

EPISODE 64: FROM COMIC BOOK HERO TO INDIE AUTHOR – WITH 2000 AD'S PAT MILLS

Speaker 1: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a bestseller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast, with Mark and James. We're back, looking remarkably similar to last time if you're watching on YouTube, but most people of course aren't watching on YouTube, so I shall stop referencing what the place looks like.

Mark Dawson: Stop talking about visuals. It's all in the audio.

James Blatch: It's all in there, theater of the mind podcast. We're talking comic books this week, which is a bit of departure for us, Mark, isn't it? I suspect you are a little bit of a comic book guy.

Mark Dawson: I am, yeah. This is a really cool interview. The background is, we obviously have lots of students in our various courses and one student in particular contacted me three or four months ago now, took up the 101 course and said that she was learning loads and had a few questions for me so I was happy to answer.

And then as an addendum, she said, "Oh by the way, I'm the wife of Pat Mills. He is the creator of 2000 A.D." It's probably more a British thing than a worldwide thing, but it still is a really big comic, famous mostly for characters like Judge Dredd.

James Blatch: "I am the law!"

Mark Dawson: That's very good, James, and not remotely scary. You're more of the Sylvester Stallone version than the Karl Urban version. So yeah, couple of movies have been spun out of that. Loads and loads of other really great and influential comic strips have been in 2000 A.D. It's also published work by people like Alan Moore who did Watchmen and League of Extraordinary Gentlemen and all that kind of stuff.

My brother was a massive 2000 A.D. fan and he's actually got every single one of ... It's been published, 40 years basically it's been going for, he's got every single episode all the way back to the first one.

Jonathan Ross is a very big fan, and I was into a comic called Crisis that he did about 20 years ago that was really political. Pushed lots of boundaries, really interesting piece of work. Anyway, Pat has moved into ... He still does comics but he's moved also into novels, and he's got a novel that he put together and it's released, and Lisa I think, from what I can gather is handling the marketing and the production side of things for Pat while he actually does the creation.

So to know that she was involved and also he was involved in the course was an opportunity that I felt was too good to miss, and we don't go beyond books too often but this is really good chance to talk about creativity and storytelling and all of those kinds of things, and how things have changed over time, so I thought it was a great chance to get Pat on the podcast, and I haven't actually heard the interview yet, so I'm looking forward to listening to it and then we can have a chat afterwards.

James Blatch: I'm just going to mention before we get into the podcast that Lisa contacted us afterwards and said that Pat would be delighted to give three signed copies of his new book Serial Killer as a prize for us, so stay tuned after the interview, we'll give away the URL to enter that contest to win potentially a Pat Mills signed novel. Let's hear from Pat.

Pat, thank you so much indeed for joining us on the Self Publishing Formula podcast. We're really delighted to have you here, especially as we are schoolboys at heart. I just said "schoolboys," that's a terrible cliché about comic reading, isn't it? Because I think the average age of the comic reader is older than that now.

Pat Mills: A lot older, yeah.

James Blatch: Let's start at the beginning. We're going to talk about where you are now. We're going to talk about the industry and I know it's not all a happy glowing picture and you've made some decisions recently.

What I'd like to do if, you don't mind, is start a little bit with the Pat Mills story and go back to, I guess back in the 1970s, with A.D. 2000.

How did you get started? How did this career that you have become quite famous in, how did it all begin?

Pat Mills: Well, British comics sold in huge quantities. This is back in the 1970s with sales figures that would make us all absolutely salivate today. You're talking about for example, a girls' comic like Tammy could sell maybe 22,000 copies a week.

There's a paradox here, because whilst these comics sold in huge numbers, the people who work for them often didn't actually like them very much. Now there are complex reasons for that, but basically because they weren't creator-owned, so the emphasis became on speed. In other words, knocking stuff out.

I came along into this industry and I actually liked the industry, if you like, as such. So it was possible to rise to the top of the heap quite quickly, as long as you have that one thing that we all need as creators, which is to like what you're doing and like the audience you're working for, and as a result, I became pretty successful at what I was doing.

