

Hello, Dr. Ryder. I've always wanted a reason to call into your show, or at least leave you a voicemail. Alas, my life is hopelessly mundane. Or at least it was until recently...

I've had two major passions throughout my life. Professionally, I work as a typeface designer. Over the years, I've had the pleasure of creating dozens of new fonts. Mostly these have been for commission by publishers across the world. My other great passion is for horror stories.

I'm not a writer, but a mere reader of terrifying tales. Maybe that's why it'd never occurred to me until a few years ago to combine these passions. Why is there not a typeface for horror?

I do not mean something kitsch like blood dripping from letters or whatever silly "spooky" fonts are used by Halloween stores. I mean there should be a typeface that, when looked at, evokes fear in the reader. Regardless of what's written. And when a horror story uses said typeface, then it should drive the reader to cower in fear. To have nightmares for weeks. To be haunted by what they've read. You might be thinking, "*Dear God, this typeface designer thinks awfully highly of his profession.*" And perhaps I am a bit pompous. But please let me make my case.

Studies have shown that people associate different emotions with various fonts. Font choice manipulates you in ways you might not be aware. It tells you what emotion to feel before you've read a single letter. Comic Sans makes people feel happy. It also comes across as immature. Trajan might be the most commonly used font on movie posters. It's serified. It looks old, traditional, serious. The movie poster for Titanic used it. Imagine if they'd chosen Comic Sans instead.

Maybe now you understand my quest better. It's proven that different fonts evoke an emotional response. Fear is an emotion. I want you to feel an even deeper fear when you read a horror story in a particular typeface. A logical, worthwhile goal, is it not?

I called this hypothetical typeface Farboshia. An homage to Marcus Fillebrown and *The Cartography of Shadows* - the supposed memoir of a lost cartographer's travels through a shadowy otherworld that haunts America. Where black stars hang in the sky, a kingdom has fallen to ruins in the east, and an endless sprawling forest strangles the west. I know you, Dr. Ryder, claim the tale is true, but I always took the book for a work of fiction. I mean, the stories in it are impossible, are they not? I used to think so...

Over the years, I made multiple attempts at crafting Farboshia from thin air. All were unsuccessful. They yielded new typefaces. However none terrified me. I became so frustrated by these setbacks, I nearly gave up my quest. But I asked myself: *What would Garamond, that Patron Saint of Type Designers, do?*

I don't know the answer to that question, but by asking it I found another sort of answer. I looked to the past. I researched - had any typeface designers previously attempted anything like this? I didn't anticipate finding a satisfactory answer.

I'm happy to tell you I was mistaken. One of my brethren did go down a similar path.

I will not bore you with the details of what lengths I went to to unearth his story, but it is as follows:

Jehan de Veelu was a 16th century French type designer, punchcutter, and publisher. He was responsible for designing a typeface and publishing an edition of the Vulgate that Pope Urban the VIII praised as, "How God himself meant for us to view His Holy Words."

Veelu received a generous stipend from The Church to continue printing his editions of the Vulgate. For years he lived an idyllic life. Until his wife and son died of sickness.

Veelu was despondent. He prayed to God to bring his family back. He'd devoted his life to spreading the Word of God. Surely, God would answer his prayers. But God did not.

So Veelu wrote to the Pope. He begged him to send a saint to perform the miracle of resurrection. But the Pope too denied Veelu's request - stating that whatever happens on this earth is God's will. It was then that Veelu explored a darker path. Somehow he found a copy of The Black Book of Hergest. A work that's said to contain the ravings of a mad Welsh druid who'd summoned creatures to him from beyond black stars. Creatures who could violate any and all natural laws. Including bringing back the dead. The book was illegal to possess. The Church burned any copy found. And the Inquisition executed all suspected warlocks.

Veelu was not deterred. And his apprentices were devoted to their master. But he did not wish to devote decades mastering the complex spells contained in the black book. He thought his profession might offer another solution. He would create a typeface. One that would cast the spells off the page when gazed upon - regardless if the person staring at the text could read or not.

The act itself of seeing the spells written in the typeface Veelu created would be enough to summon whatever beings reside past the black stars, grant them safe passage to our world. And then Veelu could strike a deal with them. To some, Veelu's quest, from the onset, might sound absurd. Perhaps it was. But he was a typeface designer. And when the only tool one possesses is a hammer. Everything is a nail.

