, most haunted house “actors” don’t do anything—except give you a chance to study their grocery store mask, notice their tennis shoes, and see the zipper on the back of their costume. Most are more annoying than scary, as they follow you until the next “spook” jumps out. This of course leaves zero time for suspense to build. At one point, there was a

group of four or five “spooks” in rubber masks crowding around us as we moved from room to room. Unfortunately, when people complain that a haunted house isn’t scary enough, the owner often thinks they need to add more actors.

Surprise in writing is often associated with the word “suddenly.” It’s been said that bad writers are easy to spot from their over use of the word “suddenly.” Most things don’t happen “suddenly.” There is usually thought involved or emotion building under the surface—it takes time for water to boil—things rise and fall—build up and ease down. Even electricity has to build up before lightning can strike. A sudden surprise can be very effective if used sparingly, but if there is too much surprise then *suddenly* we lose interest. Suspense takes time to simmer. It has to be wooed and courted correctly.

What If...

So what starts suspense?

There has to be a hint or suggestion of danger. Usually there is a noise or a sight that causes the inciting moment to occur—like hearing a sound when you think you are alone. Going back again to our bomb under the table example, the inciting moment (in the second version) was when we were shown the bomb. Movies can cheat by showing us things the hero doesn’t see and/or using music to alert the audience that something could very well happen.

The challenge of the person trying to create suspense in any medium is getting the audience’s mind to a realization that something bad could happen. This can be done in numerous ways. One method is through a form of reverse psychology. In M. Night Shyamalan’s film, *Signs*, Mel Gibson’s character is told not to open the pantry because “one of them” is locked in there. Of course, Mel Gibson’s character goes straight to the pantry to see if he can get a glimpse of it. Growing up I was intrigued by and scared of a Sesame Street book called “The Monster at the End of This Book” (Little Golden Book) in which Grover warns on each page not to turn any more pages or you will get closer to the monster at the end of the book. Both examples feature a character telling us there is something to fear, but not all inciting moments require someone saying,



“I wouldn’t go in there if I were you”. As was said before, an inciting moment can be caused by anything that shifts our thinking from the norm. Some blood, a noise, a muffled cry, a note—these can all be effective in creating that mind shift.

The Set up

Typically, the beginning of a story or film is all about setting up the rules and possibilities of this new world you are entering. If death is possible in this story then we need to know right up front. Most horror or suspense stories begin with a death (Think *Jaws*, *Zombieland*, or *Jurassic Park*). This creates an inciting moment which sensitizes us for the rest of the story. You’ve probably heard of people becoming “desensitized” or callous from watching too much TV. Well, sensitization is the opposite of that. We now know what is possible and therefore our senses become heightened. From this inciting moment our suspense level begins slowly rising and continues throughout the story (with occasional ups and downs) until the end when it is finally resolved.

To create an inciting moment, many stories will tell a smaller version of the whole story in the first few pages or at least strongly hint at what could happen later on. Now you may say, “Doesn’t hinting at the ending kill the suspense?” For example if your hero reads a note stating that there is a bad guy in the next room wearing a blue turtleneck and then we go in that room and he is standing there exactly as described, it isn’t that suspenseful. But if the note is more vague and your hero doesn’t immediately see the blue turtleneck guy, you are left wondering (1) where he is (2) when and if he is going to emerge and (3) what will happen to your hero when he does.

Once suspense is thick, a surprise can be very effective. And it doesn't have to be what the audience was set up for either. A loud phone ringing instead of a bad guy jumping out will cause just as big of a jump and keep the audience off balance. This then sets us up for a double scare to take place. My point is that all that is required to initiate suspense is to set up the kinds of bad things that could happen so that our minds can start creating "what if" scenarios for itself as it goes along. These self-created scenarios are much scarier than anything that can be written in book or performed in a movie.

Secret #3

Suspense can always be traced back to an Inciting Moment

In the last chapter we mentioned facing your fears. It should be clear from this chapter that the sooner you face your fears the better, because they only grow over time. The inciting moment should be a call to action. As soon as you recognize fear of any kind or notice



any lies seeping into your thoughts you should do everything you can to crush it as quickly as possible. It is much easier to dry off when only your toes are wet as opposed to your whole body. In this sense an inciting moment can actually be turned into a motivator—a motiva-

Exercise:

Pull out the list that you made in chapter one. Look over each item and see if you can figure out what caused your stress or fear to begin. In other words, what was the inciting moment?

Remember, the inciting moment is the moment that your mind shifted from a neutral or positive mode into a "what if" mode. Do this for as many of your events as you can remember. Write them down in a way that you can remember them each individually. Then compare and see if any of these inciting moments relate to each other.

tor to get you to take action and make things happen. My father taught me years ago that it is much easier to kill a little weed as opposed to a big one. And weeds are persistent—they may need more than one application of weed killer. Standing around and fretting and dwelling on the "what ifs" only makes the problem grow. But immediate action with continual revisits of weed killer (or truth) can eliminate fear or irrational thinking and get at the root of the problem.

"We can let circumstances rule us, or we can take charge and rule our lives from within."

Earl Nightingale

I keep a little notebook with me with my goals and some motivating thoughts written in it. This way when I feel self-doubt creeping in, I can document what caused it and then replace it with something uplifting.

Positive Inciting Moments

Inciting moments don't always have to be about fear. Inciting moments can be positive as well. Sometimes we think "I should do this" or "why couldn't I do that?" All too often we shoot down these positive inciting thoughts and return to the status quo.

There is a difference between working on things and getting things accomplished. My wife is naturally a results-oriented person and I have to work at not being a process-oriented person. A process-oriented person thinks that as long as they are working on something that is enough. Process-oriented people have to be careful not to drag things out for years without achieving any results. As I have seen and recognized this tendency in myself, it has inspired me to work toward becoming more goal oriented and less satisfied with just "working on it".

