

Amanda: So I mean, you have quite a vast body of work already. And you're quite prolific. And you're constantly writing. Do you ever have the day off?

Michael: day off? I took a day off today.

A: Yeah. Was it good?

M: I was itching to write at the same time. Yeah, I rarely take a day off. I take a day off when I absolutely have to get something out of the way. That's like a house chore.

A: Yeah, yep. Well, you said that, well you said lots of things - that you're inspired by Troma, and that you'd like a vast body of work to look back on? And that's your ultimate goal.

M: Yeah, that's the ultimate goal. Yeah, that and ideally, create something that didn't exist before. When I was a lot younger, I wanted to be an inventor. Yeah, and software development, or digital product design is really exciting. But my natural skills are more in storytelling and visual design. Yeah. I do have a lot of ideas about designs for products or inventions or toys and things like that. But it's all interaction design a lot of the time. And sometimes I'll put it in a story or I'll put a story in a game or I'll, you know, I kind of mix things together. And I do a lot of cross, not cross-pollinating. But mixing tools, mediums, processes.

A: Yes. I know what you mean, because you're was it? Was it a graduate essay? And I read their review of it, and how you basically wrote a play within the play about a play, right? That was really cool. And clearly you wrote something that hadn't been done before. In that context.

M: Thank you. I try to be myself. I try to be original. Um, I don't have to try as hard because I'm a bit weird. It's more that I want to be understood than to be different. I just keep to being myself and try to tell my unique voice. Yeah. And that tends to be quite original, I guess, in a way.

A: How are you weird?

M: How am I weird?

A: Yeah.

M: I have eccentric tastes. I have a variety of sense of humor styles. I'm stuck with a few emotional mental issues. I'm neurotic. But I find that that's almost a strength in creativity.

A: Yep. How do your issues inform your work?

M: I'm an over-thinker. So I think things through thoroughly to the point of excess. And a lot of the time that's my style and my writing. And some people like that. They like a lot of something that's either really well thought through or something that is about deep thought. Yeah. And I gravitate towards that kind of writing, but I also like to have a lot of different approaches to

things. So even within writing, sometimes I'm writing about deep thoughts. Sometimes I'm writing about. A lot of specificity. Yeah. In, in the action, or in the setting. A lot more than when people write plays, like I've submitted plays before, and they started off as novels or films, and people were like, they're too novelesque, we can't do that. So I think there is a certain amount for me still to learn. I've learned a lot in many years of writing. But I've still got a lot to learn about the differences between writing in different mediums. Like I took a really long time to try to learn for one thing, to write for a budget. Yeah, so I spent a lot of time with minimalism and restricting myself to challenge myself. Yep. And I sent a TV pilot to my national TV station.

A: Yeah. Yeah. So what was that? And why did they reject you, because of budget? And you said, Yeah, what did you learn from that experience?

M: I learned that maybe I should learn to write something that could be made for very little money. So I spent two or three years, training myself to do that kind of writing, at the same time, still working on all this fantastical, epic, crazy fantasy stuff. I fell in love with science fiction as well, which took me in a different direction. And I started trying to put things together - freelancing to raise money to make small-budget projects and produce projects without a budget. Yeah. And I started pitching my work to people who could afford to do stuff like that. So again, lots of different approaches to the same problem. Yep. And which is what I like to do, because I find otherwise I would be stopped and find myself failing. If I didn't have a lot of ways to solve it. Yep. It'd be done.

A: So would you prefer something really good. And published and out there and famous? That was epic and fantastical, or maybe minimalistic and with like, restrictive?

M: Both. My dream would be like, fantastical or scientific. Epic, but also grounded in deep thought and post modernism and minimalism and hugely intellectual and maybe even alienatingly snobby.

A: Yeah. Yeah, I was gonna ask you about that, because you've been called an intellectual snob. So, so is that true?

M: Um, sometimes.

A: Is that a good thing?

M: I'm happy with it. Yeah, it's, I'm fine with it. Um, until it becomes a problem. If it's a problem, then I will tone it down.

A: I guess it's about finding the right audience, isn't it? And yeah, and that's something that Seth Godin says a lot. That maybe if you're rejected, it's just, it's just the wrong audience.

M: Yeah. Yeah.

A: And there's plenty of authors and, and script writers and people that you cite as influences and that are along your style. So um, so who has influenced you the most? You list a lot.

M: I do, and my lists are constantly changing. I would have to say Jim Henson.

