

QQQ Erin Fulmer

[00:00:00] **Sarah:** welcome to Queries qualms and quirks, the weekly podcast that asks, published authors to share their successful query letter and discuss their journey from first spark to date of publication. I'm your host author, Sarah Nicolas and literary agent, Sarah N. Fisk.

Erin Fulmer is an attorney by day author of science fiction and fantasy by night, a 2020 pitch wars, alumna. She lives in Northern California with her husband and cats.

Cambion's blood, the second book in her urban fantasy series and sequel to her debut Cambion's law is out now. So please welcome Erin to the show. Hello?

[00:00:33] **Erin:** Hello, thank you so much for having me.

[00:00:36] **Sarah:** Yeah. Thanks for coming on and sharing your story. We're gonna talk about your journey to publication, and we're gonna start by going all the way back to the beginning. When did you first start getting interested in writing and then how long did it take from then before you started getting serious about pursuing publication?

[00:00:53] **Erin:** Well, I've always been a writer. I've always loved stories. and so I probably, as long as I could hold a pen I've been writing, and I always kind of had it in the back of my head that someday I wanted to seek publication, but, for a while I was writing fan fiction and doing things that were really for me and not for anybody else.

The first, first novel I ever finished was a fan fiction novel. So that kind of taught me the ropes, but of course, that wasn't goal oriented writing. So it really wasn't until probably. Late 2000 tens, mid 2000 tens. When I finally kind of decided that I wanted to pursue this for real.

And that's when I wrote the first draft of Cambion's law my debut, it was originally a NaNoWriMo novel, and you know, 50 K slammed out in 30 days. and it definitely has gone through many, many, iterations after that. but that was kind of the first inkling that I had that I wanted to seek publication, but I still didn't really take it seriously until, 2020.

and I think that part of it, uh, it's funny, I was thinking about this last night. When the world seems like it's falling down around you and you have certain

goals that you always thought you were going to, uh, pursue, eventually it suddenly feels a lot more urgent. So I think that that was kind of part of, I was like, well, you know, if the world's ending, I may as well, like could get this done.

I'm gonna go out doing what I love.

[00:02:20] **Sarah:** Once you got serious about publication, how did you learn more about the publishing industry? Like how it works, how to query, how to go about it?

[00:02:28] **Erin:** I really kind of just hanging around writing Twitter and reading what people had to say. I got involved in a couple of discord communities, uh, Pitch wars was hugely influential for that for getting me connected with other writers. so I was in a discord with some, with other pitch wars, hopefuls, round about August, 2020.

and there were some authors there who were already agented and who had kind of were legacy members and some who were kind of at, in the same place I was. And just having that exchange of ideas. Back and forth was super helpful.

It really was listening to other writers, talk about their experiences, asking the questions that felt silly because I really had no idea what I was doing around that time. I didn't know anything about the industry. I didn't know about querying.

I didn't know how to write a decent query letter. I didn't know how to write a decent synopsis. I was a newb. I basically became a sponge and absorbed as much as I could from everyone around me. So that was during the lead up to pitch wars, 2020, which is when everything kind of started to come together for me, uh, kind of all at once in an overwhelming kind of way.

I mean, it really is about community. I'll probably say that again. I say it all the time. Writing community is so essential. It's funny because I always thought that writing was a solitary pursuit, but it turns out that that is really not the case. And I wouldn't be where I am now without my fellow writers and people who took me by the hand and helped me write query letters.

You know, told me the inside info and gave me their lists of do not query and, you know, kind of steered me around the pitfalls along the way. So I'm just really grateful. I was able to connect with that.

[00:04:15] **Sarah:** Yeah. So then what happened? Can you break down for us, your journey from then to signing your first book contract, and then you did it like a little bit out of order and then signing with your agent after that.

[00:04:30] **Erin:** Yeah. So I, you know, in true me fashion, I did everything up upside down backwards in the hardest, possible way. That's just kind of the story of my life. I started querying Cambion's law and I mean, it, it kind of went really, probably unusually fast. Once I decided to kind of really dig in and, and do the thing.

I started querying in summer of 2020, and I queried some Query and some small presses all at once because I didn't know what I was doing. And now I would tell people don't do that. Create agents first, then query your small presses. Um, So I got interest from the small presses, but not from the agents.

