

[Enter upbeat music that fades.]

Sabrina: Hi friends! Welcome back to LitTea! I'm your host, Sabrina Lotfi, and today's very special guest is Aden Polydoros, author of *The City Beautiful* and the *Assassin Fall* series, and his short story "It Stays With You" is featured in *The Gathering Dark: An Anthology of Folk Horror*. His newest novel, *Bone Weaver*, comes out tomorrow, September 20<sup>th</sup>. So, let's jump right in.

[Upbeat music ends.]

Sabrina: I'm so excited. Okay, let's start with some getting to know you stuff. What book made you a reader?

Aden: It's really interesting because thinking back, I think more so than any one book, it was probably the *Goosebumps* series, and then the *Nancy Drew* series. I totally devoured both of those series. As a kid, I never got into *Hardy Boys*. It's always *Nancy Drew* and *Goosebumps*. And, I would definitely say that having read those books, as a kid, really made me develop an interest in horror and in mystery and thrillers.

Sabrina: I can see this connection. [Dogs barking.] Oh my gosh, we have a puppy cameo!

Aden: Yeah, I may have to mute that. We have multiple dogs.

Sabrina: Oh, no, that's okay. I've got one over here. All the dogs. My dog barks at the end of the episodes. [Aden laughs.] Okay. Well, no, I totally see the connection. And, I'm a huge *Goosebumps* and *Nancy Drew* fan. I also didn't really get into *Hardy Boys*, but yeah, I remember reading *Goosebumps* all the time. Do you remember when they made those little *Goosebumps* like movies? I think I own one of them.

Aden: Oh, God, I loved those as a kid!

Sabrina: I do, too. They're so amazing.

Aden: I remember going to Blockbusters, and all I wanted was - the *Goosebumps* movies.

Sabrina: The *Goosebumps* movies. Yes!

Aden: Yeah, I grew up in early 2,000s. So, it's like, I remember loving *Goosebumps* and wanting so much to go to Blockbusters, get those tapes and watch *Goosebumps*.

Sabrina: I remember Blockbuster. How old are you?

Aden: I'm 26.

Sabrina: Okay. I'm 35. How do you remember Blockbuster? It was so long ago.

Aden: Honestly. [Laughs.] It's like, it just started. I remember the last time I went to Blockbuster's, I was probably 14. And, that's when they began going out of business.

Sabrina: Okay. Yeah. I was older when they started going out of business. I would go to Blockbuster, like, in high school in my car.

Aden: Yeah. For me, it was always in elementary school and just - yeah.

Sabrina: Okay. I love that, though. And I do. I love those movies. So good! Now I'm gonna go watch one after our interview. If I can find one. [Both laugh.]

Aden: It definitely gave me a lifelong appreciation for horror because once I began aging out of *Goosebumps*, I began reading Stephen King, and finding other horror authors. And, I definitely say that was life changing for me in terms of what I wanted to write and the media I was consuming. Horror, as a genre, has definitely influenced my writing.

Sabrina: I can see that. I read it when it came out, of course. But I just did the audiobook of *The City Beautiful* and it was so good! I love the narrator.

Aden: Thank you! I really loved being able to hear it spoken, and I think the narrator did a great job with emotion for Alter. And, all the characters as well, the different voices.

Sabrina: Yes. I thought it was beautifully done. I loved it. I loved reading it, too, but it's just a little different. So, you said that *Goosebumps* kind of led you into Stephen King, and then Stephen King is kind of what prompted you into writing.

Aden: Yeah! I remember as a teen completely devouring every single Stephen King book I could get my hands on. Dean Koontz, Sydney Sheldon. It was really just a continuation of the mysteries and thrillers, as well as the horror, that I loved as a kid. As a teen, I was really depressed, so I would spend basically hours reading nonstop, going through a four or 500 page book in a day because I had nothing else to do. I dropped out of high school in freshman and sophomore years. So, there was a between period where I'd just read and write.

Sabrina: Okay, so you started writing early?

Aden: Yeah, it's been a goal of mine really since 7th, 8th grade. And, in high school I was starting to look into writing full length novels. I think I finished my first one. It was terrible. It was a 100,000 word hot mess. But I finished it when I was 14 or 15, I think. And yeah, that really got me into the possibility of being professionally published in the future.

Sabrina: Oh, wow! Yeah. And, going back to - I bet both reading and writing was a really big escape. I didn't know you started writing so early. That's awesome! And like, so seriously.

Aden: Yeah, thank you. I think a lot of it was like you said, an escape. I also began doing a lot of online role plays on forums around that time, where it's basically collaborative writing.

Sabrina: Oh, cool.

Aden: And I would definitely say that helped me gain an understanding of audience expectations, since you're basically writing for an audience of two when you're doing a collaborative role play. Or more, if it's a multi-person one.

Sabrina: I've never done any of those, but they sound really fun. They sound like a really fun dialogue practice, too.

Aden: Yeah. [Laughs.] Oh, definitely! And, it requires you to really think on your feet regarding what your character does, because you have to respond to someone else's character's actions in their post.

Sabrina: It reminds me of online, like, improv.

Aden: Yeah, basically that's what it was, but writing.

Sabrina: Okay, cool. Yeah, that's awesome. I would have probably liked that more than actual improv.

Aden: Yeah, I really enjoyed it as a teen.

Sabrina: I'm really bummed that I did not find this when I was younger, because I do remember doing improv and then being like, 'Oh, I have to talk in front of people, and then I have to be creative in front of people?' And I was like, 'I'm just gonna go sit in the corner.'

Aden: Yeah. I've always been interested in acting and improv, but the idea of going up on stage or just looking someone else in the eye and actually reciting - basically dialogue - I don't think I'd be able to do that.

Sabrina: Yeah, I didn't. It was not my happy place. Okay, so that is when and how you got into writing. So, what are some hobbies and interests you have?

Aden: I love thrifting. I love going to antique stores.

Sabrina: You have such beautiful photos on Twitter of your before and after stuff!

Aden: Thank you. Yeah, it's been an interest of mine for years, just going to thrift stores and looking around, and trying to find interesting stuff. I got into it in, like, college as a side hustle on eBay, selling stuff on eBay. But for me, it's just a way to sort of - if I'm trying to figure out a story in my head - I'll go to a thrift store

and I'll look for stuff. And, in the background, I'll be running through this plot in my head, or the scene, and it really helps me focus on my stories.

Sabrina: Oh, that's cool! I've heard of people, like, going for walks and stuff, but never like, 'I'm gonna go check out the thrift store while I come up with my next plot points.' I love this.

Aden: Thanks. Yeah. I think it's because I need something to keep my eyes busy and my hands busy, and that allows my mind to sort of run free.

Sabrina: No, that makes a lot of sense. I'm gonna try this. I've got a little thrift store over here that I don't usually go with the specific purpose of plotting, but I've got a book to finish, so...

Aden: Yeah, give it a shot. It's fun. The only downside is it hits you right in the bank account.

Sabrina: That's legit.

Aden: Yeah, that's the one downside.

Sabrina: Maybe I'll try and I'll just accidentally leave my wallet at home or something. Yeah, I can't get a lot of - I do my best when I'm on walks and stuff, but I have this monster with me, when I'm trying to walk and think about my book, and I'm just constantly, like, 'Don't eat that. Don't bark at them.' Like, 'No, you can't eat the squirrel. Stay over here.'

Aden: What I sometimes do on walks is that I'll dictate. Having the voice recorder on my phone, I'll have my headphones in and spend, like, an hour long walk writing, basically by talking to my phone. That's how I dictate. That's how I wrote the novel I'm working on right now.

Sabrina: You just dictate the whole thing? I love this. I write in my head and it's a lot slower.

