Q&A

Brad Answers All

Q: Where'd the idea for The Inner Circle come from?

It all came from a private conversation I had with a former President of the United States. I'll never forget it. We were talking about how hard it was to keep a secret and make sure you're not overheard when you're in the White House. And when a real President whispers something like that to you, you pay attention.

"But as I looked back through history, I realized the problem dated back to George Washington himself, who devised a secret group that would serve just the President. They weren't military men. They were regular citizens. Just like us. Washington called them The Culper Ring — and they were the secret weapon of the Revolutionary War, even though they were never in most history books.

You're telling me the first president of the US had a secret spy group that saved our country? I'm interested. And as I talked to my National Security folks, we kept coming back to one idea: who says this secret group was ever disbanded? Who says it doesn't exist today? When someone in National Security said to me: "I wish we had The Culper Ring today" — that's when I know I had the plot for the book."

Q: Your previous novels have been set in Washington, DC, in places like the White House and the Supreme Court. What made you decide to use the National Archives as the setting for your upcoming novel?
I came to visit and fell in love. Truly. Lost history...secret documents...long-forgotten letters from Presidents and other big shots—all of which tell the true history of our nation. How could a history nut not fall in love? Plus, they let me hold the Declaration of Independence.

Q: So it was all based on a visit to the Archives?

A few years back, I got a call from Homeland Security asking me if I'd come in and brainstorm different ways for terrorists to attack the US. My first thought was, "If they're calling me, we've got bigger problems than anyone thinks." But they'd seen the research in my books. And they know I have good sources, so they invited me in.

I was honored to be a part of the Red Cell program. They'd pair me with a Secret Service guy and a chemist — and they'd give us a target — and we'd destroy major cities in an hour.

It's not the kind of day where you go home feeling good. You go home terrified, because you see how easy it is to kill us.

On lunch breaks, I'd be talking to all the national security folks — and they're the ones who helped me tease out the plot of The Inner Circle. They're the ones who taught me what else every President needs — plus I had what one former President gave me. But once I saw the Archives, I knew I had a place to tell that tale."

Q: One of the recurring themes in your novels is how greatness comes from choices ordinary people make everyday. ("I don't believe in destiny. I believe in history" — a great line from The Inner Circle). What do you think is the origin of this ethos?

Blame my parents. My Mom especially. She grew up poor (though she'd hate that term and never use it). She didn't make it past high school. But she was the most amazing person I ever knew. Once, I took her to the White House — and as a decorator, I couldn't wait for her to be impressed by the decor. She took one look around and said, "Unga patchke," which is slang for "Overdone. Feh." It was the White House!

She hated snobs, she hated phonies, she hated rich obnoxious jerks who can only talk about what kind of car they drive. And when she died and I'd see the nurses or the waitresses in places she went, all they'd say is, "Oh, your mother was the best." As one receptionist reminded me, "Not
everyone is nice like that." The truth about you is what people say behind your back. And I love my mother so much for that: From the Queen of England to the janitor in the bathroom, she’d treat you the same."

**Q: You write with such authority about the Presidency and Washington DC. Where does that come from? How do you get real Presidents to help you?**

It’s funny, I feel like I never used to write about the President. I always wrote about the staffer you’d never see — the one who knew how to stay two steps out of the picture. And then one day, I got the best fan letter ever, from former President George H.W. Bush, saying he liked my novel, The Millionaires, and could I sign one for him. I’d gotten another couple of notes from President Clinton as well. And that just makes it a little easier to say, “Can I spend some time with you for research?”

The best part is, because I write fiction, I always get to see far more than what they’d show a reporter who’s out to burn them.

**Q: Unlike so many conspiracy buffs I’ve met through the years, you’re not jaded, not cynical, not angry. Where does that come from?**

Again, blame my family. My grandfather spent his whole life wanting to be a policeman. It was his dream. And he couldn’t be one because of some dumb medical reason. But he was the toughest, strongest, most amazing tough guy around. And the nicest. What I remember most about him was when he used to give all our old used toys to kids that had no money. And this was from a guy who had no money. The true toughest guy knows he doesn’t have to be the tough guy.

**Q: President Wallace is mesmerized by the written word, as so many of us are. I know your grandmother spent countless hours in the public library with you, devouring Judy Blume, Agatha Christie, Dr. Seuss. Stories change our lives, don’t they? What does the written word mean to you, and what would you like readers to take from your books?**

If readers could take one message from my books? Don’t let anyone tell you “No.” Also, as Mr. Rogers taught me, remember how special you are. Corny for sure. But, to steal a line from The Inner Circle, we should never forget that history is a selection process. It chooses all of us. Every day. The only question is, do we hear that call?
Q: The reader follows your main character, Beecher, into the vaults and stacks that visitors don’t see. But there is very little mention of the documents that most people associate with the National Archives—the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. Was this a deliberate omission?

It was. Anyone can see the gasper documents—the documents that make you gasp. Every single tourist can see the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. What I want to show you are the places you can’t go. The places only an insider sees. And yes – that underground storage cave at the end is real. I went there. Scaaaary.

Q: What was the most surprising job that you saw a National Archives staff member doing?

I was most amazed by the fact that you still have people combing through documents from the founding of our country. In my google-influenced brain, I thought everything had already been read and catalogued.

I love that there are new Lincoln letters — and new secrets — being found every single day.

Q: You’ve taken your love of secrets, mysteries, and conspiracies to the next level. You have a TV show about them. How did the show come about?

Again, I got lucky. One of the heads of the History Channel read my thriller — The Book of Fate — and he enjoyed all the Freemason secrets and the Thomas Jefferson code that was in there, and simply said, “We should do a show like that.”

So Brad Meltzer’s Decoded as a TV show is just me doing exactly what I do in my novels, looking through history and trying to solve its greatest mysteries. One of my favorites is about the very first piece of the White House, which was laid in an elaborate ceremony in 1792. Within 24 hours, that cornerstone supposedly went missing. President Truman went looking for it. So did Barbara Bush. But for 200 years, no one knows where the very first piece of the White House is. Needless to say, I want to find it.

Q: What’s a secret about you?

I can say the alphabet backwards. Faster than anyone.
Begged for no airbrushing on this. Notice how I look like a painting. And not a good one. Publishers never listen.

I. WRITING

For a list of Brad’s books in chronological order, click here.

Q. How’d you get started writing?

It wasn’t until I graduated from college. I was coming out of the University of Michigan and I had a job offer from the man who used to run Games magazine. He told me, “If you love the job, you’ll stay. If you hate it, you’ll leave a year later with some money in your pocket.” Since I had some debt to pay off, that seemed like a fair deal. So I moved all my stuff to Boston. But when I got there, the publisher left the magazine. (Surprise!) The whole reason I went there was to work for him. I thought I’d wrecked my life. I had no idea what to do. So I did what all of us would do in that situation. I said, “I’m gonna write a novel.” And I just started writing. Every day, I just fell more and more in love with the process.

Q. Did you always know you wanted to be a writer?
No, but I always liked writing. Even back in high school, I tried to write all my papers using tons of dialogue. But it never hit me until I left college. Where I grew up, writing wasn’t “a real job.” And, thankfully, it still isn’t.

Q. Where do you get your ideas?

Research, research, research. You can invent all the stuff you want, but if it doesn’t smell real, readers will know in a nanosecond (and rip your head off). To me, fiction is at its best when it has one foot in reality. That’s why I need to go out and see the places myself. I need to see what they look like, and smell like, and taste like (yum, hamburger)—and those details drive the ideas. Everything else is a gift from God.

Q. Locations like the White House, Congress, and the Supreme Court, even Disney World—how do you research these places?

Call up and ask. Seriously. If there’s one thing I’ve learned (besides that ice doesn’t get gum out of your hair), it’s that people are genuinely nice. Once they realize you’re writing fiction, and not looking for an expose, they love to talk. And that’s the only way to get the details real. Also, try to find people who recently left the job you’re trying to research. Those’re the ones you want to meet (funny, honest, and no longer worried about impressing the boss).

Q. How did you handle rejections from publishers?

I gave their e-mail addresses to my mother. You don’t know pain until you’ve met Teri Meltzer. Fear it.
Entertainment Weekly took one look at me and said, “Want to look like yourself, or you want us to make you look cool?” I said, “Myself.” They gave me the trenchcoat and said to put it on even though it was 102 degrees in Washington.

Q. How long does it take to write a book?

About a year, to a year and a half. I spend about two months doing character sketches (Who are these people? What are they like?) and anywhere from two to six months researching. The rest of the time, I’m writing (and playing Parcheesi).

Q. How do I get an agent?

First off, write the best book you can. Period. After that, you can find a list of agents in books like The Guide to Literary Agents. As a trick (which I recommend), you should pick out a few authors you like and check the Acknowledgements section of their hardback books. Most, if not all, writers thank their agents—and that’s one way to get a list of agents who have actually sold things.

Beyond that, write a short (short!) cover letter to send out to prospective agents. As someone once told me, write it like you’re writing the inside flap copy for the book. (Don’t say, “In Chapter One, this happens; then in Chapter Two, this happens; then in Chapter Three...”). They get hundreds of letters. And the sad truth is, agents want what they can’t have, and whatever they can have, they don’t want. Also, there’s a fine line between enthusiasm and
desperation. What does that mean? Don’t be a nudge (I know, because I was—and none of those agents wrote me back). Just be concise and clear, and send out the best book you can.

Q. Do you know the ending when you start?

I know what happens to the main characters simply because I have to. Each book is a journey. Ben, Sara, Michael, Oliver, Charlie, Harris, Matthew, Viv, Wes, Rogo—each of them is a different person by the time the last page hits. So I need to know where they’re going. Still, a novel is a process. It takes me over a year. During that year, I’m constantly changing my mind, adding new twists, and moving things around.