A: Okay. Yep.

M: Stephen King. David Cronenberg. Greg Egan, the science fiction writer.

A: Okay.

M: Roald Dahl. Can I have three more?

A: Yeah, go for it.

M: Okay. Richard Garfield, who invented magic gathering?

A: Oh, yeah. Why him?

M: Because he invented something that had never existed before. He came up with a whole new style of gameplay, a whole new breed of game. That was, before there was nothing. And I just, I just so admire that he was able to create something that there was no roadmap for. And it created a whole domino effect of other creation, after that. And I would just love to do something like that. That was just going to change the game, in a way.

A: Well, you're in New Zealand. So I have to ask, but Tolkien has invented a whole world, a whole new language. And are you a fan of that work?

M: I'm a fan of The Hobbit. Yeah. Okay, I couldn't... I couldn't get through Lord of the Rings. I started. I did start reading it. I was enjoying it. But it's a very heady book.

A: Yeah.

M: Some people can get through it. Some people can't.

A: There's a lot of descriptions of landscapes and everything. Yeah. People don't like that.

M: I'm more...

A: Would you invent your own language? Like that?

M: Oh, I have. Yeah, it was just a little a game to like, to play with it. I invented a language. But all I did was I took every letter from the alphabet. And assigned to each letter, a sound. Yeah, yeah. And then as I was creating words out of it, I would like, trim them down. So they sounded

better. Yeah. So it's sort of like an impromptu language. And I'm itching to use it in an arthouse film with an alien species - kind of aspiring toward Roddenberry status.

A: Yeah. Yeah. That's interesting.

M: It was.

A: That's basically English. That's basically what English has done. The way it evolves, becomes easier to say. And then there's new words invented. So how have you grown as an artist or creator? And what previous projects are you maybe most proud of?

M: Ah, second question first.

A: Yeah.

M: My script that got that critique is probably the piece that I'm most proud of.

A: The essay.

M: Yeah, my big... I turned it into a screenplay.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

M: It was a graduate manuscript. It was supposed to be a screenplay but I wrote it more as a novel, play, and poem essay. Yeah, thing.

A: Yeah.

M: Um, but I did turn it into a screenplay. And but that critique, that critique was like, she got me, you know, like, somebody has read it and, and gets what I'm trying to do. And that was a huge push forward to keep doing it. Yeah. And at the same time, it was very rewarding to finally get some feedback. That was really valuable. And I guess it was a big achievement to finish the work. But I've got lots of stories that I've written. And I guess I'm proud of that one, because it's a lot different to anything else. I've done a lot of my other stories of fantasy or turning reality into something morbid or humorous or both. But that was a study of itself. And yeah, it felt really different. And doing something different is... It's hard. I mean, it doesn't always happen that way.

A: Yep.

M: So what was your first question?

A: Well, how have you grown? Or maybe which project has made you grow the most? If that was not the same answer.

M: I've grown more patient. And I think that that shows in the work a lot of the time because I don't like to rush my pages.

A: Patience for a creative, because well, a lot of creative people, and especially people with the amount of ideas you have, probably have, yeah, you just want to get it all out on all the pages. And it's quite hard to be patient.

M: Yeah.

A: Yeah. Well, is it hard to be patient?

M: Um, it is, but you kind of learn. You learn to be better at it. What project made me grow the most? Probably there's this one fantasy novel that I've almost finished. I started writing it when I was 13.

A: Wow.

M: Yeah, many years.

A: How thick is that?

M: 300 pages.

A: Okay. Wow.

M: And it was 300 pages when I was 13, too.

That was the biggest thing I'd written up to that point. But every time I rewrote it, I found how bad it was before.

A: Oh, yeah.

M: I mean, there were still some cool ideas there. But I noticed how much I've grown as a writer, as I was writing it.

A: Yeah. Yeah. That's interesting. So is that something you're gonna get published? Or try to get published?

M: Yeah, hopefully.

A: And what are your current projects?

M: I've got a screenplay I'm working on. It's a quirky road movie kind of like, Demonlover (2002) meets Doom Generation meets Topless Women Talk About Their Lives.

A: Okay. Yeah.

M: It's just a road movie, where these three people, they hang out, they go on the road. And then they enter the Twilight Zone. Okay, and bad things happen.

A: Yeah, yeah. So is it Horror?