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "That which we persist in doing becomes easier, not that the task itself has become easier, but that our ability to perform it has improved." People can change. It is

a lie that we are beyond help. It just requires persistence toward well-defined goals—written goals that we remind ourselves of daily.

It is easy to get discouraged when we don't see major progress. It is important to review our actions at the end of each day and celebrate any little steps we achieved while still focusing on the larger goal. If we are still breathing we can improve ourselves. Our age does not matter.

Some say they are too young to do something and others say they are too old. Harland David Sanders, better known as Colonel Sanders is a good example to us. He was 65 years old (what some would consider retirement age) when he set out on the road with his special chicken recipe looking for poten-

tial franchisees. As far as money goes, Sanders' only had \$105 from his Social Security check when he set out, but he had something more important: He had a determined goal in his mind. The result of that goal was the Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise we know today.

Listen to those positive inciting moments. Write down your goals and work each day to make them happen. When fear creeps in, crowd it out with action and service. The world is waiting. You've wasted far too much time already. Your life is yours to live. Now is the time to make those changes. Throw off your fears and take control. This is your inciting moment.



CHAPTER 4: PERSONALIZED SUSPENSE

On October 30, 1938 an alien spacecraft landed in Grover's Mill, New Jersey—or at least that is what CBS radio listeners, who tuned in late to the program, were told. A weather report and some music were interrupted by a panicked sounding reporter who described the UFO and the crowd gathering around it. But the report was soon cut short as an alien emerged and began to open fire at the crowd—incinerating them with his heat wave. The lack of response from the field reporter (who had stopped mid sentence), resulted in an abrupt switch back to the CBS newsroom, which scrambled to keep up with the terrifying event.



The whole program was basically a Halloween prank done by Orson Welles, who knew many listeners would tune in their radios a few minutes late and miss the very beginning where it was explained that it was just a radio drama. But drama or not, with radio being trusted as the main news source in the 1930s,

it caused a major scare across the radio-dependant nation. Richard J. Hand cites studies by unnamed historians who "calculate[d] that some six million heard the CBS broadcast; 1.7 million believed it to be true, and 1.2 million were 'genuinely frightened.'"

Misperceptions

So what if our perception of something is wrong? What if the inciting moment was misread? In the book *Psycho-Cybernetics* the author, Maxwell Maltz, declares that fear is the same either way. "[Y] our nervous system cannot tell the difference between an actual experience and one that is vividly imagined," explains Maltz. He then gives an example of how anyone meeting a grizzly bear on a mountain trail would immediately have an automatic fear response which would trigger their body to run with the aid of adrenaline and heightened breathing. But then he goes back and asks, what if the bear wasn't real? What if the bear was actually a man in a bear suit? "Thus, it was basically idea or be-



lief which was the true causative agent, rather than emotion—which came as a result."

*I discovered I scream the same way whether
I'm about to be devoured by a great white
shark or if a piece of seaweed touches my foot.
—Unknown*

In chapter one we learned that suspense is internal. In chapter two we said it was based on perception. One of the

amazing things about the human brain is that it is constantly comparing the current signals it is being sent with all of our old experiences that it has stored away—looking for matches. When we see a chair our brain says, “I know this one! That’s a chair” and we don’t have to study it for a long time or touch it or taste it. We may even only see part of the chair and our mind fills in the rest. Our brain works very fast and can piece together lots of information with very little to work with. But that is also the problem. Sometimes our mind is so quick that it guesses wrong and we scream or jump without having time to realize that it was just a friend playing a trick on us.

A police officer could tell you that if three people witnessed an accident, chances are that you will have three fairly different accounts told of the same event. All three were there, but without instant replays and slow motion from multiple angles, your mind is left to try to automatically fill in what you missed or what you couldn’t possibly have seen.

The Book vs. The Movie

Every time a movie is produced that is based on a book you are guaranteed to hear someone say in a slightly condescending tone, “The book was much better than the movie.” But how can this be so? How can black ink on white paper be better than, special effects, outrageous stunts, powerful music, and beautiful movie stars? And yet somehow the reader still chooses the static written



page over the dynamic motion picture. Why? Because there is a movie studio in our heads that can outdo the millions of dollars and years of time put into making any feature film. It doesn’t matter how amazing the special effects technology becomes—it can never touch the limitless imagination of the mind. And, its power to create.

Yes, those black and white pages force you to create every image and moment in your mind—film not so much. Films put everything up there for you to passively observe. Books force you to design the sets, cast the actors, compose the music, and see all of the things that you can close your eyes through at a movie. Everyone’s fears are different, but movies can only be portrayed one way. In this regard, films are very limited. If I were to write, “He had a face that made you want to trust him the first time you saw it,” your mind immediately creates a mental image. But your mental image is different than my mental image, and if we asked ten other people to visualize the same thing, you would have ten more different images. Thus, the movie can never match the way you saw it the first time—in your mind.

Your fears are tailor made to fit your mental image—mine to fit mine. That is the power of mental creation, and thus the power of suspense. We are suspended by what we imagine—not by reality. Dean Koontz, well known suspense and horror author, said it this way:

“If, being cornered by the foul-breathed and grave-rank vampire, the hero must clearly die, should the bloody bite and blood-sucking be viewed by the reader in gory detail, or subtly suggested? The answer: subtly suggested, more often than not. Having spent pages to build the reader into a frenzy of suspense—and dark fantasy relies on anticipation of the encounter between hero and villain, rather than the actual physical encounter itself—it is nearly always impossible to make the climactic confrontation between good and evil as terrifying as the reader, himself, has imagined it.”