James Blatch: You mentioned Tammy there, and we can remember one or two of the other ... There was obviously things out there that are kind of being rebooted at the moment, I used to read things, but what you started writing was very different from that, wasn't it?

It was a lot more adult-orientated you would say, or older teenage orientated.

Pat Mills: It was and it wasn't. I think the trend in British comics had in the past, if you like, to be a little patronizing, a little middle class, but the most successful comic strips have always had what, for want of another term, could be called "a working class flavor."

Raw, hard-hitting, subversive. That's basically what I was writing, and I think initially at least, probably not that far outside the original age range, but it had a much more lasting appeal if you like, because we weren't talking to the readers.

I think we're all familiar with the truism that a good story can be read by people from any age group. So that's what happened. The stories had a kind of edginess, a hard-hitting quality, which was not necessarily making them too adult for children.

For example, when I started 2000 A.D., believe it or not there were readers as young as 5 or 6, as well as readers 16 and upwards. I guess that's the thing to aim for, a comic or a book with a very large age appeal.

James Blatch: We should say it wasn't without controversy though, those early attempts to shift the market a little.

I think at least one of your titles got closed down fairly early or within a couple years of starting?

Pat Mills: Yeah, absolutely. The thing was that the stories, up until the mid-'70s on the boys' comics side, were old-fashioned. They were antique. They didn't feature anyone ever getting killed.

So along I come with a war comic and then a kind of street comic called Action, and inevitably, it's how far do you go? What happened in that instance, things if you went out of hand, but it's almost inevitable when you have a comic revolution that there will be casualties.

With 2000 A.D. I think we got it right because we could escape into science fiction and we could say, "Well, these aren't real people. They're actually robots or cyborgs or whatever." I wouldn't call the action we had gratuitous, but it was certainly shocking by comparison with what had gone before.

James Blatch: I think the graphic novel probably has a longer history than this, but really what you were doing has paved the way for the modern resurgence of graphic novels and where we are today. I guess, is that where you are today as well?

You're more comfortable with what we would describe and see as the graphic novel than the comic book?

Pat Mills: I think comic books have evolved into graphic novels, and here's the thing, just to give you an idea. If you consider for example, the circulation of 2000 A.D. when it began was just over 200,000 copies a week.

Today a graphic novel is going to sell between 1000 to maybe 5000 copies per volume. Now they have a much much higher cover price, but the reality is these books are not reaching as wide an audience as they should. There are various excuses for why that is.

There's the premise that comics have increasingly appealed to an older age group and that kids today are interested in computer games and other

things other than comics. That's because we failed them. It's simply not true that kids are no longer interested in comics. We just haven't supplied them with the right comics and the proof of that, if you like, you can see in France where they have what they call bande dessinée, beautiful comic books that appeal across the ages.

So you know, the British industry is in a strange place I think, but the audience is as strong as ever. As you may know, there are comic conventions in almost every town now. There's a tremendous desire for this material, but for the most part, the British industry isn't delivering for one very simple reason. The books are not creator-owned.

In France where they are creator-owned, you get writers and artists who will spend years sometimes creating a book, but in Britain, it tends to be ... Just as when I first entered the industry, tends to be about speed. In other words, how quickly can you produce a story?

For instance, one very famous writer, when I first met him in the 1970s, he said, "My name's so-and-so and I earn more money than the British prime minister." Which was quite bizarre, and I'm sure that wouldn't be the case today, but he was writing so many stories in a day.

And he said, "How many stories can you write in a day?" And I said, "Well, I'm not even sure I can write one in a day." And he said, "Well, that's no good. You've got to ..." That principle of not caring. It's a miracle that a number of us still quality work, which is still remembered and is still ongoing, such as 2000 A.D.

James Blatch: You mentioned France. How does Japan's market then compare with that, because my impression of Japan is it's got a very healthy comic book history and culture.

But they are all quite corporate-owned, aren't there? I mean, manga is a company that is vast.

Pat Mills: Yeah, Japan ... On the manga side, girls' comics experienced a brief renaissance with manga. I get the feeling that that's been and gone in Britain, because we are a very insular nation and we do like particular kinds of stories.

