



Unfortunately... It Takes Luck

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Guest: M. Stevenson

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Mona West: Welcome to Unfortunately, a podcast about fiction, failure, and moving forward. I'm Mona West.

Courtney Floyd: I'm Courtney Floyd.

[Music: A bluesy piano progression with a distinctive drum beat]

Courtney Floyd: Hey, so today we're chatting with M. Stevenson, the author of *Behooved*, forthcoming from Bramble and Hodderscape in Summer 2025. She graduated from Brown University, with a BA in Geology and Biology, and the University of Idaho with an MEd in Environmental Education, and has worked as an outdoor educator, wilderness skills instructor, and science teacher. Her poetry and prose have appeared in publications including Small Wonders, PodCastle, Barely South, The Florida Review, and Poets Reading the News.

An avid swing dancer and amateur naturalist, she's often found dancing Lindy Hop or wandering the woods talking to birds and plants. She is a dual US-Irish citizen and is based in the Finger Lakes region of New York. You can find her on the usual places at "mstevensonbooks".

It's quite a bio. Welcome.

M. Stevenson: Yeah. Thank you.

Mona West: I would love to learn more about your communion with birds because I recently got into bird watching. I'm absolutely obsessed with it, but they don't seem to enjoy my company as much as I enjoy theirs.

M. Stevenson: I do love birds.

Mona West: Awesome. Thanks again for joining us. We're really excited for this conversation. We start every episode with an icebreaker question. This episode's icebreaker is, what is one recent brief experience you had with failure? I'll go ahead and get started, and then I'll pass it to you, and then Courtney can share her answer. For us, it's getting a little trickier because we have a finite amount of icebreakers, and we're talking about them during every interview, so we're having to really plumb deep to find new answers.

I think my most recent answer is honestly just having to hear my own voice when reviewing the recordings of these episodes. I think hearing myself and my weird verbal tics and my tendency to ramble when asking very basic questions, it's not a traditional failure, but it's definitely something that I've taken notice of and am trying to improve because I think that we want this podcast to live a long time and succeed, and part of that is, as a host, being able to have a succinct and thoughtful way with words as I'm speaking, even if I have a thoughtful way with words when I'm writing, with speaking, not so much. I think this is a perfect example of exactly what I'm talking about. Marina, what's your answer?

M. Stevenson: What I was thinking of was that I recently failed to stick to the revision schedule that I was planning for myself. The book that I'm currently working on has just been a mess, basically, which was a huge surprise to me since it's far from my first book. My failure meant that I had to ask my very kind editors for an extension, which was definitely something I didn't want to do this early in my writing career, but it worked out okay.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah. It's wild how I feel like it almost gets harder with each book instead of easier.

M. Stevenson: It's definitely easier to see all the places where it should be better. I can see all the parts that are not working a lot more easily. I guess that helps for revising. On the other hand, while I'm working on it, it feels like it's even worse than it probably is.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah. Right there with you. My recent brief experience of failure is that I am currently working on synopses for my option books, and one of them is 13 pages long, and the other one's just a huge mess. It's like three POVs, and I'm trying to figure that out. I'm just failing at the synopsis form. I'll get there, but it's not a form that's nice to begin with. I think a lot of people hate it, and I'm feeling the hate.

Mona West: It's a very different-- It's just a different mindset. I would imagine you have to completely switch gears and look at your book in a completely different way to take a step out of it. I imagine that's a real challenge.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah. The ice has been broken. How about we dive in with our first question? We're in an industry where so many of our efforts and failures are invisible and where it's easy to think of people as overnight successes when it may have taken decades for them to arrive. In the interest of making some of that invisible work more visible, can you tell us briefly where you're at in your writing journey and what did it take you to get there?

M. Stevenson: Sure. I am currently a little bit over five months out from the publication of my first published book, which is definitely not my first book that I wrote. I'm not somebody who

got there quickly. I started researching how to get published all the way back in middle school, I think. So it's been a while. I know that when I was in high school, one of the things that I asked for Christmas one year was like, I'm actually not sure if it's around anymore, but at the time there were these big 1,000 page tomes of writer's market that was a listing of agents and such.