I remember being frightened, as a child, of the mysterious Jabberwock from a sequel to *Alice in Wonderland* that I saw on TV. I remember the Alice character sitting in front of the looking glass and reading part of Lewis Carol’s poem that began “Beware the Jabberwock, my son! The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!” It then continued:

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

If I remember correctly, the Jabberwock then appeared right behind her. And

I immediately closed my eyes in fear—before getting a good look at the creature. My brother teased me and told me how dumb the creature appeared in this version of the story. But the next time it appeared I again refused to look. My brother laughed and told me it wasn't scary at all. I finally determined to look and was surprised when I noticed that my brother was right. It was obviously just a guy in a rubber costume that looked more silly than scary. My



imagination had been much worse than the reality on screen.

Nowadays, with computers the creatures created in films can be much more sophisticated. We are not limited to rubber costumes, puppets, or claymation. But, this doesn't change anything. We still know that it is fiction and even CGI (computer generated images) have boundaries—unlike our imaginations.

The scariest moment in a movie is right before something happens. The music puts our senses on high alert and our mind anticipates the worst. A sudden blur of motion and sound seems to indicate that our imagined fears are coming true. But once we actually

get a good look at the monster, we see that—unlike our mental creation—it has limitations and weaknesses. Yes, it is still scary, but the all-powerful ethereal creation of our mind has been cast down to earth and made mortal, in a sense. The abstract has become concrete. Suspense then gives way to action as the hero works to overcome this now manageable foe.

*We're more afraid of Nothing
than we are of Something.*

*You can fight Something.
But...Nothing?*

-Ray Bradbury

This is why facing your fears and taking immediate action is the best antidote to fear. Fear only lives in your mind. Things that you've worried about and been suspended from taking care of for years can often be resolved in a short period of time—like an afternoon or a few weeks. Make that phone call, drive that distance—whatever it is—just do something about it. Stop putting it off and worrying. "Nothing" is holding you back. And once you've deflated the fiction that surrounds the actual truth, the energy you've put into worrying about it will flow back into you—making you stronger. And often your perceived foe can become an ally.

In the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy and friends finally come face to face with the wizard, which appears to be a large floating head surrounded by fire with a booming voice. Later it is revealed that

the wizard is actually just a man behind a curtain controlling the scary image they had first seen. Once the truth is revealed and his fearful persona is eliminated he ends up helping them.

Personal creation or imagination is very important. Suspense books and movies would be very short if all the facts were presented right up front. The ability to use your imagination is what makes those stories so enjoyable to experience. You are a cocreator in the process.

When I worked in a haunted house we would build these elaborate mazes, tilted rooms, spinning couches, etc. and people would come out saying how much they loved the "room that was pitch black"—the room where all we did was turn off the lights and let them find their way out. This cemented in my mind the power of personal creation when it comes to fear. The only thing in that room besides some obstacles and occasional indistinguishable sound effects (inciting moment) was their imagination. And that was better than anything we could create for them.

Imagination is not limited to haunted houses, movies, and books of fiction. Imagination permeates all of life. Albert Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand." He also said, "Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions." As long as our imagination is

not hindering us from moving forward—as long as it is not laced with fear—it will be the key to our future.



In college, I remember two specific times that I took dates to haunted houses. The first date mostly closed her eyes and hugged me the whole time. The second date—I was hoping for a similar response—didn't behave at all as I had expected. She walked so fast through the haunt that I had a hard time keeping up with her. (And I was familiar with the place.) She didn't stop and look at anything. All she did was look for the exit at each room and head for it. I think she may have set a record. Afterward, she told me her goal was just to get through it. Needless to say, I was a bit disappointed at the time. Looking back though, there are some lessons about how we respond to fear that can be learned from it.

First, it is possible even with inciting moments for people not to focus on the "what ifs" and keep moving ahead with little suspense. Second, setting goals and adhering to those goals is a

good way to push past fear. And third, if you just close your eyes and let your imagination fill in the blanks you are at the mercy of others to lead you through life.

My second date's imagination was focused on how good it would be once she got through the current situation. She was filled with determination and hope. Her hope eliminated any suspense and she reached her goal very quickly.

People often say that life isn't fair (which is true), but this experience demonstrated to me that even when the situation is the same—or in other words, it is fair—how we react can make all the difference in the world. If we think it is going to be bad and we stop and close our eyes then yes it does seem to be bad. It is a self-fulfilling prophesy. We will find what we expect to find. If we look for the bad in others and in life then we will definitely find it. On the other hand, if we look for the good then we can find that too.

Secret #4

Imagination—depending on how it is focused—can reveal endless obstacles or endless opportunities.

It is crucial that we keep our dreams out in front of us and that we don't let them wither and die. Hope can be enhanced by imagination. When our dreams are fresh in our minds our imagination can brainstorm positive ways to make them happen. But pure imagination is not enough. Lasting real hope also requires

truth. Sure we can hope that we will catch a leprechaun some day, but without truth that hope is just smoke and mirrors. Evidence gives our dreams a leg to stand upon. It is the foundation that your imagination can start with. Hope based on evidence is called faith. Faith is not—as some think—a belief in something unknowable and improvable. Faith is based on relationships (trust) and past experiences (evidence). For example, if I have a friend who has always given me sound advice in the past—even if it was just on small things, then I may base a more important decision on the faith I have in my friend's recommendation.

