



Brendan O'Meara, author of the *Crafting Humanity* series, at home in Washington, DC, where he draws inspiration for his imaginative storytelling.

Brendan O'Meara discusses his debut novel, Cut From Stone, sharing insights into his creative process, character development, and the influence of his environment on his storytelling.

Crafting Humanity

BRENDAN O'MEARA

EXPLORING THE IMAGINATION BEHIND CUT FROM STONE

AS TOLD TO BEN ALAN

Brendan O'Meara, a native of White Plains, New York, has always been captivated by the power of storytelling. His debut novel, *Cut From Stone*, marks the beginning of the *Crafting Humanity* series, a project that has been a decade in the making. O'Meara's journey as a writer began in Philadelphia during his college years, where his vivid imagination and passion for adventure laid the groundwork for his dystopian narratives. Now residing in Washington, DC, with his family, Brendan draws inspiration from his diverse experiences and surroundings, infusing his work with elements of sci-fi, fantasy, and dystopian fiction.

In this interview, Brendan discusses the creative process behind *Cut From Stone*, exploring the challenges he faced and the dedication required to bring his vision to life. He delves into the development of his protagonist, James, and the thematic elements that drive the series. Brendan also shares insights into how his environment and personal experiences shape his storytelling, offering a glimpse into the mind of an author who skillfully balances multiple genres to create immersive worlds. As a recipient of the Next Generation Indie Book Award for Best Young New Adult novel, Brendan offers valuable advice to aspiring authors, emphasizing the importance of perseverance and work ethic in the pursuit of literary success.

Your debut novel, *Cut From Stone*, explores a world divided between the BlankZone and the Federation. What inspired you to create this dystopian reality, and how do you see it reflecting or commenting on current societal issues?

I pulled up on my interest in history and geopolitics to create the base world in which I would set my story. Countries like modern day North Korea, East Berlin in the Cold War, China during their social revolution, and countless other isolationist bent societies gave great real world examples. Additionally, I saw the BlankZone and its sep-

"Cut from Stone" masterfully weaves humanity's essence into a compelling narrative, blending rich storytelling with profound philosophical insights. A must-read!

aration from the Federation less as a comment on the state of the world, and more of an interesting conflict that I could use for *Crafting Humanity's* overall setting. A global backdrop is incredibly helpful when you plan on writing five books in a series.

Crafting a novel over a decade requires immense dedication. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced during this process, and how did you overcome them to bring *Cut From Stone* to completion?

I was lucky to get a lot of the book written over a few months of my senior year of college. I put the book down and focused on other things right after I graduated because I could not get past a certain point in the story. The thing I realized after years of thinking way too much about writing was the only way I would ever call myself an author is if I sat down and did the work. Developing that

work ethic and drive was the basis and most challenging aspect of finishing the book. Everything follows from there.

James, the protagonist of your series, undergoes significant transformation from a teenager to an elite warrior. How did you approach developing his character arc, and what key themes do you hope readers take away from his journey?

I wanted to create a character that anyone could relate to. Someone who was special in ways not obvious and had a relatively vanilla background. James grows from someone who follows the leader to becoming the voice in the room not because he sought power, but because he was willing to acknowledge the strengths of those around him. That's James's biggest asset but can also be his greatest detractor causing an enormous amount of self-doubt. He's the epitome of a person who has all the tools to succeed, but needs to work hard to find them. Additionally, I wanted everyone to create their own vision of James

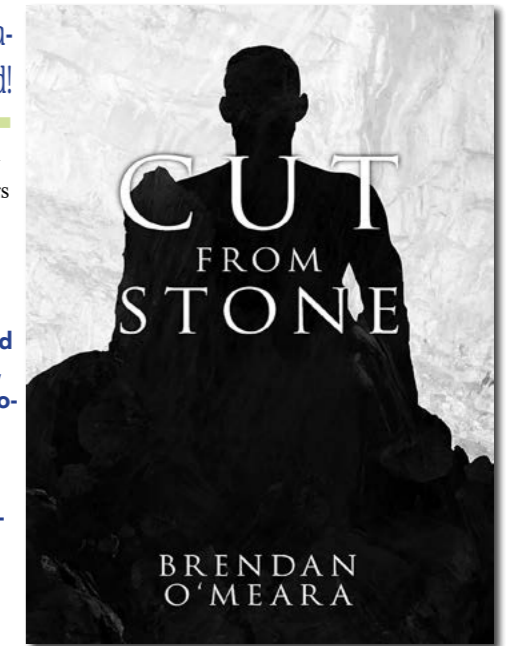
when they read. I try to keep the characters features outside of eye and hair color completely up to the reader.

Your novels blend elements of sci-fi, fantasy, and dystopian fiction. How do you balance these genres within your storytelling, and what do you find most rewarding about writing in these blended genres?

These were the first genres I was interested in as a kid. The authors and series I followed created excellent examples of where how to do things right in each genre. They gave me the ability to incorporate the mystical elements from fantasy, technical aspects of science fiction, and real world lessons examined in dystopian fiction. I blend them to create a deep and complex world where I can showcase my characters discovering their universe at the same time as the reader.

Living in Washington, DC, with your family, how does your environment influence your writing? Are there specific aspects of city life or your personal experiences that find their way into your stories?

I think one of the reasons I needed to take time away from writing in my early twenties was I needed to gain world experience. In particular, the settings and tense situations where James and the characters find themselves are based off real life experiences. From my time living in suburbs, two major cities, and a different country for some time I built a wide swath of potential settings to pull on and deliver my interpretation of those locations as best I can. DC has such a great mix of people and places that let your mind float to areas of your imagination that don't normally get piqued in other cities. From the president's helicopter flying overhead, to protest scenes, to parades, DC is never short on



excitement.

Cut From Stone won the Next Generation Indie Book Award for Best Young New Adult novel. How has this recognition impacted your writing career, and what advice would you give to aspiring authors working on their debut novels?

I was in complete shock when I got the email telling me I had won the award. I was a month out then from releasing the second book in the series, *Carved From Wood*, so receiving an award with that kind of timing was a huge accomplishment. For those writing their stories now, I would go back to my earlier comment about developing a work ethic for your writing. And know while you're trying to build that work ethic that it will take years. I already have a roadmap built out for a decade and beyond of stories that I will write and series that I've begun outlining. I love being an independent author, but it's A LOT of work to keep everything moving forward all the time and it will only work if I stay the course. Figure out your rhythm and understand that it will take a long time to build your success. I'm still working towards my goals and learning to take any wins I can when I get them so appreciating the journey is a huge part of becoming an author. Whether you start out independent or immediately get an agent and a deal there are paths to success, but doing the work is the most important part.