Being a little nerd, I asked for one of those for Christmas one year. It's been a while. I got my first agent with my sixth book, which was the fifth book that I queried. I realized by the time that I finished it, that my first one was not something that I wanted to publish, even though it was very dear to me. I queried the next one. I started querying in 2014, and I got my first agent in 2022. That was with book number six.

We went on submission with that book after some revisions, and the book did not sell, and I ended up leaving that agent and querying again with my seventh manuscript, which my first agent had turned down. Then I got an agent pretty quickly with book number seven. We went on submission in January of this year and we sold within 48 hours. So that is roughly my publishing journey.

Mona West: Wow.

Courtney Floyd: That is a roller coaster.

Mona West: Yeah. That's wild. I have a lot of questions to follow up on with that. The first is why do you think that the sixth book that ended up getting a deal and being published, what do you think was the difference maybe that led it to have to get out in the world and then just sputter out?

M. Stevenson: The one that I signed with my first agent with that didn't sell?

Mona West: Correct. Yeah.

M. Stevenson: Yeah. Honestly, it's really hard to say. I don't want to speak poorly of my first agent, but I don't know that, perhaps it was being edited and sent out in the way to optimize it for the most success. That could be a factor. I think, honestly, that a lot of it is also just luck and timing. It was a slightly weird book, which was one of the things that I think helped it stand out and get requests. It also meant that maybe some of the editors that got it weren't really sure how to place it. It also suffered from being in the crossover zone where it's like, "Is it young adult? Is it adult?"

I was thinking of it as adult, but a lot of the feedback that I'd gotten on it was this feels more on the young adult side, so I think that might have been part of it as well. Yeah, I think it's really just a combination of market factors and who knows what.

Mona West: Yeah. Did they end up selling it as young adult? Is that how they marketed it?

M. Stevenson: That book is currently on hold. It was the next one that sold. We've actually pitched it to my editors as a potential next book in the contract. I'm waiting to hear what

happens with that.

Mona West: That's exciting. Fingers crossed. I think that is a good illustration of just how much is outside your control once you've done the thing, you've written the book and then you put it out in the world. So much of what happens after is, it's kind of at the whims of all these different parties that weren't there for the creation of the work, but now basically have almost as much ownership of it as the creator themselves is the impression I get talking to folks who've been on this journey. I have not been there myself.

I can't imagine what it's like to let it go like that and then put it in the hands of someone else and hope for the best. Is that what it feels like that you're just handing it over and hoping for the best, or do you feel like you still have leverage, you still have some ability to guide the path that it takes after that?

M. Stevenson: I think with the right agent, it feels more like a partnership, but it is very much to some degree like handing over control and just trusting that they know what they're doing. It's like you can't pitch to the editors yourself, you can't make things happen, and I wouldn't want to because I don't know the business like my agent does. There's definitely a large measure of handing it off to somebody else to take care of.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah, I have similarly, like, it feels like there's a balance to strike between trusting the expertise of the person that you've chosen to work with and then also being the best advocate for your own book.

M. Stevenson: Yeah, and just to circle back to luck for a minute, I think that luck played a huge role in getting a second agent and my debut selling so fast as well. I had written *Behooved* in 2022, and in 2023, romantasy suddenly took off as this huge boom thing. *Behooved* is very much like an equal parts fantasy and romance, which was not super popular at the time that I wrote it, at least not in traditional publishing, but was taking off exactly as I started querying it. It was really interesting to see basically the same things that I'd been writing suddenly become popular.

Mona West: Yeah, that's fascinating because we've had conversations about the zeitgeist and writing to the zeitgeist or just happening to do something that fits into it. Do you feel that the success of this book and the fact that it slots so well into the current audience appetite, does that change your perception of stuff you want to write in the future? Would that make you feel more inclined to -- I don't know how much you were watching the trends before -- are you going to watch the trends more closely and try to write to those? Or is it important to you to still write what you want, even if they just so happen to not fit into what the market is looking for at any given time?

M. Stevenson: I think the way that my agent has put it when I've talked about writing to market with her is to basically write what you want and revise to trends. I don't really plan on trying to write to meet the market exactly. It is definitely something that I keep an eye on. If I'm choosing between a couple different projects, then thinking about what is more likely to be picked up is definitely something that I keep in mind as a factor.