And then through my communities, I started to learn that, you know, the urban fantasy that I was querying wasn't necessarily the best for agents or big four big five publishers. and that's when I started thinking seriously about the small presses. And I pitched Cambion's law in pit mad and that September and my future editor liked my pitch at that time.

So I centered this stuff and then really didn't think much else of it because like I was getting married that the next month I was applying for pitch wars, like all this stuff was going on. it was a very strange, year in which everything happened kind of at once. And so I didn't really think much of it.

And then I got the full request and kind of toss it off real fast when I was busy doing something else. again, that's kind of the way I do things, I guess. I actually got the email from her, with my offer, right when I was on the call with my Pitch Wars mentor. And I was like, oh no, what do I do?

You know, I have too many irons in wars fire now I'm gonna do pitch fours. Now I've got an offer on this, this other story, because they were two different novels that I was, I was working with. so we kind of worked it out. I told my editor, you know, I can't focus on this right now because I just got into this mentorship program.

We can work together once everything is over in February and she was cool with that. And I had told my mentor what was going on and she kinda helped me navigate through, the process of signing, cuz she's in publishing as well. So. It was kind of a whirlwind and I really didn't know, still felt like, I didn't know the first thing about what was happening.

Um, so there was a lot of, there were a lot of qualms and, you know, moments of like, am I doing the, am I making the right decision? Am I going the right way? am I making a big mistake? You know, I think that, I kind of flung myself headlong into this experience and, definitely overwhelming.

[00:07:13] **Sarah:** So then how did you end up with your agent?

[00:07:16] **Erin:** I started querying that book as another book. that was my pitch wars book actually, starting in February, March of 2021. and I had a pretty detailed spreadsheet with lots of agent names and I kind of had put them out in tiers and sent them in waves of, you know, 10 or 15. And it took a really long time.

I think it was nine months from the time that I queried my eventual agent to when I actually got the request for the call. but it was a very long process and I wasn't prepared. I had kind of short-cuttled over to a different path with the first book that I had published. I didn't really expect how difficult it would be to be in the trenches for that long, with what was really the book of my heart. Something that I had put, you know, a ton of work into it. Really was very ambitious compared to some of my other stuff compared to my urban fantasy. I felt like this book was quite ambitious. I had really high expectations for it. and again, I found myself in a genre that, basically kind of had a limited pool. Um, so it was definitely an emotional journey that I wasn't expecting to go on for that long.

and the funny thing is that I got call, I got the request for call from my agent the same week, actually the day before my small press book was published the day before my release day, I got the email from my agent asking for the call. So again, everything happened at once.

And I didn't necessarily take the time to process it.

I was just like, go, go, go. I've gotta figure this out right now. so I think Maeve is really my perfect agent because her manuscript wishlist just matched my book exactly. And it was so easy to write the personalization. I probably should have known from the start that this was gonna be my agent.

so I signed with her in December of last year and I went on sub uh, this year. So,

[00:09:36] **Sarah:** And then you wait some more.

[00:09:38] **Erin:** And now we wait. It's just the whole thing over it. Being on sub is different in some ways from the trenches in that I've basically asked my agent to not only update me periodically, so I don't get every rejection and that's really nice to have that buffer. but it is the same waiting, waiting, waiting, nothing, nothing, nothing.

[00:10:00] **Sarah:** mm-hmm

[00:10:01] **Erin:** you really just have to go do something else to pass the time and not think about it. My preferred coping mechanism is to forget that I did that as much as possible and just go on doing other things

[00:10:14] **Sarah:** I like approve All right. It is time for the first Q of the podcast. Can you read your successful query letter for us?

[00:10:23] **Erin:** I am going to read the query letter that got me my first book contract. and this was a query letter that I actually sent to a, my editor, my small press editor, rather than an agent. so dear editor. You can't run from your demons forever, especially when you are one. Attorney Lily Knight has a secret.

She is a Cambion, half human half succubus. She can read and manipulate human emotions to feed on their desires, but after a past mistake endangered her best friend's life, lily chooses to avoid physical intimacy with humans, abstaining from the life force that would give her superhuman strength and power. Then Lily stumbles on the corpse of a murdered succubus and her incubus mentor resurfaces to warn of a supernatural killer stalking the foggy San Francisco streets. After the police arrest the wrong man, she embarks on an unofficial hunt for the real culprit, risking her career to clear an innocent defendant's name.

