

# QQQ RR Virdi

[00:00:00] **RR Virdi:** everybody's lucky. You just don't know when your luck's gonna hit. So do everything you can to still be in the game when it happens.

[00:00:06] **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 day of publication. I am your host, author Sarah Nicholas, and literary agent, Sarah N. Fisk.

Today we have fantasy author, RR Virdi. RR Virdi is a USA Today bestseller, two time Dragon Award finalist and Nebula Award finalist. He is the author of Urban Fantasy Series, the Grave Report, and the New South Asian Epic Fantasy Series from Tour Books, Tales of Tremaine.

So please welcome RR to the show. Hello.

[00:00:44] **RR Virdi:** Hey, thanks for having me.

[00:00:45] **Sarah:** Hi, I'm so excited to have you on here cuz your journey is not quite traditional, so I'm really excited to get into it. We're gonna start by going kind of all the way back to the beginning though. When did you first start getting interested in writing, and then how long did it take from then before you started getting serious about publication?

[00:01:03] **RR Virdi:** so writing, getting serious was summer after graduating high school, so it was 2008 before going to college, and I already knew I wasn't a hundred percent sure what I wanted to do, uh, collegially because, My interests were acting, which I've always had a passion for and writing, uh, which is the new passion that came in at that time.

And I was like, okay, well, getting a degree in either of those things does not guarantee a career. I already knew that. Like, you go get an mfa. The only thing that's guaranteed is you can go teach creative writing. It doesn't promise a job in the industry, like you're not gonna become a writer. But I already started and I fell in love with it.

So I was kind of muddling through college, figuring out my way. But I, the second I started writing my first book, which I still have like a draft of it, it's god awful. Like it's torture level, bad. Everything made sense in my life. Like, I just felt ridiculously happy. Uh, the act of writing more than even like finishing

a book was just, just really pleasant, fun, and it felt like, this is right, this is what I should be doing.

[00:01:55] **Sarah:** Yeah. Let me ask you a question cuz you said the first book is awful and you're saying that with, uh, retrospect, right? Um, in retrospect, did you at the time think it was great when you finished it?

[00:02:07] **RR Viridi:** I didn't really know enough about prose and craft, I guess, to judge it, but I knew I loved doing, I was so excited by the story, like, I like the story. I mean, to this day it's still a solid story. It just needs to be completely scrapped and redone. Like the themes and the, the characters, they all, they all need rework, but it was good.

It's just, I didn't have the skill to execute it then. And you know, it's exactly what an 18 year old guy would come up with. It wasn't like a great original story. It was, you know, there was a lot of wish fulfillment in it, self projection. But you know, you're an 18 year old kid and you just, you find the love of writing you, what are you gonna write?

It's usually some kind of wish fulfillment story for a lot of younger people, and that's what it was. But it was fun.

[00:02:45] **Sarah:** So how did you learn more about the publishing industry, like how it works, and then you ultimately made the decision to self-publish. So how did you come to that decision?

[00:02:54] **RR Viridi:** I

actually

didn't know about the industry that much. I just knew I really wanted to, and around this time I've been writing. Bunch of crappy novels. And then I got pretty close to publication level ready with the first book, Grave Beginnings that I ever published. And this was on the tail end of the, the Kindle explosion that just happened, uh, 2012.

And then it was circulating just on the internet, you know, like Amanda Hocking, I believe is her name, sold like X amount of zillions of copies on smash words. and then Hugh Howie had just happened on Kindle and I was like, oh, Amazon lets you self-publish books now. This is the thing I didn't even think about querying.

I was like, I just wanna get my story out there. Do things. So I, I got my mom, who's an old school traditional, uh, graphic designer, like by hand, and she'd been learning Photoshop to help me mock up the original cover, which no longer exists. And we just threw the book out there December, 2013, in ebook format only.

And within a few weeks it was already selling copies and reviews were coming in. And I was like, wow, like this is working. People were reading my stuff and people are chiming in and, you know, I wasn't making much money, but I, I didn't care. It was like, it felt right.