Q. Do you outline?

Only about fifty to a hundred pages at a time. That way, I’m in control, but there’s still plenty of room to let the creative process happen. If I just start typing and say “Let’s see where the day takes me,” I’ll just meander around and it’ll be a rambling mess.

Q. How do you edit?

I give it to my wife, she tears it apart, then I pick my heart up off the linoleum and go to bed.

When I’m finished with the first draft, I start over again and continue layering, always trying to add more to the characters. A good plot is fine, but if the characters aren’t real, no one’ll care.

Q. What do you like to read?

While I’m writing, I won’t read in the genre and I try not to read novels. It’s the only way I can keep my voice my own. Still, I love to read, so I consume graphic novels. Alan Moore, Brian K. Vaughn, all the usual suspects. I eat that stuff like candy.
Again, I begged not to airbrush. She still airbrushed me. A little.

Q. Advice to other authors?

Don’t let anyone tell you “No.” I got twenty-four rejection letters on my first novel. It’s still sitting on my shelf, published by Kinko’s. I had twenty-four people tell me to give it up—that I couldn’t write. But the day I got my twenty-third and twenty-fourth rejection, I said to myself, “If they don’t like this novel, I’ll write another, and if they don’t like that one, I’ll write another.” Why? Because I fell in love with writing. A week later, I started the book that became The Tenth Justice.

Does that make everyone who sent me objections wrong? Not a chance. The best and worst part of publishing is that it’s a subjective industry. All it takes is one person to say “Yes.” You just have to find that person. If you love what you do, it’ll show on the page. If you don’t, it won’t. That’s the x-factor in every book. And that’s what helps you move forward as a writer.

Q. Do you get the plot...then the characters, or do the characters create your plot?
I start with a nugget. In The Tenth Justice, it was a Supreme Court clerk. In Dead Even, it was married attorneys. And in The First Counsel, it was a White House lawyer. Then I take the characters and throw them into the plot. If I’m doing it right, I hit a point where I stop telling them what to do, and they start telling me what they want to do. If all else fails, it’s back to Parcheesi.

**Q. What’s a typical day like for writing? (Do you commit to finishing a particular scene or commit to x amount of pages?)**

I get up, I walk around the block, and then I sit down with my imaginary friends. At the end of the day, I try not to count pages, but I can’t help myself. I’m sad that way.

**Q. What’s going on with Hollywood? Are they making a movie?**

Right now, The Tenth Justice rights are about to revert to us, which makes me happier than you’ll ever know. And The Zero Game is sold. Does that mean we’ll see a film? No. Would I love them to make it? Of course. But as far as I’m concerned, movies are icing on an already great cake. If it happens, I’m thrilled. If not, there’re more important things to worry about in life.

On the TV side, co-creating the TV show Jack & Bobby was on of the most amazing, humbling, rewarding, frustrating, fantastic experiences of my life. And the best part? Once you get cancelled that fast, you get to call yourself a cult-classic and no one argues.

And in terms of Dead Even, The First Counsel, The Millionaires, and The Book of Fate, we still own the rights to all of them.

**Q. If you had to cast the movies, who do you see?**

Honestly, I never see anyone. Personally, I don’t want to write someone else’s characters. I want to write mine. For that reason, I can tell you what every single character looks like, but it’d be no
one you recognize. Ben, Sara, Jared, Nora, Oliver, Charlie, Harris, Matthew, Viv, Wes, Rogo—to me, they just look like people.

Q. Any new comic book projects in the works?

We just finished doing the special Batman story to celebrate 75 years of the caped crusader. Batman AND history. How could I possibly say no to that?

II. THE BOOKS

I AM AMELIA EARHART, I AM ABRAHAM LINCOLN, I AM ROSA PARKS, I AM ALBERT EINSTEIN, I AM JACKIE ROBINSON & I AM LUCILLE BALL

Blame my daughter. A few years back, I was looking for clothing for her and all I could find were shirts with princesses on them. And I thought, as someone who’s around so much history: There are so many better heroes I can give her. So I asked a friend to draw me a cartoon picture of Amelia Earhart. I wrote the words “I Am Amelia Earhart” on it — and on the back I wrote, “I know no bounds.” My daughter loved it. Then my wife wanted one. And her friends wanted one. And the more I told her about Amelia Earhart, the more she fell in love. It made me realize: Once our
kids hear about these real American heroes, they react the same way we all do. They’re inspired. They dream bigger. They work harder. Right there, these books were born.

**Q. What made you start your series with a focus on Amelia Earhart and Abraham Lincoln?**

If you’re gonna do books about heroes, might as well start with the best ones. Amelia Earhart’s whole life is about taking chances, being brave, and finding the strength to do what everyone else said couldn’t be done. Lincoln’s life is just as powerful, especially when you see how many times he stood up for others. But what I love most is that we start with their childhoods. You see Amelia Earhart as a little girl, building a homemade roller coaster in her backyard; you see Lincoln as a boy, standing up to local bullies. For our kids and for us, these aren’t just the stories of famous people. They’re what we’re all capable of on our very best days.

**Q. When you were a kid, who were some of your heroes?**

I always loved Jim Henson and Mr. Rogers. Plus my grandfather, who used to make up stories for me. They all taught me the power of kindness — and the power of a well told story. Those lessons were never forgotten.

**Q. Who are some heroes in today’s world that you think are great role models for today’s children?**

We all love to complain that there are no current heroes today. But the truth is there are heroes everywhere. Forget about obvious ones like Nelson Mandela or Sesame Street creator Joan Ganz
Cooney. There’s also policemen like Frank Shankwitz, who helped a little boy with leukemia ride a toy motorcycle and then used the idea to come up with the idea for the Make-A-Wish Foundation...or Team Hoyt, where father pushes his son in a wheelchair through marathon after marathon. Look around. Heroes are far more local than you think.

Q. How’d you chose your illustrator, Christopher Eliopoulos?

I know Chris’s work from comics, but the reason I was so insistent about working with him was he can do that Calvin & Hobbes/Peanuts thing where the characters aren’t just funny — they’re lovable. You dream with them, fail with them, and smile with them. It’s so much harder than you think. Chris’s superpower is just that: love.

Q. Who are some of the heroes you’ll be writing about in future titles?

My daughter wants Lucille Ball, so I Am Lucille Ball comes out in June. Then I Am Helen Keller is out in September (it may be my favorite one of the series so far). Then Martin Luther King, Jr., which I’m working on now. As for who’s after that, we hide clues to who’s next in every book. But the list gets longer every day.
The real goal is to help you build a library of real heroes for your kids, grandkids, nieces and nephews.

If you already read The Fifth Assassin, click here for a Q&A with lots of spoilers. And again, there are spoilers, so don’t click unless you read it. You’ve been warned.

If you just want to learn more about the book and where it came from, keep reading...Q. A serial killer who’s copying the Presidential assassins from John Wilkes Booth to Lee Harvey Oswald. Where does an idea like that come from? For those who watch Decoded, or read my novels, I hope it’s clear that I love doing research. So I always start with the real history. In this case, it began with a government employee who told me that I needed to come to a secret museum that almost no one knew about. Naturally, I was suspicious, so I asked him what they had at this so-called museum. Then he told me: We have pieces of Abraham Lincoln’s skull, the bullet that killed him, and even the bones of John Wilkes Booth, if you want to see them. Q. And did you see them? Of course I saw them. The guy offered to show me the bullet that killed Abraham Lincoln! I got there as quick as I could. And once there, they let me hold the bones of
John Wilkes Booth...and the bones of President Garfield...and even the brain of his killer, which yes, they had in a jar.

Q. And this is real? This isn’t anything you made up?

It’s real. I held these items in my hand. The museum is run by the Army — it used to be the Army Medical Museum — and was dedicated to studying the effects of war on the human body. Back in the late 1800s, modern medicine didn’t exist. So if you got shot in the arm, the Army would cut open your arm and look inside, trying to figure out what killed you. Today, we know it usually isn’t the bullet. It’s an infection. So once germ theory was developed, they became the official Museum to document the history of medicine, and since they had all the human body parts, they got the pieces of Abraham Lincoln after he was killed. And the shirt with his blood on it. And the bullet. The government has all of it.

Q. So is this just a typical day for you?

I wish. No, finding the historical artifacts that led to the death of one of our greatest Presidents is a definitely one of those moments where you stop and wonder what message the universe is sending you. But as I started looking at the items, I could feel my brain working out the plot of the thriller. What if, over the course of a hundred years, the four assassins, from John Wilkes Booth to Lee Harvey Oswald, were secretly working together? What was their purpose? Who do they really work for? And why are they planning to kill the President today? Then I had the book.

Q. When you were researching the book, did you know what you were looking for or was the plot informed by your findings?

I had no idea that I’d be holding onto the bones of John Wilkes Booth or the brain or one of the other Presidential assassins. But when someone shares a brain with you, you start paying attention.
Needless to say, sometimes you plot the book, but sometimes, the book takes you for the ride.

Q. Where did the idea for communication via playing cards come from? When did you learn about the origin of modern suits and the symbolism of the images?

We forget just how many things are in front of us every day, but we don’t know where they came from. In the case of playing cards, we see hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades. But those symbols were picked for a reason: Hearts were the sign of the church; diamonds were arrowheads, representing vassals and archers; clubs were husbandmen or farmers; and spades were the points of lances and therefore represented the knights, and by extension, the King. They represented the four facets of society. But that’s what I love most about history: when you see where our reality really comes from. Or at least where the rumors come from.

