

PODCAST 35 AUTHOR CRITICISM WITH AUTHOR PSYCHOLOGIST DR DEBRA HOLLAND

James: The self-publishing formula has launched an amazing contest for one of our listeners to win \$3,000 worth of professional dauthor services from reedsy.com. Reedsy is an online marketplace where writers can find editors, book designers, publicists, professional marketers and even ghost writers. One winner will get \$3,000 to spend on any professional service found on reedsy. There are also 3 runners up prizes of a free book cover design voucher worth \$600. To enter simply visit selfpublishingformula.com/reedsy. That's r-double e-d-s-y. You have a chance to spread the word about the contest as well and each person who enters using your links, increases your own chances of winning, so good luck.

Hello and welcome to podcast number 35 from the Self-publishing Formula.

Intro: Two writers, one just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blanch 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: Good evening Mark, how are you?

Mark: Tired, James.

James: I should say good evening, good morning, do the old ... Good morning, good evening, good night. Good morning. Truman wasn't it.

Mark: Frost?

James: No, no, no, no. Truman show.

Mark: Partridge?

James: Yeah, very Partridge. Yes we are at the end of the day. We are colossally busy, the pair of us, or three of us with John Dyer as well at the moment and so we're squeezing in a podcast chat where we can. You've been watching the football all night, I've been busy at school meetings but here we are.

We're going to do a couple of things in this episode. If you're following what's happening with my book, which is of course one of the reasons we do this podcast is market and experienced author who's making hay and I'm a wannabe so I want to get in to get a piece of that action so I've written my first book.

Last time we spoke I'd just finished it, gone off to the editor, and Mark and I thought we'd discuss this worrying about when the notes come back, how I'm going to react to that and mindset and what you should do with notes and criticism and so on.

To time with that we have an interview with an author, quite famous author actually, called Debra Holland who writes romance herself. She's also a counselor, she's written non-fiction books on grief but she also thinks and writes a lot about the psychology of being an author, the psychology of being a writer. But what happened Mark between us deciding to talk about how you prepare for notes coming back from your editor and now, is it an e-mail drop tonight?

Mark: Yes, notes came back from your editor.

James: Notes have arrived back from my editor so we can talk a little bit about that but if I just take myself to where I was before that e-mail drops

onto my iPhone earlier, and I think probably people obviously will be at different stages. I don't know. We don't survey our audience to that degree. I don't know how many people have sent books off to editors in the past, how many people are used to that process, but I think there's a 1 and a 0 here. There's people who've never been through this process before, never used a professional editor, and there are those who are, like yourself, where you're used to using them, and to the fact that you've scaled down just how much you use editors now, don't you?

My book's gone to a developmental editor to give me the broad, brush stroke changes that she believes are necessary to make the book. You probably don't do that stage anymore do you?

Mark: No because I'm really good. No, I don't. I'm confident enough in how the book is structured and the kind of things that a developmental editor will pick up that I usually go straight to copy editing.

Although, saying that, the books I publish through Thomas and Mercer come with a full editorial package that includes developmental, then copy, then proofing at the end. It's not that long ago. In fact, it was just last month that I had a developmental edit from the same editor that I recommended for you.

James: Okay, Jennie who's given me my notes.

Mark: That's right, yup.

James: I actually have another offer of an editor, somebody who can be quite brutal and I'm currently working out what the best process is. I think probably is to implement what Jennie's given me and then potentially get a second hearing from him as well.

Before I talk about Jennie's feedback to me, I've done a couple of things.

One is I've tried to, for the first time I've stepped back from my draft, which I was almost unable to do whilst I was writing it, which is silly really because you need to step back from it, you need to read it from a readers point of view and be objective about it but I didn't really push myself through that process or didn't find easy to do and I think that's just naivety and inexperience on my part.

The act of sending it off, the act of sending that e-mail and the days that followed I guess I stopped worrying about it, stopped thinking about it, and in that time started to really think of the things I thought weren't working with it.

I was mulling over, I'm using the [Story Grid](#), which is Shawn Coyne's book as my main reference in terms of educating me about how to create a story. I know there are a lot of other texts out there but it's the one I'm reading and using.

One of the things he talks about is some absolute musts for the type of book that I'm writing is that your protagonist must have an external desire but also a subconscious one. The external one's the obvious one you set up, they got to stop the ticking bomb and save the world, whatever it is. The subconscious one is what they're really trying to do and even if by nature subconscious they're not aware of it. When I sent the book off I would have a rough idea of what my hero's subconscious desire was but three days after I sent it off I had a moment of absolute clarity and realized what his subconscious desire was. And it wasn't what I thought it was. So having clarified that in my mind, that informs the way that I would rewrite the book, not completely rewrite the book but the changes I would make.