Aden: It's funny. I used to love writing on my computer, but ever since - really ever since the start of the pandemic - it's like I can't sit

down and focus. I need to walk and dictate, or play video games and dictate.

Sabrina: I'm not that fast of a thinker. I'm, like, fine with the pen.

Aden: If I tried that, I'll get really distracted and just not write.

Sabrina: That's funny. Well, I'll get distracted if I'm on my computer. Yeah. I usually do a giant mess in my notebook, and then I'll go try and make it slightly cohesive on the computer, and then I'll ignore it for a year.

Aden: Yeah. [Laughs] I'm the same way with dictating, sadly. I tend to just ignore it after it's typed up.

Sabrina: Do you type it up yourself dictating? Like, do you listen to it and type it up yourself, or does it - Do you have an app that does it?

Aden: I have the Dragon app, so technically I can transcribe it through the app, but I've noticed that it's actually faster for me to send the recording to my computer, play it at two times the speed and type it by hand. Just because Dragon tends to butcher the words.

Sabrina: I had Dragon, and yeah, I liked it a lot, and then I also really didn't, because I was constantly being like, delete, delete comma.

Aden: Yeah, like, scratch that. It's so annoying. It may just be, like, my microphone, the quality, but it's honestly just easier for me to just transcribe by hand now.

Sabrina: I think mine is the accent because it was always, like, changing my words.

Aden: Same.

Sabrina: I have an app that I used to help me with the transcript, the podcast, too, and it'll get everybody else's just fine. But then mine, it'll change all the words, and I'm like, 'I didn't say that.'

Aden: No, honestly, oddly enough, mine's the same way. I think it's because of the way I pronounce certain words as well, where it's

keyed into American English. But, sometimes I'll butcher the pronunciation of words, and it doesn't pick it up as well as I would like.

Sabrina: Yeah, same here. Okay. Do you want to take us through your querying journey, and just kind of walk us through?

Aden: Yeah, of course. I can talk a bit about the initial querying process because I think what a lot of online resources don't talk about is it's very common for authors to go through multiple agents. I think a lot of the time, authors are afraid or embarrassed to talk about when they have to find a new agent, or when the publishing process sort of hits a dead end, and they're forced to basically approach their publishing journey from another angle, or try something new. So, for me, it's been a very interesting journey. I began querying seriously when I was 18 with a book that never saw the light of day. It was a YA horror, and I actually went through two manuscripts during that process. That horror novel, and then *Project Pandora*, which was my first published novel, neither got representation.

Sabrina: Oh, that's interesting.

Aden: Yeah, it's really interesting because the book that did get an offer of representation, a YA queer thriller novel, about this teenage boy who ends up in this, like, doomsday cult. It never sold. It was put on sub.

Sabrina: But, *Project Pandora* did.

Aden: But *Project Pandora* did. Yeah, that's because at the same time I was querying *Project Pandora*, I was sending out the manuscript to smaller publishers that allowed unagented authors to submit to them.

Sabrina: Okay, cool.

Aden: At the time, yeah, I received an offer of representation for the YA thriller book. It's called *The Garden*. I had sent *Project Pandora* to Entangled, my first publisher. So, back when we were on sub with *The Garden*, Entangled got back with an offer of publication for *Project Pandora*, and the sequel to that novel.

Sabrina: Oh, wow.

Aden: Yeah, so that was actually my first published book. *The Garden* died on submission. And, a year or two later, my agent left the industry, so I was forced to begin querying again. And, I found another agent for the book that is coming out this year, actually, *Bone Weaver*. That book also died on submission, actually, because at the time, the fantasy market was over-saturated, so no one was buying YA fantasy.

Sabrina: [Laughing.] I'm just laughing because I like, 'You had two books that you shelved that were later published.' This is amazing.

Aden: Yeah. It's funny because I think a lot of authors, if their book dies on submission, they're like, 'Okay, that book's dead forever. That book is never gonna see the light of day.' But in this case, both *Project Pandora* and *Bone Weaver*, those books died on submission, and they were still picked up, in the end.

Sabrina: That's amazing. Twice!

Aden: Yeah, exactly. The really interesting thing is, after *Bone Weaver* died on submission, I wrote *The City Beautiful*, and it was too dark for my agent at the time, so I began querying again.

Sabrina: My goodness.

Aden: And of course, *The City Beautiful* got picked up. It got published.

Sabrina: And, it's amazing! Everybody read it, if you haven't yet!

Aden: Thank you. Yeah, so that was really interesting there. I think it's so easy to forget that no author has the same journey. No book has the same journey. And I have so many books I've trunked. They may never get published. They may one day get published. They may get self-published. I don't know. But I think the most important thing about publishing is realizing that you're gonna read a ton of articles online, from a ton of different authors. Authors whose first debut novels sold at auction for six figures. Authors whose first books did all right, but not enough to get a second book picked up. Authors who are still querying. And



really, it's gonna be different for every author. It's gonna be different for every book. I think it's very easy to lose sight of that.

Sabrina: Yeah. Everybody's journey is different, but it is yours.

Aden: Yeah, and a lot of authors, they're not going to say this. They're not gonna say 'My book died on submission.' They're not gonna say, 'I'm back to querying again, and this is my third agent.' They're not gonna say that, because it's embarrassing, and because it goes against this perfect image of the publishing process that you see on Twitter and on Instagram. You see book deals announced. You see announcements of representation. You don't see what occurs in the background.

Sabrina: Yeah. You see a lot of the happy.

Aden: Yeah, I think it presents a skewed image of what is, sadly, the reality of publishing, and also the huge amount of work and the disappointments that authors go through before finding an agent, or before getting a book deal.

Sabrina: So many disappointments.

Aden: Yeah, it's really an act of love, I feel, and of determination and perseverance.

Sabrina: It is. It is all of those things. I think that's spot on! I feel like we went on a tangent.

Aden: [Laughs.] We did. [Both laughing.] I feel like there's a lot I wish I knew about querying when I first started, and there's a lot that I think would have benefited me, if it had been said up upfront in these interviews you read about.

Sabrina: Yeah, that makes sense. That's what we're doing. That's why we're here. Tell me all the things. We're gonna spill all the tea. Oh, I just put my tag in. That was cool.

Aden: I love it.

Sabrina: Okay. Do you want to – so then, no, I remember. So, we were on agent three and selling *The City Beautiful*. And then *Bone Weaver*.

Aden: Yeah. Now I'm back to querying just because I want to find the perfect agent for the story I'm working on. And, I think every time you get back to querying, you really have to reanalyze what you want from an agent partnership, and the communication and the work style that works best for you. It doesn't mean that your previous agents - they were bad agents or anything. It just means that as an author, you need to reexamine your own career and your own needs. All agents I've worked with have been a pleasure to work with.

Sabrina: Yeah. I mean, we've been friends for a while. I've known you through every single one of your agents, and you've never said anything awful about any of them, so...

Aden: Right. Yeah. I think a lot of the time it's like if someone leaves their agent or if you're back to querying, it's like, 'Oh, well, something terrible must have happened.' But no, it's really just - Like for *The City Beautiful*, my second agent, she was an amazing agent, and she loved *Bone Weaver*. But, *The City Beautiful* was darker, and my current book is even darker. And, I think it's important for both agents and authors to realize that for an agent to really want to put a book out there, to go read it multiple times, to sub it to editors, there needs to be that spark, and they really need to be enthusiastic about the project, and have a vision for the project. Otherwise, that lack of enthusiasm or uncertainty is gonna come across when they begin subbing it. So, I think that's one of the most important things I've taken away from this entire process is it's gonna be different for every book. It's gonna be different for every agent. Just because an agent rejects your book doesn't mean they won't be a good agent for a future book, or it doesn't mean it has anything to do with your book itself. It's because, with the number of manuscripts an agent handles, they really need to have the perfect vision for a manuscript, and for a submission package.