Mona West: That seems like really good advice, actually. I like that.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah. I've thought about the experience once you get an agent and make a deal, it feels like you're suddenly -- this metaphor is going to be a little bit weird because I don't actually play chess -- but it feels like you're playing chess, but there's suddenly another dimension and not just the regular 2D squares you're working on. You have to be strategic in a way that has never mattered before. It feels like such a weird thing to grow into. I'm wondering if that's -- is that something that you've also experienced figuring out how to strategize on the market in this new way?

M. Stevenson: That's definitely something that we did with revising *Behooved* before we went on submission. My agent said, for instance, she thought that it could fit into cozy fantasy, which was also trending at the time that we were going to go on submission. We revised a couple of things to make it feel a bit more cozy, like for instance, adding a warm fire and just more comfortable things. I also made it a lot more -- I don't really like the term spicy, but we'll go with it -- it's spicier than the earlier version.

Mona West: How does that feel? Does that feel, because writing for so much of the writing process, it's like you and your ideas and the words that you're putting down. Then someone's coming in and saying, "Okay, here's ideas to make it more palatable to the market or give it a better chance of selling well." Do you feel like you chafe against that in any way? Just based on the fact that so much of this is just, we do what we want to do. Then you're letting other people into the process. Did you have any challenges with that? It sounds like some of the changes were minor, like adding a fireplace to a scene and some may have been a little bit bigger. Did that disrupt your typical process? Do you feel like it impacted your process in any way?

M. Stevenson: I think it was an interesting challenge to think of it in that way. Because usually I'm not thinking of specific market things. I think as long as it's consistent with the heart of the story, then it's not something that I chafe against. For instance, I'd already been experimenting with writing contemporary romance, which is a lot more explicit than a lot of fantasy in terms of intimate scenes. That was something that I already had some practice with. I went back and applied the thing that I'd been doing for fun to the book that I'd already written.

Mona West: Nice. I have-

Courtney Floyd: Love that.

Mona West: -a few more questions, but I'm going to pass it over to Courtney because I know she has a number of questions too.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah, this is a question that I really, really wanted to ask as many people as possible this season, because being a debut novelist is such a -- it's an experience that so few people share. I'm just so curious, what are the shared elements? You got an offer within 48 hours of going on sub [submission to publishers]. I'm going to guess that was sort of an emotional whirlwind. Could you dig a little bit deeper into what did it feel like after all that time

to get a deal? Was it all screaming, shouting, throwing up, as the internet would say? Was it all celebratory? Were there any hidden failures in that or hidden complicated feelings in that process?

M. Stevenson: Yeah, it was definitely a whirlwind because I had braced myself to be on submission for a long time. I know that's more normal and that had also been my experience before. So there was definitely a lot of screaming. Yeah, I think that I was pretty much useless at doing anything for the next at least full day. I was supposed to have some meetings and stuff. I was like, "Okay, I need to calm down now so that I can actually speak words instead of just making squawking noises." Yeah, so it was definitely very exciting.

I think that my brain tends to immediately start looking for problems with things. That was something that I was actively having to combat. For instance, when we got the deal, my brain is like, "What if we can't turn out or something like that? What if it disappoints them?" And it's like, "No, no, we need to actually sit with the excitement here for a bit." Just overwhelming, I'd say.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah, I had a really similar experience of, like, I was pacing in circles flailing for a while, but then immediately started being -- it feels like such a huge decision, like choosing where to go to college or whether or not to buy a house or -- it's a life changing thing. It feels like there are a million ways that it could go wrong. I also really had to fight to hold on to the positivity and celebrate and mark the milestone, which feels like something that a lot of writers are horrifying at. We're not good at celebrating ever.

M. Stevenson: Yeah I'm really terrible at celebrating.

Courtney Floyd: Have you made an effort -- recognizing that, have you made an effort to build practices or strategies for celebrating?