M: Kind of. Yeah, I'd say it's a quirky horror. Okay, and I wrote it to be made with very little money. So I had to focus on very few characters, very few sets, very few locations. Limit the effects as much as possible. And just play with what's there. Yeah, I'm not trying to go off too much.

A: Okay. That reminds me a bit of Waiting for Godot, the restrictive element of what you're trying to do?

M: Cool.

I, you know, that essay thing that I wrote? Yeah. When I was writing it, a tutor of mine told me that I should read Krapp's Last Tape.

A: Yeah.

M: Also by Beckett. And I started reading it. I didn't read that much at the time. Yeah, but it's still on my Kindle. So I'm going to finish it. But because they thought... They were reminded of that, from the way that I was playing with language. I was playing with: this guy's talking to himself, but he's listening to a tape he made of himself. And he's actually fictional, within a play, within a play or whatever.

A: Yeah. Or like your monkey and orang-utan, which are the characters in the head of the main character? Yeah. Do you have a monkey and an orang-utan? What do they represent?

M: Well, it's not as much. It's not as interesting if he's alone.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

M: I needed to explore something more than what was going on with him physically. Yep. And I wanted to explore it dramatically. So I created these characters, but they were still a part of him. But at the same time, they're not. But they're not fictional either. Yeah. So yeah.

A: Well, yeah. What do they represent?

M: The analyst, the critical analyst, in my head. You know, how every writer has a critic and...

A: Yeah, yeah. The inner critic.

M: Yeah. One of them, the monkey or the orangutan is the critic.

A: Yep.

M: And the other one is, is the sounding board.

A: Yeah. And all artists need both of those, right?

M: Yeah.

A: Yeah, so. If you don't have them around, you have to invent them in your head. So yeah, it's interesting, what you said about beyond the physical and representing things, because you're a fan of horror. And you talk about Stephen King's theory of horror, and what he thinks the monster represents, and you had some thoughts on that.

M: I did. Stephen King posited in *Danse Macabre* study of the horror genre, that there are three main archetypes of the horror genre. No, three, three main archetypes of the horror monster. Yeah. Yeah. And these were Jekyll and Hyde. Or the werewolf. Dracula and Frankenstein's monster. Yep. Okay. And I further speculated that these monsters can be defined by their motives. You've got: the vampire needs to feed. So survival, or is it thirst? Is it sexual? Yeah. Frankenstein's monster is almost the most interesting one for me, because obviously, I told you I had trouble with the book.

A: Yeah, that's interesting.

M: But the monster is, his motive seems to be from God to punish the scientists for creating him.

A: Yeah.

M: From going against God's law. Yes, like an almighty wrath of God, creature. Which is much more interesting than being hungry.

A: Yeah, yeah.

M: And then you've got Jekyll and Hyde. And I kind of think the motive there is that we are all monsters without a conscience. We are animals without a conscience. Without a conscience we're animals or insects if you look at the fly, yeah?

A: Yeah.

M: And so, if you take away the conscience, we become the monsters so the werewolf or the Jekyll and Hyde is every person without a conscience and without that, we are all animals.

A: But need to be tamed by ourselves.

M: Yeah.

A: Um, yeah. Why did you have trouble with Frankenstein?

M: Um, there were many references to other texts and I kind of got the tangents for me were a bit much. Yeah. And the language is very thick and very few classics I can handle. Like, Faulkner I can handle. Ginsberg I can handle. Nabokov. It's just when they get really thick with the language, like William Burroughs' Naked Lunch. I tried to read that, but I was still quite young. So it probably makes sense that I couldn't understand a word of it.

A: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And well, yeah, it's interesting, because some people say as well, Frankenstein as a monster becomes more human, when he learns the language, or learns to speak. And before that, before that, so that's the distinction between monster and human is the way we learn language.

M: That's interesting.

A: And the thing you said about a monster turning against its creator, or God's law? And I guess that's the same fear in AI maybe, or machines taking over? What do you think?

M: Very much, so. I would look also, not just what makes me... What I directly think of is Terminator. Yeah. And that brings me to Aliens. And Aliens to me is the perfect Frankenstein's monster film. Yeah. Yeah. Because you've got these aliens who are essentially a weapon. Yep. That have been turned against man, mankind, humankind. To, to punish them for their greed to punish the company, but they never actually reach the company. They get everybody who's working? Yeah. Yeah. In essence, instead of getting to the company, who are the ones who created the machine? Or maybe they didn't create the machine, but they dug it up. I think there were a lot of nightmare visions about virtual reality when it first came out. As there are nowadays a lot of nightmare visions about artificial intelligence.