[00:03:58] **Sarah:** And then what happened in between then and signing that contract with Tor for *The First Binding*

[00:04:04] **RR Viridi:** Oh, a lot. Uh, God. Seven years passed. After writing *Grave Beginnings*. Oof. The, the original cover was not great. Sorry, mom, um, but I started getting readers who read it and were loving it and were critiquing it, like, Hey, need some better editing. It needs a better cover. I was like, okay. And I started putting a call out and I started networking and just talking to writers online.

Mo all self-published. I didn't know anyone traditional at this point and. Things just started falling together weirdly Like I met my cover artist who'd read the book already and she loved it. She's like, Hey, I think it can make you a better cover. And we did. And then sales started going up and then I met my editor, who's still my indie editor to this day, who I love and adore, Michelle Dunbar.

And she like completely like helped me redo the book *Developmental Editing Line*. Got me in touch with copy and proofing and the book started doing better. And I took the skills I learned from her with editing to write the second book, *Grave Measures* over a few years. When that book debuted a few months later, the, the Dragon Awards happened, and it was up for that alongside Jim Butcher and NK Jemison in the same category.

And the exposure from that like exploded the, the series sales and attention on it for a while. And then I wrote *Dangerous Ways* as an experiment to mess around with urban fantasy and see what I could do with the genre. And then that one placed for the Dragon Award. And I think about year later I met my, who'd become like one of my greatest friends now Yudhanjaya Wijeratne who's a Sri Lankan author.

And we were talking about our nitpicks with metal... Pacific Rim and our response was something called the Metal Karma, story, which the first story is the messenger. The idea like how whenever aliens attack Earth, they always attack America, but aliens would not know enough to know America's a superpower.

They mostly go by like, well, the world's population is centered to China and India. If you're gonna attack you to attack the largest concentration of people first to wipe 'em out. So we did a South Asian kind of mecha story. That placed for the Nebulas, which both he and I were like shocked. And we were, we flew out to try to, go and meet people and that's where I met my agent or who would become my agent later that year.

Uh, Joshua Bish, uh, we had met and talked over there, but he didn't. Sign off on my project. I think he just sat in his query folder for a long time. The year went on and I ended up meeting, uh, who'd become editor at Tor Christopher Morgan, and I didn't know that's who he was at first. Uh, I was meeting with somebody else and we were kicking it off at lunch and introduced me to Chris and we were just talking and nerding out and at the end of it, and he was like, yeah, send me, uh, the pitch for this novel you've got.

I was like, okay. And I did, and a month later he calls back saying, do you have time for a call in December? I was like, sure. So we make that happen and he goes, Tor wants to buy the series from you. And all I had was a sample at this point. So I was like, wow, uh, I need to go get an agent. He's like, yeah, go pick one.

And I just called back up Joshua. I was like, Hey, it's been a while. I haven't heard anything back. I need to know if you're gonna represent me or not. And he, you know, he finally got to my story in the query his, whatever his order was, and he's like, yeah, I like this. Let's do it. So I signed representation with him like just before Christmas.

I think it was like December. 19th, 2019, and then by spring 2020, we had the Tor contract in the mail, and then months later we had the Gollancz uh, UK contract. So it was nuts. It was a seven year grind, for this to work out. I guess.

[00:07:09] **Sarah:** Yeah. this is the point in the podcast where we usually read the query letter, but you didn't really get anything with the query letter,

[00:07:17] **RR Viridi:** Yeah, I've never queried.

[00:07:19] **Sarah:** so we're gonna skip that part. so how has your experience been since signing your contract? Especially let us know if there was anything surprising along the way.

And also because you spent a long time self-publishing, you know, what were kind of the contrast of your experiences between self-publishing and traditional publishing?

[00:07:37] **RR Viridi:** I had been fortunate enough not just to watch a lot of YouTube because you know, other authors who've been traditional for a long time have talked about the process and what they've gone through and how they've seen the industry change. what to expect and not expect from a publisher. So I knew a lot of that going in. It was still kind of surprising though because, you know, every, everyone has a story. So they get told certain things and certain things don't pan out or that's not the treatment you actually get. marketing stuff and being indie first, it, it's really hard to let go of all that control because at least you know, you know, it's the whole, if you want something done right, you can do it yourself.

