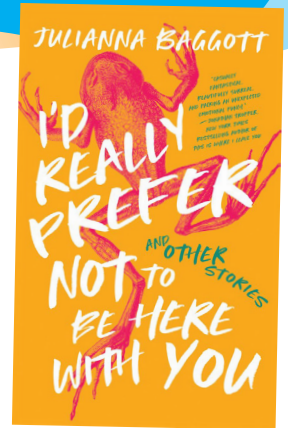


10 QUESTIONS WITH Julianna Baggott



hoopla digital: What inspired you to write this collection of short stories?

Julianna Baggott: I've published a dozen or so novels, but my first love was the short story. During the pandemic, I was restless and needed to sprint. I had more ideas and less desire to hole up in a novel. I decided to write a story a week. Many of those stories in this collection are from the stories I was working on then, though they've taken many different forms.

hd: Were "Mental Diplopia" and "The Holographer" borne from the COVID-19 pandemic?

JB: "Mental Diplopia" came before the pandemic. The bad news, for me, is that I went into the pandemic having researched the life of an epidemiologist, having interviewed people at the CDC—I'd read a huge book on the history of pandemics. It was a terrifying spot to be in, in retrospect. "The Holographer" was written while we were coming up for air, which is probably evident. What happened to our perceptions of time and memory, all skewed. That interested me.

hd: All of the stories invoke emotion, but "Nest" and "How They Got In" seemed to have more of a horror feel than the others. Do you see them that way?

JB: Yes, they were written as horror stories. I have a novel called *Pure*, which a reviewer described as "horror," and I was surprised by that. I had no idea that I was writing horror. So, I decided to really lean into it.

hd: What are your favorite books to take on holiday?

JB: I like to read books about the brain, the body, science, business strategy, perception, psychology, almost all nonfiction. My reading is pretty eclectic, and I really don't read much fiction, save a few writers who crush me.

hd: Who are authors that inspire you?

JB: Authors usually don't inspire me. They did when I was coming up, especially Marquez and Southern gothic writers. I learn a lot from poets—concision, precision, epiphany. I love playwrights and saw a lot of theater as a kid because of my family's interests. I'm usually inspired by people, their weirdness, their contradictions, what they hide.

hd: Do you have any rituals while writing?

JB: Writing is the ritual. My ritual is that I show up, I work on the story, and I always have several other stories that are in various stages of completion that I move to, and those stories always bring a new energy. I'm very physical. So I pace a lot. I walk away. I have a very loud house so I'm constantly interrupted, which is crucial to my process. I'm also a writer of faith so there's ritual there, of course. On the best days, I don't exist very much at the page. The work makes the moves.

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hd: What is your advice for new writers?

JB: Well, I have loads of advice, but the main thing is that you must love the practice of writing, not having written, not outcomes, not praise. You have to be in it for the sake of the writing itself and to protect that fraught relationship. It will be fraught. But if you keep at it because you need it, your craft will expand and you'll keep coming back.

hd: You have a Writer to Writer writing program—what do you hope your participants learn from it?

JB: I hope they learn that writing is something you can become good at with time and guided practice. My former colleague Anders Erickson did the research behind the term "10,000 hours," and I hope the Writer to Writer program sets writers on the path to putting in those hours. It's a lot of idea generation and exercises. I hope they are able to tap into their own creative energy.

hd: In addition to your adult books, you also write children's stories and poetry and founded a production company...what is your favorite of these to create?

JB: Well, I have four children, and I could never pick a favorite. I feel the same way about my work. When I'm in deep, writing a poem or story, I'm fully committed to that work and the space that work demands. I'm always thinking of the reader—not some generalized reader, but a real person, living a life, who has stumbled onto something I've written. I want to whisper my story into the ear of one reader. And each story demands that much attention and focus. The company is a business that helps me organize, manage, and sell the stories. I find great creative collaborations in the film/TV space. I also work a good bit with my son, the writer Finneas Scott. Film and television are collaborative in a way that suits me, after having spent so much of my writing career in solitude.

hd: What would readers be surprised to know about you?

JB: That while none of it is true, so much of it comes from the truth. Most of everything I've ever written comes from some more rooted experience of my life. I've just concocted them in strange and various ways. Open to any page and I can tell you where a certain detail came from, the story behind the story.



Julianna Baggott, critically acclaimed and bestselling author, has published more than 20 books under her own name as well as pen names, including two *New York Times* Notable Books of the Year: *Pure*, an ALA Alex Award winner, and *Harriet Wolf's Seventh Book of Wonders*. Over one hundred foreign editions of her books have been published overseas. Her work is currently in development with Disney+, MGM, Paramount, and Netflix. She's written for *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*; NPR; and the *Washington Post*.