A: Yep. Yep. And Sophia robot. Have you seen the robot? At the moment, Sophia, the robot was interviewed in, in the UK on a morning show. And, and, and it was asked whether they'll turn against us. The robot's just sitting there like, "yeah."

You like mechatronics, which I hadn't really heard of much before. So, um, so what is it? And why do you like it? And is that... Because I've seen the illustrations on your website as well. So that's sort of you working out how things would move and in animation-type stuff.

M: Yeah, um, it's this overthinking thing again. Yeah. Like, um, and wanting to design and the idea of iterative design and the process itself, I sometimes get so excited about the process, that I begin studying the process instead of the subject. Yeah. Yeah, and a lot of those ideas for robots or for toys or for digital products. Were seeded by this, this hunger to understand the process and to define it and to describe it and to communicate it and to express it. And I've had an illustrator on the team who has gone on to do other stuff. But we worked together on a

project. And he came up with this illustration of one of my toy designs. And the illustration, unfortunately, was not accurate to my design because I hadn't communicated it, as I should have, as I would have learned to and yeah, if I had studied that. But what it was, was a really sophisticated drawing of one way of doing it. And I was fascinated by the many different ways that you can just like, the many different ways you could tell a story, the many different ways you could design a thing to react to you. Yeah.

A: Yeah, that's, that's really interesting. So you're Yeah. But then Isn't that like Frankenstein? Are you making the next robot that will turn against or react to you, and learn to react to you in different ways?

M: I, oh, my God, am I Doctor Frankenstein? If I succeed am I Doctor Frankenstein? It's like, if I finally create that thing that never existed before.

A: Yeah. Is that God's law? That's interesting.

M: Is that breaking God's law? I don't think I'll care, by then.

A: You've got the right attitude. Yeah, um, well, what does your creative drive come from, do you think?

M: Expressing myself, the need to express myself, but at the same time, the need to get down ideas into some concrete form? Yeah. To preserve them, to share them. But I've always thought that communication was secondary to expression. And in creativity, I struggle to find a word for everything that I want to do. But creativity pretty much does it.

A: Yeah. Yeah. But you know, that reminds me of the critique of your graduate essay, because at the very end, she said, Isn't art about communication? And she ultimately says he probably would say no.

M: Right? No!!

A: Yeah.

M: Well, I think, I think communication is... I think it's a lesser beast, to expression. And I think it should be. If it's gonna affect your expression, then it has to suffer.

A: Yeah, but I sort of get what you mean, because getting your idea in a pure form, and it's for you, rather than me too. Meaning that, well communicating is about meeting someone else's expectations or language or whatever. So you're already adapting to someone else, aren't you?

M: Yeah, yeah, pandering, maybe?

A: Yeah, exactly. I thought you might say that. Yeah, that's interesting. Um, you've written somewhere that you are perfecting your craft and your art. So what would perfection look like?

M: Oh, that's a good one. At least three different types of writing and creativity. At the moment I'm doing well. So I'm designing and I'm writing. Yeah, fiction, mostly and scripts. But writing fiction and writing scripts are kind of one thing to me. And design is another thing. I need something functional. I need like three functional skills. Have creativity. So like, being able to actually create my designs? is one thing. My writing is I'm happy with where my writing is, but I'd like it to actually get published.

A: Yeah, yeah. But on some level, you know, you have to meet someone halfway. And difficult, isn't it? Yeah, someone else's standards. So yeah, I can see that, I can see the challenge.

M: Yeah. Well, at first it was, it wasn't even about me being arrogant. It was me being completely original, and young and foolish. And having no idea how to get people to understand what I'm saying.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

M: And then I had to learn how to, I guess, communicate? and express at the same time? Yeah. Yeah. And now I'm, yeah, too arrogant to submit to the, to the... Who are they? To decide what my writing should be? Yeah, well, exactly. But, yeah, yeah. When I get them done, I will decide if I'm failing too much, I'll probably have to sell myself.

A: Well, it's not so much selling yourself, maybe you need to change how you see that. But I'm interested that you said functional skills, and somewhere else you've worked out that you're trying to be a more functional member of society. So what did you mean by that?