[00:08:09] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:08:09] **RR Viridi:** because I think the year when I signed the deal, 2020, I was looking at a lot of the covers coming out through the industry and I wasn't really happy with a lot of the styles I was seeing. And I knew what I wanted for my book and I had already contracted an indie artist originally. Cause that's what I thought the future of the series would be.

To do some mockups with me. And we had beautiful concept arts done in storyboard and I had shared them and people loved them. And I sent this work to Tor just going like, I, maybe they'll consider it and just look at it and like get some good ideas. Cause I, I had a really strong idea the themes I wanted with this novel.

And I do believe a good cover does sell a book. I know people like, don't judge a book by its cover, but like ever since Amazon happened, I'm sorry. Like, yeah, everyone does. We are a visual shopper. It's why they spend so much money on movie posters. People collect them still to this day. Like there is an actual culture around it, like people buy art and books are art these days.

Brandon Sanderson's the greatest example of that. He turns his books into physical art on the outside and inside and people will pay a fortune for it. So

when I sent them the artwork, I was actually really surprised that they responded to it. They allowed us to get the same artist who'd done it.

they took bits and pieces, kinda like of a collage of all the concept art I had and made a new cover out of it the way they wanted, which worked perfectly for me. And I'm hoping that goes with book two. , but I, the lack of transparency and data and information is, has been the hardest for me? Uh, I don't know where the book's always at, marketing wise, what's going on.

I have my ideas of what I want to do, and there's kind of like a, a wall in the way at times of like, oh, well we can't do that, or It's not done this way. And I'm like, I have data that this really works, or I have a reason why I want to do this, and I'm willing to take a hit on this. So I guess it's just been that adjustment cuz what it feels like, you know, two ends of different extremes.

Indie, you have all the control, traditional, you have like very little at all. And maybe they're humoring you. It's really hard to find like a middle ground between any of them, to be honest.

[00:09:54] **Sarah:** Yeah, I, I remember in one of my author groups, someone recently coming in posting who, someone who's been a self-published author for a long time and is on her first traditional contract and is like, is it just normal to not know how many books you're selling ? And everyone's like, yes,

[00:10:09] **RR Viridi:** Yeah, that too. That's infuriating. Like I recently got what seems like good news and good projections, so I'm happy. But it's taken a long while and I'm like, I would've known this like instantaneously, anytime I wanted indie. And I'm like, this is just, ugh!

[00:10:24] **Sarah:** Yeah, . All right. It is time for the quick ground. I call it author DNA. It's just categories we like to put people in.

Are you a pantsier or a plotter?

[00:10:33] **RR Viridi:** Pantsier

[00:10:34] **Sarah:** Do you tend to be an over writer or an underwriter?

[00:10:36] **RR Viridi:** over writer

[00:10:38] **Sarah:** Do you prefer to write in the morning or at night?

[00:10:40] **RR Viridi:** whenever. I write all through the day,

[00:10:42] **Sarah:** When starting a new project, do you typically start with a character or plot or a concept or something else first?

[00:10:48] **RR Viridi:** Yes, It changes per book.

[00:10:52] **Sarah:** Do you prefer coffee or tea?

[00:10:54] **RR Viridi:** Neither I take caffeine pills.

[00:10:56] **Sarah:** Oh, okay. when writing, do you prefer silence or sound?

[00:11:00] **RR Viridi:** Both depends on the project.

[00:11:02] **Sarah:** Okay. When it comes to the first draft, are you a get it down kind of person or a get it right kind of person?

[00:11:08] **RR Viridi:** Both.

[00:11:09] **Sarah:** what tools and software do you use to draft

[00:11:13] **RR Viridi:** Oh God. Microsoft Word, 2000.

[00:11:17] **Sarah:** That's a very common answer. I mean, not the

[00:11:19] **RR Viridi:** Oh, really? Oh, yeah.

[00:11:20] **Sarah:** but Microsoft Word. Yes.

[00:11:22] **RR Viridi:** I use the old one with no distractions, no nothing. It's just a white screen of doom

[00:11:27] **Sarah:** do you prefer drafting or revising more

[00:11:30] **RR Viridi:** \*sigh\* drafting,

[00:11:31] **Sarah:** Do you write in sequential order? Do you hop around?