M. Stevenson: I don't have a strategy yet, but it's definitely something that I'm trying to be more mindful about, especially with getting closer to debut, because it's very easy to be like, "Oh, this is exciting. Next thing." Especially when you're on deadline and you have things that you're working on so when something exciting comes in, then it's very easy to move past that and start focusing on the things that are not as exciting or that you need to work on.

Yeah, I don't have any specific strategies. I am trying to take a bit more time to sit with that. I've been ordering takeout to celebrate certain things, like when we got our offer for a first translation rights I was like, "We can do something to celebrate that." We ordered takeout Indian food, because I almost never eat outside of the house. Things like that.

Courtney Floyd: I love that. I'm also wondering, so our experiences differ in that you have a multi-book deal, and I have a one book deal. I think there are pros and cons to both of those things. I was able to attend this really cool workshop by -- oh, I'm blanking on the name of the book coach, but I'll add it to the show notes [[Demystifying Your Debut with Isabel Sterling](#)] -- but it was just really put things into perspective for me in terms of celebrating my own unique position. I'm wondering, like people who are dreaming of making their first sale might automatically feel like, "Yes, multiple books, that is the dream." I'm sure in a lot of ways, it's

really positive. How has your experience with that been?

M. Stevenson: My experience has been really, really positive. I know that that's not the case for everybody, including people who have multi-book deals. I think that I got really lucky in a lot of ways. My editors are really great -- I'm saying multiple because I have a UK editor and a US editor who are working together, so I get joint edits on the books from them. They're both really great. Their edits on the first book were pretty close in alignment with things that I was willing to do anyway. It wasn't like I was fighting them on anything. When I submitted my options for what they might pick as the next book in the contract, they picked one that I was excited about. It's all going pretty well in that sense.

Mona West: That's exciting.

Courtney Floyd: That's so great.

Mona West: It's awesome that you've hit this point in your career and it's positive. It's been positive here on out because it does feel like it can be a whirlwind and it can be a roller coaster, and it can be a lot of emotional whiplash. It's really exciting when things come together and actually you're working with a good team and you're working on projects you're passionate about.

I want to backtrack. You said earlier that you started looking into the process for publication when you were really young. I was also one of those kids that got the publisher's marketplace tome or whatever it was when I was younger.

I was really, really ambitious back then. I was really, really sure of myself in a way that I certainly am not anymore. When I was younger, probably through my early twenties, the stuff I was writing was not particularly good, but I had a very inflated sense of its value and its quality. I think I would have, had I been actually subbing stuff would have really struggled more with rejection and failure then than I do now because I have a more realistic perception of everything.

All that to say, do you feel like you had a similar trajectory or maybe with your first querying attempts and your first subbing attempts you may have had much higher expectations, and did they become tempered as you moved through the process more? Then what was it like to reach this point at whatever new baseline of expectations you had?

M. Stevenson: Yeah, to a degree, yes. I was definitely one of those kids that got a lot of affirmation about my writing, but also looking back, I think that a lot of my writing that I was submitting was actually not that great. I'm glad that I was able to see that. One of the things, for instance, was I did writing classes in high school and they focused a lot on line-level prose and on short stories, but that's a totally different game from writing a novel where you have to have character arcs and story structure and such. That was totally missing from my first attempt at a novel.

Yeah, I think I did submit a bunch of things to literary magazines when I was a teenager. I definitely got a lot of early rejection. I think that helped as well because querying a novel was

not my first rejection by any means. I actually think that rejection got harder as I queried more because I'd been at it so long that it just felt really like it ground me down.

Mona West: What was it like then? We've already talked about this a little bit but in the fact that it's hard sometimes to celebrate the successes because there's so many bumps along the way that you become conditioned to look for the cracks and the failures. I guess without repeating a question that was already asked, when you got that initial notification that you had sold and you had sold fast, what were the first things that went through your mind? Did you feel like those little gremlins trying to break through even in that initial moment?

M. Stevenson: I think in the initial moment, no. I was actually going on a walk and it was snowing, and my agent sent me an email saying, "Do you have time for a call?" I'd heard enough stories to have a pretty good idea of what that meant, even though I was like, "No way, it's only been less than two days, there's no way." She called me while I was walking through the snowy woods, and I was just grinning like crazy the entire time. I think that my first thought was something like, "It's actually happening."

