

**Laura:** Hey, this is Laura. And today, I'm speaking with Kaleb Nation, author of the just released middle-grade novel, *Bran Hambric: The Farfield Curse*, published by Source Books. And this book is a blend of mystery, magic, thriller and humor and it's a really fun, exciting fast reads. And it's the first of a series.

And Kaleb is currently in the middle of a multi-city book tour and a huge blog tour. And if you go to his site, *KalebNation.com* -- and *Kaleb* is spelled with a *k* -- and click on the calendar page, you'll not only see his schedule for book signings, but you can also follow links to all of his blog interviews and you'll get to know all sorts of interesting stuff about this young author.

So Kaleb, thanks a lot of taking some time out of your busy schedule to talk to me today. I appreciate you being here.

**Kaleb:** Hi! Thanks so much for having me here.

**Laura:** It's really unusual for a first-time author to go on a book tour right after his book is published and such an extensive tour at that, a *live* book tour, which is something that is not being done as much as in the past. What have the crowds been like at your appearances?

**Kaleb:** They've been wonderful. At the schools, we've had maybe three hundred or so kids at every school. Then with the bookstores, I'd say anywhere between thirty and fifty people showing up, so it's been a good turn-out.

**Laura:** That is an *amazing* turn-out. I mean, even authors who have been published and have a track record are thrilled to get that many people at their appearances.

**Kaleb:** Oh, yeah. It's wonderful.

**Laura:** If my listeners read some of your blog interviews or go to your site, they're going to learn your really interesting story that you started writing this book when you were fourteen, wrote it during your teen years and then, got an agent and got it published by the time you were twenty. And by the way, happy birthday! I know you just turned twenty-one. And now, you're well on your way to becoming a famous author. So, right there, most of my listeners are jealous right now.

**Kaleb:** Thank you.

**Laura:** *Bran Hambric* just hit the *Mountains & Plains* Independent Bookseller's bestseller list last week, which is really pretty much driven by word of mouth and fans talking of the books to their friends. And it really helped land your book on this bestseller list. So, can you talk a little bit about your path to how you got here.

**Kaleb:** Well, when I was thirteen years old -- maybe I was thirteen -- I basically just asked my parents if I could call up the local radio station and volunteer because I heard they were looking for volunteers. So, I called them up. And the manager sounded interested. So, me and my brother and my Dad were down there. We did an audition for a few minutes and they got us on the air. So, we did this show every other week on this radio station in Austin for a little while. And then, after that, I was still interested in radio, but we couldn't drive into Austin because we moved, so

I started my own show from my bedroom. And I would record the show on my computer and I'd have a microphone hanging in the closet, because the closet was more sound-proof. And I'd record the show and every week, I'd put it online to like a password-protected website. And all these radio stations would sign up and download it. So, I had I think it was twenty-five stations all over the country and there was some international and satellite, FM, AM, every type of radio, they will play it at their show.

So, I did radio for a while. And during time while I was doing that show, I was still writing *Bran Hambric*. So, I kind of [was] doing two things at the same time. And then, after radio -- I was in radio for a little while. And then, I slowly started getting out of it when I was nineteen. And I started focusing more in YouTube.com. So, I moved from radio into YouTube, yeah.

**Laura:** Yup. And now, can you tell us about *TwilightGuy.com*?

**Kaleb:** Oh, yeah. *TwilightGuy.com*, that was a really big thing for me. It was on -- I think, I believe it was April 18<sup>th</sup> and it was like a Wednesday night in 2008, it was last year and I just -- I had been blogging about Twilight stuff on my normal blog at *KalebNation.com*, I was just kind of mentioning Twilight and saying things. And every time Twilight or Stephanie Meyer, all these people would come in and comment on the blog post. And I didn't know why. There was something that just had these people just so interested every time there was news.

So, I thought, "Well, I need to read these books and find out why they're so crazy about it." And I said, "Well, what I'll do is I'll start a blog called *TwilightGuy.com* and I'll do a review of each chapter as I read it so that other people that are wondering why everyone was so crazy about these books, well they can just read my site and they'll find out why everyone loves it."