For me, even before I got the notes back, I've been able to do something that I think you probably do all the time when you write now is to think about it from a reader's perspective and take that step back and think

objectively that new writers, like me, don't know how that process works and don't know to do it.

Mark: Yeah, it's something that comes with experience. I've written more than 20 novels now so some of it is just something that's reflexive. I don't know the unconscious of it so those kinds of things just kind of happen. You could look at things, those kinds of motivations, as always very important. Other things as well, even things like how the text looks on the page. I think white space is very important and I've seen, I've read through the comments that Jennie sent you and some of those changes that she has suggested will reduce the amount of text on the page and will increase the white space.

If you look at someone like James Patterson, there's a reason why he's the best-selling author in the world, at least I think he is. If you look at how his paragraphs are structured, very often they'll be 1 sentence paragraphs, they're very quick, staccato, and it just ushers the reader through the pages very quickly and that makes those books unputdownable, which is something that I try to emulate as well.

James: Again, that's something that obviously comes with experience. One of the things that I've been doing, I'm sure lots of people listening to this podcast do, is you wonder how you're supposed to structure some basic aspects.

For instance, if you've got two scenes going on at the same time and you want to cut between them, how actually you use that white space and what that looks like or whether it's best put into a separate chapter. I keep opening other people's novels all the time and looking at the basics of how they do that. Not everyone does it the same of course, and some people deliberately set out to play with those conventions but I think from where I am, I'm not interested in subverting the conventions at this stage. I'm interested in trying to understand them and nail them.

Let me take you back a bit then, you just mentioned you think a lot of this happened sort of subconsciously to you now. When you set out on a new book and you're writing at the moment, you don't have formed in your mind this is what the hero is going to want to physically do on the surface and this is below the surface what you think he's actually trying to do. You don't clarify that in your mind before you start the book?

Mark: No, not normally. I know with Milton for example, I'm writing a John Milton book at the moment. His subconscious is always seeking atonement for the things that he's done in the past. That is his motivation. He does realize that it's not a subconscious thing for him. He does realize that's what he needs to do.

That drives all of the books. It has done since the first one, and then in terms of the physical process through the book I'll have a start point and an end point mapped out usually and then I'll have scenes throughout the book that I now want to include and then as I'm writing those they'll propagate other ideas and other scenes will naturally follow them or proceed them.

I don't write chronologically, I write whatever the place, and often I'll write dialogue first. I might have a conversation between the two characters and just see where that goes within the structures of the plot, which can be reasonably sometimes but they'll usually be a direction they're heading for. That's a really good way just to jump in and out, just to our conversation and to see where that takes you.

James: You have a plot when you start that's effectively your starting point?

Mark: Usually. I usually have an idea. So for this one I wanted to, I mean no spoilers here, but I wanted Milton to be in prison in a country that he's not comfortable with. So it's set in the Philippines and he finds himself in an extremely dangerous prison in the south of the island.

The book is called Black Out, that's the title at the moment, and the conceit is he's an alcoholic. He's suffered from alcoholic black outs in the past. He wakes up in a hotel with a dead body and he doesn't remember how he got there, who she is, and he's basically then he's arrested and goes to prison. The rest of the book is unraveling of what's happened and then an accounting is Milton addresses the things that have been done to him and to other people in the book.

James: Okay. You don't know what they are when you start writing. You're a classic mixture I suppose of a plotter and a pantsier.

Mark: Probably more in the plotter. I'm kind of a pantsy plotter I suppose. I know pretty much. I know how he ended up there. I know the solution to the mystery. I know who's responsible for that, why they've done it. What I'm not sure about is how Milton will escape from the prison and then how he will free himself from suspicion and then get revenge. I'm not entirely sure how that will play out and I usually just kind of feel my way towards that as I'm writing.

James: Let's move back to mindset then for this stage that we go through to get the book improved and to the point where it might stand a chance of commercial success. We immediately are confronted by the problem of having something that you've put a lot of hours into, that you feel quite vulnerable about, being criticized and poked about and lauded over by somebody else who you're paying for their privilege of doing that. I mean I have to say, Jennie was very kind in her e-mail and in her initial notes these are the positives, these are the areas we need to work on.

I've done quite a lot of thinking about it. As I said I've been able to step back from the novel since I sent it off and actually I pretty much predicted what she was going to say. It was almost the best case scenario for me that I wanted her to be able to say to me, "Do you know what? I think you can probably write a good book. This is a start."