In Europe, manga is still very very strong. And of course, what they often produce are these huge books, and that must be because of the sales returns on it and the way manga is set up.

Basically, Japan is number one in the world. France is number two. France is the second biggest producer of comics. I mean, I've worked for France and it has its challenges but they do produce beautiful books. America is number three, and the majority of American comic books are superhero and would be Marvel, DC, or Dark Horse.

James Blatch: Let me take you back a little bit to how you work because I think people would be interested to hear about this.

I know you worked with a partner on A.D. 2000 and Judge Dredd for instance as a character, but my understanding is you actually did a lot of the early development work of Judge Dredd and the guy we know today is the guy that you created in those early stories.

For a start, how do you approach the beginning of that?

How do you decide what you're going to be doing in a comic book and how does that differ from perhaps a lot of our audience who write novels, will write a single novel, possibly a series?

Pat Mills: Okay, well I'll briefly take you through Judge Dredd. What happened was a writing colleague of mine said that he wanted to do a cop story about a really extreme cop that would be a kind of satire, if you like. He came up with this basic idea.

He then wrote some scripts which didn't really work for me. We worked on a combined version which went to the artist Carlos Ezquerro. Carlos came back with a very futuristic cop, much more futuristic than either of us had envisaged, so John said, "Oh no, I don't like that guy. He looks like a Spanish pirate."

But I felt that the guy looked right. This often happens in ... Well it certainly happens in comics all the times, where people make errors of judgment in the heat of the moment. In other words, they visualize something in their minds and this possibly happens more with comics than with ... Well it must happen, by comparison, with a text novel because you have an image of how you want your secret agent to look, how you want your super cop to look.

And so then I wrote what I felt would be the right story for Judge Dredd and then I wasn't happy with that. We all of us as writers go through this process of first, second, third and fourth draft.

Meanwhile, my colleague John had said he didn't want anything more to do with the character because he didn't like the way it looked. And the artist had gone as well, and the artist has said because of rights situation, that he didn't want to draw Judge Dredd.

So what I had was, I had a great character and no writer and no artist because the original creative team had left, and I went through various versions and I put it out to a number of creators, and I wasn't happy with their results.

And then one version came back where it had elements in it that I'd missed and John had missed and we'd all missed, and I thought, "That's what we need. It makes the character more heroic." And so I used an element from this guy's story, plus my own story and that's how Judge Dredd emerged. It's a very complex process which probably couldn't happen today because we are much more aware of the importance of our role as creators, but

back then, there weren't even any bylines on the stories. So when Judge Dredd appeared, no one had any idea who wrote it and that was the norm. It's part of the rather prehistoric background of British comics, and although things are much better today, we still bear a certain legacy from that era.

So that was how Judge Dredd came into being. I knew he would be very very successful with the readers because we got a lot of feedback from them in their letters. We had what was called a popularity poll. Probably not that different from the kind of graphs you get on ebook sales, and so you could actually see which stories the readers liked and which episodes.

As long as you paid attention to reader feedback, you could end up with saying, "Okay, this is what they're looking for," and inevitably what the readers were looking for was an extreme character.

James Blatch: When you write the stories, do you do little sketches, sort of stick men sketches and that's how you write. Or do you imagine each frame?

Or do you just write in text and just wait to see how the guy's gonna compose the frames and so on?

Pat Mills: Neither of those, actually. I'd say it's remarkably similar to a screenplay, except that in a film screenplay, invariably the descriptions of the characters are not that comprehensive.

For a comic strip, the descriptions can be quite massive. I think if anyone was really curious about this, an extreme example would be my colleague Alan Moore's scripts which are novel-length. Each picture, he might describe exactly where the armchair is in the room, the color of the room and so forth.

But for me, I tend to approach it like a screenplay, because it has to have a flow, a sequential speed about it which has so many similarities to a movie, and in some respects differs from a novel where unless you've got a real page-turner, you don't perhaps get that sense of movement quite so strongly.