So, I started blogging and then, the first day I started the website and I thought, "Nah! This isn't a good idea. I'll take it down tomorrow", but then, the next morning, I woke up and three thousand people had already read it just overnight. They had somehow find it.

And so, I thought, "Well, I'll do it." So, I started blogging and I blogged some little bit. And three days later, Stephanie Meyer herself who wrote the books found out about me and she blogged about me on her website saying that I had -- she had laughed so much at the story that I had written all that.

So, that's what really got me started there. And it got about -- it was usually 10,000 - 15,000 hits a day. People would read my blog posts. I got to go to the film premiere. I've met Stephanie. I've met all the stars from the movie. And it's just been a wonderful experience, getting to meet with this entirely new fan domain, getting to be involved in it when I've never, ever expected to be a part. So, it was a great experience.

And the thing about *TwilightGuy.com* is that it kind of inadvertently served as an introduction to my own writing style because a lot of the people that read the *TwilightGuy.com* and enjoyed the post there, they've realized that since I'm the same person that wrote *Bran Hambric* that they might also enjoy my real writing and my book. So, it was like a free introduction to my writing style that way even though I [inaudible 00:05:51] to be that.

**Laura:** Well, exactly. And I was thinking that when I was looking over the *Twilight Guy* site. It's that a lot of the audiences are crossover because it's similar genres. Though, the Twilight books are for a slightly older audience, but the interest might crossover with your book.

And I think that it really -- it's a great example of how having a presence out there on the web on some way is going to get your name out there and it doesn't necessarily -- it's not necessarily like you're blogging about the book you're writing, but just like you said, putting yourself out there, it's an intro to who *you* are and your writing style.

**Kaleb:** Right.

**Laura:** Do you think that since you are basically not that much removed from the middle-grade and young adult readers that a lot of people are trying to reach, can you talk a little bit about the importance of the Internet to your generation. And what kind of role this plays in the everyday lives of teenagers these days?

**Kaleb:** Well, the Internet plays an *enormous* role in the lives of teenagers right now and middle-grade readers, as well. The thing about being online is that kids are online so much these days and they have an online presence. Well, that's [inaudible 00:07:05] that they can look at and that they can connect with you. It's a big part of your own personal marketing for yourself and for your books because I know that most of the success from Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga came from the fact that there were fan sites and that she had a MySpace and she had a website. And so, all these fans that enjoyed her books, they would in turn go and make their own websites and they'd promote it like what I did with *TwilightGuy.com* or *TheTwilightLexicon.com* and all of that.

And so, by having all of this entire online Internet fan-dom, you kind of organize all the fans in one place. So, if they want the music and go get it there, whereas if you don't have a website and if you don't have all of these things going on for you online, there's really no organization. There's no way to spread the word. There's no way to get the fans organized and get them together. And it's really important if you want your books to be popular to find a way to group your fans together because once they see that there are more people like them, that there are more kids out there who are enjoying the same stuff, then they start to get more into it. Then, they tell their friends because they want their friends to be involved in the group, as well.

I know for a fact that *that* was one of the biggest thing that got Stephanie Meyer really big especially with *TwilightMoms.com* because Moms from all over the world, they had this feeling that they were the only person who knew what Twilight was. And when they go online to *TwilightMoms.com* and see there are 35,000 other Moms out there that are enjoying there, well then they feel like getting their other Mom-friends in there. They feel like joining the group and talking the book up, then promoting it and all that. It just gets people involved in their own little movement, which is one of the biggest and most important thing about being online if marketing your book.

**Laura:** That's a really good point. That's really a good point. Feeling like you're joining a group of like-minded people is really important.

**Kaleb:** Right.

**Laura:** Now, how do they find you? I mean, people always ask me that. So, I put a blog out there, but how is my audience going to find it.

**Kaleb:** Well, they find me -- I have a lot of different avenues that I go through because I do a lot of YouTube videos. And YouTube was a really big thing for me because I have almost 40,000 who's subscribed there. And I just -- with YouTube, I can spread the word in videos. When people search certain things, they can find my videos that way and they follow the links to my website.