Q. Have there actually been copycat assassination attempts?

Readers will think I made this plot up. I didn’t. When Timothy McVeigh blew up the FBI building, he was actually wearing a t-shirt that said Sic Semper Tyrannis. And back in 1994, a man named Francisco Martin Duran tried to kill President Bill Clinton by firing twenty-nine shots at the White House. But on his drive from Colorado to Washington, did you know he stopped in Dallas, Texas, passing the Book Depository...and that when he got to DC, he even stayed at the Hilton Hotel where John Hinckley shot Reagan? These assassins have never been forgotten.

Q. You also owe a great deal to your own past with this book. The book is dedicated to the memory of your father, and in the Acknowledgments, you talk about the loss of your mom.
In the course of the past four years, I buried both of my parents: my mom died of breast cancer, then my father died suddenly last year. To be clear, my parents came from nothing and gave me everything, making me the first in my immediate family to attend college. Needless to say, as I wrote The Fifth Assassin, I wasn’t at all surprised to see that it was about...growing up. Burying them, I had no choice but to write about growing up. I didn’t plan it that way, but that’s where the book decided I needed to go. I owe them way more than that.

Brad Meltzer

HEROES FOR MY DAUGHTER

Q: Where did Heroes For My Daughter come from?

Six years ago, on the night my daughter was born, I began writing this book for her. I did the same for my sons when I wrote “Heroes For My Son.” And yes, for two years now, my daughter’s been asking, “Where the heck’s my book?” But as for where this book actually came from, in these past few years, my mother died after losing her battle with breast cancer. And in the past year, I also lost my Dad and my grandmother (who’s one of the heroes in here). It’s been a heck of a year. And as I wrote this book, I was forced to look to the world for women (and men) who, like my own parents, could serve as ideals for my daughter.

Q: What are some of the attributes you wanted to emphasize for your daughter over those you did for your son?
To be honest, I really thought both books would be the same — as a dad, I wanted to treat my daughter and sons exactly the same. But when I handed in the manuscript for my daughter’s book, the editor came back with a surprising reply. She noticed that I kept overusing one word throughout the manuscript. That word? Fighter. By my editor’s count, fourteen of the fifty profiles had the word “fight” or “fighter” in it.

As she pointed out, “Some of them, like Abigail Adams, Winston Churchill, Hannah Senesh, Thurgood Marshall, were literally fighters, so of course the term should stay there.” But I also used it with Audrey Hepburn, Helen Keller, Teddy Roosevelt, Nancy Brinker—even with Lisa Simpson and the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama! Even in the pacifist, I sought a fighter. And yes, that probably highlights my lack of descriptive ability. And how overprotective I am. But it also shows that — and I’m just being honest here — I do want my daughter to learn how to fight.

It’s the dream that links every single hero I picked for her. As I now often tell my daughter Lila, no matter what stage of life you’re in, when you want something — no matter how impossible it seems — you need to fight for it. When you believe in something, fight for it. And when you see injustice, fight harder than you’ve ever fought before.

**Q: Was there anything that you found out from talking to readers of Heroes For My Son on book tours or over the web that you’ve applied to this book?**

My readers know the best heroes. So many of the ones they sent me — through Facebook, or Twitter, via email or on book tour — so many of those heroes made it into the book. Alexandra Scott...Wangari Maathai...I’d never have heard of them if it weren’t for my readers.

**Q: Who was the most unlikely hero that you included in the book, and why were they included?**
The Three Stooges. Oh yes — I put them in there. My wife hates them. But what people don’t know is they were the very first ones to take on Adolf Hitler in film. These three subversives. Gotta share that with my daughter. (Though my wife still thinks they’re not funny).

**Q: A point was made to not only include women in this book, but to also include men. Why was this so important for you?**

I included women like Mother Teresa and Anne Sullivan in the book for my son. Would I really be doing any justice for my daughter if I told her only women could be heroes? Plus, I gave her really good ones. Like Ben Franklin. Few men are as cool as Ben Franklin.

**Q: Were there any heroes that your wife (or daughter) specifically wanted in the book?**

I did 50 brand new heroes for my daughter. But there were six heroes that I felt were worth repeating from Heroes For My Son — a sort of hall of fame that I felt needed to be there for my daughter: Rosa Parks, Amelia Earhart, Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt and Lucille Ball. Plus I again included my Mom. C’mon. It’s my Mom.

**Q: There’s a great deal of care given to the selection of the images used for both Heroes books, can you talk about that process?**

For me, the stories we tell about the heroes isn’t about just their accomplishments. It’s also about how ordinary their beginnings were. Indeed, no one is born a hero. So when it came to pictures, I always look for ones that aren’t the “usual” ones. I like the ones that remind us they’re just like us. And thanks to the research for my novels — and for Decoded — we have great friends at the
Melzer emplores the staff of an empty Borders to please stop talking about last night's "Lost" and listen to something he wrote about Superman or something.

Official Release
April 1, 2010, Miami, Florida. Last night, at the annual meeting of the Writer's Club, a petition was circulated requesting that New York Times bestselling thriller writer Brad Meltzer no longer be allowed to practice the fine art of writing. To that end, Meltzer should no longer be permitted to possess a pen, a pencil, or of course, a keyboard.

In support of the petition, the following sworn testimonies, all written by the authors themselves, were delivered at last night's meeting (and in no way did this have anything to do with today being the 40th birthday of Meltzer, or the fact he was born on April 1).

"For the sheer level of purple prose, inept plotting, snotty-nosed characters and the overall pathetic quality of his entire oeuvre, Meltzer stands alone. He is our Lincoln of crappy fiction. Happy 40th Birthday, Brad, and save some trees."

- David Baldacci

"Brad's writing is both good and original. However, what is good is not original and what is original is not good."

- Nelson DeMille

"I want to congratulate Brad on turning 40. For years, after all, I've been saying that he writes like an 8 year old."

- Nicholas Sparks

"I don't really have time to waste on a guy who single-handedly lowered the level of the political thriller to zero. Basically, Brad Meltzer sucks out loud."
"Whilst on the toilet, there is simply nothing better than the collected works of Brad Meltzer. Not to read, mind you, but to wipe with."

- Damon Lindelof, co-creator, LOST

"Mr. Meltzer latest novel--a dengue stew of imbecilic fatuities--makes a reader wish reading had never been invented--or, for that matter, Brad Meltzer."

- Junot Diaz

"When it comes to writing great thrillers, Brad Meltzer has a nice personality."

- Harlan Coben

"I know John Grisham . . . and Brad's no John Grisham!"

- Scott Turow

"I can't say enough about Brad's latest book. I used it to weigh down a trash can lid that kept blowing off-- and it did a better job than any book I tried before. Five stars!" --R.L. Stine

"Brad Meltzer is the Hemingway of the thriller genre. And by that, I mean he's maladjusted, paranoid and a drunk."

- AJ Jacobs

"As Wonder Woman's writerly alter ego, all I can offer as a birthday challenge is that my DC character could kick the butt of any of his DC characters. Game on, Brad!"

- Jodi Picoult

"Meltzer's writing...is...a roller coaster ride...for my gag reflex..."

- Patton Oswalt

"From his first novel THE TENTH JUSTICE to his more recent novels, THE BOOK OF FATE and THE BOOK OF LIES, fans have watched as Meltzer's characters have matured and aged appropriately. It is a shame, therefore, that the same cannot be said of the author himself, who continues to be fixated on comic books and has yet to introduce sex and drugs into his supposedly more adult-themed work."
- Jamie Raab, Meltzer's publisher and editor

"Happy birthday to the best novelist ever to grace the medium of comics with his presence. Well, after Michael Chabon. And Jonathan Lethem, I guess. Oh, and Stephen King now, too. And what's the name of that one crime writer who did that thing? Anyway, Brad is almost definitely in the top twenty. Top forty, easily."

- Brian K. Vaughan

"Oh God, Meltzer again. I'm not 100% sure that the drivel this wretched ex-catamite produces is bad for western civilisation, but I know it's bad for me."

- Garth Ennis

"Meltzer has packed more clichés, hackneyed plot twists, and feeble minded characterizations into his relatively short, but bewilderingly uninterrupted career than most writers find possible in a lifetime. The damage he's done to comics, an art form he purports to love, is incalculable, and will take generations to repair."

- Phil Hester

"Meltzer just swims around in the comicbook muck and produces the most astounding work of slimy residue that can be found off the bottom of my shoe!"

- J H Williams III

"I get along with Brad very well, but the way he treats his public is appalling. It's one thing to read chapters from a new book at a store signing, it's another for that book to be "The History of Dirt."

-- John Cassaday

"Happy 40th to the guy that made Doctor Light radioactive!"

- Geoff Johns

"It's clear with Identity Crisis, Brad was working out some serious personal issues. Hope its all resolved and wishing him a very Happy Birthday!"

- Dan DiDio
"I've never actually read anything by Brad Meltzer, but I told him I had when we met. I was like "I'm a huge fan" and then I realized when I got back to my hotel room, that this wasn't actually the guy who wrote The DaVinci Code. Can't believe I wasted a whole night at the Eisners talking to him about Superman's fucking dad or whatever. But Happy Birthday, I guess."

- Ed Brubaker

"Brad Meltzer writes as if telling a suspenseful story, grounding it in emotional truth, and grandly entertaining the audience is all that matters in contemporary fiction. Until he writes solely for the critics who govern the so-called literary establishment, Meltzer will have to content himself with merely selling millions of books and making millions of devoted readers deliriously happy."

- Allan Heinberg

"Dear Brad, I'll never forget what a joy it was to meet you at the White House Breakfast. I was just sad that it had to end so soon. Honestly, in retrospect, letting the secret service know you'd made it into the building and within shooting distance of the president, again, might have been a mistake. I should have waited until you'd finished your coffee."