James Blatch: Let's move a bit more up to date then. Let me ask you a question, because the area you're in is an area that people can feel very passionate about and vocational rather than a commercially orientated and typically will just start and want to be a part of the comic book industry.

Is it possible in 2017 for somebody starting out to get involved in comic books and make a successful commercial career out of it?

Pat Mills: The short answer would probably be no, not in Britain. If they wanted to work for Marvel or DC, they could probably do well financially. If they were an artist as well as a writer, that would increase their chances, but by and large it's very very difficult to get anywhere in comics today.

The one exception perhaps might be France. One would have to have some connections with the industry there, but I think the proof of what I'm saying is that I think in the last 15 years, I cannot think of a leading writer who has come out from nowhere and entered the industry and done very well.

Artists, yes. That's different again, but for a writer or a writer/artist, very very difficult. I think you'd have to go back probably to the 1990s and of course the famous examples would be Neil Gaiman, Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, and in each case you would be going back to the 1980s.

I wish I could be more positive about it. It sounds so negative, and it's an industry that I'm full of enthusiasm for, and there are some things that can happen but they happen so randomly that it would be foolish to mislead people.

For example, a number of comic books get made into movies and arguably they are more likely to get made into a film or at least be film optioned than a text novel, because Hollywood producers have a short attention span. They look at a comic book and they say, "Ah, I get it."

So yeah, a number of comic books do get optioned as movies and that's one way where you can make a living, but there's a lot of disappointments in that area. I finally had a movie gone forward and now it's in, after ... It's been put together. It's called Accident Man. So fingers crossed that's finally gonna happen, but they do take a lot of work.

James Blatch: You must have had a few false starts on the movies. I mean, you can't go into a cinema now without tripping over another comic book character who's being put onto the big screen, but there's always been a bit of a thirst for that in cinema.

I'd guess you've had a lot of dealings with the movie industry over the years and probably a few dead ends?

Pat Mills: Absolutely. I've had any number of characters optioned for film. Accident Man I think was optioned about three times and it's only on this fourth time that it's gone through the production process and they're now at the editing stage. It's a film starring Scott Adkins, martial arts actor.

Yeah, it's tricky and I think for anyone who's going down that road, the thing to always avoid ... Which must surely apply to all of us, but ... Hollywood producers will try on, they'll ask for a shopping agreement.

In other words, they want your intellectual property for free and they want the right to shop it around the studios, which ... As in anything in life, if you get it for free, it's not valued.

You have to charge a good going rate and yeah, there's an awful lot of sharks in Hollywood, but after a while you get quite good at spotting them,

seeing what they're like and you kind of enjoy the conflict. Or at least I have, anyway.

James Blatch: That chimes very nicely with the advice that Cal Moriarty who's quite experienced in this area gave as well recently.

Now you mentioned Neil Gaiman earlier. Mark sat next to Neil on BBC Front Row, a program you've been on recently, and Neil gave a quote which I think will live long in our industry, which is if he was starting out today he would be independently publishing himself. He would turn down traditional deals because he's completely sold on the indie publishing world, and I think this is an area that you're coming to quite enthusiastically now as well.

Pat Mills: Absolutely, and I'm really encouraged that Neil said that. I mean, considering he's such an established author in the conventional publishing, that's really good to hear.

The reason for it is that, the attraction for comics for me for a long while was that they were dynamic. In other words, I could sit down, I could create a story, find an artist and it could be out there in print in a matter of three or four months. Today it can take, and has taken ... I'm embarrassed to reveal this, really ... It can take three or four years sometimes.

In other words, the artist says, "Yes, I want to draw this," and then he sits on it for a year or two years and so on. In that sense, it can take longer than a movie.

I think this is one of the reasons I've become quite frustrated with the industry and I like the idea of being able to turn things round, so to give you an example of this, the first text novel I've written recently, Serial Killer. What happened was, I had the idea for turning it into a novel for maybe a year or so, but it was only in June or July last year that I decided to write it

and to get it out, published in time for 2000 A.D.'s 40th birthday event, and we made the deadline.

