

***Transcript of June 10, 2008 interview between Alternative Press editor Michael Shapiro and Berkeley Heights, NJ author Yorick von Fortinbras.***

**Michael Shapiro:** You appear to be very well read. Do you have a background in writing/literature? If so, what is it?

**Yorick von Fortinbras:** I've been reading all kinds of books my whole life. I read to learn. Whether it is philosophy, non-fiction or fiction, I'm always looking for the hidden nuggets of wisdom. I think a lot of different styles have rubbed off on me over the years, but I have been particularly influenced by Daniel Dennett, Herman Hesse and as a teenager I used to digest a lot of Dean Koontz. I also keep current on latest developments in the technology industries and even in science/neurology. I'm very interested in how the brain works and the variation you find from person to person even though, genetically, we're 99.9% identical – I find it fascinating.

**MS:** How long have you been writing? When did you start your first story (and which one was your first story)? When did you finish it?

**YvF:** I've been writing as long as I remember. As a child, I created these little pamphlets of stories and thoughts for my family during summer break. Strangely, I spent one summer learning to type on my mother's electric typewriter and from then on would type anything that came into my head – because it was fun. I had a journal when I was very young and would write about silly stuff that happened during the day like winning a kick ball game or talking to a girl I liked. Throughout the years, that blossomed into poetry and little stories. My first real short stories were inspired by people like Bukowski and Kerouac. They were concise usually, sometimes a bit offensive and always ending with irony or little twists.

I enjoy trying to work the unexpected into my stories. I want to write stories that make people think and keep them off balance at times. My first novel, *After Delphi*, was written in about 4-5 months back in 2003 and was a conglomeration of lots of theories and short pieces I had written over the years. I am proud of it, but it's not for everybody...

**MS:** Why do you write?

**YvF:** Aside from the need I have to express myself, I write to learn, not just through research during the write, but about myself. I think having a journal as a child really helped me think about how I was feeling and I learned to express that in a productive way that would help me feel better about myself and my experiences. In writing, I'm looking to discover Truth – both in myself and in the world. It's both a frustrating and rewarding search. As an author, I try to put down on paper my take of the world, describe the objective subjectively so to speak, but with a quiet mind that I try very much to keep free of conditioning by society and today's popular culture, which I think offers very little value to the growth of the individual.

**MS:** How do you choose what you write about? Are there characters or plot lines that are based on real life?

**YvF:** It chooses me. I'm influenced by everybody and everything around me. Sometimes I'll remember something that happened to me 20 years ago and work that into the novels. Other times I'll wake up, remember a dream and work that in. Nothing is sacred or safe, but I do try to protect the innocent with some obscurity

**MS:** Why did you choose to remain anonymous?

**YvF:** I'm an extremely private person and I want to protect that privacy. I don't want to be uncomfortable or make anyone I know uncomfortable. In fact, only the closest people to me know that I even write at all. A lot of people I know in town would be very surprised to know that I'm a writer.

**MS:** How did you come up with the pen name, Yorick von Fortinbras?

**YvF:** As many people might know, "Yorick" and "Fortinbras" are Shakespearian characters. I'm not a huge Hamlet fan, but many people might know the famous skull carried around during the play. That is Yorick's skull, the court jester. Conversely, Fortinbras was a king whose name translates to "strong arm." So there is a duality there that I think reflects my life. Writing is that other side of me that I don't mix with my "real" world. These names were also used in skits in the work by Douglas Hofstadter and Daniel Dennett in "The Mind's I" – which I highly recommend for anyone that wants to think.

**MS:** Where can a reader purchase your stories? Have you sold many of them? Have you tried or will you try to have your stories published by a publishing house?

**YvF:** I am very intimidated by the publishing industry and I don't think I fit in well with the established formula. I was content to have my novels safe on CDs in my lockbox until, on a whim, I published them on Amazon a couple months ago. Now I have my four novels "published" on Amazon and the "Kindle" version can be purchased there. Personally, I think the Kindle is a very good idea; it allows you to load hundreds of books from anywhere a cell phone signal exists to a device that is no bigger than one book. But is it priced too high – yet Amazon sells out these little reading devices consistently, so there must be decent demand.

**MS:** Where do you see yourself in 10 years? What will you be writing?

**YvF:** Probably living the same kind of life I'm living now. I don't know if I'll be writing. It's something that hits me. I'll get an idea and will not sleep until I've developed it and come up with all of the little details and plot lines that make up a novel. If the ideas don't come, I won't write.

**MS:** Are you interested in pursuing other aspects of writing (ex. screenplays) or other genres of writing (ex. nonfiction, etc.)? If so, which ones?