- Neil Gaiman

"Brad has labored mightily to add verisimilitude to comics, bringing sex crimes, paranoia, and twisting characters older than he is claiming to make the stories more suspenseful. Hate to tell you, but some of us liked our comics sweet and harmless. (And by the way, Superman's not real...but if he was, he'd be there to blow out your birthday candles with you.)"

- Paul Levitz

"To Brad who completely ruined for all time my utterly brilliant and subtly defined character. I worked so very hard to create a sociable well-meaning mercenary for hire who just happened to kill thousands of people (they deserved dying so dispatching them was a Godsend), had sex with a 15-year old chick who smoked and wore revealing lingerie (like duh, of course she was asking for it), turned his oldest son over to a villainous group which then sent him on a mission to his death (first born kids are always a problem) and shot his youngest son in the throat robbing him of the ability to speak (and needless to say, if could
speak he would have been asking for it, too). And what did you do? You turned this Fozzie Bear of a sweetheart into a bad guy. You shouldn't be having a birthday. You should be paying for the evil you've done."

Happiest,

Marv Wolfman

"Meltzer's run on Green Arrow was an absolute abomination! I invited him to the party solely because of the numbers I knew he'd bring... Face it Brad... we're both whores."

- Bob Schreck

"I recall one night I got a frantic email from Brad saying that if I didn't learn how to draw faster I'd be "visited". Needless to say, I learned not to mess with someone who has connections in Washington. Now every time I see a certified letter from the IRS or some such, I piddle just a bit. Many more happy returns, old man!"

- Rags Morales

"Whenever people talk about Brad, they always (and rightfully so) focus primarily on his immense talent. But for me, it's Brad Meltzer the man that I always like to take note of first. His incredible generosity, his loyal nature and his ability to make you feel like you've known him for your entire life though you've just met for the first time. It's those kinds of things that make Brad truly stand out in this fast food, attention deficit, disposable world we live in.

I for one will never forget when, without too much arm-twisting, Brad very kindly sent me a copy of his latest novel, Book of Lies. As thrilled as I was by this incredibly show of friendship and camaraderie, nothing prepared me for the thrill of the inscription that waited inside.

"To Paul Levitz.

Best.

Brad Meltzer."

Happy Birthday, Brad!!!"

- Joe Quesada
When reached for comment, Meltzer's wife, Cori, said, "Happy 40th to my favorite April Fool."
AN INTERVIEW WITH BRAD MELTZER

Brad Meltzer writes heart-pounding thrillers that take you on wild rides through worlds of deception, conspiracy, and murder. His novel *The Book of Fate* debuted at No. 1 on *The New York Times* bestseller list. A longtime comic book fan, he also penned graphic novels in the Justice League of America and Buffy the Vampire Slayer series. On The History Channel, he hosts *Brad Meltzer’s Decoded*, a new show that delves into unsolved historical mysteries.

His new novel, *The Inner Circle*, features young National Archives employee Beecher White who stumbles upon a hidden document. When its discovery leads to a murder, he unearths its connection to a secret organization -- the best-kept secret of the American presidency.

Meltzer spoke with Bookslut contributor Grace Bello about his latest novel; his love of Agatha Christie, Superman, and Elvis; and his childhood crushes (who sparked one of his most intriguing characters).

**What inspired your new book *The Inner Circle*?**

A couple of years ago, I got a call from The Department of Homeland Security asking me to brainstorm different ways for terrorists to attack us.
My first thought was, “If they’re calling me, we have bigger problems than anybody thinks.”

What happened was they brought me in, paired me with a Secret Service guy and with a chemist. It was kind of the A-Team of geekery. They would give us major targets to destroy, and we would have to destroy them. It was one of these things where you go home not excited by what you’ve done, but terrified because you see how easy it is to kill us.

Basically, what I was so fascinated by was simply that idea that they were calling regular people -- ordinary people like myself -- that weren’t experts in anything. I write novels, and I write these fictional thrillers. But for the most part, we’re just regular people that have little expertise. I thought, “Where did that come from? Where did that start?”

I was able to trace it back to a guy named George Washington. He started his own personal spy ring. And George Washington’s spy ring -- this is actually pretty amazing. He was so tired of the military people giving out these secrets that he said, “Give me regular citizens. Give me ordinary people.” He started what he called The Culper Ring, this secret group that helped win The Revolutionary War for us. And I was so struck by that. I said, “You know what? That’s a really cool plot idea.”

I said to the guy in Homeland Security, I said, “What if we found out that George Washington’s spy ring still exists to this very day?” He said to me, “What makes you think it doesn’t?” That’s the moment where you go, “Well, what are you talking about?” He said, “Listen, it was one of his greatest success stories; why would George Washington ever disband it?” That’s when I said, “OK, I got the plot for the book.”
What if George Washington’s spy ring exists to this very day? And a young archivist in The National Archives finds out about it? Now, he has no idea who they’re working for, but the greatest secret about the American presidency is about to come out. And there’s *The Inner Circle*.

I really like the character of Clementine [in *The Inner Circle*]. Are your characters inspired at all by people who you know?

It’s not that she’s someone I know, but the experience is one that I very much know. I think everyone has that girl in their life or that boy in their life who scares them and thrills them at the same time.

For me -- I can speak for myself, but I think a lot of people are going through it... Because of Facebook, you are suddenly reconnected with all these people from your past. And I don’t care where you go or what you do, when you get that e-mail or that friend request from that girl who gave you your first kiss, you’re instantly thrown back into your past. I think America is going through -- and all across the world, we’re going through -- this resurgence with our own past that’s just amazing to me. That’s where Clementine came from, my own past.

**So someone contacted you on Facebook, and you thought...**

Yeah. It was the two girls that I used to have elementary school crushes on, one of them being my first kiss. I couldn’t help but be taken by that. In a way, I was amazed and kind of traumatized at how pathetic I was acting. But it was great to speak with her again. She was, in a strange way, just as I remembered her.
And it’s not that we care about other people so much. What we care about is ourselves, right? We care about what we ourselves were like back then. Were we as we remember ourselves or as we wish we were?

Yeah, definitely. Did she know that you were an author?

She figured it out pretty quickly because she was late to Facebook, and all of our other friends were kind of connected.

She also saw a story that I wrote about her a couple years ago. The two girls, actually. One of them was dating a guy that said, “You know a guy named Brad Meltzer?” “Oh, you mean Bradley Meltzer?” -- which is what I used to be known as in elementary school. “Yeah, he wrote about some crush he used to have on you.”

It’s fun when you can put embarrassing details on the Internet.

You write a lot about heroes, whether it’s civilians exposing the truth, comic book heroes, and [your nonfiction book] Heroes for My Son. So who are your literary heroes?

Listen, if you say to me, “Who’s your number one?” it’s still got to be Harper Lee. If I could put my name on any book and steal credit for it, that’s the one I’d steal credit for. To Kill a Mockingbird still kicks all kinds of literary butt.

I still think Moby-Dick is the first book I ever read that was well researched. But [my inspiration] would just as easily be Agatha Christie and just as easily be Woody Allen’s funny essays.

We steal from everywhere in terms of where we get tone. To me, there’s no such thing as highbrow and lowbrow, there’s just one “brow.”
You mention Agatha Christie. Which writers have inspired you in terms of pursuing thrillers or doing historical stuff?

I remember reading *Murder at the Vicarage*, which is an Agatha Christie book, when I was really young. I had to be 10 years old or 12 years old. I remember opening this book and -- to this day, I don't know what a vicarage is. I don't want to know what a vicarage is, don't tell me, I don't ever want to know. But I just remember opening that book and there was a dead body. There was a dead body and someone's got to figure it out, and that was amazing to me. That one just blew apart my brain.

And in terms of research, certainly. When I read Melville, I remember just being like, “Oh, I want to go whaling.” And I’m Jewish; I have no business whaling! But I wanted to do it for that moment. So I think the research side came from that.

I think, in terms of other mysteries, it was Marv Wolfman and George Pérez writing stories for [the comic series] *Teen Titans*. They were as much an influence as anything else. Or Paul Levitz and *The Legion of Super-Heroes: The Great Darkness Saga*, which was one of the great mysteries of its time. And to me, it still is.

Cool. So you mention research. How much research do you do for your novels?

I spend about six months just going through and combing through every crazy detail I can find. And that doesn’t include -- when I get to every scene, I eventually have to bring someone else to help flesh it out.

I went to The National Archives [for *The Inner Circle*]. Archivists are really nice people. They have the patience of librarians. But I guarantee -- can
you make an archivist angry? Yes, you can. Watch when you call them for the 95th time to say, “Does that door at The National Archives open toward you or is it a door you have to push away from you?” Ask that fifty times, and watch the answer you get. They did take me to the secret underground caves that they have, so that was pretty A-OK.

What’s your creative process like? What’s the ratio of research to actually hunkering down and writing?

I do about six months of research and about a year and a half of writing. It takes me about two years to write a book.

I’m just slow. My publisher would love for me to write a book a year, and I guess that’s what you’re supposed to do in this genre. But if I did, it would turn out to be garbage. And that’s the thing I’m most afraid of. I would never want to do that. So I would much rather put out the best book that I can put out. To me, it’s quality over quantity.

Yeah, definitely. Who reads your first draft?

My wife reads the first one. It’s not even written until my wife reads it.

How influential is she in editing your work?

She’s ruthless. And I mean that in a very good way. She’s not afraid to say to me, you know, “That’s not funny.” “That doesn’t work; I don’t believe it.” “Women don’t act like that.” Anything that I do that’s wrong, she -- for the most part -- won’t hesitate. And that’s what you need.

I think that some writers want someone to tell them that they’re geniuses at every point of the story. But if I want to hand in a book and everyone says,
“Looks great,” my first reaction is sheer terror. Because nothing’s great at first. Nothing.

