



Compass Rose

Literature and Art Journal

Interview with Steven Brust

Compass Rose:

As you were developing as a writer, were there any artists you tried to emulate? How did that affect your work?

Steven Brust:

I've tried to emulate pretty much everyone I liked, at one time or another. Roger Zelazny and Alexandre Dumas should probably be at the top of the list. I suppose I tried to emulate Twain, too, but I didn't get very far. How did it affect my work? Well, I'd like to think it taught me some things.

CR:

How do you approach a new piece?

Brust:

Warily. I don't go in too fast until I find out what sort of teeth it has. Then, usually, I'll put some food out for it, and see if I can entice it into the snare. My biggest concern is staying out of its reach. Generally, by the end, I call for air support and bomb the shit out of it.

CR:

Explain how you deal with criticism.

Brust:

From whom? If it is from those people from I've asked for it, I listen to it very carefully and try to learn as much as I can. If it's from someone I don't know, I respond about the same way you'd respond if a stranger walked up to you and said your trousers made you look fat.

CR:

Describe your writing process.

Brust:

I make sure I have caffeine and tobacco within easy reach, then I bring up whatever I'm working on on the Linux box, and start playing a game or something on the windows box. Periodically I glance at the work until it nags at me to put a sentence down. Later in the process, as the book gets toward the end, I skip the windows box entirely.

CR:

What methods do you take to support yourself through your writing?

Brust:

Um. Ah. I write stuff and they pay me for it?

CR:

What's the strangest thing you've ever done to support your writing?

Brust:

Er...okay, now I'm just confused.

CR:

Do you have a history of writers in your family? If not, how did you know you wanted to become a writer?

Brust:

It was just an itch that I'd get from time to time--I had to write. Eventually, the itch became more frequent, and lasted longer. It's chronic. The doctors are not optimistic.

CR:

What reactions do you aim to extract from your readers? How do these goals change when you write different genres?

Brust:

"Wow! That's COOL!"

CR:

How do you create the profiles for your main characters?

Brust:

I give them room to move around in until they tell me who they are. Sometimes I'll write up a snapshot of their history--that is, some scene from their life--that doesn't go into the book.

CR:

What do you want to let people know about your life that is out of the ordinary?

Brust:

They lied about the groupies.

CR:

How do you decide when your work is done?

Brust:

There is no one method. After a certain point, it just starts to feel like I'm polishing the

polish, and anything else I do is as likely to make it worse as better.

CR:

What publishing advice would you give to aspiring writers?

Brust:

Write something you wish someone else had written because you want to read it. Then hope like hell someone else wants to read it.