Courtney Floyd: That's such a fairytale experience.

M. Stevenson: Yeah, it was definitely a highlight.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah. You mentioned that you had braced yourself for a long time on submission, which is totally the norm. I'm wondering if you, like how you went about bracing yourself for that? Were you just prepared for the long wait? I read like every single one of -- what are they? Kate Dylan's "[Sub Stories](#)" collection of all the nightmare sub[mission] scenarios, just because I was like, "If I know all of the ways this could go horribly wrong, then I'll be prepared," which was probably not the best for my mental health.

M. Stevenson: I think my strategy and the same as for when I was querying was really to think of it as little as possible. I was prepared to be like, "I'm just not going to think about submission for a while. I'm going to focus on the next thing." I was working on revising the next book, which then I paused because I couldn't think about anything other than getting the offer. Yeah, I guess distraction.

Courtney Floyd: Nice, yeah, that's a good one. On the note of the submission process, we've asked a couple of people this, or I guess this kind of question has come up once or twice in other episodes, but do you feel like rejection felt different at the querying versus the sub phase, especially in that first submission, that earlier submission?

M. Stevenson: It does, yeah. I think that getting rejected on submission felt more like getting rejected on full requests. I don't know, I guess it's different in other ways too, because with querying, I felt more hopeless, I think, because it was just me. I felt like if it got rejected, then I could keep going and going, but there was never any guarantee. And there *isn't* a guarantee, but at least when you're on submission, you have an agent in your corner. I know for a lot of people, it's the other way around where they feel like they have more control over querying and that submission is a lot harder. For me, I found being on submission a lot easier because I was like, at least if this book fails on submission, then I'm not back to ground zero.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah. I had the same experience rejections on sub. For one thing, they're called "passes," which just feels nicer. But it did feel like much less hopeless because the book had at least gotten into editors' hands in the first place and I had an agent who had a strategy and like, yeah, I agree that it felt more in control somehow.

Mona West: A running theme that I've noticed in the few episodes that we've recorded so far is just how important it is to have a community there to support you through the process. Even though the relationship with an agent is different than a relationship to your peer debut authors and your beta readers, et cetera, et cetera, I think it still speaks to the fact that having people in your corner in any capacity really helps dull the pain of rejections. Just another reason to keep seeking out community in this work that we do.

Speaking of that, though, have you experienced any feelings of Imposter Syndrome or guilt or anything negative in relation to the deal you got and the, not to define success for you, but like the relative success that you've experienced compared to peers who've been part of your community who haven't experienced the same thing? Do you think that there's any amount of internalizing that, like, "Why am I getting this and they aren't?" I just wonder if that's something you struggle with when you've reached a point like this in your career.

M. Stevenson: Oh yeah, for sure. I don't think that Imposter Syndrome is generally something I struggle with, but guilt, like for sure, like I feel hugely guilty about having – I mean, it's a big deal, like literally. It's a lot of money. I think that feels really weird when I'm friends with people who have been struggling for just as long or who are a more talented or just as talented writer or who deserve it every bit as much as I do. They're on their third book or fifth book or even sixth book on submission and haven't gotten that success yet, or they've sold their book, but only for a very small amount. Yeah, it carries a lot of guilt for me.

Mona West: How do you grapple with that? How do you get yourself out of that mindset?

M. Stevenson: One of the things that I try to do is find ways to give back. For instance, I am a mentor for [Round Table Mentor](#), and this is my second year mentoring. Mentorship is something that I've always wanted to do. I'm also like a teacher, or at least I have been, so I think that comes naturally. I also want to look for opportunities to pass the ladder back down and help people up it, because I've been incredibly lucky. I want to try and help manufacture some of that luck for other people as well. Yeah, and I guess the other thing is I just don't really talk about the book deal, like the size of it that much because it feels a little bit weird. Money is always a little weird.

Mona West: Yeah. I can imagine it's hard to be really excited when it feels almost, in addition to whatever guilt you might be feeling, it just feels kind of taboo, like braggadocious, right, to talk about it, even if it's very much earned. It's something that you should be able to just scream off the rooftops about. Have you, I'm curious, when you have talked to people about it, has any of the concern that you have been borne out? Like, do you notice that people respond to it negatively or does it seem like it's mostly just, it's what we think is going to be the reaction, but in reality, people are excited and happy for it?