Sabrina: Yeah. I was even just looking at feedback from critique partners and stuff. Like, you get so many, somebody'll say something about one character, then another person will love that character and which one do you follow? You really need to have the same vision on that and someone that you trust and whose guidance you trust in getting it where it needs to go, too, I think.

Aden: Yeah, exactly. That's another thing. I've really come to appreciate the way that it helps to have a bunch of critique partners, but also, you also have to realize that sometimes critique partners you've worked with in the past, they're not gonna be the right fit for the manuscript that you're working on now. And, you really just have to understand that if someone's giving you feedback you don't agree with, or you feel isn't helpful, then you need to reanalyze. Okay. Is this feedback useful? Is this honest? Is this something I want to take into consideration as I revise this manuscript? Or, do I need to find a critique partner who can offer a different perspective?

Sabrina: It's more in line with your vision. Yeah. We can turn books on their heads if we follow any different rabbit holes, really.

Aden: Yeah. I think it's very easy to take feedback too deeply, especially when you're starting out writing. And really, what I've realized, and what's been most helpful for me, is understanding that I know the story I want to tell. Feedback can be very useful for discovering how to best tell the story and what needs work. But it's not an end all. As the author, you know your characters best, you know your plot best, you know the messages you want to get across.

Sabrina: Yeah, I love all that. Since you've had a few of these babies go out at this point, do you want to walk us through the creation of a book from getting your offer to it sitting on the shelves? Like, the different steps with the different editors that you take, and like, about roughly how long those kind of things take, and what all is involved?

Aden: Yeah, of course. So, it's been different for each book. For *The City Beautiful*, that was the last book that went on submission to multiple editors. Every book since then has sold on proposal.

Sabrina: Okay, cool.

Aden: Yeah, which means that we would send the first 50 pages and a synopsis to my editor and they would offer. Or, they wouldn't offer.

Sabrina: How long is a synopsis for a proposal?

Aden: For me, it's been about 1,000 to 2,000 words. A bit long. Honestly, it depends on the manuscript. With querying, you're sort of expected to stay within that two-page range. With the synopsis for my books, I'm not looking at word count. I'm looking at getting the whole story laid out, because I want to make sure that it's clearly defined. But, honestly, it varies for each book. It honestly depends on if I've written the book or not yet.

Sabrina: Okay, that makes sense.

Aden: Yeah, for *Bone Weaver*, I had the full manuscript written. So, I had the synopsis clearly laid out. For *Ring of Solomon*, the middle grade book coming out in February, and for *A Monster's Vengeance*, the YA book coming out next fall, I didn't have the full – well, actually, for *A Monster's Vengeance*, I did have the full manuscript written. For *Ring of Solomon*, I didn't. But, for *A Monster's Vengeance*, I completely changed the ending between proposal and turning in the final manuscript. So, I think it's really just important getting that full story laid out so they can see where the book goes. It's not like, 'Oh, it has to be completely like the synopsis.' But back to the whole process. Let's see, *The City Beautiful*, we sent it in, and got an offer. Once everything was signed, my editor sent notes back. I began the revision process. I believe we went through three rounds.

Sabrina: And, were these more focused on bigger picture?

Aden: Yeah. It's been a couple of years since I did *The City Beautiful*, but it was about pacing, and about developing the characters' relationships a bit more, and pacing regarding the mystery, and the different supernatural elements that occur later in the story. With *Bone Weaver*, a lot of the revisions were about both world building and developing the characters' relationships, and also bringing the antagonist onto the page a bit more. It's varied for each book. For every story, I feel it's a bit different because there's different elements of the story that need work.

Sabrina: Well, each book is unique.

Aden: Yeah. And then yeah, of course, just getting the whole cover's been really fun, getting blurbs from authors. It really varies, I'd say, for each book.

Sabrina: What kind of say do you get in a cover? Like, do you get to give them ideas at the beginning?

Aden: Yeah. I'm just gonna go with my new book. It's actually not *A Monster's Vengeance* anymore. It's: *Wrath Becomes Her*.

Sabrina: Oh, I saw that. I saw that announcement. Yes.

Aden: Yeah, I feel like I really love this new title. For this book, I gave a few examples of covers I liked. I gave some art I commissioned of the main character, and some inspirational images that I felt fit the vibe of the book. I haven't seen the cover yet, but I'm very excited because it's gonna be drawn by a digital artist I've always loved. So, I'm very excited there. Yeah, I feel like it depends on each book. It's really up to the publisher, in this case.

Sabrina: I mean, everything is.

Aden: Yeah, same with the title. A lot of it's the market and what the publisher knows will sell, both in terms of cover and title. I think that's important to realize, as an author, because if you self-publish a book, you're gonna get total say in the cover and in the title. If you have a book traditionally published, you're not gonna have that same level of power because we ultimately have to realize is - this is a publisher's job to make sure that a book gets in front of the audience it's meant for, and cover is gonna have a huge role in that, and title as well.

Sabrina: Well, and there's an entire team making decisions on it, too, outside of you. Yeah.

Aden: Yeah, exactly.

Sabrina: So how early do ARCs go out, usually?

Aden: I think about six months before. I'd say that's been the case for me. Yeah, I'd say about six months.

Sabrina: So, what should authors expect from their agents?

Aden: I think it depends on the sort of working relationship you have, how hands on they are, as an agent. I'd say authors should expect agents to be their advocate. If you have an issue and you don't feel comfortable bringing it in front of your publisher, your agent should do that for you. Your agent should keep you in the loop regarding where your book's going out, who your book is going out to. I would always recommend authors to get a list of editors when their book goes on submission, because ultimately, if a relationship goes sour, you're gonna want that list of editors. And also, for me, communication has always been very important. I want to know where my book is out. I want to know if it's gotten rejections. It's gonna ultimately depend on who you are as an author. Do you just want positive feedback? Do you want your agent to check in with you if the book's on submission, and so on? I think the most important thing is when you're trying to figure out what you want from an agent relationship, knowing how you want to communicate and knowing do you feel comfortable telling your agent, like, 'I need this from our relationship, I need this level of feedback.' Are you afraid to communicate with them? Do you feel like you're bothering them, or that you're inconveniencing them? And, I really think writing is such - in some ways - a really personal endeavor that I think it's important to go into the process being aware of your own needs as an author. And, if you're not aware of those needs, but you begin figuring them out somewhere down the line, it's important to communicate those needs with your agent, or with your editor, and making sure everyone is on the same page.

Sabrina: I love what you just said, too, about being comfortable talking to them like, that's so important because yeah, it can be really easy to just wait and wait without actually saying, 'This isn't working for me.'

Aden: Yeah, I know, for me, that's always been - especially starting out as a young author - because I think I got my first offer of representation, the first agent, like, at 18 or 19. And, I didn't have really an idea of publishing or of communication because I was just out - a freshman in college, and I expect I wasn't viewing it as a partnership. I was viewing it as 'I'm an employee,

this is my boss.' And, that's a very flawed way of looking at it, because that's not the level, that's not the sort of relationship you want with an agent. You want to be on the same level as a business partnership.

Sabrina: Yeah, it's very much a partnership. So, what are some things that you think writers can do now, both in their query and their sample pages, to give them and their books their best shot, and help them stand out in the current market?

Aden: That's a great question. I know for me, when I was starting out as a very new author, I didn't take as much time as I should have, making sure my full manuscript was revised. I thought, 'Okay, if the first 50 pages are polished, we're good.' I queried before I should've.

Sabrina: It's brilliant! You wrote a book. I get it. We've all been there. We've all been there with at least one, I'm sure.

Aden: Yeah, and that was my mistake. So, I think for my top suggestion would be, okay, you didn't add a NaNoWriMo. Do you have a finished manuscript? Don't query yet.

