



The 7 Question Interview with Eddie Schneider

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Please let us know who you are, your company, and some of your clients:

I'm Eddie Schneider, a literary agent with JABberwocky Literary Agency, the world's leading agency for fantasy and science fiction. Some of our clients include Charlaine Harris, Brandon Sanderson, Simon R. Green, Jack Campbell, Elizabeth Moon, and Tanya Huff.

So our readers may fully understand the role of an agent, please tell us how you make contact with an editor at a major house once you have a manuscript you are interested in.

Typically, what I will actually do once I have a manuscript I'm interested in, is to work with the author to polish that manuscript so that all of the plot works, and that other things which an editor might use as excuses to pass on a project are also dealt with.

Then, once it really is ready, I'll call or email editors I know personally who I think will be truly interested in the manuscript (virtually all of whom are at major houses). Any decent agent will have the sense to carefully choose editors, and the result is that editors often get back to us quickly, and read the manuscript themselves as opposed to dumping it on an assistant or intern.

When reviewing a submission, what do you look for:

I'd love to go on about how it's voice, great plotting, and the like that are what draw me to a book, but these things are unhelpful, because they're so subjective and nebulous. Many an aspiring author will think, "Oh, he likes great books! Well, have I got something for him!"



Instead, I'll list genres, and examples within these genres, because they will actually be useful:

Literary fiction - I'm looking for literary novels with both great writing and a strong conceptual anchor. I'd also like something that's experimental without being inaccessible. An example of a (non-client) novel I enjoyed that meets these criteria is Italo Calvino's *IF ON A WINTER'S NIGHT A TRAVELER*.

Fantasy - I'm looking for literary fantasy with one foot in the real world and one foot in the fantastic. I go for character-driven novels with intricate, imaginative settings that are internally consistent and have verisimilitude. An example of a (non-client) novel I enjoyed that meets these criteria is Susanna Clarke's *JONATHAN STRANGE & MR. NORRELL*.

Other subgenres and special areas of fantasy that are of interest to me include: magical realism (e.g. Isabel Allende's *THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS*), steampunk, and urban fantasy. High fantasy is best directed to Joshua.

Science fiction - I'm looking for science fiction with evocative writing and a good sense of adventure, in which the info-dumping takes a back seat to character and narrative. An example of a (non-client) novel I enjoyed that meets these criteria is Ursula K. Le Guin's *THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS*.

Other subgenres & special areas of science fiction that are of interest to me include: dystopian novels, for which I have a special place in my heart (e.g. Ray Bradbury's *FAHRENHEIT 451*), some space opera, and novels involving near-future space exploration and first contact (e.g. Robert Charles Wilson's *SPIN*). Hard SF and military SF are best directed to Joshua.

Other genres - I will also consider adventure, horror, satire, and graphic novels, the last of these by either an author-illustrator or an already established author-illustrator team. Aspiring graphic novelists should include a standard query letter and one printed or photocopied page of artwork.

Young adult - I am happy to consider young adult submissions in any of the above genres or subgenres.

Any suggestions or comments on how a writer can break into the publishing industry:

The best thing a writer can do to further his or her career is to make time every day to write, and to spend that writing time wisely. To spend it wisely means to continually try to improve. It's very similar to trying to become a concert pianist or an Olympic athlete, in that the writer must go all out in each day's writing. The more time a writer is able to dedicate each day, the fewer the number of years it will take to develop.



The next thing that's necessary is for the writer to take agent research (and short story market research) as seriously as his or her writing. This means sending material to the right person, in the requested format, and being conscientious of how the process actually works.

Lastly, it is also a very good idea for the aspiring author to join a writing group with one or more published authors in which people are honest with one another, and not cloying with encouragement or constantly fixated on their own work. Because humans learn better when they can see each other's body language, it's best to try to join a group that meets in person regularly, but online groups can also be helpful, in lieu of a good local group.

Aside from excellent writing skills, what are the literary factors that make an author successful?

Excellent writing skills are essential to the success of a piece of fiction (if not necessarily to the success of an author), but there are three other factors, I believe, that make a story truly successful (hopefully, critical and financial success will follow for the author as well).

The first and most foundational of these, even before the ability to articulate oneself, is creativity. Interesting ideas, scenarios, and details are the primordial soup that attracts people to any artistic endeavor. Next, of course, comes the ability to communicate these ideas, which is where I'd place writing skills.

Once these two criteria have been met, the next important factor in making a story successful is the ability to put all these ideas into a discrete narrative. Having a story with a beginning, middle, and end, in which tension rises, events happen, and there is some sort of resolution, is essential to a really successful story. Even with literary fiction.

The last item, and the one that's rarest, in making a piece of fiction successful, is talking that well-articulated, well-plotted, creative story and having it engage with larger issues, be they philosophical, psychological, or otherwise. The real trick here is to do it without falling into the Ayn Rand trap and expounding upon the virtues of a single ideology. Polemics should be polemics, and not novels.

You can have only some of these attributes and be a successful author (Stephenie Meyer comes to mind; she takes certain primeval feelings and tells stories of obvious appeal, even if they're not well-written or philosophically engaging), but the best books have all of these and leave the reader in awe.



What are your feelings concerning traditional publishing houses versus smaller vanity press houses or self-publishing?

I admit to being reticent to read someone's self-published novel, because it implies that the author has poor impulse control.

That being said, there are books that people (publishers and agents alike) just don't get, and have to be shown, by sales success, that they ought to get.

The world of vanity presses is also like playground basketball. The best playground players might make it in the pros, but most couldn't, and those that do will typically need some guidance before they really fulfill their potential.

Are there any upcoming releases associated with your agency that you would like to tell our readers about?

So many!

First, Brandon Sanderson's *WARBREAKER* is out in May. Charlaine's latest Sookie Stackhouse novel, *DEAD AND GONE*, also comes out in May, Tanya Huff's *ENCHANTMENT EMPORIUM* is out in June, and others on the horizon include David Louis Edelman's *GEOSYNCHRON*, Tim Akers' *THE HEART OF VERIDON*, Peter V. Brett's *THE DESERT SPEAR*, and Elizabeth Moon is hard at work on a brand new Paksenarrion novel called *OATH OF FEALTY*.

WritingRaw.com would like to thank Mr. Schneider for taking the time out of his busy schedule for this interview.