M: Oh, just that. I've had day jobs before. Yep. And they haven't been the most glamorous day jobs. I built a website for a school. And I did data entry. But I enjoyed those jobs. But then I haven't had that kind of work for a long time. And I was hoping that if I learn a skill, like JavaScript, yep, I could use that to put my designs into some physical form. At the same time, I could use that to get another one of these unglamorous, yet functional fall-back jobs. (If I could learn, like a trade. That could keep me afloat.)

A: Yeah. And yeah, that's fair enough. It's kind of like the, the artist who then kind of worked as a graphic designer making, I don't know, labels for pens or something. You get to do both. But then that gives you a means to do the, the wild and creative and all of the stuff. Yeah.

M: Are you familiar with Emily Wapnick? (and) The Einsteinier?

A: Oh, no.

M: You know, you know about the multi-potentialites?

A: Yes. Oh, yes. Yeah. Oh, is that, that's the girl. Yeah. Yeah, that's right. Yeah, I know the website. Yeah. And that's definitely you. You are definitely a Multipotentialite.

M: Yeah. Well, one of the forms of multi-potentialites is the Einsteiner. Okay. And it's basically you get a good enough job, which allows you to do whatever you like in your, in the rest of the time. Yeah, because Einstein was a patent clerk. Right? Yeah. And he did all the amazing things that he did in his own time. And there are other forms that, that she's put down for different ways of being a multi-potentialite. And some people actually are more than one different type of multi-potentialite, they'd like, merge them together. So there's the Phoenix who rises from the ashes every couple of years to create a new self.

A: Yeah.

M: And there's the group hug, where you've got a lot of stuff that you do, and you put it together. And then there's the slash, which you got lots of stuff that you're doing that's not compatible. Yeah. And so you are a violinist/scientist/graphic designer/singer.

A: Yep. Yep.

M: Um, well, I fancy myself an Einsteiner but I don't have a day job yet.

A: Well, you know, that's, that's fine. You can still be an Einsteiner if you're looking for a day job. Well, yeah, it depends. But I mean, you work really hard at what you do. And I mean, how many hours in the day do you spend on your creative pursuits? And what's your average day like?

M: My ideal is five hours, but I never reach that.

A: Okay. Okay.

M: Because I'm like, I have the attention span of a gnat. I can write 23 pages in an hour of rewrites.

A: Yeah.

M: And then in an hour and a half, I can write another 800 to 1000 words. Then I'm tired. Yeah, yeah, I might get around to doing an hour drawing.

And I'd love to be able to do an hour (on design art), some Photoshop, and business writing or video editing or deep research reading/communicating with collaborators/backers as well. And that's almost, you know, the lot. But it usually happens that I do two and a half hours writing. Then there's, throughout the day, I'll be thinking about problems. Yep. But I don't count that as part of my work time.

A: Well, some people say that the most productive time of an artist is when they're sitting and doing nothing.

M: Yeah, yeah.

A: Oh, it's true. Yeah, I'll send you that quote. And on Facebook, you often put your goals, and you change them quite a bit. And but your goals as well, you kind of list out, like what you just said, like five hours of writing or one hour of coding and everything. But I think just the list itself doesn't do it justice, because you? Well, you underestimate the energy and the thought that you put into it, which is why you're tired. It's not about the five hours. But what do you think? Because I mean, you could phrase it, like, not necessarily the time because there's a whole theory going on at the moment as well, that time management is a load of rubbish, and that it's more about energy management. So being healthy and productive for two hours can be much better than sitting in an office for eight hours. Yeah, yeah. Because like, no one actually works eight hours, even if they clock in.

M: Yeah, Skinner said that. Yeah. Yeah. Did you read Walden Two?

A: Um, oh, I know of it. Yes. Yes. I yeah. Exactly. And, and that kind of feeds into what I said about how the most productive time might be when you're sitting and staring out the window. And trying to bang out things when you're sitting in front of the screen and it's not working. It's a terrible feeling.

M: Yeah.

A: Right?

M: Yeah.

A: So yeah, so maybe you should recognise how much energy and thought you put in rather than the minutes.

M: Yeah, I'm, I'm kind of obsessive about it.

A: Yeah.

M: I don't know about good things. I know I'm obsessive about bad things, about not bad things, but my weaknesses and my... things that are obvious to me that I'm not as good at or that I have a habit of doing. And I'm obsessive about those things. And I'm obsessive when I'm doing those things. But I don't know if I'm obsessive about any of my strengths. I'm arrogant about them. Definitely confident.