Have you ever been driving during a snowstorm and found the white falling snowflakes somewhat hypnotic? If you look at the fluttering snowflakes you can lose track of where you are and end up running off the road. If you turn your "brights" on it seems to only make it worse by illuminating more snowflakes. But if you keep your headlights on low beam and focus on the yellow painted lines you can keep from drifting off the side. You can trust the yellow lines. They've always led you right in the past. Real lasting hope (or faith) is based on the evidence you gain from past experiences. Fear is like a fog that clouds and distorts our judgment.

Successful action requires correct decision making.

If we base our decisions on smoke and mirrors then we may find ourselves

running away from a guy in bear suit. A painful memory of mine comes from a time when I listened to my fears. While I was still in school, I was interviewing for a job with a newspaper. The interviewer asked a lot of tough questions and made me feel very unqualified for the position I was trying for. It had also come up during the interview that I had created a certain website that he had visited and appreciated. Upon leaving the interview I forgot all the positive aspects of the discussion and became focused on how unqualified I felt. I was ashamed that I had even applied for the position. Fear took control of my imagination. I became angry with myself and embarrassed to think that I had ever felt I could do that job. I got so worked up by my imagination that I finally called up the company and told them I was no longer interested in the position. A friend of mine who worked at the company informed me a few days later that they had not been considering me for the position I had applied for, but were considering me for another position—that is, of course, until I had called and irrationally withdrew my name.

Our imaginations can make us do nonsensical things. But it can also open doors and show us paths that we didn't know existed. In college, I was dismayed to find that a class that I needed, to graduate on schedule, was not being offered at a time that I could take it. I would have to wait until the next year and throw off all of my plans. Not knowing what to do, I turned to prayer. I pondered the situation and tried to keep



an open mind. Soon, an idea presented itself to my imagination: I could test out of the class. Yes! I had already done a major project outside of school that could be used to demonstrate my knowledge of the area. I filled out the forms and made my case. My imagination soon became a reality as my request was granted.

Faith can redirect our imagination toward wonderful new possibilities. In our constantly changing world where we don't know if we will be working at the same job next year, it is crucial that we utilize our imaginations as a tool to propel us forward rather than let it hold us back by unfounded fears.

I've had people tell me to "get real" when I was pushing myself to be better. Sometimes people will try to hold us back from our dreams because it makes them feel bad about not working to achieve theirs. Fears and doubts can be thrown at us from all directions. Keeping faith in our goal can deflect those fears. It is our choice whether we stop moving and close our eyes—suspending ourselves in fear—or keep moving forward with faith in our goal. The more experiences we have where our faith pays off, the more our hope will grow. And our imagination will either

listen to our fear or our hope—whichever it finds within us.

Faith redirects imagination into wonderful new possibilities.

CHAPTER 5: THE NIGHTMARE MIRROR

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THE INTERNET IS STILL RELATIVELY NEW. The speed with which it has enveloped the world and integrated itself into our lives still amazes me. And it is constantly growing and changing. Web 2.0 is a term used to differentiate the way the Internet was when it first began, to its more interactive current state. Originally, the web let you look at pictures and read information. It was a lot like reading a magazine or newspaper but you could click on certain words called “hyperlinks” to read more about that subject. I actually had a class in college that taught you what a link was and my homework was to use links to find a specific picture on the net. (They teach that in elementary school now.) Interactivity is the way the web works now. It is all about connecting through social media and adding your two cents to any publication. There are blogs about everything and groups for every subject. People are connecting in unprecedented ways.

The Internet has broken down many walls and erased many stereotypes.

I recall finding myself chatting one time with someone from a foreign country that I new little about. I found him and the way he described his country to be nothing like I had heard. He showed me where I could see images and hear music and discover yummy sounding food I had no idea existed. The world became smaller and the prejudices and misperceptions I had grown up with about “those people” was replaced by truth.

While the web has connected people and eliminated fears, it has also created new problems. Though seemingly more connected digitally, we are less connected physically. Go to a public place and you will notice lots of people in their own little worlds. Instead of interacting with the people and world around them they are on their phones, listening to music, or texting. It is also very easy to portray yourself online as something you are not—creating relationships and joining groups based on lies. We can even live out fantasy lives in a fictional world with other fantasy people who are not who they say they are either. These other lives can begin to mean more to us as

we spend more and more time there. And reality—boring reality—slips away.

The Origins of the Gothic Fantasy

Escapism didn’t begin with the web. It just compounded it. In the 1700s two eccentric aristocrats, Horace Walpole and William Beckford, used their riches to each create extravagant Gothic mansions that fit with their private fantasies. Walpole’s “castle” —though newly built of plaster—had wallpaper painted to look like stone and fake medieval looking



battlements (Tropp). Both aristocrats also wrote novels about their self-referential fantasy worlds, and according to William Day "By the 1790s, these private worlds had become public ones, and the Gothic fantasy was transformed from aristocratic hobby to middle-class entertainment." Soon hundreds of Gothic novels with basically the same story line were made available to the now reading British public, while the wealthy found it "sublime" to have skeletons in their gardens and "hermits' caves" or "ruined abbeys" being newly constructed for them.

Interestingly enough, Horace Walpole said his inspiration for his very popular novel, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*, came from a dream—a fantasy in itself. In the dream he was in a castle "and that on the uppermost banister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armor" (Tropp). He began to write that evening "without knowing in the least what I intended to say."

Today the Gothic fantasy (supernatural events in a medieval setting) lives on in continuously resurrected stories like *Frankenstein* and a multitude of vampire stories that just won't die. All of these stories tap into our fears through means of dreamlike fantasies.