Sabrina: Okay. Yeah, that's a good one.

Aden: Begin doing your research. Begin looking into agents. Polish your manuscript. Polish your full manuscript. Because, if you just polish the first 50 pages and the query letter, you're gonna be burning their bridges if you send them a manuscript that's not revised to the best of its ability - because there's only a limited number of agents you can send to - you don't want to burn bridges. My advice would be, find critique partners. Get your query critiqued, get your synopsis, get your entire manuscript, and don't send out too many queries all at once. I've made that mistake before in the past. Especially if you're a new author and you don't have published books or you don't have a previous agent, you want to take it slow. Send out ten queries, wait for feedback.

Sabrina: I feel like no one gives feedback on queries anymore.

Aden: No, they don't. But, if you keep getting rejections because of your query letter, that's feedback.

Sabrina: That's feedback. It is feedback.

Aden: If you keep getting rejections because of your first ten pages, that's feedback as well. If you're getting partial requests, and they're not turning into full requests, that's gonna tell you, you need to look at your beginning. And if you're getting rejections for fulls, that tells you, you need to start looking at the full manuscript.

Sabrina: To be fair, it is a really saturated market right now. Sometimes it really just isn't the right fit. But I would look at if you are getting a lot of rejections, send it to your readers, you're really honest readers, and be like, 'Dude, can I write a sentence? Is this making sense?'

Aden: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And honestly, it's the market, too. I hate to say it, but a perfect manuscript can just flop and not sell or not get picked up, if the market is over-saturated, I think it's very easy to lose sight of the fact that publishing is a business. The manuscript you send out is a product. You don't want to view it that way, but it's a product. And if an agent doesn't think they can sell the manuscript in an over-saturated market, that's gonna influence if they offer, no matter how well the manuscript's written. Yeah. I know, also, with Covid and everything, I've read that querying now is a lot different than it was three years ago, back when I was querying *The City Beautiful*. So, times are longer, agents are overworked, over-saturated with stuff. It's never gonna be the same experience for everyone. A lot of the helpful guides you see online – were written five, six, seven years ago - they're not gonna be up to date with the current environment.

Sabrina: Their lists are packed, the editors are busy, everybody's tired. There's a lot going on. What are some questions that you think are really important for writers to ask when they do get a call and an offer from an agent, that not a lot of writers think of?

Aden: That's a really good question. What I would do is I would ask an agent about their whole working process. Are they an editorial



agent? How soon can they get a manuscript back? How is their communication style? I would recommend asking if you can talk to other authors they represent. There's a lot of useful tips online of what you should ask an agent. I know for me, just because I've had multiple agents in the past, that the questions I'm asking now really more pertain to the manuscript I'm querying, because it's a different book than a lot of my others, and I want to approach the submission process differently this time around. I think for my previous books, it would have really just been wanting to know the agent's communication style, wanting to know: Do they have editors in mind already? Where do they see this book going out? What sort of imprints are they planning to submit to? Because I think it's important for an agent to know where they're gonna be sending a book. And, if they've submitted books like this before, if they've sold books in a similar genre or age group, and also like, just getting a feel for who they are as an agent, what resources they have at their agency. Yeah, I would say for me, it's really just communication is really important and transparency in an agent relationship. But also, one more. How do they plan to revise the manuscript? What's their editorial vision? I think because you don't want to sign with an agent and then realize that their vision for this book isn't your own vision, that, you know, they want to turn this book into something completely different than what it is.

Sabrina: That can be a super tricky spot, too, especially when you're first seeking, like, your first agent. The power dynamics between agent and author are so skewed. You don't want to be pushed in the direction that you weren't anticipating or like, it doesn't match your heart.

Aden: Oh, definitely. I know for me, because of the position I'm in right now, where I've had multiple books published, and I feel like I have more of a say in my editorial vision for this book and what I'm willing to do for the book I'm querying right now. If I had written this book five years ago, and I was querying it, I wouldn't question an agent's editorial vision. I would just do it.

Sabrina: You would be like, 'Oh, that's what it needs right now. Perfect.'

Aden: Yeah, exactly. And honestly, I don't know if I'd be able to say if I was in this position back then for the same book. Honestly, I

would probably go with what the agent wants. And, I really think it's easy saying 'I want to find an agent with the right editorial vision.' It's a lot different saying that when you're just starting out querying, when you don't have any books published, when you're new to the industry and you don't know what to expect from an agent. I think it's a very tricky topic. I think it's very difficult for new authors to really find the sweet spot between my vision for this book, and my agent's vision for this book, and who has the say here. So, I think it's a really tricky topic. I think there's not really a right way of going about it. I think for me, if I could look back and tell myself one thing starting out, it would be: Take it step by step, take it slowly and really look inside and analyze 'What do I want and what do I need as an author? What control am I willing to give up as an author?' And, just trying to find that right fit for an agent. I've had friends who've signed with agents who haven't been the right fit, or who have in fact been very harmful for their career as an author. Because, an agent for one of my friends, the agent sent out the manuscript to a bunch of editors without really being picky. And a bad agent is a lot more harmful than no agent. A bad agent can kill a new author's desire to write. It can kill your career as an author. So, I guess my top suggestion would be take it slowly and don't go into this process with rose tinted glasses. Be very mindful of the entire process and ask people, ask agented authors. Look up the agent on Query Tracker. Look them up online. Do your due diligence, do your research. You've put in so much work in writing a manuscript and getting it out there, the best thing you can do for your book and your career is taking your time.

Sabrina: Yeah, that's really smart. What do you think are some red flags in all these different aspects, so before querying, during your call, and once you become a client?

Aden: This is a great question. Let's begin with when you begin querying. I think that because of the accessibility of the Internet, it's very easy for bad agents to get out there, and it's very easy to not realize that you're submitting to a bad agent or a bad publisher. First of all, for agents, do not sign with an agent who expects you to pay them. You do not pay agents. Agents only get paid when you get paid.

Sabrina: No reading fees. If it says reading fee run! Run the other way.

Exactly. Or, if an agent says, 'I love this book, but it needs a bit of work. Here's an editor I know who can whip this book into shape.' Red flag. Run.

Sabrina: They cost \$3,000 for one read. Here you go.

Aden: Right, exactly. Any publisher, or agent, or industry professional who demands payment, red flag. I mean, it's different if you submit to a freelance editor who is gonna give you notes back. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about an editor with a publisher.

Sabrina: That's hiring an editor. And that's also very valuable, but an agent shouldn't ask you to hire an editor. That's definitely a you decision and what you think you need and what you're able to handle with your own personal money and where you're at in your career and everything.

Aden: Yeah, exactly. It can be helpful, but it's obviously – I never - for none of my books. None of them. I didn't pay an editor to revise them. I found critique partners. And that's honestly been the best choice I've made as an author, finding critique partners. I have critique partners I had when I was 18. You want to find people in the industry you can be friends with, who you can exchange work with, who you can talk to if you find an agent and you're not sure if you want to sign with them. That's been the best thing I've done as an author, is finding people within the industry you can talk to, people who you can make friends with and make connections with, who you can trust. It's hard starting out because I know - for me especially - I don't know if it's just a YA thing, but book Twitter, or it can feel very clickish at times. And there's people are gonna talk to you differently when you're querying, compared to when you have a book out, or compared to when you have an agent. And that can be very isolating in some ways as an author. As a beginner author, it can feel like you're on the outside and there's this whole click of published or agented authors. And I think my best suggestion there would be, no matter where you are in the process, be a good person. Don't completely cut off all your critique partners the moment you get a book deal or the moment you get an agent. That's a horrible thing to do. That's a place I've been in where it feels like everyone's getting an agent or a book deal but you, and they're

not talking to you anymore. And that would be my biggest advice. Be a good person - when you're querying, when you're published, when you're agented, it doesn't matter. Don't treat querying authors like they're below you. I know - I went off topic again.