**YvF:** I converted my first novel into a screenplay last summer. It was a lot of fun to think about how it would be presented on screen rather than in someone's head. You've got an extra degree of freedom there to show things how you imagine it, yet conversely it removes the imagination of the "consumer" as well – they're forced to see it how you show it. It reminds me of one of my ideas in "Beyond 558" called a "mind movie". I think one day the technology will exist where instead of watching a movie on a large screen, the sensations, actions, sounds, sights, etc. of a story can be fed directly into someone's brain for a more direct and real experience. There are some interesting implications there that I go into in the story. I would also love – one day – to have a screenplay produced and also supply the soundtrack. I'm somewhat of a musician and have written about 30 or so tunes that I also keep on CDs around the house. But my goals are simply to be recognized as an author – that would be enough.

**MS:** Regarding Backgammon, please give a brief description of the story. How did you develop the characters? Why are they non-humans? Why did you use the game of backgammon to frame the story? Do you play backgammon? Are you good at it?

**YvF:** Backgammon is the least technology-driven of my 4 stories and it was my 3<sup>rd</sup>. By the time I started thinking about Backgammon, I knew that I wanted to create a pure story and put a lot of attention into the characters, the scenery and develop character interplay more than I had ever done. The characters, while named as animals, are not necessarily animals. It was a way for me to get around the problem of what to name them, which I always have a problem with. For

example, if a character is named Jack, the reader will tend to think of a person they know named Jack and that distorts their perception of the character – that’s my experience with reading. In some of my stories, characters have absurd names; in others, characters are “the man” and “the woman”, some have animal names. But there’s a meaning to it all that you’ll understand after you read them.

I do play backgammon and I’m OK at it. Contrary to what’s written in the story, I also think chess is a great game. At the time I wrote the story, I was playing it quite a bit and started building all of the metaphors between the game and life; it was just an observation that grew into a full-fledged story.

**MS:** Regarding 558, please give a description of the story. Did you write in pre or post 9-11? If post 9-11, is 558 in part a critique of new-age security measures and restrictions on privacy/personal freedom?

**YvF:** Beyond 558 is based around the concept of – what if you could just send your mind to work? In other words, if you could replicate your mind, its experiences, knowledge, its essence and have that part toil away all day at work while “you” were free to pursue whatever kind of lifestyle you wanted, if you could do that, what could happen, what could go wrong? And of course, things do go terribly wrong for one man.

As I’ve said, in writing, I’m looking for Truth. Sometimes I write tenderly and try to convey sweet, calming imagery, but other times the subject calls for some brutality. Backgammon is more of a gentle novel. Beyond 558 has a brutal murder of a young child, a drowning of a man, the vicious rape of a young woman and the stabbing of a man by his wife with a glass shard – all within the first 20 pages. But it’s not for the purpose of shocking the reader. It all fits within the story.

I’ve written all of my novels post 9-11. I wouldn’t say what I’ve written is a critique of new security measures, but I’ve definitely been influenced by all of the security concerns and the contemplation of what would happen if, in response to some terrible things happening in the world, some technology were built and integrated into people that could help filter out the “bad” people. The concept of some lawmakers defining a “bad” person and the problems that are raised is very appealing to me – as an author. One of the things I’ve gotten very excited about is that as the years have gone by and people’s mindsets sway here and there with current events and you see the new things that are being discovered about how the brain works, I realize how relevant much of the things I write about are to today’s world. We have fears, concerns and insecurities that swirl around and are fed by these events. The events change, morph, amplify and subside with time, but the fear always seems to find new things to latch on to. I wrote about some of these ideas I had 10 years ago and to see society going in the general direction that I wrote about is both worrying and intriguing.

**MS:** Do you ever plan to use your real name? If so, what would cause you to do so?

**YvF:** Probably not. I don’t see myself doing so.

**MS:** Do you have a story currently in the works? If so, can you briefly describe it?

**YvF:** I do, but it is only in outline format right now, very undeveloped. I was thinking a lot about the so-called technology singularity that is approaching. Just like a black hole is a singularity where all the known laws of physics breaks down, the technology singularity is the future point at which our technological development grows so quickly and furiously that no one can comprehend the technology that will arise from that. There will be massive, unbelievable new things coming. It’s fun to think about and I’ve got some of the unintended consequences, problems and unconventional characters mixed up and blended together to create some mayhem.

**MS:** What town do you live in? Approximately how long have you lived there? Does your town and/or its inhabitants play a role in your stories?

**YvF:** I live in Berkeley Heights. I grew up in Union County and moved to BH close to a decade ago. The town, the people and the general way of life is a part of what I write. It's hard to imagine my home not playing a large part in my creations. I love Berkeley Heights from the geography to the variations of people you find, and I'm an involved member of the community. This area has so much to offer in so many aspects of life. I could do without the sub-freezing temperatures, though.

**MS:** Is there anything else you would like to tell our readers?

**YvF:** I have a website: <http://www.yorickvonfortinbras.com>, which I encourage people to visit. At the site there are links to Amazon where the novels can be purchased for \$2.99 each and at <http://www.yorickvonfortinbras.com> you can also view the cover art - photography and graphics of my creation. If anyone would like to contact me, I encourage that. They can do so from the email link on the home page or by emailing me directly at [YvF@yorickvonfortinbras.com](mailto:YvF@yorickvonfortinbras.com).