[00:11:35] **RR Viridi:** uh, sequential order

[00:11:36] **Sarah:** And final quick round question, are you an extrovert or an introvert?

[00:11:40] **RR Viridi:** extrovert.

[00:11:41] **Sarah:** All right,

[00:11:42] **RR Viridi:** Like the one author who might be.

[00:11:44] **Sarah:** There are a few of us, not many though. it's time for the second Q of a podcast. What were some of the qualms or worries that you had on your publishing journey and you know, where they realized, or did you overcome them or how did they shake out?

[00:11:57] **RR Viridi:** I, I guess it's, everyone's heard the whole, like how much control you lose with editing stuff and I didn't know how much I'd have to like change or rewrite in the original story or have cut. . and having done this for so long at this point, like starting in 20 2008 and my first published novel, going through its edits like 2021, I didn't have to cut much.

Like I, I've gotten to the point where if I estimate a story will be, let's say 350,000 words, I'm usually within a few thousand words, perfectly accurate of where the story will be after edits and even my traditional experience was with that, we cut x amount of thousands of words. And then Tor wanted me to add in a few more scenes to the book, which I did, and it bumped exactly back up to what I estimated the final book would be.

So I was really happy about that. But, I guess for me it's been timeline. That's what I am having the hardest point, and I've always worried about, cause I've always heard that publishing can be really slow. That delays pop up, that communication things can pop up and it sets off this cycle of this delay leads, so this delay, which just delays this, which means you get X part of your book or process back later, which then delays you, which means you can only get it done by X amount of time.

And they're juggling so many of the books. If it gets to them by X time, they might be wrapped up in this project and it just, It's like this whole thing of bureaucracy and like this holds rollercoaster of timelines that just get muddled. And I, I'm not used to that. Working with freelancers, it's very much been like, if I get you the book by this date, barring something horrible happened, they usually get it back by X date and you just can move on like a very clean assembly line.



And then the, God forbid if anything happens, you at least can adjust, not screw up timelines anywhere else.

[00:13:29] **Sarah:** Yeah. it's funny you mentioned word count because the first binding is kind of a a hefty book. How many words that end up being

[00:13:36] **RR Viridi:** 351,000 words and Book Two's draft is bigger. Book two's draft was 450.

[00:13:43] **Sarah:** I'd like to provide a content warning for a suicide and suicidal ideation, if you would like to skip that, please fast forward three full minutes. All right. Did you have any kind of low parts in your journey? And if you did, you know, what kept you going?

[00:14:03] **RR Viridi:** Uh, yeah. Uh, 2008 part of me found writing out of a, uh, I guess like a rebound from, uh, attempting suicide. Uh, I, I struggle with depression and suicidal ideation. mostly through certain life circumstances before I reached that age, trauma and stuff. and writing and acting were kind of things that saved me from that. And I suppose that my struggles with writing, cause I didn't know what I wanted to do and how to get there. I had a, a really bad relapse in 2011. It was around when, Jim Butcher's Ghost Story, uh, the novel just came out for the Dresden files and had already read it. I think we were like maybe a month out of its release or maybe two.

I don't remember exactly when. It was early enough that he was on tour promoting it still. So it must have been very fresh and. I remember seeing a sign, cause I'd asked for a sign from life and I, I literally quite literally saw a sign, uh, stuck in the Barnes and Noble that I still visit and go to, uh, that Jim Butcher would be there signing for the book.

And my idea was, okay, I will go meet him, get the book signed, and then that, that night. end of my life and I will end on a good note. And we went to the signing. Uh, my sisters were there at the mall too, and they went around doing their thing and it finally got done. And he was signing books at this point.

And he was doing the very, you know, thing where every author's like, Hey, how you doing? Moving the line along, being very nice, asking everyone the thing, how was the signing for them? What's up? And when he asked me how I was doing, I don't know why, but I told him everything, uh, what I was struggling with.

And he stopped and gave me this whole speech of how only I could write my story and if I did and stuck to it, I had more of a shot of controlling it and deciding what happens than if I didn't, cuz if I let go of my story that night, I would be deciding it right there. I would be ending my story. Like no one could say what could happen.