M. Stevenson: Yeah, no, when I've talked to people, they've been like, "Hell yes, I'll get the

money."

Mona West: Nice. Yeah, I second that. It just means so much of this is just in our own heads, right? We're just on this hamster wheel of self-doubt, and it doesn't even necessarily reflect the reality, but it can hold us back from really being proud of ourselves and really being loud about our successes. Even though this is all about being loud about our failures, so we should probably get back onto that topic.

Courtney Floyd: Along those lines of, other than just not talking about it, like has getting your deal changed the way that you interact in your more mixed writer communities? Because I've noticed, for example, that, one, that I want to be mindful of not always blowing up about my wins, because that feels insensitive when people are still in the middle of their struggle. But another thing that's happened for me is that it sometimes feels like if I give advice or if I beta read or critique or something, that people are more likely to take my opinions as facts. I've found myself being increasingly careful about that and really hedging my feedback.

That's just been a weird way that, it doesn't feel like I have changed at all, but suddenly my positionality in my groups has changed in a way that's hard to keep my finger on all the time. Have you experienced that at all?

M. Stevenson: I think I felt that more between querying and getting agented where when you're agented, it feels more like suddenly you're an authority, even though you're the same person.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah. Now everyone hopes that you have the secret handshake to get them an agent too, maybe, or something. But that reminds me something that I wanted to make sure that we talked a little bit about today, one of the ways that you're giving back is that you recently pulled together this really cool resource for querying authors. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

M. Stevenson: Yeah, so it's called [The Querying Hub](#). I basically found that there were a handful of links that I was sharing over and over when people asked for advice. The thought was it would be really handy to just be able to share one link. That's basically what it is, is just a compilation of all of my favorite querying resources. Then I also crowd sourced from a couple of different servers that I'm in to ask for other people's favorites as well so that I could catch some more that I wasn't aware of.

Everything on it is free. This may have been a response to a particular thing where people were saying that you had to pay like \$500 for querying services or something like that. There was a little bit of spite motivation there. It's got different pages for writing a query letter, for researching agents, for the call [with a potential agent]. There's a bunch of templates for nudging agents. There's some things on writing synopses and finding comp titles. Basically, all the stuff that you would need for querying, and it's all free.

Mona West: That is so cool. Thank you for putting that together.

M. Stevenson: Yeah, I'd love for more people to know about it. I have posted it on my social

media, but I hope that it's helpful for anyone who's querying.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah, we'll put a link in the show notes for sure and share it on our social media, too. It's really great. Nobody should be paying for querying resources.

Mona West: Yeah. One thing I've thought about a fair amount as I've started pursuing publication and all of that in earnest is that the writing community is generally bad about sharing information. It seems like there isn't really a central hub like that for all these different aspects of the process. It's made me think are we shooting ourselves in the foot because we aren't putting forth the effort to consolidate it all together and make sure that anyone who's interested can find all the resources they need in one place? Because if you're not part of a writing community, if you're just someone who loves to write, it's going to be such a challenge to find all of that. Your journey is going to be much more difficult just by virtue of the fact that you don't have easy access to everything.

This isn't so much a question as a discussion point maybe. I don't really know why it is so difficult to find information like this and why it is so scattered. I think what you're doing is incredible, and I would love to see this for everything. I had thought about putting together a spreadsheet similarly of just general writing resources, but it is a bit of a Herculean task, and maybe that's why it's been so hard, but it's, I guess it just a thought, just wondering why there isn't more emphasis on making things readily accessible to anyone. You don't need to be in the community to know this stuff exists.

M. Stevenson: Yeah, and I feel like part of it is probably that there's this weird veil of secrecy over a lot of publishing, not so much writing craft, but the actual publishing part. I feel like, for instance, whisper networks, people talk about a lot, but it's actually really hard to get hooked into those whisper networks until you already have an agent. Then suddenly when your agent is like, "Oh, of course, everybody knows about all of these red flag agents."