Sabrina: It's okay. That is such beautiful advice, and I love that. And it's very different. I want to say I want to add this to anybody. It's okay for your critique partners to change if something's not a fit anymore. I mean, I've left some writing groups that just weren't working for me anymore, and it's not anything to do with the people that were in it, or not wanting to work with them. There was a lot of factors and like the speed of the group and stuff. And, 'I love all of y'all!'

Aden: Yeah, sometimes it just happens that you drift apart for whatever reason. I mean, I've had critique partners who have just fallen out of touch over the years because maybe they're not writing as much, or maybe they felt like they couldn't provide the right feedback for my books. But that's a lot different than -

Sabrina: Being a jerk.

Aden: Being a jerk and cutting authors out or even just ignoring their messages because you're agented now, or you have a book now. Yeah, especially on social media. I've seen that a lot with other authors where, just hearing it through the grapevine, 'Now that I'm agented I don't want to talk to these people anymore,' or just it's very easy to fall into clicks, I think, on book Twitter or on social media. And I would just advise beginner authors to find your people. Find critique partners who are a good match that you can talk to throughout the process. It can be very isolating as a new author, or even as an established author. And, you want to find friends in the industry.

Sabrina: Yeah, I was gonna say it's okay to just find friends, too. Maybe ya'll don't vibe as like, critique partners, but you can always cheer somebody on and have an extra cheerleader. And there's nothing wrong with patting each other's backs and just being like, 'Hey, I'm thinking of you and I've got my fingers crossed for you today. That's all, goodbye.'

Aden: Yeah, definitely. I have a lot of people I know in the industry who we just talk, we don't even exchange work.

Sabrina: You and I do that a lot, actually. We don't really exchange work. We just talk and we catch up.

Aden: Yeah. And it's great.

Sabrina: Yeah. Find your people.

Aden: Yeah. I think it's especially important just because it's such a personal industry where you're putting yourself out there basically with your books. So yeah, that would be my advice for you when you're starting out with querying, just to really do your research for red flags on the call. It would be obviously the same business with the fees. Don't sign with an agent who wants you to pay for anything. If you get an offer and the agent wants you to sign with them right away and doesn't give you time to notify other agents. Big red flag.

Sabrina: That's a good one.

Aden: Yeah, back when I was querying in 2019, it was two weeks. Now it's three weeks minimum that you need.

Sabrina: Have they upped it? Because I'm still hearing people say two weeks, and I've been like, that feels really short the way things are right now. And I actually like three weeks.

Aden: Yeah, for me, I'm giving three weeks because it's easy to fall in love with an agent on the call and say, 'Yeah, I'll sign with you,' and not give the other agents time. But that burns bridges. Take your time. Give other agents a chance to respond and to read the work. Even if you find an agent, maybe it's the second agent who calls, even in an instant, 'Okay, this is the agent I'm gonna sign with. I know in my heart,' don't go back on the deadline. Wait. That offer is not gonna disappear, but what you will do if you say, 'Hey, I'm gonna give you until, say, the 20th to get back to me,' and then on the 15th, you're like, 'Hey, actually, never mind.' That burns bridges. It's a sign of being unprofessional, and it's not gonna help you. It's not going to make the agent who offered

originally fall in love with you more. It's not helping you as an author.

Sabrina: I mean, people leave their agents all the time. You might want to reach out to one of those agents that read this time that maybe it wasn't the right fit for them this time, or they didn't have enough time, but they were really interested. You might actually want to work with them in the future just because you don't necessarily right now.

Aden: Exactly. Same with if you receive multiple offers, be polite, be gracious, don't burn bridges. Don't just brush those agents off. A lot of the agents I've become friends with I've queried before, they've rejected, or I queried, they offered, I went with another agent. And, I got invited to a panel by one of those agents, and she's a wonderful agent. And it's like I've always gone into this industry and the way I act online and trying to be aware that it's important for me to approach this as a career and approach this professionally. Both with how I talk to industry professionals, but also how I act on social media. I think my advice on that front would be if you get books published, your social media stops being your social media and becomes your platform. As an author, I think that was something I didn't realize starting out and something I wish I knew going into it, because it changes how you act on social media. It changes how you view your social media, and you really just want to be aware of that, when you're starting out as an author.

Sabrina: Yeah, that all makes a lot of sense. Where are we? Red flags once they become a client.

Aden: Yeah, I think red flags would be lack of communication and transparency. If they're avoiding getting back to you, or if they're not reading your work in fair time, or they're not communicating with you where you are in the submission process, or if they're not telling you when they're gonna get to your book, that's a red flag. If they aren't sending you feedback when you ask. Like, if you want rejections and they're not sending them. Or, they're not giving you a submission list. Or, you feel like you're not even sure if your book's on sub yet. Those are all red flags.

Sabrina: If there's something you've discussed. But then you're like, 'Well, after we said that you're gonna send me these things, you've never told me about it.'

Aden: Yeah, exactly. Or if you have to keep checking back with them about stuff, or even just if you get a feel that there's a lack of enthusiasm in the relationship. I think it's very hard to be proactive and reach out and say, 'This isn't working,' or 'We need to reexamine the way we're doing this.' It's very easy to just sit there and cross your fingers and hope things change. But that's probably the worst thing that you can do as an author, is not communicate.

Sabrina: And you don't have to jump into it, with it necessarily first with, 'This is an issue.' Well, if it's an issue, it's an issue, but jump into it with, 'Hey, this is an issue. What's going on?' Do listen first before you pull any plugs.

Aden: Yeah. Try to work with them first.

Sabrina: Aden, you already said communicate, but I'm just gonna reiterate here. Communicate first.

Aden: Yeah, exactly.

Sabrina: But yeah, those are good things to when those are happening. Have a conversation and then it's not just about having a conversation. I think it's like, see how the conversation goes and what the response is and then what the action after the conversation is. Like, does behavior change? Is it more of the same? Those kind of things.

Aden: Exactly. Yeah. My recommendation there would always be: Be mindful, take things slow, don't make any knee jerk decisions. And, even if you have friends and you have critique partners, get their opinion, especially if they have an agent or if they're published.

Sabrina: Yes. Go say, 'Does this happen with you? Like, 'Is this a thing that's common?'

Aden: Yeah, exactly. It's different for every agent, but it always helps to have someone else's opinion.

Sabrina: Yeah. Okay, so do you have any tips to help people determine which agent is the right fit for them, both in terms of for a first offer, and deciding between multiple offers?

Aden: Yeah. Well, I would start out by saying I've always taken advantage of Manuscript Wish Lists. Look at what authors the agent represents. Look at what genres they want. Look at what books they've sold. Decide, do you want a big-name agent who has multiple clients, who may not be able to be as hands on as you would like? Do you want a smaller agent who's just starting out, but who can give you their full, undivided attention? I think it's really just examining what you want from an agent-author partnership and what their vision is for the book. Like, with *The City Beautiful*, it had multiple offers, and it was really important for me to find an agent whose editorial notes best matched my vision for the book. I wanted to be enthusiastic going into the process, and what I liked about my previous agent and her thoughts on the book was as soon as she began talking about what she envisioned for the edits, I got that spark of enthusiasm, and I knew right away 'I want to dive into this revision.'

Sabrina: You got excited about the changes she suggested?

