

Q&A with Brandon Mull: New York Time's best-selling author of the *Fablehaven* Series

By Chad Robert Parker

As I anticipate publishing my own works, I like to network and ask questions of other authors. Brandon Mull, a friend of mine, allowed me to publish this Q & A we had over e-mail. He is candid and gives advice to be read over again and again through the writing process:

I met Brandon Mull while at college. He was devotedly giving of himself in his service in an unpaid church position. He was also known for his hilarity while writing for and acting in a comedy troupe that performed on campus. But he was not yet a discovered author. His first book published was *Fablehaven* and it was a New York Time's bestseller, as were other books that followed. Three books in the *Fablehaven* series accompany another book in publication, *The Candy Shop War*. I will review three of his books following this article. I highly recommend all his works, knowing they would appeal to anyone who liked the *Harry Potter* novels, for instance.

Here is our Q & A from May 2007, in full:

1. Is there anything you would have done differently, if you could do it over?

Nope, I made some concessions with my first contract but getting published is hard and I'm glad it happened.

2. What advice would you give a first time author, in general?

Polish your work. Research places to submit and submit everywhere it makes sense. Pay attention when you get feedback. You never know how you'll get your start. Might be publishing short stories, might be landing an agent, might be going straight to a big publisher, might be going straight to a small publisher. I've heard of all those things working. Speaking broadly, it usually takes a mix of a marketable piece of writing, persistence, and luck. Sadly, sometimes it never happens, which is why only crazy people try to become writers, and it certainly isn't for everyone.

3. What advice would you give in looking for an agent or a publisher)? Which would you say is the best way to go about getting a novel noticed?

See above.

4. Do you have any tips in working out terms for contracts/royalties/etc?

I know some standard things. If you get a contract I could tell you if things aren't standard.

5. Are there areas of marketing or promoting that publishers leave up to you?

You can generally do as much marketing as you want. I think authors should do what they can. The trick is getting marketing from your publisher, which doesn't happen much when you're new, no matter who publishes you.

6. You have an excellent website. Did someone you know set that up?

I was very lucky. My publisher hired somebody to do the site.

7. How much pull do you have, with who works for you on tour? (I thought it was cool to see your sister Summer and your brother Bryce working with you).

My publisher wanted to tour me, but they were shorthanded, so I recommended my siblings. Helps when you have siblings willing to work for pretty mediocre pay.

8. Has writing become your full-time job? Is it different writing with a deadline? Do you get to write while on book tours, or are your days scheduled during that time (What is it like)?

Writing is my day job. I waited until I was making more money writing than at my day job to make that transition. I'm so booked that I don't get much writing done on tour, but I do a little. The deadlines add pressure, but I write pretty fast.

9. Do you have to work on Sundays, for book tours, etc.?

I generally don't work Sundays. Sometimes I have to catch a flight on Sundays.

10. Is there anything you wish you would have known before about the process to getting published, from writing to successful two-time author?

It is hard to break in. I put in way more hours as a writer than I have at any other job I've worked. It is consuming. Don't do it unless you really, really want it. For me, I'm glad to be insanely busy doing this.

11. Do you aim for a certain amount of words, or pages per chapter? Does the publisher have guidelines for their expectations on the length of a book and its chapters?

Yeah. Depends on the genre. Maybe 70,000-110,000 words for YA books.

12. Do you work on more than one book at a time? Does the industry expect you to stick with one genre? Do you contract an advance toward each next book? Are you

committed to one publisher with your time and efforts? (I guess I am just curious, but really wouldn't know what to expect or even what to ask about this).

I work on one at a time. It is wise to carve out a niche for yourself so an audience can find you. I would recommend sticking to a particular genre at least at first. If a book does well you can get an advance on the next one. If a big publisher picks you up, you'll probably get an advance right off the bat.

13. What is the Editing process like for you? Do you expect significant changes in content or otherwise, as a part of that process? Do you schedule for it?

You have to schedule for it. I've edited my stuff tons, including collecting feedback from trusted sources and rewriting, before my editors sees a thing. Still expect changes. Usually when they ask you to change stuff, they're right.

14. Is it still the dream you had hoped for?

It is pretty close. Even with good success on my first couple of things, I don't feel I have truly arrived. It is an unstable career. But I do love it. I'll be happiest when I know things are going well enough for this to actually be my lifelong career. Right now it looks like I may be on that path.

Hope that helped!

Brandon

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