I wanted her to be able to see the potential for being able to get a good book out of it.

The worst case scenario is that you can read between the lines of what she's written back to you is, "Good luck with your pet project but this is not going to make it." That wasn't the tone I got from her.

In terms of the detail, I absolutely love it. I love the fact that she's tightening things up and she's got fantastic, clear description for me and I can't wait to implement it. I don't know if I've surprised myself by having that attitude or whether it's because you've been telling me, and other people on Facebook have been telling me to prepare myself and get into the correct mindset.

I think a couple years ago, I probably would have reacted differently. Now I'm thinking this is a commercial endeavor. I want this book to make money, I've got an ambition, I've got a financial ambition for maybe the end of next year to be in some kind of profit with a series of books and therefore this is a business and I follow this and I do it and that's not where I was a few years ago.

Mark: The way to look at it is Hemingway I think said this, and I won't complete the quote because we'll lose our family friendly rating but it's basically the first draft of anything is S-H, etc. etc.. That's absolutely true and I feel the same way about my stuff most of the time.

The way to look at the editorial process, and it's my favorite part by miles and miles, I love editing, is everything that you improve in the process is making your novel better. It could be something large like a character is taken out or is introduced and you tighten up the pacing. Even just small things. I certainly don't recommend people fixate on this kind of stuff but sometimes changes to punctuation can speed a sentence.

Just hitting return to have shorter paragraphs as I mentioned earlier. Every one of those changes is making your book better. The trick at this point that you have to understand, and you'll get help with this from your editor and from me if you ask me, is you've got to know when it becomes marginal gains.

If you do start fixating and moving paragraphs and punctuation around then you've probably got to the stage where you've squeezed about as much worthwhile improvement out of it as you can and although subsequent changes are making improvements, they're incremental at that stage and it's probably time to step back, accept that it's finished, and then move on to whatever's next.

James: Yeah. I think it was attributed to Francis Fort Coppola who said about the film editing process, that a film is never completed it's just an abandoned project at some point. That's probably the same about any kind of long form piece of work, is at some point you have to start working on it and release it.

I've got myself into that mindset which I think is good. I'm still under confident about my ability to implement everything that she's suggested. The thought of problems that she's talking about, like getting the characters into a 3-dimensional zone, making them more complex, stopping them being automatons to you to doing what you want them to do to make the story work.

I know that there's quite a lot in that central section of the book that I need to work on but I am really looking forward to getting stuck into it. There's a deadline, which will work perfectly for me and I'm excited about it because I'm a deadline person.

From your point of view, what are your tips to me on how to make best use of editing notes?

Mark: I would say go through them a couple of times, read them, maybe print them out. Take them somewhere else just sit down and muddle on them and then just start to dig into them. I would say probably still work in Scrivener.

I've read all the notes but if she's suggested significant structural changes than I would still work in Scrivener and then give Jennie a chat to compare between the two documents that you send her. Scrivener's power will be very useful if you need to make structural changes. Much more useful than using Word. I'd just say get the notes up on one screen, get the Scrivener file up on the other one and then just get into it. It's fun. It depends on who much has got to be done but it's an exciting process now.

You know as I said, every change you're making is taking something which is pretty good for a starting effort and improving it all the time. Hopefully by the end of it it'll be something that you can be proud of. Well, you should be proud anyway; you've written a novel. That's something very impressive. What you want now is to make it as good as you can and then move on to the next one. At the end of the day, the first book is probably not going to be very good. My first book's terrible. There's glimmers of promise but it's pretty much awful, but it's 90,000 published words in the bank and the next 90,000 were better and then the next 90,000 were better, to the stage now where I'm confident that I'm a pretty good writer. People seem to enjoy reading my stuff and that kind of confidence gives you a lot of freedom and flexibility as you move forward with new projects.

James: Did I hear this correct, there's a difference between a developmental editor and a structural editor or are they the same thing?

Mark: Very similar. Very similar. I mean you basically look at, they're not looking at sentences, they're looking at bigger flow and characterization and pacing and those kinds of more structural facets of a novel. The copy editor will get down into sentences that can be tightened, will pick up errors, and then when we get down to the proofreading, that's

when they'll go over it one final time to make sure that your grammar's correct, that you don't have typos and all that kind of stuff.

One of the things I did notice, and I think you knew this, was something that you're going to suffer from is that you're missing a lot of words out of sentences.

James: Jennie, my editor's offered me a phone conversation to go through things, which I'm definitely taking her up on.