Aden: I got excited. If I don't get excited about the changes, that's a red flag for me. Not red flag, as in 'This is a bad agent,' but a red flag as in 'This isn't where I want to take this manuscript, and I don't think this is the right fit.' I've had, even just like with the editorial notes, I know when a note isn't gonna work for me, when it's not right for the book. And increasingly, with each manuscript I've written, it's become more and more important for me to write the book I want to write, than to have the book sell, I guess. For the current book I'm querying, I've come to the conclusion that this book may not be as marketable in its current state, but it's the book I want to tell. It's the story I want to tell. And for me, at least for this particular manuscript, that's gonna trump all else. For another book, say, another manuscript I'm working on, I'm gonna be a lot more flexible, maybe. I may be a lot more open to making changes that - at first glance - may not be ones I want to make, but I can recognize the merit in those



suggestions. I'd say it really depends on the book, for me at least, on where I am in my journey, what I want from an agent or from an editor. It's different for every book.

Sabrina: Yeah. We're constantly growing and changing, so that makes sense. Do you have any tips or advice on protecting your mental health while querying, or being on submission?

Aden: Oh, God. Yeah. [Both laugh.] Well, for me, I struggle with severe depression and anxiety, so mental health has always been at the forefront for this entire process. It's gonna be different for every author. It's gonna be different for an author who doesn't struggle with mental health issues. For me, it's been very difficult detaching myself from the rejection phase, or from the feedback phase. But luckily, I have a lot of experience in trying to balance my own mental health with my publishing career. I think my suggestion would be: When you're querying, realize that a lot of it's not your book. It's the industry, it's the market, it's the fact that your book is a product. It's the fact that even if you're writing about personal experiences, or emotions, or you've put your entire heart into this book, that's irrelevant, in a sense. It's a product. It's gonna go be submitted as a product. It's gonna be marketed and sold as a product. And, I think as a beginning author, it's very hard to see it that way. So, you're gonna be taking rejections personally, and you're going to be reading into form rejections, and you're gonna be thinking, 'I put my heart into this book, and I just got a one sentence form rejection. What's wrong with my book? What's wrong with me as an author?' Nothing. It's the market.

Sabrina: It's the market. And, I promise you, thousands of other people just got the same...

Aden: Exactly. Same rejection.

Sabrina: Maybe not from that agent, maybe not that same minute...maybe that same minute, and maybe that same agent!

Aden: Yeah. So, I think my suggestion there would be: Find hobbies. If your hobby is writing, prepare for that hobby to be monetized and prepare for it to become a product and a career.

Sabrina: Find another creative outlet that you can do that you don't have to focus on.

Aden: Exactly. Like I said, in my teens, writing was my outlet. It's not now. It's my career. And I've been forced to view it as a career in my head, and everything I do with my writing. And, for me at least, it's no longer a hobby, it's no longer escapism. It's something I do as a career, as a way of making money. And it's sad to view it that way, but once you begin viewing it more as a career and less as an escapism, that forces you to reconceptualize rejection because you're gonna face rejection at every stage in the business. You're gonna get rejections when you're querying. You're gonna get rejections when you're on sub. The book I'm querying now, it was gonna be an option book for my publisher, but because it's a very dark book, it didn't fit their lineup. So, I'm back to querying. It's very hard, I think, for authors to see it that way, especially when you're starting out. So, I mean, protect your mental health is my suggestion. Protect your mental health, if you're writing books that are their own voices, or draw from your own experiences, or they are queer, or that deal with subjects that you've personally experienced. Like racism or homophobia or anti-Semitism or any of that. Because you're gonna be getting responses, whether it's rejections, whether it's reviews. They're gonna put into question what you're writing about, and just because of - especially for kid lit - you're gonna be in a vulnerable position, putting yourself out there. That would be my main suggestion.

Sabrina: Yeah. Do what you can to protect yourself.

Aden: Yeah. And, decide how much you want to put into it, like going to social media. I know for me, that's been a very difficult thing to balance, because if I'd known at the time the way that my social media profiles would become my platform, I probably would have published under a pen name. Obviously, this is a choice everyone has to make for themselves. I'm going into that as someone who does struggle with anxiety and depression, and where it can feel very overwhelming realizing that you have to view your social media platforms now as an extension of your author platform. Yeah. So, my recommendation would be: As important as it is to use it to market your book, the fact is, if going on social media and doing that is doing more harm than

good for your own mental health, don't do it. You're not gonna sell more copies than it's worth, putting your own mental health at risk.

Sabrina: That was amazing advice. While you're giving such incredible advice, do you have any advice for debut authors, either leading up to their debut coming out or once it's released, or both?

Aden: Yeah, I guess it's interesting. My debut novel of *Project Pandora*, it was with a smaller publisher, it didn't get the same level of marketing or attention that *The City Beautiful* did, which was with a Big Five imprint.

Sabrina: It's still on my shelf, though.

Aden: I'm glad. Yeah, I mean, I love that book. It was a fun book to write. But what I wish at the time was, I wish I was aware of the role that marketing and publisher plays into how well a book does. If you're a debut author, and you're with a smaller publisher and you see these massive sparkling deals landing and you're like, 'Oh, God, why isn't my book getting that level of attention? Why?' It's the marketing. It's the amount of money a book publisher puts behind a book. Like my first books, they didn't get an advance. So, it was a totally different experience going into publishing with *The City Beautiful*, where it was with a Big Five publisher. It did get an advance, it got an audiobook deal, and it was a totally different experience. If you're starting out, it's very easy to lose sight of the fact that every book is different, every marketing plan is different. Publishers have different approaches to how they're gonna get a book out there. If your book publishes during a pandemic like *The City Beautiful*, that's gonna affect it, and it's sad and that sucks. But I think the thing is just accepting that you've done everything you can. At some point, you're just gonna have to accept a book's going to land where it lands, and you, as an author, don't have the control and the marketing push that a publisher does. You can only do so much. And if you're really trying to get to market your book, and it's just not working, and it's affecting your mental health, or it's affecting your enthusiasm.

Sabrina: It's just frustrating. Yeah.

Aden: Yeah. You just have to let it go. Get your eyes on the next book. That's my advice. Get your eyes on the next manuscript. Realize that your first book isn't going to make or break your career, in most cases. You need to keep writing.

Sabrina: Yeah, I know that's true.

Aden: Yeah, I think it's very easy to think this book is gonna make my - you know - really start my career as an author. It's gonna be this huge explosive book. I'm gonna be like Stephen King and then the book just - that doesn't happen - and you get unmotivated. So yeah, that would be my advice. As soon as you get a book deal, start thinking about what you want to write next, and working on a new project and putting your enthusiasm and excitement into that new project.

Sabrina: I think that's the best advice for literally every step of anything that you're doing in this. Like you're querying? Write a new book. You're on sub? Write a new book. Did your book just come out? Write a new book. [Both laughing.]

Aden: Yeah, exactly.

Sabrina: I mean, at least it just keeps them going. Okay, you wanta get into some writing and writer questions?

Aden: Yeah, sure.

Sabrina: So, what is the hardest, and or biggest, revision you've undertaken as an author?

Aden: That's really interesting. I was gonna say *The City Beautiful* because when I first worked it up with my second agent, it was a completely different book, more supernatural. But honestly, I think it's actually this current project. It's gone through - I've been working on it two years now. It's gone through so many revisions and I think finally, now, I'm finally beginning to realize the story I want to tell and what the heart of the book is. What I want the focus to be really varies for each book. I'd say in this case, it's like this final version is gonna be completely different from the story I began writing starting out. Completely different plot, tone. It's veering more into adult now compared to YA.

Sabrina: Yeah, no, that one sounds really big. How long does it normally take you to draft?

Aden: It really depends on the book. I think that it varies. Back when I was starting out, you know, for my first manuscripts, I could probably churn out a first draft in a couple of months. I've actually found that with each subsequent book it's been taking me longer and longer.

Sabrina: Okay, that's interesting.

Aden: Yeah, I mean for *The City Beautiful*, I think I got it out in like three or four months. But revising it took me like six, seven months longer, and that's before it even got to my editor. And, like I said, this book has been two years in the making, basically.