**What is it like to work on graphic novels? I know you’ve written for The Justice League series and the Buffy comic, so how was that process different from writing a novel?**

You know, to me, it’s just different muscles. But it’s the same thing; it has to be a good story. That’s it. At the end of the day, yes, it’s more collaborative because the artist can do the heavy lifting in some parts.

You can say to the artist, “Oh, this is going to be a scene where we’re in a really bad neighborhood. Draw a bad neighborhood.” And it’s much easier than trying to describe a bad neighborhood and not making it sound like one giant cliché. All that physical [description] stuff that drives me bananas when I write a novel because I see it in my head and I don’t want to take the time to describe it. It’s great to just pass off onto somebody else.

The nice part is when you get a drawing back of a scene [that you wrote] that was pretty interesting, but [the artist] turns it into something that’s just Rock ‘Em Sock ‘Em Robots because it’s so spectacular in its execution. And then you look like a giant genius when, in reality, I did nothing for it. I love that.

If you’re asking what the difference is between them or what they have in common I think -- at the end of the day, whether it’s Superman or whether it’s George Washington, it’s still part of the American mythology. And I don’t care that one was real and one was not. They are characters that tell us who we want to be.

**Did you write comic books as a kid at all?**
You know what I did, actually? I was so pathetic; I never wrote them. I don't know; I just didn't think about writing them. But I used to take tracing paper, and I would trace my favorite covers. So there was this amazing, oversized Justice League reprint that I remember that had The Justice League on one side and The Justice Society on the other. I think it was Dick Giordano who drew it. I started to take tracing paper to that. It was just one of those things where the characters were flying at you in some iconic way. And [I remember] thinking, after I traced it, that I "drew" it. I would take full credit for it, make no mistake.

Even though you were just a tracer.

Even though it was on tracing paper and really horribly done.

You mention pop culture -- Superman and all that -- and I mean this question earnestly: Do you have any plans to investigate pop culture conspiracies? Who killed The Notorious B.I.G.? Or whether Elvis is still alive?

To me, what we do on Decoded every week is we get to be explorers. We get to explore these different parts. But what we try to explore is something we can bring something new to. If we're just going to regurgitate what's already out there, I feel like we shouldn't do it. When we did a show on D.B. Cooper [the mysterious Boeing 727 hijacker who escaped by parachuting away], it was because we found something that we felt was new and that we could contribute some part to that giant quilt that is history. I feel like if we could bring something new to something, I would love to do that.
I went to Graceland. I saw the three TVs. I saw the carpet on the ceiling. I would love to get back to that. But you’ve got to find something new. You’ve got to find a mystery there.

Yeah, that makes sense.

The great mystery could be, “Why does a man have carpet on his ceiling?”

[Laughs.] I read somewhere that The Truman Show is one of your favorite movies. So I was wondering if you have plans to explore some more psychological rather than political themes.

You know, it’s funny. In a strange way, that’s what I feel like I do. When I wrote legal thrillers, everyone was like, “Well, you’re a legal thriller writer.” Then I wrote a financial thriller called The Millionaires, and everyone said, “Oh, he writes financial thrillers.” And now I did this [The Inner Circle] and they’re like, “Oh, he loves history.” It’s just shorthand that the publishers use to make it easier to understand what you [the reader] are getting.

But to me, all the books are all about the characters. And the characters are always searching for -- they’re not fighting bad guys. The greatest battle we’ll all have is the battle within ourselves. And that’s what all of them are fighting. Every single one of them, in every single book I’ve done. But, because there’s no shrink in them, I don’t write “psychological thrillers.” But, you know, I’ll put a shrink in them, and then I’ll take that one.

What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

Listen, I got 24 rejection letters for my first book -- which still sits on my shelf, published by Kinko’s. There were only 20 publishers at the time; I got
24 rejection letters, which means some people are writing to you twice to make sure you get the point.

But I don’t look back at it and say, “I was right, and they were wrong.” I look back and think, “You know what? Life is subjective.” And whatever it is you’re doing, whatever it is you’re writing, it just takes one person to say “yes.” You’re just searching for that one person. I believe that you should never let anyone tell you “no.”

The week of my 23rd, 24th rejection letters is the week that I started *The Tenth Justice*, which became my first published novel. Again, I just think, “Don’t let anyone tell you ‘no.’”

*Grace Bello is a writer based in New York. Her work has appeared in McSweeney’s, Flavorpill, and USA Today’s Pop Candy.*
National Archives and the Library of Congress who were willing to dig for ones few people have seen before.

Q: If the book was one page longer, who would have made it in?

My wife’s grandmother, Sara Flam, who my daughter is named after. But I already had my own grandmother and mother in there — plus my wife. I couldn’t make it a family album.

Q: Any heroes you’re particularly proud of?

Sheila Spicer — my ninth grade English teacher. The first person who told me I could write. I owe her forever for that.

THE INNER CIRCLE

Q: Where’d the idea for The Inner Circle come from?

It all came from a private conversation I had with a former President of the United States. I’ll never forget it. We were talking about how hard it was to keep a secret and make sure you’re not overheard when you’re in the White House. And when a real President whispers something like that to you, you pay attention. But as I looked back through history, I realized the problem dated back to George Washington himself, who devised a secret group
that would serve just the President. They weren’t military men. They were regular citizens. Just like us. Washington called them The Culper Ring — and they were the secret weapon of the Revolutionary War, even though they were never in most history books. You’re telling me the first president of the US had a secret spy group that saved our country? I’m interested. And as I talked to my National Security folks, we kept coming back to one idea: who says this secret group was ever disbanded? Who says it doesn’t exist today? When someone in National Security said to me: “I wish we had The Culper Ring today” — that’s when I know I had the plot for the book.

Q: Your previous novels have been set in Washington, DC, in places like the White House and the Supreme Court. What made you decide to use the National Archives as the setting for your upcoming novel?

I came to visit and fell in love. Truly. Lost history...secret documents...long-forgotten letters from Presidents and other big shots—all of which tell the true history of our nation. How could a history nut not fall in love? Plus, they let me hold the Declaration of Independence.

Q: So it was all based on a visit to the Archives?

A few years back, I got a call from Homeland Security asking me if I’d come in and brainstorm different ways for terrorists to attack the US. My first thought was, “If they’re calling me, we’ve got bigger problems than anyone thinks.” But they’d seen the research in my books. And they knew I have good sources, so they invited me in. I was honored to be a part of the Red Cell program. They’d pair me with a Secret Service guy and a chemist — and they’d give us a target — and we’d destroy major cities in an hour. It’s not the kind of day where you go home feeling good. You go home terrified, because you see how easy it is to kill us. On lunch breaks, I’d be talking to all the national security folks — and they’re the ones who helped me tease out the plot of The Inner Circle. They’re
the ones who taught me what else every President needs — plus I had what one former President gave me. But once I saw the Archives, I knew I had a place to tell that tale.

**Q: One of the recurring themes in your novels is how greatness comes from choices ordinary people make everyday. (“I don’t believe in destiny. I believe in history” – a great line from The Inner Circle). What do you think is the origin of this ethos?**

Blame my parents. My Mom especially. She grew up poor (though she’d hate that term and never use it). She didn’t make it past high school. But she was the most amazing person I ever knew. Once, I took her to the White House — and as a decorator, I couldn’t wait for her to be impressed by the decor. She took one look around and said, “Unga patchke,” which is slang for “Overdone. Feh.” It was the White House! She hated snobs, she hated phonies, she hated rich obnoxious jerks who can only talk about what kind of car they drive. And when she died and I’d see the nurses or the waitresses in places she went, all they’d say is, “Oh, your mother was the best.” As one receptionist reminded me, “Not everyone is nice like that.” The truth about you is what people say behind your back. And I love my mother so much for that: From the Queen of England to the janitor in the bathroom, she’d treat you the same.

**Q: You write with such authority about the Presidency and Washington DC. Where does that come from? How do you get real Presidents to help you?**

It’s funny, I feel like I never used to write about the President. I always wrote about the staffer you’d never see — the one who knew how to stay two steps out of the picture. And then one day, I got the best fan letter ever, from former President George H.W. Bush, saying he liked my novel, The Millionaires, and could I sign one for him. I’d gotten another couple of notes from President Clinton as well. And that just makes it a little easier to say, “Can I spend some time with you for research?” The best part is, because
I write fiction, I always get to see far more than what they’d show a reporter who’s out to burn them.

Unlike so many conspiracy buffs I’ve met through the years, you’re not jaded, not cynical, not angry. Where does that come from? Again, blame my family. My grandfather spent his whole life wanting to be a policeman. It was his dream. And he couldn’t be one because of some dumb medical reason. But he was the toughest, strongest, most amazing tough guy around. And the nicest. What I remember most about him was when he used to give all our old used toys to kids that had no money. And this was from a guy who had no money. The true toughest guy knows he doesn’t have be the tough guy.

Q: President Wallace is mesmerized by the written word, as so many of us are. I know your grandmother spent countless hours in the public library with you, devouring Judy Blume, Agatha Christie, Dr. Seuss. Stories change our lives, don’t they? What does the written word mean to you, and what would you like readers to take from your books?

If readers could take one message from my books? Don’t let anyone tell you “No.” Also, as Mr. Rogers taught me, remember how special you are. Corny for sure. But, to steal a line from The Inner Circle, we should never forget that history is a selection process. It chooses all of us. Every day. The only question is, do we hear that call?

