There’s No Normal in Publishing: Stories from ‘23 YA Debuts
Kansas City Convention Center, Street Level, Room 2211
12:10-1:25 pm

Moderator: Ellen O’Clover
Description: From Twitter discourse to private group chats to varying successes, Young Adult publishing can feel like the Wild West. We oftentimes hear “There’s no normal in publishing,” but what does that mean? Is the journey from idea to publication really that different between houses? Five Young Adult authors from a range of backgrounds, genres, and publishers discuss their experiences as 2023 debuts. We’ll tackle the myths and shine a light on what happens behind the scenes from a writer’s perspective.

Housekeeping: Welcome to There’s No Normal in Publishing: Stories from ‘23 YA Debuts. A few reminders before we begin:
- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let me know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities

Intros
- I’m Ellen O’Clover (she/her), the author of Seven Percent of Ro Devereux, which came out in January 2023 with HarperCollins, and The Someday Daughter, which comes out in a couple of weeks. My debut novel, Seven Percent of Ro Devereux, is about Ro, who creates a future-predicting app based on the game MASH for her senior
I'm honored to be moderating this panel today alongside my fellow 2023 debuts, and I'm going to invite each of them to introduce themselves and their books in the order in which they're sitting.

- I'm Jenna Miller (she/her), and I write Young Adult books about fat, queer, nerdy girls who deserve to be seen and have their voices heard. My debut novel, *Out of Character* (HarperCollins), is about Cassidy Williams—a fat, nerdy lesbian juggling family drama, her first girlfriend, and senior year while having a secret online roleplaying addiction. When she realizes she has feelings for her snarky and compassionate online bestie, things get even more complicated. As Cass’s lies continue to build, she must decide what to do—be honest about her double life and risk losing her safe space, or keep it a secret and risk destroying her relationships and academic future.

- I’m Krystal Marquis (she/her). A lifelong reader, I began researching and writing on a dare to complete the NaNoWriMo Challenge, resulting in the first partial draft of my debut novel, *The Davenports* (Penguin Random House). The Davenports are one of the few Black families of immense wealth and status in a changing United States, their fortune made through the entrepreneurship of William Davenport, a formerly enslaved man who founded the Davenport Carriage Company years ago. Now the Davenports live surrounded by servants, crystal chandeliers, and endless parties, finding their way and finding love—even where they’re not supposed to.

- I’m Trang Thanh Tran (they/she), and I write scary and emotional stories for teens and adults. My debut novel, *She is a Haunting* (Bloomsbury), is about a house in Vietnam with a terrifying appetite that haunts a broken family.

- I’m Edward Underhill (he/him). I studied music composition in college and earned a masters in film music composition—now I write music by day and stories by night. My debut novel, *Always the Almost* (Macmillan), is about a trans pianist who makes a New Year’s
resolution on a frozen Wisconsin night to win regionals and win back his ex—but then a new boy complicates things.

Opening remarks:
Thank you all for joining us! In our hour or so together today, we’re going to chat about debut year. From Twitter discourse to private group chats to varying successes, Young Adult publishing can feel like the Wild West. We often hear “There’s no normal in publishing,” but what exactly does that mean? We’re going to touch on expectations, surprises, and the overall inside scoop on what it’s like to traditionally publish your first book.

Discussion questions (30-40 minutes):
1. Let’s start with the positives: what was the biggest, happiest surprise of your debut experience?
   - Connecting with other authors
   - Connecting with readers
   - In-house support
   - In-person events
   - Internal journey: growth as a creator
   - Other/misc.
2. On the flip side, what was an unexpected struggle of your debut experience?
   - The editorial letter: going from draft to final
   - In-house support
   - Social media
     - Related, the comparison game
   - Personal marketing
   - Other/misc.
3. Since each of you debuted with a different publisher, can you describe the makeup of your in-house team, how much contact you had with them, and what that relationship looked like as your debut year progressed?
   - Editor/author relationship
   - In-house marketing/publicity
   - Frequency of communication
4. What’s one thing you’d do differently if you could re-live your debut year?
   - Time management
   - Marketing strategies
   - Relationship building (with pub team, other authors, readers, etc.)
   - In-person events
   - Working on other projects
   - Other/misc.

5. What’s your top piece of advice for authors gearing up for their own debut years?
   - Self-care/balance
   - Avoiding reviews
   - Working on something new
   - Where to dedicate promo effort
   - Other/misc.

**Audience Q&A (20-30 minutes):**
We’ll end by opening the floor to audience questions.