Sabrina: But that's been through different rounds and stuff. It's not the same draft.

Aden: Yeah, it also depends. It could be even the first draft. It's like, I could churn out one draft in a month. I could churn it out in six months. It depends on the book.

Sabrina: Are you a pantsier or a plotter? I guess you kind of have to be a little bit of a plotter if you're doing stuff on proposal, since you have to get the synopsis together first.

Aden: Yeah, exactly. Proposal changed the entire way I work. I used to be a total pantsier. But, because I need some synopsis, I have to figure out how a book's going to end, and work it all out.

Sabrina: How does the plotting process work for you? Do you just work on the synopsis, or do you do, like, an outline, or do you get character stuff together? How do you plot?

Aden: It depends on the books. Some books just begin with an image in my head of a scene. Others, I have basically a blurb of an idea where it's like, 'Yeah, I want to write a book about - I want to set a book during the 1893 World's Fair, just like for *The City Beautiful*.' For example, I had this image in my head of I had visited a burial society house in Prague, when I was studying

abroad, and that was the first time I learned about the whole Jewish burial process. And I found it fascinating.

Sabrina: The details in *The City Beautiful* were so incredible, in all that. I really loved all that.

Aden: Thanks! Yeah, so that was the first idea, just this image of the main character performing the whole purification rites on the body. And I was just thinking, 'Okay, cool, maybe a vampire story.' I ended up doing one with a dybbuk, but yeah, it really depends on the book. Sometimes it's a lot easier to draft it. I never write in chronological order, so usually I have to do a bit of rearranging there.

Sabrina: Do you just do as they come or do you just do your favorites?

Aden: Usually as they come, but also if I have a really great idea, I'm gonna be writing that, because otherwise it's not gonna come across as clear if I have to wait.

Sabrina: Okay, so do you just get a collection of, like, a bunch of scenes that are kind of out of order? Is that like, your first draft or do you go put them together and that's your first draft, or how does that work?

Aden: I revise as I go, usually. So, I'll just be making random chapter headings and descriptions of, like, I'll say 'motel scene' or 'interaction between so and so' in the chapter headings. So, when I go back to rearrange it, I'll know where each scene goes and I just use Word document.

Sabrina: Do you work on more than one project at a time?

Aden: Oh, God, yes! I'm terrible at working on one project at a time. I always work on more than one. Usually like three or four.

Sabrina: Are they all in different stages?

Yeah. Right now, I have the one I'm querying and that's done, of course, but I also have an adult version of it, all starting to work on. It's still in the back of my mind, still playing around with the adult version, because I don't know if they'll want to sub it as YA

or adult. But then, I also have three or four just random manuscripts. Anywhere from 30,000 words into it, to 5,000 words. Yeah. I could never focus on one project at a time. I would just not write it.

Sabrina: That's impressive. That's really impressive. I can barely keep characters from one book straight. What is your favorite tip to battle writer's block?

Aden: That's interesting. Probably just push through. I do have - get writer's block a lot and I'll push through it. I may not like what I'm writing down, I may hate it.

Sabrina: But, how do you push past that mental hurdle of writing what you hate but still moving forward and getting it done? Because that's a big one, I think, for a lot of people.

Aden: Honestly, dictation has helped a lot with that, because I'm not reading it as I go. I'm just speaking into my phone or my microphone. And, it may be terrible, but at least then I have 1,000 words. It's there, it can be fixed. And I don't spend an hour staring blankly at a Word document. I'm just walking and I'm speaking.

Sabrina: Okay, so you just like, you do the word vomit route of it.

Aden: Yeah. Basically.

Sabrina: I actually really like that.

Aden: Yeah, it's been so helpful.

Sabrina: I'm gonna actually steal this from you.

Aden: Yeah, especially with my current project. It's a very character driven story. Like, the way it's written, it's more confessional, where it's more of like, the main character's writing in diaries, basically.

Sabrina: Oh, cool.

Aden: So, the tone of dictation works really well because – normally - I'd be cutting out a bunch of filtering words like 'just' and 'really' and 'sure'. -Well, sure is not one. - I'm keeping them in because I want to have a very voice driven feel. Yeah.

Sabrina: I am. I'm gonna try that. I'm gonna try when I'm having a hard time with the page and dragging the words out, to just get my little, my cute little recording app out and go take Ginny on a walk.

Aden: Yeah, it's been the most helpful thing I found. Also, like, one of my friends recommended an old word processor. I think it's an Alpha 3000, I think. It's one of those really old ones where there's just a very small, like, basically Game Boy sized screen and it's like, the text disappears.

Sabrina: Okay. Yes.

Aden: So, I've actually started doing that where I'll take it with me and I'll type. And, because the words disappear after four lines, you're not editing as you go, you're just typing.

Sabrina: I want one of those.

Aden: Yeah, it's great. It is like \$15 on eBay. And, once I'm done, I plug the old vintage printer cord into my laptop and the words just get copied onto my Word document.

Sabrina: That's a good one. Okay. I love that, too. When you're dictating, do you dictate like you're reading a book in full sentences with dialogue and action and stuff? Or, is it more like bullet points or how does that - what do you do?

Aden: Yeah, it's basically like begin quote "This is why I told you not to do this," comma, end quote. He said, comma, 'glancing over', period. New line. That's basically how I dictate.

Sabrina: Okay. No, I love it. I remember doing Dragon Dictation. I just haven't done it in a while.



Aden: It took a long time getting used to, but I've probably dictated maybe 500,000 words over the last year. So, it's really natural now.

Sabrina: Oh, wow! Okay, well, we've done all of this. Look at us go! It's only been 4 hours. [Laughs.] Would you like to tell us about *Bone Weaver*?

Aden: Yeah, of course. Well, it comes out on September 20th. It's a YA dark Slavic fantasy. It's strongly inspired by Imperial Russia. And the setting is based on the Pale of Settlement, which was an Imperial Russian territory where Jews were made to live. During that time, they weren't allowed to live in mainland Russia or many of the larger cities, or extremely rural areas. So, it was basically a region where they were restricted to live. And, it's basically about this girl who was raised by the undead, because in this world, the dead are resurrected indiscriminately. So, people take precautions. They take precautions to prevent the resurrection of the dead. Like severing the tendons in the arms and legs, or dismembering the bodies, or burning them. And, in this case, she's spent most of her life living with basically, they're basically zombies, the reanimated dead. And then one day, a boy crashes in an airship and she rescues him. And she gets dragged into this civil war between these basically magic endowed elites, and then this other faction that's basically just normal people without powers - but who have started a whole revolution - to try to overthrow the monarchy. It goes into, I mean, it's secondary world. But I would definitely say that the research, the extensive research I did into *The City Beautiful*, and into the political environment of Imperial Russia during the late 1800s and early 1900s definitely influenced the plot and the politics of the book, as well.

Sabrina: This sounds so good! I actually remember reading - I don't think I read the whole thing, but I do remember reading part of it. A long time ago! I don't know if any of it's the same. I'm really excited to actually dive in and see if I remember it when I'm reading now. I should dig through my emails and see if I can find it. I remember loving it before, and it still sounds just as amazing this time around, hearing it now.

Aden: Thank you.

Sabrina: Yeah. It's such a cool concept, and I love the inspiration you took.

Aden: Thank you. Yeah, I really love what I've done with the revisions.

Sabrina: Who is your favorite character to write?

Aden: Definitely Vanya. Basically the chaos bisexual. Yeah, I love writing his character so much, it's interesting. For each book I write, usually there's a character who I just know in an instant, like, they appear on page. I know who they are, I know what they want, I know what their personality is. For *The City Beautiful*, that was Frankie.