I couldn't definitively say that I'll never make it. I, I chose not to make it that night, but if I stuck to it, he told me that one day I might be up for awards next to him. I could be in anthologies with him, I might panel with him. I might have my name on a best sel-- like all the things you would think to do, sign a traditional deal, whatever.

and I, I weirdly stuck to that. And oddly enough, most of those things, if not all, have happened or in the process of happening, some I can't talk about. But, the First Dragon Awards, I was nominated alongside him in the same category. years later, I was in an indie anthology with them, parallel worlds.

And then this year I was featured in his urban fantasy anthology that he edits with Carrie Hughes Heroic Hearts. Uh, so my urban fantasy story got to debut alongside, uh, Dresden Stories. Uh, I've been up for the other stuff you said, like nebulas and stuff. Uh, the best seller list, uh, like he said, 2019.

Cause I remember this specifically. It was my first panel with him. It was recorded at Dragon Con and I got to have that happen. yeah, every single thing he's said, has been what's kept me going and they've become little weird goals. It might sound really vain, but they've been like, maybe I can make this happen.

Like the way he said it can. And like I said, uh, they, they've been happening.

[00:16:47] **Sarah:** Wow. I knew that you and him had, you know, a lot of kind of interaction back and forth, but I didn't know the history behind it. um, changing gears a little bit, do you feel like you made any kind of publishing mistakes along the way that you might want to let listeners know about so they don't make the same ones?

[00:17:03] **RR Viridi:** Indie, I would say, yeah, it's definitely worth getting your covers and your, your editing done perfectly upfront, but it's not gonna kill you. I understand everyone has different circumstances and money and stuff like that, and they didn't kill my books. It didn't, it maybe got a few early bad reviews for that stuff, but you know what?

Some people are gonna look for reasons to, to knock you down anyways. Don't listen to them. Cuz I have editions of like extremely famous authors and their works and there are mistakes in there and I've counted more some in traditional books than indie books, which is not to disparage any. Just do the best you can with where you're at at the point and go back to fix what you can when you can.

For traditional, I'd say, Never be afraid to ask as many questions as you need to a hundred percent understand anything contractually with your agent, even if you think it might be good, even if your agent tells you it might be good, it might not be good for your circumstances. Ask and ask and ask until you have the answers you're satisfied with or solution to something you're so, uh, satisfied with.

Because, uh, we've all been on Twitter and stuff and seen a lot of things are changing in the industry with how payments work or how payments are broken up in their time or percentages. and things with, like I was talking about with delays, where if those go on, that's your money getting delayed, and that can really hurt people depending on where they are financially and stuff in their life.

So don't be afraid to rock boats and ask questions because that's why all the contract language exists. It's supposed to go two ways, and if it doesn't, do whatever you can to ask the right things to make it go somewhat in your favor.

[00:18:30] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm. All right. Kind of related question, can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons that you learned on your journey to publication?

[00:18:38] **RR Viridi:** It's gonna sound really, uh, cliché, but don't give up because looking back I could tell you how it all worked out and added it up, but looking forward, I never knew. And the only thing I can guarantee is because I didn't quit and I had so many opportunities and voices in my head telling me to, and it really was just the next dumb moment led to another.

And I guess it's the idea of everybody's lucky. You just don't know when your luck's gonna hit. So do everything you can to still be in the game when it happens. Because like I said, you don't know. For me it was, I was at the Nebula and I met my agent, but he didn't take a chance on me then. And I had, and I still stuck it out that year and by chance, met editor and I got the contract or the interest from a publisher before even having my agent and had to go backwards to get my agent, which is not how it works.

But I don't know if there's a real way how it works because. Again, like it's different for everybody and that's kind of the point. Like you don't know how it's gonna work for you, so just keep showing up because it might work out differently from you than it has for everybody else. But you've gotta be there for that to happen.

[00:19:36] **Sarah:** Yeah. If everyone had the same journey, this podcast wouldn't exist.

[00:19:39] **RR Viridi:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:19:40] **Sarah:** This is not a business that most of us succeed in completely on our own. Who are some of the people who helped you along the way and how?