So that was like, from June or July last year up until the end of January this year. Now if I'd gone to a conventional publisher, even if they had looked at the material positively ... And there'd be no guarantee that they would because more and more publishers are all these wonderful conventional traditional names, they're all owned by maybe one transnational now, and therefore they have a certain style and tone to them.

But even if they had given me the green light, I suspect they would have said, "Okay, we'll put it in for next year or perhaps even the year after." I'm quoted on some of my other projects, publishers are saying, "Oh yeah, we might be able to fit you in in 2018." And that just seems such a slow, long-winded way of doing things.

Plus the other experience with conventional publishing which I've had and I'm sure other authors have as well: A publisher will take you on and you think, "Well that's fantastic, great." And then you realize that you are basically ballast at the bottom of their line and that the majority of their line is one or two, maybe three or four top selling authors at the top, and you're just there and they're not really gonna market you.

Whereas how we've done it, and it seems to have worked so far, is we're responsible for our own marketing. We're responsible for our own quality control. We put the book out to formatters and so on, so if things go wrong, we've only got ourselves to blame, because that's the thing that traditionally authors often do is spend all their time complaining about publishers, with good reason.

I like the idea of, we're responsible for the whole package. It can be tough and it would have been impossible to have done without my wife. In other words, she takes care of the business side and I have the easy part which is just sitting down and writing fiction.

But I think it is the way to go and I am in awe of all you guys. I mean it's your examples that we followed. In other words, we listened to your podcasts and we looked things up online and we thought, "Hey, this is the way to go," and it's got energy behind it, and that surely what must be what it's all about.

James Blatch: Yeah, there's definitely an energy and a esprit de corps, and it's a fun movement to be a part of at the moment in publishing and it's great to hear you talking about it so enthusiastically.

Pat Mills: You are all happy, and that is remarkable. I've tried to sort of shield that part but British companies aren't really that happy a place for the most part and it is noticeable what a great sense of community you guys have, and so one is automatically drawn to that. It makes it very attractive.

James Blatch: So your text novels, Pat. Is there a crossover with the style of comic book writing?

Pat Mills: There probably will be. The first one is a black comedy actually about the world of comics. It started off as a sitcom for the BBC years ago, and the producer at the BBC greenlit it and then his boss turned it down.

But we always felt that the world of comics was a colorful and humorous place, so I decided to novelize this sitcom. It's basically a black comedy. But I think, although it's part of a series, it's book one of four, once again following a lot of the ground rules that we picked up from you guys, that series are a good idea.

Looking beyond it, I would definitely do an adventure science fiction series probably thereafter, and of course the influence of comics is bound to come into it. I'm sure the story will be fast-moving, but there's all kinds of things that I can do in a text novel that is quite rough to do in a comic strip because the artist can only produce three pages a week. Maybe four, five

pages if he's fast. So there's a wealth of detail that you can get into a text novel that you can't into a comic strip. Otherwise the artist would be drawing forever.

Those are all possibilities to explore, and the one that I must mention above all others because there may well be some of your listeners that are thinking in this direction and I would encourage them. Although it would appear that boys' comics are the most well-known and the most successful, in fact surprise surprise, girls' comics outsold boys' comics by two-to-one.

They disappeared because of apathy within the industry for the reasons I've already given, but they were outselling boys' comics by two to one. Now that won't come as a surprise to you and to many of your listeners because women have always read more than men, and a lot of those themes that were in girls' comics can be adapted into text novels for the YA audience and perhaps older.

The examples I would give would be the Hunger Games for example. That's a typical girls' comic, in terms of its quite harsh, it's got fantastic elements, but it's not about big guns. It's about emotions, it's about feelings and so on.

I would say that there is not just a gap in the market, I would say there's a chasm in the market where female mystery and adventure fiction, perhaps aimed at that YA audience ...

I know there are some books that fill that category, but where girls' comics were concerned, we were covering endless numbers of them with a comic I started called Misty which was kind of like scaled down Steven King, that kind of material. So that's an area that I think I would probably return to myself, but rather than as a comic strip, to say, "Okay, let's try and do something for the YA audience."