Q: The reader follows your main character, Beecher, into the vaults and stacks that visitors don’t see. But there is very little mention of the documents that most people associate with the National Archives—the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. Was this a deliberate omission?
It was. Anyone can see the gasper documents—the documents that make you gasp. Every single tourist can see the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. What I want to show you are the places you can’t go. The places only an insider sees. And yes—that underground storage cave at the end is real. I went there. Scaaaary. What was the most surprising job that you saw a National Archives staff member doing? I was most amazed by the fact that you still have people combing through documents from the founding of our country. In my google-influenced brain, I thought everything had already been read and catalogued. I love that there are new Lincoln letters—and new secrets—being found every single day. You’ve taken your love of secrets, mysteries, and conspiracies to the next level. You have a TV show about them. How did the show come about? Again, I got lucky. One of the heads of the History Channel read my thriller—The Book of Fate—and he enjoyed all the Freemason secrets and the Thomas Jefferson code that was in there, and simply said, “We should do a show like that.” So Brad Meltzer’s Decoded as a TV show is just me doing exactly what I do in my novels, looking through history and trying to solve its greatest mysteries. One of my favorites is about the very first piece of the White House, which was laid in an elaborate ceremony in 1792. Within 24 hours, that cornerstone supposedly went missing. President Truman went looking for it. So did Barbara Bush. But for 200 years, no one knows where the very first piece of the White House is. Needless to say, I want to find it.

**Q: What’s a secret about you?**

I can say the alphabet backwards. Faster than anyone.
Q: As an idea, where did Heroes For My Son come from?

It began the night my first son was born. I was stuck at a red light, and I remember looking up at the black sky and thinking of this baby boy we were just blessed with. That’s when I asked myself the question for the very first time: What kind of man did I want my son to be? I have three children now. I’ve long ago realized I have little say in the matter. But at that moment, I decided that I wanted to write a book over the course of my son’s life – and then when I eventually gave it to him, he’d realize what a brilliant father I was. I’d assumed Norman Rockwell would of course be resurrected to paint the moment, because it would be that perfect.

But the book was just a list of silly platitudes — until a friend of mine told me this story about the Wright Brothers: Every day Orville and Wilbur Wright went out to fly their plane, they would bring enough materials for multiple crashes. That way, when they crashed, they could rebuild the plane and try again. Think about it a moment: every time they went out — every time — they knew they were going to fail. But that’s what they did: Crash and rebuild. Crash and rebuild. And that’s why they finally took off.

I loved that story. I still love that story. And that’s the kind of story I wanted my son to hear: a story that wouldn’t lecture to him, but would show him that if he was determined...if he wasn’t afraid to fail...if he had persistence (and a side order of stubbornness), the impossible becomes possible.
Since that time, I’ve been collecting heroes for this book, which has been one of the most rewarding projects of my life.

**Q: Who were some of your heroes growing up?**

My Mom and my grandfather. After them, Jim Henson and Mr. Rogers always led the list. Sure, there are tons of others in the book — from Rosa Parks, to Gandhi, to Muhammad Ali — but Jim Henson and Mr. Rogers just always had the biggest impact on me. Maybe it was their kindness. Maybe it was Kermit and that idea of “making millions of people happy.” Maybe it was just my obsession with idealistic puppets. But the idea of being the top of your game — at the cutting-edge of entertainment — and you can do anything, but instead, you give all of that to children’s public television...? Yes. My heroes.

**Q: Who were some of the people that didn’t make the book?**

Mussolini. And Hitler. No question, Hitler was at the top of the list of people we didn’t want in the book. But as for people that were actually close to making it, it’s hard. Especially when you’re looking at people who are still alive. I mean, with one bad news day, even the biggest hero can suddenly become Tiger Woods (who I will say was never in the running for being in the book). And the last thing I want is to have someone like that in a book for my sons. Of course, there were other heroes like Winston Churchill, Susan B. Anthony, and Benjamin Franklin — some of whom we ran out of space for, and some who I saved for the book I’m doing for my daughter.

**Q: What do you think is the overall message of the book?**

There’s a line I just wrote for my next novel. It says: History doesn’t just pick people. History picks everyone. Every day. The only question is, do you pay attention...do you put in the hard work...do you hear that calling? Yes, I know that sounds all new
age-y. And I’m not new age-y. I just believe in hard work and regular people. That’s how the very best historic changes take place.

**Q: How much time did it take to compile the list of heroes?**

My son was born eight years ago. So it’s taken me far longer than I ever anticipated.

**Q: Who was the first hero you selected for the book and why?**

The very first one was my grandfather, Ben Rubin. When I was little, my grandfather knew I loved hearing Batman stories, so he’d always tell me this one story that went like this: “Batman and Robin were in the Batmobile. And they were riding along the edge of a curving cliff. And up ahead of them was a white van, which held the Joker, the Penguin, the Riddler, and Catwoman. And as they drove along this cliff, Batman and Robin caught them.”

That’s when I’d look him right in the eyes and whisper, “Tell it again.”

He’d smile at me and say, “Batman and Robin were in the Batmobile... It was the same story every time. Just four sentences long. Batman and Robin were in the Batmobile... But he told me this story over and over simply because he knew I loved hearing it. That’s a hero to me. In that action, he taught me about love and compassion and dedication. He taught me the power of creativity. He opened the first window of my imagination. And most of all, as I looked back on it, he showed me the true impact of a well-told story. That’s what I wanted for my son.

**Q: How was writing non-fiction different from fiction?**

I have to say, it’s far easier to make stuff up. But there’s also nothing more inspiring than knowing the story really happened.
Who were some of the people who influenced the writing of this book? Not necessarily heroes in the book but other authors or people aside from your son that you thought about when writing this book?

Whenever I read non-fiction, or watch something on the History Channel, I forget most of it. I forget nearly every detail. But I always remember at least one little nugget—one detail that’s just gold—like finding out that when Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, he never took credit for writing it, even when he ran for President. I wanted this book to be filled with gold like that. Gandhi. John Lennon. Mother Teresa. Amelia Earhart. These wouldn’t just be the stories about great people. These were the moments that made each person great.

**Q: The book uses a lot of photos, was there anything you found in the photographs of these heroes that influenced the book?**

I was amazed when John Lennon’s people said they didn’t like the photo we picked (we didn’t change it). And when we unearthed the Mr. Rogers photo, which hasn’t been seen by the public in decades. I just love that shot.

If you had to pick one quote from the book, what is your favorite quote?

There are two:
- “In a gentle way, you can shake the world.” – Gandhi
- “Not everyone is nice like that.” – The receptionist in my Mom’s doctor’s office, when she heard my Mom had died from breast cancer. Always remember: The truth is what people say behind your back.

**Q: What is going on with the Heroes For My Son Blog and on facebook? What are you doing there?**
Finding more heroes. People send us new ones every day. I love sharing them with the world. If you have one, please send him or her along.

Q: Is there another book we can look forward to after Heroes For My Son?

I have a daughter. I’ve been working on hers since the day she was born (let it be known she asks every day, “Where’s my book?”). So Heroes For My Daughter is coming soon.

Q. THE BOOK OF LIES is based on two true stories that remain mysteries: the murder of Abel by his brother Cain and the unsolved murder of Mitchell Siegel, whose son went on to, create Superman. Why do these two murders fascinate you and how are they connected in your mind – and in this new book?

Every writer has a story they’ve been waiting their whole life to tell. This is mine. We are a country founded on our own legends and myths, and in this election year, where everyone is pushing
hope, what’s crazy to me is that we still don’t know which of these myths are real. Cain is known as one of the world’s worst villains, but maybe he’s not the bad guy in the story. And why did the world get Superman? Because a little boy named Jerry Siegel heard his father was murdered and, in grief, created a bulletproof man. These stories — about Cain and Abel, about Superman — are not just folklore. They’re stories about us. Our heroes and villains tell us who we are. And sometimes we need to find the truth, even if it means revealing our own vulnerabilities.

**Q. How did his father’s murder lead Jerry Siegel to create the man of steel and why did he never talk about this during his lifetime?**

For the past 70 years, the public has been told that Superman was created by two teenagers in Cleveland. And that’s true. Action Comics was published in 1938. But what no one realizes is that Superman was actually created in 1932, just weeks after Jerry Siegel’s father was killed in a robbery. So why does no one know the story? Because Jerry Siegel never told anyone. In the thousands of interviews he gave throughout his life, where they asked him where he got the idea for Superman, Jerry never once—not once!—mentions that his father was killed during a robbery. To this day, half the family was told it was a heart attack, while the other half says it was a murder. The story goes back to the two other versions of Superman that were created before the hero we now know and love—one of them, the first version, even has Superman as the main villain. In fact, even in the current version of Superman, when he was first introduced, Superman couldn’t fly. He jumped. He didn’t have heat or x-ray vision. All he was was strong—and bulletproof. The one thing young Jerry’s dad needed.

**Q. As a comics books author in addition to your work as a novelist, how has the legend of Superman influenced your work and why is it the perfect myth for America?**
For me, the interesting part has never been the Superman story; the interesting part is Clark Kent — the idea that all of us, in all our ordinariness — can change the world. That theme is in every single thing I’ve ever worked on, from the novels, to the comics, to “Jack & Bobby.” I believe there is greatness in all of us and once you find what you love, and accept yourself for who you are — that greatness comes out. In every novel, that’s always the journey. They don’t win until they lose — and finally accept themselves for who they are.

Q. You do extensive research for each of your books. Tell us what was different about your research for THE BOOK OF LIES and how did you learn some of the arcane information that you include here?

Research isn’t magic. It’s just legwork. I spoke to Jerry Siegel’s family, as well as his widow and his daughter, who told me that in all the years that people have written about the Siegels, I’m the first one to actually call and speak with all of them. During the research, I went back and searched through the old newspapers from 1932 just to see what was going on when Jerry’s father was killed. You won’t believe what’s in there.