*TwilightGuy.com* was really driven by the Twilight fan-dom accepting me in. Like they helped promote me. *The Twilight Lexicon* mentioned a lot of times. [*Inaudible* 00:09:23] mentioned me a ton of times. And those are like the biggest Twilight fan sites there are. And especially with Stephanie Meyer's little endorsement of me, that helped to make me legit.

And it just -- things start building. People start telling their friends. And I start going to events. And at the events, people find out about the websites. And it just kept growing and growing.

But one of the things that -- people can find you on Google if you do your websites well. And you have it really have search terms for like young adult authors and they search your name that way. But it's just a big thing of interlinking your websites. And for example, on your YouTube videos, you also link to your Twitter account and then, your Twitter account links to your main websites. And they can follow the link through and find out more and more about you like a little miniature online adventure.

**Laura:** And how much time does this take you? I know you're a writer. How much time away from your writing does all of this promotional stuff take?

**Kaleb:** Well, I probably -- I would say I do maybe three to four hours a day online stuff and that's mostly emails and just updating blogs and updating Twitter and filming videos and editing and all that because there are a lot of stuff going on. So, I just have to spread it out through all these different websites.

It used to be a lot more because I was running *TwilightGuy.com* very actively over the past year and a half, but since I've finished most of my work with *TwilightGuy.com*, it kind of slow down because there's less news and stuff. So, it varies depending on what time of year it is. But I'd say maybe three to four hours, but that's because I'm very, very involved. And those other people probably don't need to spend that much time. They might need to spend maybe an hour in total spread out over the day.

**Laura:** You have a lot of really great stuff on your site, videos and all sorts of stuff. If someone wanted to just have basically a very basic website with writing and a blog that they maybe update every day, do you think that's sufficient?

**Kaleb:** For some people, it is. For some people, it is sufficient because I know that Stephanie Meyer had a MySpace account. She had a MySpace and a website and that was pretty much it. And she didn't update her MySpace very often, but it was enough just to have a presence there because her fans love getting any updates they could from Stephanie.

For some people, that works well for. If you really want to have success and you want to be active in it, you have to put a lot of effort into it and especially in the beginning to build it up because I know now I don't have to blog every day anymore and I don't have to post something every single day because I've already found the people. I've already found the audience and they're already there. And they're spreading the word for me now.

So, once you get it all established and you have a good foundation, then you can let down and just keep it up and keep doing what you were doing before without taking as much time as you were.

**Laura:** Let's switch gears for just a second here and talk a little bit about your writing process. You started this book when you were so young. And I'm sure you matured quite a bit as a writer as you were working on it. And then, you went through the whole editing. What are some of the most important things that you think you learned about writing middle-grade in the whole process?

**Kaleb:** Well, with middle-grade [inaudible 00:12:25] writing, I had to learn that when you're writing, there aren't really that many big rules. You can use your imagination as much as you want in these stories because when I first started writing on *Bran Hambric*, I struggled for so long with the idea of creating the world that was just like our own, except had magic in it. Like for some reason, I felt like, "That just can't happen. That doesn't happen inside of books." But usually whenever something just doesn't happen inside of books, that's the book that needs to be written because that means no one has taken that story idea yet.

So, I wanted to write a story that was like that, that I can invent anything that I wanted it. And that's just -- that's one of the things that it took me a long time to get used to, but I finally did. And I always taught other writers that if you can just use your imagination and let your mind go and let yourself write the story that you want to without other people hindering you or without hindered by these so-called *rules* of writing, then you can write a wonderful story that way.

**Laura:** And the character of Bran Hambric, when you were creating this protagonist, did you put any of yourself into him? Or what did you base him on?