But perhaps harder and perhaps with a more raw energy than some of those YA books which can be ... Forgive me, I can't think of another word really, but a little "middle class," a little too smooth. The kind of thing I'm thinking of is more Grange Hill, that kind of raw tone to it.

James Blatch: I remember some of the breakout really from that era. In the '60s and the '70s, there was a counterculture in the '60s but it took a long time to really come through to things like comic books and TV series. That was the '70s where we started to see sort of more gritty stuff.

It woke me up as a child born in 1967 who got taken to the cinema to see One of Our Dinosaurs is Missing or this tawdry, boring, boring. And then suddenly, mid-'70s it started to get more interesting and more exciting for us all.

Pat Mills: That's a perfect analysis of where comics were and the energy that I think we can claim for new generations.

James Blatch: Pat, it's been fascinating talking to you, I'm really excited to hear about your next stage. I feel a little bit sad about the industry.

You mentioned the sitcom. Actually there was a sitcom called Spaced, you might remember it, in the 1990s on British television with Simon Pegg and he was a struggling comic book artist and in that series, the comic book industry was portrayed as bitter, desperate and dark. Pretty much everything you said backs that up.

Pat Mills: I have to interrupt you there and say, the produce of Spaced, Gareth Edwards, was the producer who took an interest in Serial Killer and liked it, obviously because he has an affection for comics. That's where we came from, yeah.

James Blatch: Dogstar Comics with ... Yes. I remember it well, but it was obviously a satire of it, and I think probably comes from the same sort of place that you come from as well.

Pat Mills: Simon Pegg, like so many people, he grew up reading 2000 A.D., and there's so many people in the media today, Edgar Wright, Jonathan Ross and so forth, who grew up reading these comics and they still have an affection for them today.

I think if it is possible to capture some of that flavor in text novels, I think it can be well-received. If you think for example of Grange Hill, the opening credits have a comic book theme. So I think if it's possible to just have a comic book echo in either the cover or the title or whatever.

Some of your listeners could actually be drawing on that energy, because it is very ... I think you summed it up so well by saying it was gritty, and it's that grittiness that perhaps isn't even properly catered for today.

James Blatch: Yeah, and I think Hunger Games is a good example of where that is beginning to happen. How huge was the Hunger Games?

And then a lot of the stuff around it has actually gone back a little bit to being quite moderated and a little bit softer. Hunger Games actually does have quite an edge to it. Children are being killed in that.

It goes back to a Lord of the Flies type thing, and Lord of the Flies is something that again stands out as an outlier but why was that an outlier? Because that actually was an amazing book, and yet decades go through and you get the kind of, polite and let's be polite to the children.

Pat Mills: Yeah. I went to the cinema and I observed the audience of Hunger Games, and they were predominately young women. Maybe somewhere between 18 to 25, something like that, often on their own or with a friend. It was quite remarkable to see that.

The thing I would say as well is that there are very precise rules to writing girls' mystery, action, or science fiction stories. An example that I shall never forget, is the film *Never Let Me Go*, which appears to be a girls' comic type mystery, but isn't. Basically it's like a Harry Potter style boarding school where children are kept as clones.

Now, it's a nightmarish concept obviously. They're being used for organ transplants. Now if it was a traditional girls' comic, halfway through the drama, the heroines, the hero would rebel, would run, would fight back against evil authority. But because this is actually more of an art house film, that doesn't happen. It's based on a Japanese novel.

I watched the film and I didn't really know what it's about and it had some great actors in it, and then I started to get very depressed when I saw that they weren't going to fight back, which is so fundamental, that the hero and the heroine have to be proactive.

To my astonishment, I saw several young women in the audience walk out of the film. It's the only time I've ever seen that happen. In other words, they got the same feeling. They thought, "I don't like this," and they just walked out.

So that's the thing with this kind of mystery, adventure, action kind of story for girls. Just as for boys, the hero must be proactive. Must be. And if they're not, the story will go down like a lead balloon, and rightly so in my opinion.

James Blatch: I read the novel *Never Let Me Go*. I haven't actually seen the film, be interested to see the film. But it's a very bleak, dark, very dystopian view of humanity, but it's done in a very strange way because as you say, the characters are quite at ease with their roles and they never really resist it.