[00:19:49] **RR Viridi:** Sarah Anderson, who would be my first cover artist, my indie artist that I use, and as well as Michelle Dunbar, who I already mentioned, uh, the indie editor. later along the way, it'd be many years later, but Jim Butcher, obviously, not just for when he first showed up in my life in 2011, uh, 2018.

Before Dragoncon, I think this was around spring, he added me on Facebook and was super kind and started offering me like business mentorship and friendship and personal life advice. There was like this huge gap when I met him at the first signing where he saved my life to many years ago later, where he started actually showing up in my life.

Like before then, there wasn't really a time of like we built friendship or anything. It's, he showed up much later again and just started talking and telling me about traditional and the business and I guess writing fortitude, inspiration. I could talk to him about my personal life, like just a real friend, and that's helped me a lot, especially with the transition, understanding some of the things that where the industry's at now, where the industry's at now, where it used to be, what to expect and how to go about it and, and honestly, more than anything, again, like the fortitude

[00:20:53] **Sarah:** nice. All right, so you have two releases I think coming out this year. Do you wanna tell us about them?

[00:20:59] **RR Viridi:** yeah, I have, the Instinct Animal Anthology that's being edited by LJ Hachmeister and money from that's gonna be going to, uh, animal Rescue and Charities. It's all dedicated to that. I think every author's putting in

some kind of animal adjacent or animal featuring story. Uh, I know I will be, mine's gonna be from the point of view of the cat that Ari gets in the first binding. Uh, we called in like I think every favor we could to get as many different writers as we can. I think it's gonna be featuring like Jim Butcher, Seanan McGuire, Patricia Briggs, Faith Hunter, Kelley Armstrong, like just everybody we could possibly

[00:21:30] **Sarah:** get.

Yeah. Good list.

[00:21:32] **RR Viridi:** then I found out recently that book two tales of Tremain is technically up and announced.

I'm not gonna spoil the title cuz I was kind of waiting for a cover to spoil it, but I will say it's October 3rd cuz it is officially listed publicly now. So there is that

[00:21:46] **Sarah:** Nice. Yeah. Do you wanna tell us about that series, what that's about?

[00:21:49] **RR Viridi:** so Tales of Tremain is sort of my love letter to the history of storytelling and stories themselves, both ones that I grew up with as well as stories from our world, from mythology and the great epics from the original proto Indo-European myths all the way up to more modern ones. It tackles everything from the beats and tropes and famous archetypes that have been used, uh, both in my favorite series, as well as in the history of storytelling.

A lot of those ended up being codified in Joseph Campbell's Hero's Myth, but. That's also a reduction. There's so many other beats and tropes that get left out of that, and I'm sort of doing a love letter in response to all of that. So it's a story about stories that's also using techniques from the history of stories as well as beats and tropes from them.

Like it's was kind of my ultimate love letter and meta-analysis of storytelling. And it's set through a South Asian framework. part of it is a frame narrative because the original, grand myth of South Asia, besides the, uh, the Rigveda is Mahabharata, which is done in a framed narrative and it's an epic poem.

So I wanted that lyricism and that structure to this, and it made sense for the character to be a storyteller. So you're really following the world's greatest villain or hero, depending on where you've heard his story from and how it's been twisted. Cuz that's another theme, that stories never hold their shape.

They get ret twisted and taken and people are quick to judge you based on what they hear, but they never hear the whole truth. And it's all about that, the malleability of stories, how they evolve and the people caught between them. And how you never know a true story until you hear it from the person who lived it.

So be really careful who and what you judge them for. And even then still, you know, reserve some judgment cause you don't know what's made a person make those choices.

[00:23:21] **Sarah:** All right, awesome. So the anthology comes out next week when this podcast airs, and then, the second book in your series comes out in October. So that's plenty of time for people to read the first book if they haven't yet. thank you so much for coming on the show today and sharing your story with everyone.

[00:23:37] **RR Viridi:** Thank you for having me.

[00:23:38] **Sarah:** Yeah. Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Queries, qualms, and Quirks. You can find the full text of the transcript in the show notes along with links to find out more about RR Viridi and his books. If you enjoyed the show, I'd appreciate if you'd help me find new listeners by leaving a review on Apple Podcast or Pod chaser, telling your friends, or sharing this episode on social media.

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