The Dream World

We dream every night, but most of the time we don't remember it. In my dream last night it made complete sense that I was giving a speech at the same place I had spoken at just a week before and the fact that it was raining indoors

didn't seem to faze me one bit or that the next moment I was inexplicably walking on a beach. It all seemed normal at the time. Apparently our minds are processing the events and thoughts of the day before and comparing them to other stored thoughts and experiences that can produce an array of odd images and moments. Much like a computer needing to reboot once in a while, our minds need this time to sort things out. Have you ever awoken with the answer to a problem that you hadn't been able



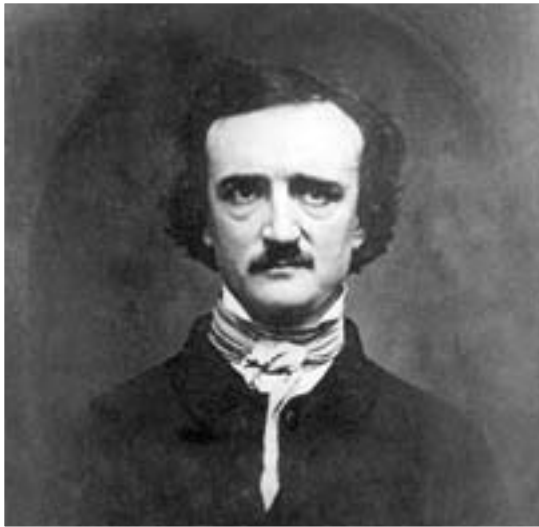
to figure out the night before? I have. Our mind doesn't stop while we are sleeping. It utilizes the time to catch up. And the resulting dreams can be quite odd, sometimes hopeful, and sometimes scary too. Problems that we can't figure out can come to the surface and take the form of nightmares.

The creations of our mind whether asleep or awake are not purely random. A dream is a more tangible representation of our inner thoughts. Much like a fantasy story, our thoughts and fears can be represented by a character or an event—giving us a more fully formed representation of our inner thoughts. Sometimes a dragon can be slayed in our mind that gives us courage or insight toward conquering the obstacle that the fantasy represents for us in real life. It may be that the only time that our subconscious can get through to us is in our dreams.

Sleep is much like suspense in that all of the work or action we are performing is only taking place in the mind. Our bodies are suspended in slumber while our imagination runs free. The main difference between the two is that you wake up from dreams and immediately (or soon thereafter) can distinguish between reality and fantasy. Suspense, on the other hand, is like living in a dream where you never automatically wake up and what is real and what is imagined can blur together like the cliché fog in a horror movie. If not relieved, time and space can seem to disappear, as well as the distinction between yourself and the atmosphere enveloping you. Like a fun house mirror or a shattered piece of glass everything we see is actually a distorted reflection of ourselves—a reflection that is both personal and fictitious.

Edgar Allan Poe's use of Dream States

The Gothic fantasy is an imitation of



this dreamlike quality. Edgar Allan Poe was a master at using these dream-like states in his writings. He once wrote, "The world of dreams and nightmares is the true realm of art." His work seems to reflect this belief and much can be understood about dreams and the way our minds work through an analysis of his work.

In the book "A Psychology of Fear: The Nightmare Formula of Edgar Allan Poe", David R. Saliba does just this. Through an extensive analysis of Poe's writings, Saliba uncovers for us the "nightmare formula." He states, "Poe identified imagination with dream. Where Poe differed from other romantic poets was in the literalness and absoluteness of the identification, and in the clinical precision with which he observed the phenomena of dream, carefully distinguishing the various states through which the mind passes on its way to sleep."

Edgar Allan Poe lived from 1809 to 1849 and yet he is still well known today. His writings can be found in any bookstore and his poem "The Raven" has even found its way into pop culture (*The Simpson's* Halloween special). Why are these eerie stories and poems still so recognized? I believe it is because of the pattern he uses. He doesn't just try and scare us by throwing random spooky scenes at us, but connects to us through the frightfully familiar pattern of our nightmares. In his own words, "Most of our tale-writers ... seem to begin their stories without knowing how they are to end; and their ends ... appear to have forgotten their beginnings."

According to Saliba, Poe takes us "from wakefulness, to reverie, from reverie to hypnagogic state, from hypnagogic state to deep sleep."

A professional haunted house, if done well, can be an imitation of the dream



world—the world of the mind. Let's use a haunted house to illustrate the different sleep stages that Poe was such a master of:

Wakefulness

Everyone arrives at the haunted attraction awake and with lots of things on their minds. The mood is usually set by music, occasional screams heard from inside the haunt, and some "sublime" visuals to get their minds working creatively—moving into reverie—while they wait to go in.

Reverie

Reverie is daydreaming – "A state of abstracted musing" (Dictionary.com). In the previous chapter we discussed the power of personal creation when it comes to suspense. Limited visuals at this point of the haunt's story force people to begin looking inside to their own fears.

"[The visitor] is willing to subject his conscious mind to the enjoyment of the fantasy world ... because he is confident of his own ability to maintain control over his own senses and to distinguish between fact and fiction. It is what he does not realize about his own mind that ultimately renders him a victim of fear." (Saliba)

Hypnagogic State

When we fall asleep we do not imme-

diately go into REM and start having long vivid dreams. There is an intermediate phase as we are just falling asleep where we have "hypnagogic hallucinations". These have been described as "the flickering images and voices that well up just before sleep takes over." (Night: An Exploration of Night Life, Night Language, Sleep and Dreams, by A. Alvarez). The best example I can think of for this is the opening sequence of the old Twilight Zone television show where seemingly unrelated images (like an eyeball, a breaking window, a door, a clock, etc.) float toward us. An art gallery is probably the closest representation of a hypnagogic state in the conscious world, because the images are hung on a neutral wall so that you move from one image to the next with a bit of space between them. The images are usually unrelated to each other but can stir up memories and emotions in the viewer.