There's a sort of nudge here and there about their fate but they don't really ever question it, and that's the disturbing thing about it, but I think that probably doesn't really lend itself to the type of adventure that, as you say, a YA audience is really looking for at the moment.

We should say we've got loads of independent on our books ... I don't want to say "on our books," makes it sound like a publisher. In our community, I should say, who are turning out fantastic novels that do really fit in this genre and that's the exciting thing about the indie industry.

It's a space where if you want it, you will probably find it somewhere and I think you're gonna be a big part of that, Pat.

Pat Mills: That's wonderful to hear. That's really good to know, and yeah, I'm looking forward to adding to it.

James Blatch: If you're watching on video, you probably winced ... Or if you weren't watching the video, when I said that Pat looked like a beach boy. He's got this kind of Californian look but he's actually living ... He likes the sun. They're living down in ...

Mark Dawson: Spain I think, now.

James Blatch: Spain. Absolutely riveting, fascinating guy. Really interesting to hear him. Obviously a little bit wound up about how difficult it is to make money with comics now, pretty cynical about that.

Interestingly I had an exchange on email with somebody who's trying to get into comics now and they emailed us and said, "Would our cost be suitable for comics? I want to make money from that." And I wrote him back and said, "Well there's an interview coming up, you want to listen to that."

Because Pat's been around the block a few times. But actually, funnily enough it's one of those things, if you talk creativity ... Pat was a little bit,

not bitter, but just cynical and there's enthusiasm for the art that's frustrated by the commercial side of things, but that's the same energies that's fed into the pictures you see, and the stories you see in the comic books.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, absolutely. Also, that kind of experience is one that I'm familiar with. I've been traditionally published, I was frustrated with the machine of trying to get more, trying to get different books out there, and what self-publishing has enabled people like Pat and people like me and all of our listeners to do, is to bypass gatekeepers who have previously been able to put the kibosh on a piece of creative work.

We can go directly to the audience, which is an extremely exciting development. It's also something that is possible now with comics. Amazon is opening up new avenues to get comics onto the Kindle. Apple is very big on that, there's some apps for iDevices that enable comics to be read in a really kind of native and fluid format which works really well too, so gradually all of these kinds of impediments are being whittled away and it's enabling creative people to get their stuff as widely distributed as possible.

James Blatch: Really interesting talking to Pat and I wish him all the best of luck with his novel writing.

Mark Dawson: Before we move on, I also need to thank Lisa because it was my brother's 40th birthday on Saturday ... Or as this goes out, it'd be about two Saturdays ago, and Lisa hooked me up with an artist who worked on 2000 A.D. and I commissioned a piece of art from him.

He did a 2000 A.D. cover with my brother on it with Judge Dredd, so maybe we'll put that on-screen for people who want to see what that looks like, but it was absolutely brilliant.

James Blatch: Oh, amazing.

Mark Dawson: And I basically won the birthday with that, so thanks very much, Lisa for setting that up. Much appreciate it.

James Blatch: Yeah, you've won every birthday coming. You are very competitive with your brother, so ...

Mark Dawson: I am.

James Blatch: You're gonna get something amazing when you're 40.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, I wish.

James Blatch: Okay, let's talk about this competition. So Pat and Lisa very kindly offered three signed copies of Pat's first novel, Serial Killer. I think it's co-written, I think they said that in ...

Mark Dawson: It is, yes.

James Blatch: From memory, yeah. So if pop along to selfpublishingformula.com/patmills, and enter your e-mail there and we will select somebody in three weeks' time or so to win one of those copies of the book.

Thank you to Pat and to Lisa for that. Really, I really enjoyed that interview and I think it's good for the podcast to stretch its legs a little bit and go outside sometimes the very book orientated world that we live in. Who knows how many people are out there who want to write or want to illustrate or perhaps as Pat alluded to, the best of both worlds is to do both.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, absolutely, and Pat is ... He is kind of comic royalty, at least in this country so it was great to get him on.

James Blatch: Yeah, great. That's it. We'll speak to you again next week.

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