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(Dale McGarrigle)

Are reports of Stephen King's retirement from publishing greatly exaggerated?

Rumors of the Bangor author's being done with publishing novels have swirled about in recent years, often fed by statements from King himself.

Now comes a report that King is three novels away from not publishing any more books.

The headline on the Sept. 27 issue of Entertainment Weekly screams: "Stephen King Calls It Quits: America's Most Popular Author Tells Us Why He's Written His Last Book."

In an interview given grudgingly to promote his new novel, "From a Buick 8," King, 55, tells EW writer Chris Nashawaty, "I've killed enough of the world's trees."

King's current plans call for him to publish the last three volumes of his gunslinger fantasy series "The Dark Tower." Books five and six are already written, and he's hard at work on the final installment.

Why walk away at the time when critics are finally beginning to embrace his work?

"First of all, I'd never stop writing because I don't know what I'd do between 9 and 1 every day," he told EW. "But I'd stop publishing. I don't need the money."

Just file them away in a drawer?, Nashawaty asked.

"Why not?" King replied. "What's wrong with that? J.D. Salinger's been doing it for years!"

King also worries about not having anything new to say.

“From a Buick 8” is, he told EW, “as close as I want to get to repeating myself — it’s not ‘Christine,’ but it’s a novel about a car ... I mean, experience tells us that every writer gets to a point where he starts to lose his power. And you have to ask yourself this: How much is enough? Yeah, I might have some more books I can write, but honest to God, I’ve published damn near 50 books now. That’s a lot more than Norman Mailer’s ever gonna publish, I guarantee you.”

Susan Moldow, his publisher at Scribner, is skeptical about King actually retiring.

“That rumor is older than Methusaleh, and yet he keeps writing and publishing,” she said in a phone interview Monday. “I’ve heard him describe a novel that I know he wants to write, that isn’t a part of the ‘Dark Tower’ series and that doesn’t seem to duplicate anything he’s done before. And since he’s described it to me, it would be harsh and cruel for him to withhold it from me.”

Even if he retires from publishing, King will remain busy. He will executive-produce and write a 13-hour ABC miniseries, “The Kingdom,” about a haunted hospital built on an ancient graveyard. It’s inspired by director Lars von Trier’s 1994 Danish miniseries. Also, he’s collaborating with John Mellencamp on a musical about the fatal relationship between a pair of feuding Indiana brothers.

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