"The narrator of 'The Assigination' is astonished at the glare of blinding luxury and fantastic chaos that he sees upon entering the room above the winding staircase. His senses are immediately accosted by confusing odors, melancholy sounds, and illogically displayed art objects and artifacts. He is clearly entrapped in the insanity of a nightmare world," explains Saliba.

I prefer haunted houses that do not start off with a big scene acted out and people jumping out at you, but with some peculiar objects or other visuals (such as statues, jack-o'-lanterns, skeletons, a dead body, or even some



eerie paintings) that are spaced out in such a way that it feels more dreamlike. Whatever it is, it needs to have an otherworldly quality about it to help visitors feel separated from the everyday world they are comfortable with and get them in touch with their own fears.

"...the unconscious mind is the storehouse of primal and irrational fears basic to every human being. Once these dark emotions are stirred by contacts from the conscious mind they cannot be allayed or dispelled entirely by conscious effort, they linger and haunt the conscious mind, causing the [visitor] to become the victim of his own unrealized emotions," writes Saliba.

Deep Sleep

This stage of sleep rotates between dreams and dreamlessness. As the night progresses the dreams seem to lengthen and become more vivid while the spaces between seem to shorten. I like to think of the dreams as scenes in a haunt and the dreamlessness as the dark spaces and hallways between the scenes.

A nightmare is considered a nightmare when the dream is so intense and vivid that the dreamer wakes up to escape from it. In a haunted attraction the empty spaces shorten as it progresses and the scares build up to a point that they run out screaming.

Dreaming permits each and every one of us to be quietly and safely insane every night of our lives.

--William Dement

Returning to Sanity

In the dream world there are no laws. Anything can happen and thus fear can run rampant. Sanity is knowing fantasy from reality. And our biggest fear is losing the ability to distinguish between the two. The nightmare mirror with its distorted shattered glass can increasingly prevent us from seeing anything past our own fragmented misperceptions. The real world, though all around us, is blocked from our view. Fear's reflection projects a selfish false reality that continuously disconnects us from reality and shrinks our influence in the real world.

Every person has what is called a circle of influence. It includes all of the things and people that we can affect. Some people, including some celebrities, have huge circles of influence and what they do and say can change thousands of people's lives. Other people couldn't convince a starving man to eat. Fear subtracts from our influence. Confidence and service increase our influence.

Confidence

Confidence or self-esteem is one of the most important things anyone needs to succeed. And most of us are lacking. Rick Pitino, pro basketball coach, wrote, "self-esteem must be earned. You

must deserve it, just as you must deserve victory. If the effort is there, plus the discipline to back it up, you will automatically start to feel better about yourself. Believe me, there is nothing better than the feeling you get when you've taken control of a situation." When there is a disconnect between what you feel you should be doing and what you actually are doing on a daily basis, it causes your self esteem to diminish. As you take responsibility for your life and discipline yourself to do the things which you know that you should do, self confidence grows.

There was a point in my life where I would rather have done anything other than speak in public. I dreaded it. It scared me to death. The problem was that I had earned an important award and it was tradition for the person receiving the award to get up and say a few words—mostly just thank everyone. But for me that seemed overwhelming I almost turned down the honor on account of my fear. In fact, I told the people putting on the event that I would rather not speak if I didn't have to. In the end I sat there in front of everyone scared to death that they might still ask me to speak. I felt like a fool and really missed out on a great opportunity to expand my influence through public speaking.

Soon after this experience I came across a book by Dale Carnegie called "How to Develop Self-Confidence And Influence People By Public Speaking." It was just what I needed. With each chapter I felt my unearthed fears dissipating. I real-

ized that most people would rather choose death over public speaking and that many had overcome this very common fear. For some reason, just reading the book changed me. It was as



if the tables had turned and I now had the advantage over my audience. I knew the rules. I controlled what happened and my distorted nightmare mirror had vanished. For the first time in my life I wanted to speak.

My chance came soon enough. I was asked to speak to a group of several hundred people from the stage of a large theatre. I had disciplined myself by studying my subject backward and forward and had practiced my speech every day, multiple times. The seats in the theatre were full as I stood to speak. It was amazing. As soon as I stood, I had confidence and felt a real connection with my audience. It was the first of many wonderful speaking experiences, and the beginning of an increase in my personal confidence.

Service

If there is a common theme found in books by influential people it is service. Service is a key to breaking out of fear. Fear is selfish. It looks only inward. Service forces you out of your self-contained world. It changes your focus so you can see past your own mistakes and worries. By serving others you serve yourself. Service is one of the steps used by organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous to help people break free from their addictions. Though often overlooked and even mocked, it is one of the most powerful tools we can utilize in expanding our circle of influence. You've probably heard the oft-quoted line, "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." Service is love put into action. And if it is sincere (it has to be sincere) than it can break down even the biggest barriers. Serving others without expecting anything in return will not only improve your relationships, but it will improve you. G. K. Chesterton expressed this idea very beautifully: "How much larger your life would be if you could become smaller in it ... You would begin to be interested in others. You would break out of this tiny tawdry theatre in which your own little plot is always being played, and you would find yourself under a freer sky, in a street full of splendid strangers."

I have been trying something in my life lately. I am not perfect at it yet, but it has already made a huge difference.

I always try to give more than I receive—every day—in every situation.



If I walk past someone I give them a smile. If someone tells me about their day, I turn and give them my full attention. When I tell people about this they inevitably ask, "What about giving money?". It is hard for people to think of giving in any way other than money or store bought things. When a stranger approaches me and bluntly asks me for money I do not feel obliged to give him money or guilty if I don't. If I give him nothing other than kindness I am giving him far more than he is giving me. Even if I had tons of money I wouldn't necessarily give it to everyone who asks. There are so many other things that are worth more: our time, muscle, encouragement, a referral, an understanding ear, etc. It requires some work and practice to develop the habit of looking at other people not as "what can they do for me" but with the attitude of "how can I make their day a little better?".