**Kaleb:** I think unintentionally Bran turned out a lot like me. Whenever I was writing, I was trying very hard to not base him off of me and to make him different from me, but as I was writing it -- it took me five or six years to really get his character down and before I knew him well. He was the character that took the longest, which was bad because he was my main character, but it took a long time. And then, whenever I realized, probably about maybe -- right a year before it was published, I realized that I was struggling, *fighting* with who Bran really was because Bran was really similar to me just intrinsically, just similar to me that way. And I was trying to change that when I shouldn't have been.

So, whenever I really let Bran's character go and I started letting him be similar to me in certain ways and similar to me in his own sort of way, he just came out a lot better. And I think that part of Bran -- like Bran, he enjoys doing drawing and that's the way he makes sense of the world around him and that's very comparable to me in writing. Like I write in the same -- it's for the same reasons, *almost* the same reasons that Bran draws. So, he has all these very similar parts to me, but he's not an exact copy.

**Laura:** And when you submitted this to the agent, did you say in your cover letter that you were a teenager or did you keep that secret until they judged your book?

**Kaleb:** I did. I told them that. I remember mentioning -- I told them the story about how I started writing it because I was fond of the story, which is interesting, that I started writing on 3-3-03, which is March 03, 2003. I thought that's a little porky thing that they might enjoy. So, I wrote the note that I started when I was fourteen years old and it worked out really well because a lot of them, they would reach me a lot. But then, some of them were like -- actually, I'm sure they refused me because they didn't want another kid authored. [Inaudible 00:15:16] how that would work out. But yeah, I told them.

**Laura:** Right. And so, you did have some rejections before you got your agent then?

**Kaleb:** Yes. I had a lot of rejections. I'd say anywhere between forty and eighty rejections. But the number of rejections, a lot of that was because I was doing email queries. And with email queries, it's very easy to reject someone. You just hit *reply* and reject it. So...

**Laura:** Well, that's actually encouraging for people to hear that you got that many rejections and you kept going.

**Kaleb:** Yeah.

**Laura:** What kept you going in the face of all that rejection?

**Kaleb:** It was just my dream. I had always dreamed of being an author. That's what I wanted most of all. And I was so driven to become an author. I wanted to be an author very early in life because I looked up people like Christopher Paolini who wrote books when he was young and got published like when he was like twenty, as well. I wanted to be published like that. I wanted to start off young and I wanted to start off young. And I wanted my stories to be out when I was at a close age to the readers that I was writing for because I felt like that I could connect with them much easier that way.

And I was just driven by this dream. I wanted to be published so that kept me going all the way especially after spending five or six years writing this book. I was like, "I need this -- I need some pay-off for this. I need to get this book published."

**Laura:** Well, your perseverance is certainly a great example for everybody listening.

**Kaleb:** Thank you.

**Laura:** So, what's next for you after you're done with your tour? Are you working on the next book in the *Bran Hambric* series?

**Kaleb:** Yes, I am. I'm actually working on the sequels from wow! I am out in hotels and on airplanes. I've been writing on the sequel. And I'm trying to finish -- I need to wrap it up within the next three months and finish the story. So, I'll be working on that.

**Laura:** Great! Great! Well, I encourage everyone to go to *KalebNation.com*. Look at the calendars, scheduled events and see if Kaleb's coming to your town because it would be a really wonderful experience to go see him in person.

**Kaleb:** Yeah. I also wanted to mention that while I'm on tour for the people who can't come and see me, I am posting on Twitter -- a lot of times a day, I have photos from all the stops and videos and all that. So, anyone who wants to keep up with me on tour, they can follow me at [Twitter.com/KalebNation](https://twitter.com/KalebNation). And *Kaleb* is with a *k*.

**Laura:** Great! And your website too has a lot of great videos. I really feel like I'm *there* on tour with you when I follow you, which I'm sure is what you want.

**Kaleb:** Mm-hmmm. I hope.

**Laura:** So, it's been fun just tracking your progress. So well, good luck to you, Kaleb. Thank you so much for talking to me and we'll look forward to the next book. And I look forward to tracking your career over many, many years. I think you've got a great future ahead of you.

**Kaleb:** Oh! Thank you so much. And thank you for having me on the show.

**Laura:** Bye.

**Kaleb:** Alright. Good bye.