

When Brad Meltzer published his first novel, there was no telling what fate had in store for him. Ten years and several best-selling books later, Meltzer's writing career has never looked brighter with his latest endeavour, *The Book of Fate* topping the New York Times best-seller list.

A Master in his own House



Any writer would be happy with success in writing prose novels, but Meltzer has also contributed his talents to comic books, garnering acclaim for his work at DC Comics on *Green Arrow* and the *Identity Crisis* mini-series. He's currently handling writing duty on a chart-topping comic book, *Justice League of America* at DC, and this September became the first author to have a number-one novel and a number-one comic book on the stands at the same time.

While 2006 has certainly been a banner year for Meltzer, some people might be surprised to learn that he initially set out to become a lawyer rather than a writer.

Meltzer admits that his motivations were misplaced when he was studying at Columbia Law School.

"I think on many levels I was just a coward, for lack of any other better explanation. I grew up in a very normal family and money was an issue for us. I did not want to go through life having to deal with that issue again in terms of worrying every month whether we were going to have any. So instead of playing starving writer, I went to law school."

Obviously, Meltzer had a change of heart, as he explains why he decided to pursue a career as an author.

"In truth, I finally learned to follow my passion. That's the real answer. I like law; I'm not a self-hating lawyer but I really feel like you have to follow your passion in life and my passion is certainly to write."

As one might expect, then, the spheres of politics and law hold a particular fascination in his thriller novels.

"I think that's the world I've learned to understand. My first job was as an intern in government. I remember sitting in that job and I think there are some people who become interns in government and they feel like they own the place and they feel like it's theirs. And I never felt that way. I always felt like an outsider looking in. I never

felt like I was entitled to it, so that was my perspective, and that's the same perspective I bring into all my novels; that same 'outsider looking in,'" Meltzer says.

The worlds of heroes and villains of the superhuman variety are just as appealing to Meltzer, who offers some thoughts on the characters he handles in his other job.

"For me, superheroes are not just an idea; they're an ideal, and I like that ideal. I love being a pessimist, but I wish I were an optimist at times and I think superheroes let me be that," he says. "I love that good versus evil battle. I love believing that friends will have your back if you need their help. Those things make sense to me."

Meltzer points to his comic book projects as having a significant effect on how he approaches his novels.

"I feel like, in a strange way, that comic books—because they demand that you explore character—have really influenced the way I write my novels and trying to get more out of character than just simply trying to get plot out of them," he relates. "It's strange but I really think that comic books have made me a better writer."

Versatility might be one trait that Brad Meltzer possesses, but he's hardly alone in that regard with more writers contributing to different media these days.

"I think on some levels, a little bit of the snobbery has broken down. When I was little, I was the only one in my school that I felt read comics. If I wanted to talk to someone else who read comics, I had to go to the comic store. And now you can just go right online; you'll find hundreds of people like yourself," he explains. "You're not alone anymore and I think in many ways it just makes it easier to find each other."

"I think it used to be harder to contact writers that weren't within your industry, and now the intellectual snobbery and 'us and them' has really broken down," he continues. "People realize just because you write a novel doesn't mean you can't write a comic book."

Meltzer is no different than any other writer, though, in offering his choice for a fellow creator that has had a huge impact on him, and, incidentally, several other creative professionals.

"Without a doubt, Alan Moore. I just think—in any medium—nobody tops him. I tend to like comics as much as I like novels so I don't feel like I need to say, 'Well, I've given you a comic book person so I need to give you a novelist.' I think Alan Moore is the best in all worlds."

Alan Moore certainly has a large and legendary portfolio, which includes *V for Vendetta* that was translated into a film last year, so picking a favourite can be rather daunting.

"Only a fool doesn't say *Watchmen*, but you could just as easily give me the Mogo story from *Green Lantern*. You could just as easily give me *Top Ten League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. Anything else."

Since *Watchmen* was first released in 1986, a lot has changed with the emergence of the digital age, personal computers, and the Internet.



Any aspiring or established writer knows that maintaining a certain presence online—with webpages, message boards, blogs and other tools—has become more or less necessary to help reach prospective audiences.

Of course, nobody has to tell Meltzer any of this; he's been tapping into the potential of the World Wide Web for nearly as long as he's been publishing his work.

"We've had our webpage up for almost ten years now and I'm proud of that. I kind of pride myself on the fact that I've been able to have a very close connection with any of my readers," he says. "To me, that's one of the fun parts of the process."

In today's world of iPods, video-games, DVDs, and hi-def TV, there are those who might wonder if reading and writing have become obsolete but Meltzer's outlook is hardly so gloomy.

"I think this always gets overstated. I was reading an article today that said, 'When they created movies, everyone said it was the death of radio, and when they created television, it was the death of movies, and when they created e-books, it was the end of books, and when they created computers, it's the end of writing,'" he relates. "I think communicating in all these various forms is still communicating and

I'm not one to scream that the sky's falling."

Regardless of the medium, any artist knows that, where their work goes, the critics will follow, but Meltzer takes it all in stride.

"I've had reviews that have called me 'brilliant' and I've had reviews that have called me a 'moron.' That doesn't mean the 'brilliant' ones are right; that doesn't mean the 'moron' ones are right," Meltzer says. "I think you just have to always realize that it's just a subjective opinion. That's what it all is and you can only take it as that. I just feel lucky that people get to read the books; I don't get caught up on, 'Oh my gosh, what are they saying about me today?'"

While dealing with criticism is one part of the writing business, Meltzer also offers some wisdom about the writing process for aspiring authors.

"It's okay to admit that it's hard. I was involved in my third book when someone said that to me and it really made a difference. It really helped because you feel like, 'Someone's paying me to write about imaginary people; I feel so lucky and I don't want to complain or I'll be a real bastard.' And I really appreciated that."

—written by Tyson Durst