Fear is like a black hole. It sucks all of the energy around it in and gives nothing back. A powerful tool to conquering fear is service. Service forces you to stop thinking about yourself and your concerns. It reverses the black hole effect. Helping others is one of the best ways to help yourself. Gandhi, the well-known Indian Philosopher said, "The best way

to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." This sounds backward, but try it. It will change your life guaranteed.

It is one thing to think things in your mind, and quite another to take action in the real world. Dreams do come true, but not in the dream world.

Secret #5

*Fear disconnects us from reality
and shrinks our influence in
the real world.*

CHAPTER 6: GIVE IT TIME

I ONCE MET A WOMAN WHO HAD SURROUNDED HERSELF WITH PAPER-BACK NOVELS. Literally every surface in her room was stacked with books. She explained to me that her life had been so hard that now all she could handle was “fluff”. She had given up on reality and wanted to live in a fantasy world until she died.

Life is very hard. I believe it is designed that way for a reason. It is up to us how we will live it. We can just endure it or we can take charge and “endure it well”.

“Boil, boil, toil, and trouble”

We’ve discussed many elements of understanding suspense: the ingredients, the type of pot (or cauldron) to use, how the inciting moment gets the flames going, how imagination drenches the ingredients, and seeing past the distorted bubbles that pop up to reality. But that is just the beginning. Now we must watch and wait, stirring occasionally, sampling and adjusting. You don’t just throw

everything in and expect perfection. We learn from trial and error, and constant correction.

How often do you stir the pot? Once an emotion gets into our system it can linger for a long time. Especially if something stirs it up just a little, every so often. I remember an experience I had when I was driving down the freeway and I realized that I was feeling angry. There didn’t seem to be any reason to be angry as I was having a very good day. After scanning my memory I remembered that someone had cut me off on the road several miles back. I had pretty much forgotten about it, but the anger still lingered—looking for something else to attach itself too. I had to consciously tell myself not to be angry and focus on something else before it seemed to disappear completely. An interesting exercise is to time how often a scare occurs in your favorite suspense film or count the pages in between scares in a book. Generally, people are surprised by how much is just mood, build up, and lingering emotion.

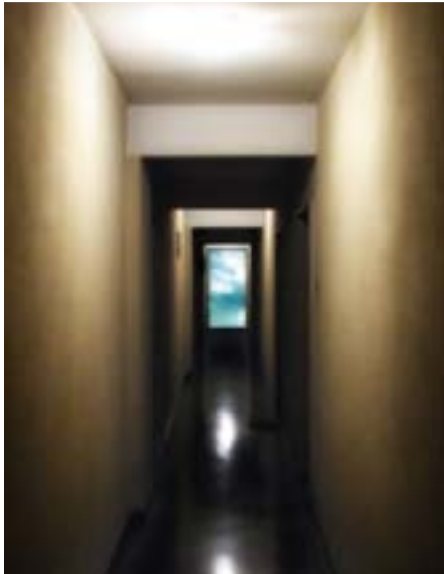


In the book, *Writing the Thriller*, we learn that suspense is like a river. “Suspense has a flow. Imagine it as a river meandering here and there, rippling over small rocks, then rushing headlong over larger boulders to create dangerous rapids before dwindling back down to a benign stream.”

“Moments involving action or intense emotional conflict need to be balanced by calmer passages of short narrative reflection or tension-free conversation that allow readers room to breathe. Think of the suspense itself as wait-

ing beneath the surface during these lulls... just as the readers catch their breath, the writer whirls them downstream once more toward the waterfall that awaits."

Every suspense story has a main overarching cause for suspense that is set up at the beginning and not relieved



until near the end, but aside from that or within that "global" suspense can be several smaller "local" crises. It is like hiking up a mountain. The incline is not perfectly even the whole way. There are steep spots and good rest spots, but ultimately you are still working your way to the top.

Your life is going to have periods of uncertainty. Life is not an escalator.

Successful people learn to take time out for themselves to meditate and

regroup. Many people take an occasional vacation, but smaller more accessible breaks on a weekly—or even daily—basis are part of a healthy lifestyle. I have found that a little time to myself each morning where I can read, meditate, and plan helps me break out of the tension that naturally occurs in life. And I have set one day aside each week to be with my family and develop myself spiritually as well. It is amazing how much more can be accomplished in six days when I break the suspense every seventh.

People as Houses

The difference between a haunted looking mansion and a dazzlingly beautiful mansion is the condition it is in. Any building if left alone long enough will fall apart and become overgrown and faded. I sometimes like to think of people's minds as houses. Your house can be a run down dilapidated building filled with cobwebs, holes, and darkness; or it can be an exquisite mansion full of light and art. The difference is what we put into it and how often.

If we allow ourselves to be filled with fear and we don't regularly take action to cleanse ourselves of that fear then it will affect us over time. We need to think about what we think about. Do you let the TV station decide what will be put in your head each night or the radio hosts to dictate your thoughts of the day? If so your world will be warped and sensationalized. I have a friend who used to work for a local news station as a cameraman and he got so fed up with them

trying to make a story out of nothing or twisting the truth to look like something completely different, that he finally quit. If you are going to listen to or watch the news, at least get it from a variety of sources.

I also recommend reading good books. Learn about new topics. Expand your mind and keep it working. Your mind needs the furniture rearranged once in a while.

Rhythms of Life

Have you ever noticed how people can sleep in a car through all sorts of noises, but when you turn off the car they suddenly wake up? Could it be that the silence woke them up?