Mark: Yeah.

James: Probably on Thursday and she's referred to us, we'll discuss this on the phone and a few places in the notes. At some point I need to apologize to her because it was, in the normal run of events it wasn't fit to be sent to an editor just because it needed a proper read through. In fact, I printed it out after I sent it, started going through it with a red pen. I think on every page I found between 2 and 6 errors that needed correcting, but we have a deadline at the moment. You pushed me a lot in the last minute and that's how it is, so it'll be a lot better next time it goes.

I also think the fact that I had been thinking about it for 3 days almost felt like should I stop Jennie where she is and do a structural, a rewrite and then give it back to her? But natural fact this is the best way for me to find my way structurally is alongside her now. She's an expert, I'm paying her, and this is a learning experience for me. Hopefully an already positive one. Obviously, I've given myself another back breaking few weeks but that's how I thrive, right?

Mark: Yup. It's busy. I know it's hard work but it's sometimes, it's a bit cliché, but you apply pressure to coal and diamonds can appear sometimes. There you go. The moment you're in love with coal, James. I see potential.

James: I've got you on tape saying that. If you're interested in this process, if you're in the same place as me and you're interested how the editing process is going to work on a particular novel, in this case mine, I am in the process of blogging it in detail.

I've already done one which describes where the book came from, how I got to where I am now and a bit more about the writing process ramming up to the why to get it into edit. Then a bit about, number 3 will be about preparing mindset for the notes.

What I'm going to do with this, and I haven't actually got to it yet, but it will be done in the next couple of weeks, is there will be this manuscript, which will be available, including Jennie's notes. I've got a slight problem because I need to work out how to remove her surname from it. Her surname will be released at some point she said, but at the moment she's swamped with work so she just wants to be known as Jennie. I think that is quite, I mean obviously I think a reasonably brave thing of me to do, to put out a substandard early draft but I think for people who want to read the book, forget it, leave it and you can read it next year.

However, if you're interested in learning. If you're writing a novel now and you wonder what's going to happen at the end of it and what you should be thinking about now, I think this will be a really useful exercise. I don't know how many people have done this before, to publish the early drafts with the notes to see how it progresses into the final thing.

I'm going to go ahead and do that and when it's set up I'll give you the details. If you want to read the first entry of the blog, if you go to our website, selfpublishingformula.com, you will see under blogs that James little blog is there. Can't work out exactly what we're going to call it because we're actually recording this on the day that works being done but it'll be there for you to have a look at.

Did you react badly the first time someone told you that something you'd written needed to be changed?

Mark: It's hard to remember. It's so long ago now. I mean it was 2000 when my first one was published so that was traditionally published. The full editorial process was included.

I don't think I did forget but I think I was excited like you are because I know that, it's almost legitimizing when you start to work with professionals as a first time writer. The only praise you might have had is from close friends and family, which you can basically discount because in your mind you will think, "Yeah, they're bound to say that because they're my wife or they're my husband," or whatever the relationship between you and the reviewer is.

But when you start to get input from people you have a commercial relationship with, not an emotional one, that it's an exciting moment because you will naturally take their criticism, either positive or negative, you'll take onboard more easily than you would from somebody else. I remember at the time I was getting praise from people who had read my stuff but I think one of them was my fiance at the time. I kind of ignored that. Friends as well said it was good but I didn't really believe it.

It was only when an agent got involved and then an editor. It was like okay so perhaps I can write a bit. That's encouraging. I remember it being very very good for motivation so I went into kind of a super manic, almost blatching, made a word up there by the way. An almost blatching, splurge of creativity. Just basically wrote another book in 3 months, which actually now come to think of it, I do that all the time now.

At the time I actually made myself sick from working too hard, but it was just driven by the fact that I was working with professional people who I took more seriously because they were professional rather than friends or acquaintances.

James: Okay. Let's move on to the thicker skin that you need to grow, even thicker than receiving notes from a paid professional, and that is the

random comments of people who bought your book, for whatever reason reacted badly and then leave a review, negative review.

How did you deal with them as you set out in your career and how do you deal with that now?

Mark: It used to bother me massively. I used to refresh my author page obsessively. Almost as much as I refreshed my sales page. A review would come in and a good one would make me euphoric and a bad one would put me in a funk for hours afterwards and I'd take it very very personally. These days I don't check very often. I'm not bothered by, I mean it's always wonderful to get good reviews and thankfully I get more good review than I do bad ones by quite a way but I still get bad reviews all the time. I still get 1 star reviews.