Only his three apprentices knew his goal. He took his beautiful Vulgate typeface, and created a perverse, unholy sibling from it. Designing it on paper, casting it in iron. He printed various spells from the black book and traveled to nearby villages, asking illiterate beggars to examine the parchments he brought. For years this yielded no results.

But one winter, after casting a new variant of his typeface and printing one of the spells, something was different. One of his apprentices took the paper from the press and stood there. Enraptured. Something happened. It was not recorded how, but the apprentice died. I believe I know what happened, and I'll get to that later. But whatever happened was so terrible that one of the two remaining apprentices ran screaming from the workshop into the cold winter night. Veelu did not pursue him - assuming the cold would kill him before he traveled the several miles by foot to town. The remaining apprentice was fully dedicated to Veelu and his dark quest. They printed a single edition of The Black Book in Veelu's unholy typeface. Or at least they started to.

The Inquisition, led by the apprentice who'd ran into the night, came to Veelu's workshop before they could finish. Veelu and his last loyal apprentice were burned at the stake.

The partially printed black book was either destroyed or taken to the hidden library beneath the Vatican. Pope Urban VIII ordered the collection of every edition of the Vulgate Veelu created. Nearly all were sealed away beneath the Vatican. Sixty years ago one surfaced at an estate sale. It sold at auction for a higher price than a Gutenberg Bible.

Because of my reputation in my field, I have many contacts. Some within the Vatican. I asked if Veelu's edition of the black book still existed, and if I could examine it or one of their copies of his Vulgate. My request was denied.

I asked every contact I had for anything related to Veelu. Anything at all. I was desperate. Imagine my surprise when a librarian for the special collections at the Newberry Library in Chicago said he could help me.

The Newberry had a set of Veelu's punches - the metal type used to print his edition of the Vulgate. They'd been given them by the estate of John Wing - an eccentric Chicago book collector and publisher. The same man who's estate gave the Newberry a book bound in human skin. Imagine such a treasure hiding right under your nose, doctor. Aren't you a lifelong resident of the windy city?

I asked if I could scan the punches to create a digital version of Veelu's typeface. They had no objection, but I didn't tell them the rest of my plan - to start with the punches as a base and try to "unholy" them. Since that's what Veelu himself had done.

When examining the typeface, I noticed some strange details. The punches looked new. Not in the sense that they'd been recently cast. But not worn down. If these were the punches Veelu used for his Vulgate, they should look more used. I wondered - could these instead be the typeface Veelu created for the black book?

After I scanned the punches, I was easily able to create a digital version of the typeface. A dark thought entered my mind. I found a digital copy of The Black Book of Hergest (it's amazing what people put on the internet without a second thought). I printed a spell in Veelu's typeface. I'm embarrassed to say I did this without staring fully at it. I've never been one to believe in magic. But I was cautious.

I live in a large city. I traveled downtown and wandered until a homeless man approached me. It was night, we were near an alley, and no one was near us. He asked for money. I told him I'd give him twenty dollars if he looked at a piece of paper.

I handed him the folded paper. He opened it and gazed upon the text. I held my breath.

Nothing happened. I don't know what I expected, but I reached into my pocket to pull out the twenty I promised. But then the light shifted. We were downtown. Normally it's impossible to see the stars there from all the light pollution, but from above us, the stars burned black.

The homeless man gazed into my eyes.

"The candle is lit. Now cast the shadow," he said in a language I did not recognize, but understood. His canine teeth grew, piercing through his cheeks. His tongue slid out of his body like a snake and strangled his throat. His arms and leg joints cracked and bent backwards. He fell to the sidewalk. His spine corkscrewed and stretched. When he died minutes later, his body was twisted into a shape none would ever recognize as human. I believe this was the same fate as Veelu's apprentice who first looked upon the text.

In a state of shock and sickness, I don't know how I accomplished what I did next. I pulled his body into the alley and threw it into a dumpster. From my car I retrieved a lighter and set the dumpster on fire. I ran into the night. Black stars, glowing above me.

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The next day, all the news said was that someone lit a dumpster on fire with an unrecognizable animal corpse inside. No details of the body. No photos. No detectives came knocking on my door. I was relieved.

My initial goal, of creating a typeface to make horror stories more frightening feels childish now. No, I have a greater purpose. I must finish Veelu's quest. I'll print the whole of The Black Book in his unholy typeface. I'll cast the shadow.