Sabrina: Oh, yay! I love Frankie so much. I loved all the characters, but Frankie was so fun. Every scene he came in, I was just like, 'What are you gonna do now?'

Aden: Yeah, it's so interesting how that works for *Project Pandora's*, Hades, it's just like the moment that character shows up, I know them. And with Vanya, the moment he showed up, I knew him. I knew his humor, I knew his personality, and I loved writing him. And, it's funny how that works. Sometimes it takes you a while to know characters. Other times you know them as soon as you write them. Same with point of view characters. Toma, I knew, but it took me a bit to figure her out. For the manuscript I'm working on now, the main character, Elliot, it's like the moment I began writing the book, I knew who he was. For *The City Beautiful*, Alter took a bit of figuring out, but Frankie, the moment I wrote him, I knew him.

Sabrina: Okay. That's so interesting to find out. I love that.

Aden: Thanks, yeah.

Sabrina: What were your favorite locations in the books to write?

Aden: That's a great question. For *The City Beautiful* favorite location, honestly, I loved writing the sort of dream sequences where Alter steps from his own reality into the sort of distorted memories of Yakov. Yeah, that's my favorite for *The City Beautiful*. For *Bone Weaver*, I would have to say probably the train scene and the forest scenes that follow were the funnest to

write. Although I also really adored writing the wilderness scenes in the beginning.

Sabrina: Nice. Okay, which character is most like you?

Aden: Oh, that's hard. For *Bone Weaver*. I'd have to say, Toma. I feel like her personality, the way she views the world, the sort of isolation she feels is something that I've felt. And the way she feels, I guess, distant from interactions and the way she sort of analyzes them, I put a lot of myself into that. It's interesting. It varies for each book. For each character, I put my - parts of my own personality or insight or thought processes into every character. Like with *The City Beautiful*, personality wise, I'm a lot more like Alter than I'm like Frankie, but a lot of Frankie's thoughts and feelings are similar to ones I felt in the past. So, it really depends.

Sabrina: Okay. What else would you like to share with us about books and about *Bone Weaver*, and about anything?

Aden: I guess just I hope readers will enjoy the books. I really want to write the kinds of books I would have loved to read as a teen, and I am hoping readers will be able to see themselves in these books. And, especially as I continue writing, I really want to write books that teens can relate to. That deal with topics that aren't always discussed in genre fiction. Like, as someone who's struggled with severe depression since I was twelve, I want to write books with characters who struggle with depression and who struggle with anxiety, or even books with characters who struggle with internalized homophobia, or with their sexuality, or with issues that - racism or anti-Semitism, or issues you don't see discussed in genre books.

Sabrina: Extremely, extremely important topics. Yes.

Aden: Yeah. It's important that teens can see themselves as the heroes. Not just in books that deal with these things, but in books where they can go on adventures and rescue the tsar or find a serial killer. Books where they can be the heroes.

Sabrina: I love that so much.

Aden: Thanks.

Sabrina: Can you tell us a little tiny, tiny bit about your middle grade that's coming out?

Aden: Yeah, it comes out in February of 2023. It's the first middle grade book I wrote, *Ring of Solomon*. It's basically about this twelve-year-old boy who finds this magical ring at a flea market, and he doesn't know it at the time, but it's the legendary Ring of Solomon that King Solomon used to summon demons to help build the first temple in Jerusalem. And, it can let you talk to animals as well. So, he basically accidentally summons the King of Demons and it starts this whole crazy chain of events where, like, this doomsday cult comes into the picture and wants to use the ring to summon the three beasts that were created at the dawn of creation and start the apocalypse.

Sabrina: Oh my God!

Aden: And, he has to stop that. And it's a really fun book. I loved writing the humor in it. It was so fun because it was the kind of book I would have loved as a kid. It's just a really fun adventure book, like *Percy Jackson*.

Sabrina: It sounds so fun! I'm ready for it.

Aden: Thanks. Yeah, I'm so excited.

Sabrina: It sounds really cute, and like super fun adventure. Yeah, I'm excited.

Aden: Thank you.

Sabrina: Oh, what is - I can't remember what it's called. My brain sucks. What's your other - that's coming out in the fall? Next fall.

Aden: Oh, next fall. *Wrath Becomes Her*.

Sabrina: *Wrath Becomes Her*. It's a gorgeous name. I'm sorry.

Aden: [Laughs.] No worries. I mean the title just changed too, so yeah, it's set during World War II in Lithuania. It's about a Golem, a

creature made of clay and Jewish folklore, who's brought to life in order to avenge the death of the - her creator's daughter - who was murdered by the Nazis. So, she's created the Golem Vera. She's created to basically kill the Nazis. So, it's basically *Inglorious Bastards*. But YA, and with a Golem.

Sabrina: I love it!

Aden: Yeah, I'm so excited.

Sabrina: These all sound so fun! Get all your Aden books on your TBRs everybody.

Aden: Yeah, and then - also in September - I have a short story coming out in the *Gathering Dark* anthology. It's a folk horror anthology.

Sabrina: How was working on an anthology?

Aden: Oh, so fun! The first short story I wrote in a long time, so it was very interesting diving into it. And yeah, it was just really interesting doing a short story after I've written novels for so long.

Sabrina: Gosh you have so many things coming out. All really soon! Like all within like a year really.

Aden: Yeah, it's a lot. [Both laugh.]

Sabrina: It is. I don't know. Are you sleeping over there? Are you okay?

Aden: I'm trying to. [Both laugh.]

Sabrina: Okay, good. Do you have any - are there any recently released or upcoming books you'd like to recommend - aside from all of yours?

Aden: Yeah, I know I say this in every interview, probably because I'm still obsessed with the book, but I just really loved *Hell Followed With Us*. It's glorious! I've been rereading it again just because I love it. And yeah, it's a YA very dark horror, queer horror. It has a trans guy main lead.

Sabrina: I've heard it's really angry, and really brilliant!

Aden: Really angry? Oh God! Yeah, it's angry. I loved it. I was gonna say it's like a master class in basically writing horror, and the way that you can use gore to evoke strong emotions. The way you can really make anger come across on a page, with voice. Yeah, so I love the book *Hell Followed With Us* by A. J. White. Yeah.

Sabrina: No, that's been on my list for a while. Thank you! That just got bumped up. And then, do you want to tell everybody where we can find you, and all of your amazing books?

Aden: Yeah, I can be found on Twitter and Instagram. Aden Polydoros, just type in my name. My website is [adenpolydoros.com](http://adenpolydoros.com). And yeah, all of my books are listed on there. But also, of course, you could find them on Goodreads, as well.

Sabrina: Okay sweet. Yay! That was so fun! Thank you!

Aden: Yeah, of course. Thank you so much. I had such a great time.

Sabrina: Oh my gosh, I had the best time! It was so fun!

Aden: Same. Can't wait for this to, you know, come out. Hi everyone who's listening, thank you so much for joining us. Bye everyone!

[Upbeat music starts, and fades.]

Sabrina: Okay everyone, that's all for Episode 4. You can find a Content List and all the Aden links on the Show Notes page of my website. Thanks so much for joining us! Okay, Ginny. Say goodbye.

Ginny: [Dog barks.]

[Upbeat music ends.]

**In this episode:**

Goosebumps series by R.L. Stein

Nancy Drew Mystery Stories series by Carolyn Keene

The Hardy Boys series by Franklin W. Dixon

Blockbuster Videos

Stephen King

Dean Koontz

Sidney Sheldon

Dragon

Entangled Teen

NaNoWriMo

Manuscript Wish List

Hell Followed With Us by Andrew Joseph White

**Aden's books:**

BONE WEAVER

Out Now:

Project Pandora

The City Beautiful

The Gathering Dark: An Anthology of Folk Horror - "It Stays With You"

Forthcoming:

Ring of Solomon

Wrath Becomes Her