A: Yeah.

M: Confident in the face of adversity or whatever, in the face of wild odds or whatever.

A: Yeah, but...

M: I don't think I obsess over things I'm good at. I obsess over things that worry me.

A: Yeah, that's that. And that kind of makes sense. Because if you're making a huge leap into wild odds, that kind of takes a bit of... You're balancing like, Oh, this probably won't happen. Is that right? Yeah, but I'm gonna try anyway. Yeah. I can relate to that. Yeah, you like, Well, do you like structure? But I guess not. You're too creative.

M: Um, I don't know. You might be right. I mean, I've tried to like structure because structure seems like the sensible way of doing things. Yep. But it never seems to work.

A: Yep, yeah. Well, what is sensible anyway? Isn't that just then, on some level conforming?

M: Oh, no, I hope not.

A: Well, that plan is necessary. And yeah, but it's interesting. That and that is the struggle of all creative people, don't worry. You're certainly not alone. It's good. So what are you focusing on?

M: What am I focusing on?

A: Yeah.

M: I think research and design. And (a technical skill) has to come in there somewhere because I need something practical. Yeah, I don't want to say "sensible."

A: Well, we said design and writing are all very functional skills as well. You can be. Yeah, you can be a copywriter. You can look at marketing. You can research, AI, medical journals. There's all sorts of things...

M: I suppose. When I co wrote that, that ghost writing book on real estate investment. I surprised myself, on the one hand, because it was a topic I had very little knowledge about. Yeah. So I had to do a lot of research. And I did a lot of learning in a very short span of time. And I wrote 60 pages in a week. Yeah. That's ridiculous.

A: Yeah. And there you go. And that's, that's, you know, that's functional.

M: Yeah. (But it was a nightmare I'll never repeat. On the other hand, I realised exactly how much more I could do if I was pushed.)

A: In the sense that it's a job that is, what's the word? Like a proven business model, I guess rather than what you're trying to do is invent something that's never been there before. That's

your, that's the conflict. Right? A little bit. Yeah. And yeah, I mean. You say you're, well, no, I wouldn't say you're unemployable. But you like being your own boss, and going for things in your own way.

M: I'd say I'm hard to employ.

A: Yeah, yeah.

M: Not impossible. But...

A: Well, the strength of a creative person in any workforce is that they don't just blindly follow instructions, and they can look at so many ways of solving your problem, which is totally what you said. That's what you said at the start of this.

M: Yeah.

A: So the workplace should value you.

M: Well, maybe they will.

A: Yeah. And you? Yeah. So Oh, you're, um, you're in New Zealand. I lived in New Zealand for a bit. Do you feel that you're quite isolated there for the rest of the world? And does that affect how you work? I guess with online it doesn't make a difference. But is that a feeling you have?

M: Um, it's interesting, because I recently thought I would like to invent a digital desert. Because I can't go visit the desert. Yeah, yeah. Right. I mean, I could (afford to) go to Australia. But that's still not very, it's not close by. And even with that, and you don't want to go to an Australian desert anyway. It's full of, you know, things that will bite you and kill you.

A: Yeah, absolutely.

M: Um, but no, I was thinking about, oh, sometimes I think about... I've been traveling with family and stuff. And I've been to Australia.

A: Yeah. You said you'd been around the globe four times. So I wanted to know,

M: Yeah, I have. Yeah, I was actually born in England.

A: Oh, okay. Oh, cool.

M: Yeah, so...

A: Okay, so you were born here. So when did you?

M: I was six when we came in. Okay. So I've been here most of my life. So. But that's sort of how the four times around the world happened. Because we, we came around halfway around the world to check it out. Yeah. Then we went back. And we came back. Yeah, then we wanted to visit the people. And then we came back. And then we did it again. Another couple of times.

A: I have been through the same thing when I was a teenager and family moved to New Zealand, and university in Auckland, and I moved back, and we all moved back. So yes, yeah, I know exactly what you mean. So yeah, I mean, how has that affected you or your work?

M: Um, because it's isolation.

A: Yeah, yeah.

M: Oh, weird thing that happened. Okay. When I was researching the real estate investment book, I happened upon this thing called cozy spaces. Yeah. It was a book called cozy home living or something. It's the Danish concept of Hygge, I think that's it. I read half a book on that. So that I could inform my interior design aspect of the real estate ebook.

A: Oh, yeah?