My experience when I got agented was, "Wait a minute, some of these were on my dream agent list. How is this a thing that everybody knows?" It's also subjective too, that it's kind of hard to say for most of them, that this is bad universally because people's experiences vary a lot. I think that's definitely a factor anyway.

Mona West: Yeah. Even [Codex](#), you have to reach a certain threshold to get into Codex, which in a way is a bit of a central hub because you can find almost any topic in there and ask people questions about these things that you may not know about, but you can't get in there until you've had a publication or you've attended one of the workshops, and the workshops are often expensive and they require a lot of time. There's all these things that you have to do in order to get that foot in the door, just to know what the heck you do next. It would be great to see that more widely available. I think your site is an awesome start in that direction.

M. Stevenson: Thank you.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah, I think also a lot of that sharing used to happen on Twitter.

M. Stevenson: That's true.

Mona West: RIP.

M. Stevenson: I think it's become harder to find information since Twitter has kind of – I mean, it's still there, obviously, but a lot of the information is not there anymore.

Mona West: You have to dig through a lot of garbage to find it.

Courtney Floyd: I think we have one more big question for you. As you mentioned, you have a [major deal](#). I'm wondering if -- it sounds like the writing communities you're in have reacted really positively, but out in the wider world, what has people's perceptions of that been? Have you found that there's a tendency toward incorrect assumptions about how you got here or what it means in your life or anything like that that you've had to navigate?

M. Stevenson: Not with regards to the deal specifically. Honestly, I think that the Publisher's Marketplace language is so jargony that most people have no idea what that even means, so I don't have people flagging me down, being like, "Hey, you got so-and-so." It's more like, it's been my experience that people who are not in the writing community who have seen the deal announcement have been like, "What does this mean?"

Courtney Floyd: It is like a secret society code.

M. Stevenson: Yeah. I don't think that the deal itself has really, like the size of it at least, has been much of a discussion outside of the communities that I'm in. That might be more of the case once the book finds its way to more readers, so we'll see.

Courtney Floyd: Yeah, fair enough.

Mona West: Do you get the sense that people who may not have seen your journey from early on to now think there weren't years behind this. There wasn't a book that didn't sell. Do some people maybe perceive this as, "Oh, you're successful right out the gate because everything leading up to it is a little bit more invisible?"

M. Stevenson: Yeah, honestly, I have no idea. I've talked a lot on my social media about having a long writing journey and long publishing journey. If you look at my stuff, that's pretty easy to find, I think, but I don't really know what somebody who doesn't know me would think.

Mona West: That's reasonable, yeah. Awesome.

Courtney Floyd: It's really great chatting with you about this roller coaster of a writing life. Could you tell our listeners where they can find you online and pitch a thing you want them to check out?

M. Stevenson: Yeah, so my debut is called *Behooved*. It is an adult fantasy rom-com or romantasy, whichever you want to call it, about a noblewoman who gets engaged to the heir of the neighboring kingdom in order to prevent a war and then accidentally turns her new husband into a horse on her wedding night, and they need to work together to unhorsify him and stop a plot against the throne. It's also, my main character has a chronic illness that's based on celiac disease, which is what I have, among other things, and it's also set in a queer

normative world.

Yeah, so that is *Behooved*. It comes out on May 20th in the US and May 22nd in the UK, and it's up for pre-order. It's on Goodreads, Storygraph, et cetera. You can find me at **M. Stevenson Books** on various social websites.

Courtney Floyd: That's awesome. I am so, so, so, so excited for *Behooved*.

Mona West: It sounds amazing.

Courtney Floyd: Everything I hear about it is amazing.

M. Stevenson: It's very fun.

Courtney Floyd: The cover. The cover is stunning.

M. Stevenson: The cover is gorgeous. I really lucked out with the cover.

Mona West: Congratulations again.

M. Stevenson: Thank you.

Mona West: Awesome.

M. Stevenson: It's weird because it's literally the dream in so many ways, and it's really, really weird to have that after a literal decade of rejection.

Mona West: Yeah.

[music: A bluesy piano progression with a distinctive drum beat, which fades into the sound of a crashing train]

[00:43:06] [END OF AUDIO]