But as she closes in on the killer's identity, the killer closes in on her. Now she must embrace the long suppressed power of her demonic heritage and risk the soul of the handsome suspect. She doesn't want to fall for, or end up the murderer's next victim, an adult urban fantasy novel complete at 95,000 words.

Cambion's Law is a standalone story with series potential that will appeal to fans of Lucifer, lost girl and Shannon McGuire's October day series. I'm an anti poverty attorney who writes under the pen name, Erin Fuller. I also enjoy playing indie video games, blogging and snuggling my two rescue kitties. My previous experience in criminal defense law informed the writing of Cambion's Law.

Thank you for your time and consideration, best regards. So it's funny reading this because it's been two years since I wrote it. and I don't think that this query letter is by any means perfect. So I think that that is a really good example of you don't have to write a perfect query letter.

[00:12:25] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm

[00:12:25] **Erin:** It's okay.

That it may not be the best. but you, you wanna get, you wanna get the ideas across and the setting and, you know,

[00:12:35] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm

[00:12:36] **Erin:** start off with a bang.

[00:12:38] **Sarah:** All right. So how has your experience been since signing that first contract? You talked about a little bit already, but especially let us know if there were any surprises along the way.

[00:12:49] **Erin:** I mean, everything was a surprise to me in a way, because I, I didn't know what to expect. I think I went in without too many expectations. I think that the biggest surprises for me actually had to do with kind of the emotions that I experienced as I went through the publishing process, because it definitely was a roller coaster.

And I think that when you're in the trenches or you are, you know, thinking about going for publishing as a career or as you know, a second career, what, whatnot. I don't think that you realize that the successful query letter is only the beginning of that journey. So I thought that once I got my book accepted.

Once I got the contract, once I got the agent, you know, I'd be set, I'd be good to go. You know, everything would be gravy from there, on out. And in fact, it's really just another, it opens up a new journey. It opens up a new series of things that you have to learn. getting edits, you know, going through copy edits, promoting your book.

Marketing as a small press author. I do a lot of my own marketing. I think that a big surprise for me was how much work that actually entailed and how much, time and energy went into that, those efforts. and things like you don't realize how important reviews are until you are trying to get your book on people's radars.

You know, it's things like that, that I only really got and understood once I was actually in that experience.

[00:14:31] **Sarah:** Yeah, for sure. It is time for our quick round. I call it author DNA. It's just classifications that we like to put writers in sometimes. Are you a pantsier or a plotter?

[00:14:42] **Erin:** I'm a reformed pantsier

[00:14:44] **Sarah:** do you tend to be an over writer or an underwriter?

[00:14:47] **Erin:** I've been both in the past, but currently hit my mark more often than not,

[00:14:52] **Sarah:** Do you tend to write better in the morning or at night?

[00:14:55] **Erin:** used to be night, but now it's morning and I'm both annoyed and shocked by this.

[00:15:00] **Sarah:** When you start a new project, do you typically start with a character or plot or concept or something else first?

[00:15:06] **Erin:** This is a tough one to answer in short terms, because it's more of a rolling hamster ball of ideas and characters and concepts that kind of rolls until it becomes a story.

[00:15:17] **Sarah:** Do you prefer coffee or tea?

[00:15:20] **Erin:** Coffee,

[00:15:21] **Sarah:** When writing, do you prefer silence or some kind of sound?

[00:15:24] **Erin:** silence, noise canceling headphones, or instrumental sound.

[00:15:29] **Sarah:** Hmm. When it comes to the first draft, are you more of a, get it down kind of person or a get it right kind of person

Erin: I'd say probably get it down.

Sarah: What tools or software do you use to draft

[00:15:42] **Erin:** Scrivener all the way forever.

[00:15:44] **Sarah:** Do you prefer drafting or revising more?

[00:15:48] **Erin:** Revising,

[00:15:48] **Sarah:** Do you write in sequential order or do you hop around

Erin: Sequential

Sarah: and final, quick round question? Are you an extrovert or an introvert?

Erin: Definitely an introvert

Sarah: all right. Now, we're gonna talk about the second Q of the podcast, which you alluded to earlier. What were some of the qualms or worries that you had on your journey and were they realized, or did you overcome them or how did they shake out?

