**Q&A with David Michael Williams**

**What is *Ghost Mode & Other Strange Stories*?**

In the past, I’ve joked that I am incapable of writing short stories. Every idea just seems to expand into a full-blown book, a sequel, a series.

And yet, while writing and publishing eight novels over the past few years, I have amassed many ideas, brainstorming notes, writing exercises, and rough drafts for smaller, self-contained tales—if only I had the time to polish them.

Finally, I forced myself to prioritize these streamlined narratives, refining what I had written long ago as well as cultivating long-neglected concepts.

*Ghost Mode & Other Strange Stories* is a collection of short stories that spans the gamut of speculative fiction subgenres. It’s also a confident step out of my comfort zone in order to explore new techniques, themes, and characters.

Here’s how the back cover sums up the collection:

**UNCOMMON DENOMINATORS**

*A hacker-for-hire who blurs the line between hero and villain...*

*A guardian angel struggling with a deceptively simple assignment…*

*A cunning grifter whose easy mark is much more than she seems…*

Encompassing a diverse array of speculative fiction—including sci-fi, fantasy, dreampunk, and paranormal—this collection of short fiction celebrates the supernatural while exploring exactly what it means to be human.

**How many stories are in the collection?**

There are 13, including the titular story:

* Ghost Mode
* Anthropology in Apogee
* Gamechanger
* Flesh & Blood
* Unparalleled
* Reputation
* Captive
* The Fix
* The Lake Road
* Suspect 814553
* Drifters
* The Monster & The Mirage
* The End

**Why did you decide to write short stories instead of new novel?**

Writing a full-length novel is incredibly time consuming. Even *The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot*, a breezy YA book clocking in at about 54,000 words, took more than a year from conception to completion. Series are even more of a commitment.

Meanwhile, other ideas pop up (and have to be suppressed) while elbow deep in a work in progress. I track them all, telling myself that someday I’ll find the time to explore them. Over the years, that list has only grown, and even though I occasionally use short stories as palate cleansers between bigger projects, I rarely give them the attention they deserve.

Therefore, my purpose for compiling this short story collection is twofold: to finally finish these tales that demand to be released into the world as well as to indulge in bite-sized storytelling that lets me tackle new characters, new settings, new themes—in short, to *experiment*.

**Is there a central theme for the collection?**

They say every collection should have a theme. They also say rules are meant to be broken.

I didn’t set out to position my stories comfortably under any sort of umbrella. I simply wanted to tell the tales that have been clawing at my subconscious for years or even decades. Naturally, most of them contained an element of the supernatural, but trying to connect the dots between stories about spiritual warfare, computer viruses, alien visitations, and vengeful assassins seemed like a fool’s errand.

So I decided to celebrate my diversity of interests and flexibility as a writer. Ignoring conventional wisdom, I simply wrote what I wanted.

Imagine, then, my surprise when I discovered a couple of threads loosely winding their way through the collection:

1. Seldom will you find a clear-cut hero or villain; the stories are populated with complex characters making difficult decisions.
2. Despite a plethora of supernatural beings, every story provides its own perspective on what it means to be human.

**Who will enjoy this book?**

Fans of speculative fiction genres and subgenres—from sword-and-sorcery fantasy to science fiction, cyberpunk to dreampunk—will likely find something that tickles their gray matter. Also, because even the most otherworldly tale is rooted in reality, readers who prefer stories that make them think can appreciate this collection.

In other words, if you like your fiction wonderfully weird, you’ll like *Ghost Mode & Other Strange Stories*.

**What is *Ghost Mode & Other Strange Stories* “rated”?**

While most of the stories probably wouldn’t warrant a rating above PG, several of them explore mature themes and include coarse language. For that reason, the collection as a whole is marketed to adult readers.

**Are all of the stories standalone, or does the reader need to be familiar with your novels?**

Every story in the collection is intended to be self-contained and satisfying in its own right.

Having said that, three stories tie into my other fiction: “Gamechanger” is a prequel of sorts to *The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot*, “Reputation” revisits the reason why a certain wizard came to Capricon in *The Renegade Chronicles*, and “Drifters” introduces the metaphysical setting of *The Soul Sleep Cycle* and reveals the origin of a reluctant dream drifter.

Each of those stories can serve as either a first glimpse into a wider world or a fresh visit with familiar characters, depending on the reader.

**What were your biggest challenges with this book?**

As mentioned before, preventing my short stories from growing into full-fledged novels has always been something of a struggle for me. So it was important to identify a clear beginning, middle, and end for each tale.

I also wanted to make sure the collection represented my best work. It would’ve been easy—or, at least, easier—to spruce up some stuff I wrote back in college. Because I wanted a mix of ideas and a wider sample to draw from, I challenged myself to write eight short stories in eight weeks near the end of 2020. In all, I wrote 12 stories last year.

While I was pleased with my output, my enthusiasm resulted in a new challenge: deciding which stories would make the final cut for the collection!

**What did you like best about writing *Ghost Mode & Other Strange Stories*?**

In a word: experimentation!

Whether it’s a seldom-used narrative style, unique point-of-view character, or plot twist, short fiction lends itself to taking risks. You can get away with literary devices that couldn’t be sustained or simply wouldn’t work in longform fiction.

Moreover, *Ghost Mode & Other Strange Stories* includes some of my favorite characters. While it’s possible they may appear in future works—I’m looking at you Nic and Bettie—right now it’s enough to see so many new faces between the covers of this collection.

**Were there any surprises along the way?**

Before I shipped my stories off to beta readers, I had already whittled the collection down to 17 contenders. One story surprised me by how much praise it garnered, including “I could not put this down.”

Considering “The Monster & The Mirage” is, by far, the longest story, it made me rethink the notion of *not* including it simply because of its length. So this was a happy surprise, in no small part because this short story was my first attempt at writing sword-and-sorcery fantasy outside of Altaerra.

I’m excited to see this desert-swept mini-epic in print!

**What is your next project?**

I’m currently producing a free weekly webcomic called *Curmudgeons & Flagons*. It’s a fantasy-themed, pixel-art parody about retired adventurers. Look for it at GraphiteComics.com.

However, my next *new* project will take me even farther afield from my comfort zone: I intend to create a tabletop roleplaying game (TTRPG) starring the heroes of *The Lost Tale of Sir Larpsalot*. I’m keeping my fingers crossed for a release in spring 2022.

After that? Right now it’s a tossup between a sequel to *Magic’s Daughter* (and, incidentally, *The Renegade Chronicles*) and a novel about less-than-stellar superheroes.

As always, you can follow my progress on these projects at david-michael-williams.com.