M: Um, but I was so taken with that idea that made me think about travel. And, and the idea that isolating oneself can be positive. And whenever I travel, I do find that I feel isolated, even if I meet people. But in a good way. And it's like, it's really cool. But it's less easy to travel when you live in New Zealand. Yeah, because all the good places are so far away, not all the good places, but all the places that are easy to get to everywhere else. Yeah, yeah. On the other side of them.

A: Yeah, yeah. Well, if you did, do you see you living anywhere else? Do you like New Zealand as your home?

M: Oh, that's a big question. Okay, I haven't figured that out yet.

A: Okay.

M: I've thought about it. I just haven't figured it out. Like, I'd have to try living somewhere else. Yeah. To know for sure whether it was gonna work. It's, it's always been a fantasy of living in a hermit hut on a beach. Or on a mountain or in the desert. With a dairy (aka convenience store) nearby.

A: Yeah, so some convenience.

M: Yes, some convenience. Nice.

A: Cuz, yeah, you've written somewhere that your parents live in quite a rural part. So um, yeah. And I've kind of driven through very rural parts of New Zealand where it's just like, the town is an ice cream shop and a petrol station.

M: Yeah. Yeah.

We're pretty good. Yeah. We're pretty good here. We've got a couple of bakeries. cafes, pubs. Yeah, restaurants. It's not nightlife.

A: Yeah, really?

M: Yeah. That's like half an hour away to get to like, a town that you know, stays up all night. Yeah, sort of thing. But, um, we're not. We're not that isolated out here. Although, yeah.

A: Well, it's all comparable. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I'm from London, and I find that quite stressful now. So yeah, it's good and bad. It depends what stage of life you're in. And that can change. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's interesting that you're into horror, and also from New Zealand, cuz that's very much Peter Jackson, isn't it?

M: Did you just say Peter Jackson?

A: Well, you know, he likes his horror. What do you think?

M: Yeah.

I've never met him. (and New Zealand is pretty small.)

And it's like, I've been to the Weta Cave. I went there. And I had a tour of the shop. Just went on a walking tour. Yeah, it was fascinating. But my favorite part was the Meet the Feebles stuff.

A: Yeah. I've heard about it.

M: Early Peter Jackson was, I mean, I did enjoy the fellowship. The First Lord of the Rings movie.

A: Yeah. I'm thinking of that weird horror.

M: Braindead.

A: They're all like, there's all these weird things in the house. And they're all like, globs and stuff. Yeah, that's it.

M: Yeah. Oh, the rat monkey? Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

A: Just that. And I'm like...

M: (Yea, but it's a shame internationally people seem to be aware of early Peter Jackson, but not Harry Sinclair, Robert Sarkies and The Locals and Black Sheep.) I've seen Bad Taste twice. I've only seen Braindead once. So that's why I didn't remember it straightaway. But then I've seen Meet the Feebles like five times. Yeah. Yeah. And it gets called The Muppets on acid or something.

A: Yeah, that rings a bell.

M: Yeah. I saw an article recently that said, bad taste or brain dead. I can't remember which one was one of the most violent movies. Some kind of crazy list. And I was like, we're good.

A: Yep.

M: That splatter stuff was so cool when I was studying in high school. When I first saw that stuff, and I was just like, Man, that is awesome. Had like a budget of 20 bucks.

A: Yeah, exactly, exactly.

M: Yeah, he didn't have a huge budget. I mean, I read his book, Peter Jackson: a Filmmaker's Journey and the tenacity that he had to annoy the Film Commission enough to get them to finally back his films. I mean, it's almost unimaginable.

A: Yeah. You've got a lot of respect for someone who annoys people enough.

M: Yeah, that was the way he put it.

A: Yeah, yeah.

M: Not him. The guy who wrote the book.

A: And you wrote somewhere that you were as a kid, that you were terrified of everything you said, that's on the front of your website. So yeah. So like, What? What do you mean, what were you like as a kid? And you also mentioned, I think this is on the front page of your website, that that turned into anxieties, and experiences with drugs and things. Do you want to elaborate?

M: Um, not really. No.

A: (laughs) Okay. How is that? How were you as a kid? And what were you scared of as a kid?

M: As a kid? I was scared of the dark. I was afraid of monsters. I was afraid of serial killers. I was afraid of axes in the middle of the night. I was afraid of...

A: And what did you do about it?

M: And What did I do about it? I don't know. I thought it was normal.