[00:16:11] **Erin:** I mean, some of them are still shaking out in a way. when I signed that first book contract, while also having this other iron in the fire of wanting to go to a more, a bigger press with my other book, one of the worries I had was that going the small press direction would potentially hurt my chances with an agent or hurt my chances eventually with a larger publisher.

This does not worry me as much as it used to because when I was first signing That first contract, It felt like such a huge deal. You know, this was life changing and now it was just like I said, one step along the way. but the, the dice are still rolling when it comes to how that's gonna work out, with my sub experience. I think I definitely worried that I was potentially going in the wrong direction and if I had it to do again, I might have stuck with querying agents for longer before I went to the small press.

But there are also some things that small press publishing offers that I don't think, does feature in larger publishing companies. I have a lot of creative control, my editor and I have a close relationship, you know, it's very, it's a lot more, it feels a lot more personal. And I also know everybody who is sharing in my profits, and I know that they're good people and that's a huge deal too.

I think that it's easy to feel like when you're making that big first decision first agent first, you know, first contract, it's easy to feel like it's picking your path for the rest of your writing career. And I don't actually now I wouldn't say that

that is the case. also since I write in different genres, and I am on sub right now with the science fiction novel instead of an urban fantasy novel, it's probably, doesn't have much impact either way. but I did have a lot of qualms with going with a small press and I would say that for the most part, I think that that experience has been very valuable.

There's definitely some, some cons as well as pros. as far as distribution, especially is, is kind of something that I didn't realize.

[00:18:23] **Sarah:** Mm, mm-hmm yeah, distribution. I feel like is probably one of the biggest

[00:18:24] **Erin:** Would go exactly the way it has,

[00:18:27] **Sarah:** presses and big five big four.

[00:18:34] **Erin:** right, because if your dream and I think most writers, dream of walking into a bookstore, you know, somewhere randomly and finding their book there, that's not, something that you're going to as likely experience in a small press. and I did know that when I signed, I'm not gonna say that I didn't, It's definitely something that's still in my, in my dream category as opposed to something that I've achieved at this point.

But I think that for the most part, those qualms and worries, they feel so big when, when you are, like I said, when you are making that decision, it feels huge. And it feels like, this is a huge fork point in your path. And it's really more of a curve or bend than a fork where you're going, picking, uh, one direction forever.

[00:19:17] **Sarah:** yeah. And now it's time for the third Q. Do you have any writing quirks? Is there anything about your writing process that you think is kind of different or interesting or unique?

[00:19:27] **Erin:** so I said I was a pantsier uh, a reformed pantsier. I'm really more of a plantsier now trying to plan, trying to, to reduce my chaos, to, uh, workable levels, and produce better first drafts. but I actually use a lot of spreadsheets. I never thought of myself as a fan of spreadsheet since it's all I started using it for outlining and things like that.

So I have a giant spreadsheet that I use when I'm drafting. I use save the cat beats to keep myself on track. I don't know if those are super quirky, but. It's

kind of, part of my process. I do kind of edit as I go now I'm just filling in the stuff that I wanted to say in the, in the quick round.

Um, both on everything. I edit as I go and a lot of people say not to do that, but I do do it, not to get things right. But because it's a good way, uh, for me to reengage with the story when I sit down every day. Would say I probably don't do anything just one way. And it's all in the middle uh,

[00:20:25] **Sarah:** When you were in the lowest parts of your publishing journey, whatever that may have been for you, what kept you going and why did you stick to it.

[00:20:33] **Erin:** think it was again, community that kept me going, having writers around me who were striving and going through those ups and downs or ups while I was down or downs, while I was up to understand that it wasn't just special to me that I was experiencing these things. But you know, the question of am I the only one who feels this way, it's really helpful to have people be like, no, it's not the, you're not the only one.

This is, this is normal. this is not unusual. We all feel this way. so leaning on my community has really kept me going. My spouse has been my biggest cheerleader and believed in me through the moments that I didn't believe in myself. Which I think goes to something that I think people don't always talk about as much as they can is that it does take a village to raise a writer.

And having that support both in your personal life and in your creative community is incredibly important. and there really is no going it alone as introverted as I am. That's probably my biggest lesson.

[00:21:39] **Sarah:** Do you feel like you've made any mistakes along the way that you might wanna warn listeners about? So they don't make the same ones?