It’s the same with Cain. According to most modern Bibles, Cain thinks God’s punishment is too much—‘My punishment is greater than I can bear’ is what the text says, which is why Cain is seen as such a remorseless monster. But when you go back to the original text—like in the geniza fragments from Cairo—that same passage can just as easily be translated as My sin is too great to forgive. See the difference there? In this version, Cain feels so awful...so sorry...for what he’s done to poor Abel, he tells God he should never be forgiven. That’s a pretty different view of Cain. Of course, most religions prefer the vicious-Cain. A little threat of evil is always the far better way to fill the seats. But sometimes the monsters aren’t who we think they are.
Q. The father-son relationship is at the heart of the Jerry Siegel story and, frankly, at the heart of most of your books. What was your father’s greatest influence on your life and how does that infuse your writing?

When I was thirteen years old, my father lost his job and moved us from Brooklyn to Florida. He called it the do-over of life. He was forty years old, had two kids, no job, no place to live, and barely $1,200 to his name. Once we got to Florida, we couldn’t afford babysitters, so we’d go on the job interviews with my Dad. I still remember sitting in a Wendy’s while my he was being interviewed for an insurance job — we had to pretend we didn’t know him, and all I could think was, “I can’t believe my life is being decided in a fast food joint.” From there, my parents used a fake address to get me into the good local public school, and it was there I first started thinking about college. Seeing all those rich kids, and their cars and houses, and how little they appreciated it all...that made a mark in me. It made me hungry, and it gave me my most leaned-on, overused point-of-view: as an outsider. I’ve never been part of the in-crowd. And I never want to be (except on my weakest days). But in that mix of mess that built my life, all the blame and credit began with those poorly planned decisions by my father. It’s an easy joke, but I’ve been writing books to deal with it since.

Q. And your Mom?

This book was born at the same time my mother was diagnosed with (now fatal) breast cancer. Every novel is shaded and filled with whatever issue the author is personally wrangling with. My mother’s impending death was clearly mine. She read this book faster than any other, and I read her the final dedication on her deathbed. My mother’s the one who gave me faith in myself and in people and in just simply being who you are. That’s all she knew how to be. The woman who was still shopping at Marshall’s on the day I called her and told her we hit #1 on the bestseller list. It was
her best lesson: never ever change for anyone. So it’s no surprise to me that my mother’s best lesson — and the issue of losing a parent — is the strongest theme in the book.

Q. You are a bestselling novelist and comic book writer and you write for television, your most recent venture being a new show that you’ve been working on with Avenue Q creator Jeff Marx. How as a writer do you cross over to different mediums and what is the biggest challenge with each of these?

When I write a novel, I paint with one palette: the palette of words. It’s just me and my editor, who keeps me from riding off the cliff. But in a comic book, you’re painting with a brand-new palette. Now you have words and pictures. And you have another person — the artist — who’s affecting the final picture. The artist can take the worst scene and draw the best picture for it, and suddenly I’m a genius. Or they can ruin my carefully concocted geekiness and turn it to mush (which never happens). And then you have TV. There you paint with the palette of...everyone. In a TV show, it’s like trying to push water. You don’t control it. Directors, actors, studios, networks, show-runners, editors, etc all grab the brush. So for a novelist, it’s far harder to release that control. But in the end, all the palettes rely on character. That’s the core of any craft. Today, we all love to rank which is cooler: books, TV, comics, film. But that’s just snobbery. It’s not a hierarchy. It’s a continuum.

Q. You are working with Sony on a soundtrack to go with the book. Tell us about that...

Does a book really need a soundtrack? No. And neither does a movie or a TV show. But when you pull on those manipulative strings that music tugs on, you sometimes get something that’s just mesmerizing. And so we built a soundtrack. Sony Music had someone score the key chapters of the book — they sent me the songs — and I rejected most of them. Then we fought and pulled
each other’s hair and finally settled on songs that truly evoked the mood of the novel. You can go to a certain chapter, hit PLAY, and read along with music that I believe perfectly represents that chapter. And that’s cool to me. Plus, there’s nothing, just nothing like sitting in a room and hearing someone sing the title track to your own book. That’s neater than Play-Doh.

Q. You are the driving force behind the campaign to save Superman’s house – the house in Cleveland where Jerry Siegel grew up and where he created Superman – and are launching a website, www.OrdinaryPeopleChangeTheWorld.com, so that others can join in your crusade. How is this going?

My wife jokes and says this website is my new religion. And maybe it is. But I really do believe in it. I believe ordinary people change the world and I believe that enough of us can join together to keep Jerry Siegel’s house from destruction. I’m just a guy who went to Cleveland, Ohio and saw that the house where Superman was created was falling apart and a total wreck. So now we’re saving it. We don’t need grants, or political favors, or skeevey politicians. All of those entities let it languish. We’ll save it. Or we’ll at least try. And how could I not believe in that?

Q. And we have to ask: is this house really painted red and blue as you describe in The Book of Lies?

know it sounds hard to believe, but yep, Superman red and blue. You can’t miss it. Even if you want to. However, when we restore it, we’ll return it to the true colors when Jerry Siegel lived there.

To arrange an interview with Brad Meltzer, please contact us.
Q. The Book of Fate begins with a bang. What inspired this thriller?

To me, each novel is first about the character, then the plot. So The Book of Fate began with my own sense of frustration from feeling like I was about to rewrite a character I’d already written many times before. That’s what terrifies me most as a writer – being one of those novelists who just starts churning it out. At the same time, my father was diagnosed with cancer – and in the surgery that saved his life, he received an unavoidable scar that now marks his entire forehead. That’s when the light bulb blinked. I just remember thinking; instead of writing yet another thriller with yet another young perfect hero, what if I took that hero, shattered and broke him in chapter one, and then tried to see if that shattered character could do the same things that his former self did so easily? I wasn’t sure of the answer, so that’s what excited me as a writer. At the same time, I received a letter from former President Bush saying that he liked one of the novels. It’s a fun letter to get. And it put me on my current obsession with
studying former presidents. The loss of power is fascinating. So maybe in the end, it was all just fate.

Q. Can you give me a thumbnail sketch of the book in your own words?

The one sentence on the back of the book will probably say something sexy like: Wes Holloway is a young Presidential aide who helplessly watches as fellow aide Ron Boyle is killed in an assassination attempt—but eight years later, Wes learns that his so-called friend Boyle is actually alive. I’m sure there’ll be lots of exclamation points in there—and words like gripping and stunning and brilliant. And for sure they’ll mention the decade-old Presidential crossword puzzle and the two-hundred year old code created by Thomas Jefferson. But I think The Book of Fate is actually about the loss of power and the struggles we all have when we think we haven’t reached our personal potential. Wes, the President, Lisbeth, Rogo, Dreidel, the Three, even Nico— all of them have fallen short from what they’d planned. And The Book of Fate grapples with each of their personal theories for why that’s happened: that it’s an accident, that it’s someone else’s fault, that it’s the circumstances of the moment, that it’s their own fault, and of course—the one all of us in America love to reach for—that it’s fate. All books are a reflection of the time they’re written in. And The Book of Fate is, to me, a reflection of our current world: a world where we all search for heroes—and especially after 9/11—where we realize that the super-perfect-idealized hero doesn’t really exist anymore. In WWII, we were a country of supermen. Now we’re a country of spider-men: people who want to save the day and do it all perfectly, even though we realize we’re all a bit scared and terrified like teenagers inside.

Q. You’ve obviously gotten some unusual access to former presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. How did that come about and what has it contributed to the book?
It came from a simple letter I got in the mail from former President Bush. He wrote to say he liked one of the novels—and then put up with me when I asked if I could come out there to see what life was like. As for former President Clinton, I’d met him when The Tenth Justice was published, so was happy when he signed off on me visiting his staff in Harlem. As for what the visits gave me, it gave me every one of the true details in the book that makes you think “that’s exactly how it is.” Because that’s exactly how it is (though the book is all fiction!). My favorite was former Presidents being required to plan their own funerals right when they leave office (what a nice was to say thanks).

**Q. What are some of the interesting things you’ve learned about the life of presidents and former presidents?**

How absolute the loss of power is. Clinton said it best—when you leave office, “you lose your power but not your influence.” But man, you lose your power. For me, though, the one thing that amazed me was how little we actually use our former presidents. Only recently—with the tsunami and Katrina relief—have we called upon these great men for service. They ran the entire country—and yes, they’ve earned the rest if they want it—but for the most part, we send them on their way and treat them like second cousins, only calling them on anniversaries and birthdays. As for what else I learned, my favorite details are in the book: from how some presidents race to get their morning briefings as their last tie to power, to how others miss the spotlight so much, they travel abroad because that’s when they get briefed by the CIA. It’s a subculture shared by four men. Current Bush will soon make it five. It’s the greatest most elite club in the world.

**Q. How does Wes Holloway compare to the heroes of your previous novels?**

I hope Wes is the homonym to my other characters: he sounds and is spelled the same, but he has an entirely different meaning.
Of all my characters, I think I feel the most for Wes—especially because of his link to my own father. And let’s be honest, every one of my books is really about my father.

Q. You seem to be diversifying away from your earlier legal-based thrillers. Did you make a conscious decision to aim for a larger market with The Book of Fate?

It’s odd—when The Tenth Justice came out, I never thought of myself as a legal thriller writer. But the publishers and press liked that box, and they thought it would sell books, and I was 27 years old, so I was more than happy to go along with it. But the books I’ve written have always been designed to transport readers into a world they couldn’t go otherwise, from the Supreme Court, to the White House, to the Capitol, to prestigious private banks, to the world of former presidents and secrets about our founding fathers and the Masons. The books are always steeped in historical research, not law—and I’ve proudly never written a true courtroom scene. I was a history major and I’ll always be a history major. So to me, I’m doing what I always do—simply writing about worlds that fascinate me.
Q. Could The Zero Game really happen, and do you think that right now, there’s a “Zero Game” being played on Capitol Hill?