A: It's a little normal.

M: I started writing stories when I was four. So I would write, I actually turned to fantasy more than horror straight away. Because I was living rural. And that was really boring. So I would make up stuff that wasn't. Yeah, yeah. Magic. Again. Magic was important to me and believing in magic, the idea of believing in magic and, and the impossible. It just made things more interesting and exciting. And I fell into books, and I enjoyed school. Up until Intermediate. Yeah, and then things got serious and boring.

A: Yeah. Do you think that the fantasy was sort of your escape from being scared of everything?

M: Um, it could have been. (But I think it was more my escape from being bored. Designing play was my solution to not being satisfied with my toys, games, books and movies. I had an elevated level of need for sophisticated and unique play and writing. So I figured if no one can meet that standard, I'll make it myself. And I was so young I didn't realise the amount of work that would require.) I may be considered an optimist in that, I will. Rather than get bogged down by what am I afraid of? I will look at positive things. Happy things. Yeah. Even if they're fiction.

A: Well, you refer to anxieties and things. It kind of makes me think about how, especially in horror, it's like you sort of discover the demons in you. And then that's far more scary than the demons outside.

M: Yeah, totally. That's my life. Yeah. I want to write an epic horror novel about what really are the demons inside that scare me. And what I think people can relate to.

A: Yeah, yeah.

M: But yeah, it does. It does kind of pose a threat. In a way it's like the reality of the fear, the real fears. Yeah. They put magical demons to shame. (Like Ginger Snaps, Scarfies, Cronenberg, Stephen King, Japanese and South Korean Horror/Fantasy - they're all about tapping into real fears, society's deeper fears explored through monsters as masks of reality.)

A: Yeah. Yeah. Well, you know, maybe magical fantasy heroes are enough to keep them at bay.

M: Yeah. (But I don't write about heroes.)

A: Well, you said you're an optimist. And we're sort of coming to the end of the time. And you've answered so many questions. So interestingly, and so what are your values - have you thought about that?

M: My values?

A: Or if that's too difficult your values sort of in your art that you want to put forward?

M: Integrity?

A: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

M: That's important to me. Even if I have to sell out.

A: Well, it's about doing it for reasons that have integrity, right.

M: Yeah. Yeah. Maybe. Compromise maybe. Yeah, yeah. Compromise is a dirty word.

A: It can be.

M: Improvisation. Is that a value?

A: Spontaneity, maybe.

M: And thinking things through thoroughly. Thoroughness, maybe in thought?
(comprehensiveness and sophistication)

A: Yeah. Totally. Yeah. Yeah.

M: Um, passion. Passion is important. If I don't love it, what the hell am I doing? Right, writing it for, like, you know, however many hours? Yeah, however many months, you know. Yep. I've got to really love what I'm doing. Otherwise, there's no point doing it. Mm hmm. Yeah. And it certainly won't sustain me along my journey.

A: That's interesting.

M: I think honesty in a certain sense is important.

A: In a certain sense?

M: Yeah. I mean, being true to yourself. not lying to yourself.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

M: You lie to other people. But...

A: Yep, that's fair enough. Yeah. Interesting.

M: Um, sincerity, different to honesty. I think sincerity is about meaning what you say?

A: Yeah.

M: And honesty is about being faithful to who you really are.

A: Yeah.

So do all of your stories have happy endings?

M: No. None of them. Depends what I'm feeling on the day. Okay. Yeah. Well, for me if I'm happy, it's a happy ending.

A: Yeah. Totally.

M: I mean, if I kill everybody in the book, right. But I like the ending. Yeah.

A: Exactly. It's a happy ending for you. Yeah. Yeah, and killing a bunch of people in your book is a great way to like, get over a bad day.

M: Yeah. So cathartic?

A: Yeah.

What would you like to say to your audience?

M: Well, all I can think of is this girl who dumped me. And then I killed the character and named it after her.

A: Yeah, yep. Well, there you go. That's cathartic. It's what you have to do.

M: But then I read it to her, and she loved it. I don't know if she recognised the character, I had somewhat fictionalised her.

A: Yeah, yeah.

M: So it was like, reality/fantasy. Okay. We tell the difference.

A: Yeah, there was a healthy fantasy to represent actually something that really happened. Like, yeah, you're using fantasy to recreate something that really happened to you. But it... Yeah. And no one else would recognise it. And then that's fine. Yeah. So yeah.