



Horror author David Moody had dreams of being a film maker after leaving school

With his book being turned into a big-budget Hollywood movie, David Moody tells **Lorne Jackson** about his troubled road to success

Writer's scary success story

David Moody began his writing career trying to scare readers.

Yet it was David who ended up being mugged by a gang of psychological tykes called the Yikes!

It was the Yikes! inside the Halesowen banker's head who came skulking when he failed to get a major publishing deal.

They battered him almost into submission during those gloomy days when he was forced to conclude that the reading public was indifferent to his work.

But thanks to the magic of the worldwide web, the Yikes! have been vanquished, replaced by the triumphant tribe of Yippeel!

David decided to set up his own website, where browsers could download his books for free. The website became a major hit with fans of the horror genre.

As a direct result, David's latest novel, *Hater*, is being turned into a big-budget Hollywood movie and has also just been released by a major UK publisher.

"I can't tell you the exact root that got me to this stage," grins a dazed yet delighted David. "The first I knew, I was sitting round my house in the summer of 2006.

"My latest self-published book, *Hater*, was doing OK. The feedback was positive and I was cool with that.

"Then this email came, claiming to be from a production company in Los Angeles. Someone wanted to talk to me about film rights for my book.

"I didn't believe a word of it, of course. I phoned round everybody who I thought might be winding me up, but it turned out to be genuine.

"So I got back in touch, and everything has come from that. It's the defining moment of my life."

The movie version of *Hater*, which is now in preproduction, is being produced by Guillermo Del Toro, the director of such international hits as *Pan's Labyrinth* and the *Hellboy* franchise.

Del Toro is a huge fan of Moody's work. He has been quoted as saying: "*Hater* will haunt you long after you read the last page."

The director will be Juan Antonio Bayona, whose initial major hit was the Spanish horror movie, *The Orphanage*. His reputation is rising in LA and this will be his first English language movie.

David's reputation is also scaling the heady heights, but it has not been an overnight success.

The 38-year-old churned out novel after novel for 15 years before making an impact.

"Initially I was a frustrated film maker," he said. "That's what I dreamed of doing



Belen Rueda in *The Orphanage*

after leaving school. Instead, I went to work in a bank since I had no experience of film making, and didn't know how to make it happen.

"That's when I came up with the idea of writing novels in my spare time. I thought I'd put down on paper the stories that I wanted to tell. Much cheaper and less risky than hiring a camera crew and actors!"

In 1996, David got a novel released by a small, independent publisher.

But so-so success was quickly followed by a setback.

"The book basically went nowhere. We're talking sales of less than 500. Which is nothing.

"When my second book, *Autumn*, was ready, I decided to try something a bit different.

"I had a family out of nowhere. There was a wife and loads of stepdaughters running around.

"The internet was taking off, so I came up with the idea of giving my book away as a free download."

This may sound rather complex, yet David admits he is no web wizard.

"It was a lot of trial and error. The first website I put together was awful.

"But the great thing about the internet is you get immediate feedback. So I'd get messages saying, 'You've done this all right, but why not try this?'"

"I took all the points on board and really started to improve my website. It wasn't local help. The handiest hints came from a guy in Czechoslovakia!"

Eventually 500,000 people logged on to check out David's work.

"Out of all those readers, I hooked the interest of Hollywood - without trying."

David's latest novel imagines a scenario where people suddenly and lethally attack each other, for apparently no reason.

The book version has just been released by Gollancz, one of the UK's biggest players in SF and horror.

Meanwhile, David has been given £60,000 from the movie makers, with more to follow when the film goes into production.

Which will come in handy, since he now has three stepdaughters and two of his own. The cash will help him concentrate on writing, with no pressure to continue with other full-time work.

"My writing success has come at just the right time," chuckles David. "There doesn't seem to be that much of a future in my first career - banking."

His main frustration is how little involvement he has in the process of turning his book into a film.

"I do know that it's going to have filmed interiors in Spain, with exteriors in America. That's a bit of a shame, because it's a very British book.

"In my head, all the scenes were set in Birmingham.

"But you have to make some sacrifices, don't you?"

■ *Hater* by David Moody is published by Gollancz: £9.99.

➔ www.djmoody.co.uk
for more information
about David Moody