To be honest I made it up, but so far, two different government employees have told me they’ve seen a smaller variation being played (i.e., people betting on how many votes will be cast for a certain bill). That’s just scary. Also, I’m honestly amazed by how many staffers on the Hill, when they hear the plot, say, “I wouldn’t be surprised if someone was doing that right now.” God bless America!

Q. On the site, you have a “deleted chapter” from The Zero Game. How much of what you write never makes it into the final book?

I wish I could say all of it makes it into the final version, but that’s just not the case. For me, it’s the early chapters of a book that get cut down the most. When I’m done with my research and ready to start a new novel, I’ve got so much I want to put in there, I just vomit it all out in the opening chapters. Those are the same
chapters that all my family and friends read and say, “Nice research, but can you get on with the book?” So the early chapters get cut. In The Zero Game, the first seventy pages were originally a hundred and twenty. And the scene in the mine was another thirty pages longer. Welcome to the cutting room floor.

Q. Did you really go down into that mine?

Yep. Probably not the smartest move, but I did—eight thousand feet straight down. The first time I went, because of a flood, we could only go down two thousand feet. I went back two weeks later and they took me to the very bottom. Two weeks after that, those miners got trapped in that Pennsylvania mine. They were 240 feet down; I was 8,000. My wife wanted to kill me—but for my readers, I’ll risk my life.

Q. How hard was it to write the character of Viv?

Far harder than I thought. Viv is a young, black female Senate page. So let me put it this way: There are three things that, no matter what I do, I know I’ll never be in my life: young, black and female. But I just didn’t want to write a walking cliche, so I spent months researching...talking to friends...interviewing people...anything that would put me in that character’s brain. The gender part I could manage—the race issue was tougher. I hope I did her justice.

Q. What was the most fun you had researching this book?

Tie. Crawling around the basements and attics of the Capitol—and going down into the mine (c’mon, they let me wear that hat with the flashlight—what beats that?).
Q. Is Charlie real and can I date him?

No, he’s not real—so save your smutty come-ons for those porn sites. He’s a pure figment of my imagination, with far more hair than I have. And can you date him? Sure, right after your date with the Tooth Fairy.

Q. The Millionaires centers around two brothers. Do you have a brother?

Nope. I have a sister (the Charlie to my Oliver and the Oliver to my Charlie)—but to write the book, I spent months interviewing all my friends who had brothers, trying to pick out the subtle things only brothers can share. In the end, Charlie and Oliver just came to life in my head—and I still think about them, if that makes sense.

Q. The climax of The Millionaires takes place in the underground tunnels under Disney World. Are those real or just urban legend?
Real. Real, real, real (creepy, ain’t it?). And after researching books on the White House, the Supreme Court, and the Capitol, I can honestly say that Disney keeps its secrets better than all of them combined. No lie. You wanna know who should be the head of Homeland Security? Michael Eisner. I love the place, but they don’t play around. They’ll throw you in Mickey-jail without batting an eye. Scarier than Oz.

**Q. Is that really your Grandmother’s condo in the book?**

Could I possibly make that up? Of course it’s her condo. When I was little, they wouldn’t let us jump in the pool, but I never held a grudge. (They’ll pay one day, though.)

**Q. In this book, you used first person narrative (telling the story from Oliver’s point of view). Did this present problems since you had two main characters?**

Point of view is always tricky. Get too cute and you risk losing your reader. In fact, when I wrote the first draft of the book, I had each chapter alternating between Oliver’s and Charlie’s POV—but it quickly got so confusing that I switched to just one. It was the hardest decision I made with The Millionaires, but I still think the right one.

**Q. What was it like writing Miami for the first time?**

Great. When I needed to know what restaurant was on a particular corner, I just called my Dad. He majors in restaurants.
Q. Were you thinking of any President in particular when you wrote this book?

No—I was thinking of all of them. Sadly, you don’t get to be President by being Father of the Year.

Q. While you write thrillers, most people think of you as a “legal thriller” writer. However, this book really deals more with politics than the law. What was the reason for that decision?

It really wasn’t a decision. I just try to write the best book I can. When I researched this one, I thought, “Hey, this White House place is pretty keen.” That was it. As for genres, that just seems silly. Genres can be great, but they’re also a trap. Don’t write for genres. Write for yourself.

Q. Let’s talk about The West Wing. What’s the story? Do you watch it?

Ah, The West Wing. First, it’s a brilliant show, and yes, I love the writing. Second, I’d be a liar if I said it didn’t make me nuts. Why? Here’s the history: The week I started researching The First Counsel was the same week the Monica Lewinsky scandal broke. The Washington Post then wrote this big story about how the
Washington thriller was dead, and how no one could compete with reality. And there I was, thinking, “Oh, God—I’m about to start a Washington thriller. How can it be dead?”

Little did I know that two years later, The West Wing would be one of the best shows on television. Of course, by the time it aired, I was already in the editing stage. Then I watched the first show. They deal with the census. In The First Counsel, the opening meeting talks about the census. Their President’s name is Bartlet. In The First Counsel, the politician running against the President is named Bartlett. I almost ate my remote right there. Obviously, it was just a coincidence (the census is always a good, solid, play-at-any-time issue), but it was still nuts. As for Bartlet, that was just freaky weird. Yes, I could’ve changed it—there was time—but that was the name I picked and I wasn’t changing it for anyone. Now, in the book, it just seems like a inside joke.

Q. Is Nora based on a real first daughter?

No (and even if it was Yes, I’d lie).
Q. Rafferty is an evil character. Do you find writing this type of antagonist therapeutic? And is a character with that base level of psychology (pure evil) more difficult to write than a character like Sara, who finds herself faced with moral ambiguity?

Rafferty was actually much harder to write because he was always the bad guy. That’s what he did. Name: Rafferty. Occupation: Bad Guy. Sure, he’s there to scare, but as a character, I’m far more interested in his back story as a loser kid from Hoboken (which only appears on two or three pages).

And is it therapeutic? I’m betting I saved at least seventy-five bucks worth of shrink’s bills just on the final scene alone.

Q. Both yourself and your wife are lawyers. Were the characters of Dead Even based on you and your wife?

No. Okay, that’s a lie. I’ve known my wife since ninth grade. I know how we interact. The opening scene—where Sara and Jared take on the coupon lady? Pretend it didn’t happen in a bagel store; pretend it was in Bethesda, Maryland; pretend Jared had a lot less hair. But are Sara and Jared us? Not a chance (which I can only prove by the fact that half our friends say I’m Jared and that my wife is Sara, while the other half say the reverse).
Q. Was this your first book?

No. The first book I ever wrote was a book called, Fraternity. It got twenty-four rejection letters, and still sits on my shelf. Will I ever go back to it? I don’t know. It’s kinda like a ‘68 Mustang. You can clean it up, and put in a new engine, and install new air conditioning and a CD player, but on some level, when you do that, you rob it of its soul.

What I love about Fraternity is that, whatever I think about it, it’s a book with a soul. It’s me figuring out how to write. And on every page, it has the passion of someone who’s falling in love with the process. That’s what’s great about it. So, yes, I can take it, update it, and put in the new CD player, but sometimes, AM/FM is more than enough.

Q. Are the roommates in the house based on you and your friends?

The funny, handsome ones are me. All the losers are my friend Chris.
COMICS

Q. How does writing novels compare to playing god with Superman and Batman in the bestselling Identity Crisis, or in Justice League of America?

Superman is easier to write because he’s so well defined—for almost 70 years, writers have been defining him for us. But the difficulty is that you can’t do WHATEVER you want to him. In The Book of Fate, I can do anything I want to any character. I own them. They’re mine. And when you don’t have that power, beyond my own ego, there are creative limits to that.

Q. What’s the biggest difference between writing a novel and writing a comic book?

You have to learn to shut up. When I write a novel, if I want to say someone is nervous, I paint with one palette: the palette of words. Now admittedly, I have an infinite number of words I can use. I can say, “He was sweating, he was tapping his foot, he was scratching his head.” But that permutation of words—even if it’s subtle—is the only way for me to get that idea across. But in a comic book, you’re painting with a brand-new palette. Now you have words and pictures. So for example, in the comic book script, I'll write the instructions to the artist and I'll say: Panel one: extreme close-up on Superman. Just on the spit-curl—I just want to see his brow. Panel two: Still tight on the brow, but now show a bead of sweat coming down Superman’s forehead. Panel three: Close-up even tighter on that bead of sweat. Panel four: I want to be so close, we should see the reflection of who he’s talking to in that bead of sweat.” On the page, I haven’t used a single word. But there’s no doubt every reader knows that Superman is terrified. So in a comic, you have to learn to rely on your artist. It’s far more freeing that you know. But you have to take advantage of it—and most writers don’t.
III. THE FUTURE

Q. What are you currently working on?


Q. Will you come speak at my school/charity/corporate event?

Sorry to say, if I did all the speaking requests I’m offered, I’d never see my own family, or write my next book. So the time I allot for speaking in schools tends to get transferred to my work with City Year, which helps put mentors in the country’s neediest schools. As for corporate events, my speaking agent Brenda Kane at APB Speakers can help you. They price me at a ridiculously high rate so that I won’t leave home.

Q. Is there anything you’ve written, where after you saw it in print, you wished were different?

All my author photos. Real quote from someone: “Who taught you how to smile? Mussolini?”

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- .@ThatKevinSmith, you killed it tonight in Florida. Made the wife laugh too (and feel good for getting the Daredevil fight reference). 04:49:33 AM April 18, 2015

- Fake Movie College Pool Championship is live. Vote or lose the right to complain. Kinda. http://t.co/XFg8p87fTf 10:10:24 PM April 17, 2015

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