[00:21:47] **Erin:** Well, I did, I did call myself out earlier and I'll do it again. Um, when I first started querying Cambion's Law, I queried both agents and small presses at the same time. Don't do that. I mean, you can, if you want, it's a free country, but probably should not because, the problem is, which I didn't understand at the time is that obviously a small press is not going to be offering you the kind of advances that an agent would want to see because it's

their livelihood too. It's your livelihood too, as an agent. and you don't want to have submission opportunities foreclosed. So I think people may get the idea

that it is helpful to have an offer any offer on the table and take that to an agent. But I don't think that that is the case.

I think you should pick your path and then. Reassess and maybe change your strategy later, but kind of doing it scatter shot the way I did it is not something that I would advise just because, it can foreclose opportunities. I don't know that it did for me. I think that, the Cambion series is always destined for a small press due to the way the markets are right now.

but again, not a strategy that I would recommend to querying writers at all.

[00:23:02] **Sarah:** Yeah. Can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons that you learned on your journey to publication?

[00:23:10] **Erin:** Community is most important or maybe not most important, but community is incredibly important for writer support. It takes a village to raise a writer. It takes a village to, to create a book. You know, there's so much work that goes in on the backend that you don't see as a reader, from authors doing multiple revisions to edits, to copy edits, to, you know, cover design and all of there's.

There's so many people it takes to make a book and we don't necessarily see that when we're outside of the industry. And also those big, what feels like the big, huge decisions that are gonna pick your path for the rest of time? I don't know. Maybe I'm not the only one who felt that way. That's not actually true.

you can change your agent, you can change your path. you can take two different paths at the same time. Like I did. Um, there is no one true way to do it. Uh, I would be Remi

[00:24:02] **Sarah:** I call this the acknowledgements portion of this podcast. You mentioned your husband already as well, but, um, This is not a business that most of us succeed in completely on our own. So who are some of the people or organizations who helped you along the way and how?

[00:24:18] **Erin:** I would be remiss to not Again, mention pitch wars, the community of other writers being among, peers, being able to learn from them and my mentor, Ren Hutchings, who is a fabulous, enthusiastic, just role model for me in every possible way. I was so incredibly lucky to get her as my mentor that year, She has definitely not only helped me become a better writer and helped me get that book in a form that, that eventually got me, my agent, but also has been my cheerleader and has picked me up when I was at my low

points as well. So. She's amazing. I'm incredibly lucky to, have her in my circles and call her friend now.

but there's just been so many people. I feel like I could do a whole hour on all the people who have helped me. There's people who have looked at my query letters, Mike Mammay helped me figure out my small press path and gave me advice on that. Just like the entire Twitter writing community, both, sometimes aggravates me, but most of the time inspires me.

know, my, my discord communities where I can just go and commiserate or get advice, I don't know. I feel like. I've really, I've just been very fortunate to find that kind of community and to have that kind of support. And without it, I don't think that I would be here now doing what I'm doing now.

[00:25:48] **Sarah:** All right before you go. Is there anything more that you wanna tell listeners about Cambion's Law or Cambion's blood who may be interested in checking out your books?

[00:25:58] **Erin:** so this is a series that is it's classic, urban fantasy. You know, my influences for this series are series like the hollows by Kim Harrison or Shannon McGuire's Toby day. The series is about choice, agency and their correct use of power. and it's funny because I chose a, I chose a succubus, uh, heroine and I think that.

I've had some folks who are like, there's not enough spiciness in these books, but you know, it's really a lot of, a lot of what I write about is about those intersections of power, sexuality, and, agency. think that that's really what this series is about. but it's also fun and action packed and, and full of suspense and tension

I hope people will check it out. I am very fortunate to have found my audience, small as it may be. I'm just very grateful to everyone who has read it and got in what I was going for, because that's the goal. it always feels so good when, when people get it.

[00:27:02] **Sarah:** Nice, Erin, thank you so much for coming the show and sharing your story with.

[00:27:06] **Erin:** Thank you very much for having me. I apologize for my rambling. This has been a great experience though. So thank you for being a great host.

[00:27:15] **Sarah:** thanks.

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Queries, Qualms and quirks, you can find the text of Erin's query in the show notes, along with links to find out more about her and her books. If you enjoyed the show, I'd really appreciate

if you'd help me find new listeners by leaving a review on apple podcasts or pod chaser, telling your friends or sharing this episode on social media.

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