We get used to certain rhythms—like the sounds of the road or the construction down the street—and we don't even notice it after awhile.

Until the rhythm is broken.

My suggestion is to occasionally find a way to break your rhythm. Start to notice things (and people) around you. Look at life in a new way.

Homeostasis

The dictionary defines Homeostasis as "a state of psychological equilibrium obtained when tension or a drive has been reduced or eliminated." Every movie pretty much starts out in homeostasis—where we see the main character in his normal every day world. But the

movie doesn't take off until something or someone forces him out of his comfort zone and toward a goal. This is when his fears are overcome and his life improved.

Exercise

Take your list of fears and the inciting moments that caused them and right out the opposite of it. Write out a list of positive statements that describe how you would like to respond the next time that inciting moment arrives. Writing these in the present tense makes it much more powerful to your subconscious. For example, instead of saying "I am going to be confident around people," you would say, "I am confident around people." Memorize these positive statements and then actually visualize yourself acting them out.

I also write down great quotes that inspire me and try to memorize them as well.

Expanding the Mind

I used to have a video game that would light up areas of a map where your character had already been. But after a while if your character didn't go back through those areas it would begin to darken again. Light has a way of expanding our minds. Darkness, the absence of light, is nothing. Negative thoughts do nothing for us at best and take from us at worst. Light fills us with something. If

we then act on that light (like the video game) then the vision remains. We can then use that new information to expand to new areas. Unfortunately, much like the game, our mind will darken if we misuse or neglect it. If we don't act on or use the information we gained, then it fades back to its original understanding.

How often?

Our minds can be like a car with poor alignment. Unless we are constantly correcting them they will drift off to one side or the other.

It is fairly easy to set goals while you are motivated, but the trick is to keep working at those goals the next week when the excitement isn't there, and fear is trying to sneak back in. The written goal itself seems somewhat lackluster without the emotion that it was created under. Real success is being able to recreate that motivation each day as you reread and (I recommend) rewrite your goals down. Something that helps me with this is remembering the trick of commercials.

Why is it that commercials always cut in right at the best parts? The answer: They are trying to create suspense so that you will stay to see what happens. If you give yourself something to look forward to and work toward in the long term you won't stress so much about what decisions to make right now. If we have our long term goal set firmly in our mind then we will reach our goal even if our current path takes a detour. Sometimes we stress so much about "major" decisions we face today, but if we focus

on the long term than either road could get us there. You may get stuck in the commercials momentarily, but "stay tuned."

Secret #6 *Overcoming suspense* *requires frequent And* *repeated effort*

You will notice that in movies and books the goal of the hero is brought up occasionally to remind the audience why we are going through all of this. Frequently remind yourself of your long-term and your short-term goals. Take time to notice the progress you have made. Don't make impossible goals that will only discourage you, but don't aim so low that you aren't pushed and stretched.



I really believe that you can accomplish amazing things by simply setting and reaching attainable goals each day. Large, elephant sized goals can scare us into immobility, but if we just focus on eating "one bite at a time" (as the saying goes) then it doesn't seem so

overwhelming. Each morning I focus on the little goals I want to accomplish that day. And each night (as part of my prayers) I review the day—almost as if I am reporting back on my progress.

Endure it Well

There are two ways to view life. You can simply endure all of the hard things that will inevitably come your way. Or you can choose to act—to take control. When inciting moments come along, choose to act positively. If it is a fear or a lie or some other negative thought, recognize it for what it is and take control of your mind. Discard anything that will hold you back or slow you down. To go back to our river analogy, just because the water wants to take you down stream toward rough areas and waterfalls doesn't mean you have to go there. Plop your outboard motor in the water and steer yourself to where you want to go.

*The night is far spent, the day is at hand:
let us therefore cast off the works of
darkness, and let us put on
the armour of light.*

Romans 13:12

If you are like I was, you may need to correct your thinking or be motivated several times in a day. A help that I have found is to listen occasionally throughout the day to uplifting and inspiring audios, such as motivational talks or positive music. Eventually, the needed words will come to your head automatically



when truth is needed. To quote Sun Tzu again, "If you know the enemy and know yourself you need not fear the results of a hundred battles."

Just like suspense needs time to grow, so too does hope, faith, and courage. It is easy to give up—to abandon your dreams like a deserted old house. Or you can put in the work that is needed to make it the way you know it can be.

EPILOGUE

The Six Secrets of Suspense:

- 1) *Suspense is an internal mixture of hope and fear.*
- 2) *A perceived suspension of time in the present is based on concern for the unseen future.*
- 3) *Suspense can always be traced back to an inciting moment*
- 4) *Imagination—depending on how it is focused—can reveal endless obstacles or endless opportunities.*
- 5) *Fear disconnects us from reality and shrinks our influence in the real world.*
- 6) *Overcoming suspense requires frequent and repeated effort*



LOOKING BACK I REALIZE NOW

that I was drawn to the haunted house to find myself. I had no idea how deep and cavernous my fears were until I had evicted every shadow from every room, washed every cupboard, and emptied every pocket of every old coat. I had to not only face my fears head on but also digest them completely—to consume the shadow that I feared, and understand myself so well that I could navigate the hallways in the darkness guided only by the internal light and map I created from previous experiences of walking them. Only then, could the suspense pass from me. Fear attracts the fearful, but light always conquers darkness.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin Harris is an award winning speaker, writer, and graphic designer. His work ranges from an acclaimed documentary on the disease Lupus to a direct-to-video cartoon that sold out of its first run in a national bookstore. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Multimedia Communications and a continued love of learning. He lives in Denver, Colorado with his wife and children.

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