The ones that bother you the most are the 1 star ones but their actually taking the time to write 4 or 5 paragraphs about what was wrong with the book. It bugs me a bit but not really that much. I've had I don't know how many reviews now, probably 10,000 over the course over all of my books and you just have to take the rough with the smooth.

Bad reviews you can learn a lot from them. A case in point. When I started writing I'd given Milton a gun that wasn't accurately described or he used it in a way that you couldn't use it, or even worse there's a safety on a gun that doesn't have a safety.

If you look back at the early reviews for the Cleaner and Saint Death, you'll see reviews from gun aficionado's in the States especially just basically laying into me for being an uneducated palm, and not knowing that the stuff that I was professing to know. It's a completely legitimate criticism because I'm selling myself as a writer of books involving guns and gun play and action and all this kind of stuff. I was getting a fairly fundamental part wrong so if they can't trust me on that, they can't trust me on anything. That's something I don't have a problem with now because I've got people who I refer to for help when I'm not sure about something. I wouldn't

necessarily have realized that I was making those kinds of errors without those 1 stars. You can find good, useful information from reviews that at first blush might make you want to stop and never write again.

James: There are two different ways of reacting.

One is to be annoyed or upset by it to the point where you would avoid reading it and the second is just to embrace it. Is there anything of value you can extract out of it and if there isn't, ignore it, and if there is. You're very good at that I think anyway. We've had in our business lives, we get occasionally challenged by something that appears very snotty and rude and you're the one out of the 3 of us that takes, maybe the lawyer approach. The very calm kind of yeah they've got a point, we need to change, and John and I are saying let's take these people to the cleaners. I think that's a good thing. That's a very positive thing.

I'm not sure everybody has it built in and it can be distressing, I think, for authors and it can end careers for some authors.

They just never really get used to that criticism, they feel vulnerable and assaulted by people who are rude about their work.

Mark: You don't have to go back too far to remember. I mean Steve Fry is a good example. People may or may not remember this but he was in a play called Cell Mates in the west end of London, probably 10 or maybe even 15 years ago. He got very bad reviews on his opening night and he basically did a runner and he ended up in Belgium.

Obviously there are other reasons why, I think he's bipolar, didn't help when it came to that, but I think one of the reasons he said he felt that way was because he felt personally assaulted by this litany of bad reviews. It's not unusual.

I've seen dozens of authors lose their rag over that kind of thing, but you just have to get over it. It isn't personal. Those people probably, almost certainly, 99.9% of the time don't know who you are. They wouldn't know who you were if you walked down the street. You can't take it to heart, you just have to take it on the chin, get anything useful out of it if you can and then just forget about it and move on.

James: Great. Okay.

Let's hear from a professional on these matters, Debra Holland.

Debra: I'm Doctor Debra Holland and I am a psychotherapist and I'm also an author. I have some nonfiction books. One is the Essential Guide to Grief and Grieving and I also write fiction. I'm most well known for my sweet historical western romances, The Montana Sky series.

James: Debra let's start with the mixture of you being an expert in psychotherapy, a doctor of psychotherapy, and also an author. That's given you an insight into perhaps the mind of the author and some of the stress and the strains that go along with writing.

Debra: Right. It's often a very isolated career where in our cave, wherever that may be, writing, and we might not have a lot of contact with the public, which we might be very comfortable with. Many authors are introverts and that's fine until you have to go to a conference or be speaking or a book signing or something like that.

I think one of the big stresses is that very creative people and that creative part of us is also, can be sensitive. When we put all this time and effort into birthing our creation, our child so to speak, goes out into the world and then it is criticized and judged and that's very hard for us to have that kind of thick skin to let people go okay, you're baby has these and these and these problems or I don't like it. That's one of the unique stresses. I think the other one is just the uncertainties of the financial situation. We don't have the regular paycheck that comes every week or every 2 weeks or

every month. Royalties can be up and down. If you're traditionally published maybe you only get paid a few times a year and you don't know what that payment is going to be so how can you live this day to day life? How can you project when it's going to be a good year or when it's going to be a bad year. Financial stress is one of the biggest stresses that we have.

James: Those are really interesting areas. Let's break them down a little bit and talk first of all about the creative aspect, the courage it takes to create something, put it out there. You're going to be scared about what people think and most of us are probably under confident about ourselves and our writing and probably think is it horrible? I don't know, still waiting to hear, but it's a bit like anything. Cooking a meal for people and you sit down and you're a little bit sensitive. If somebody says oh I don't know ...

Debra: Especially if you put your heart into that.

James: Yeah, your kids make some offhand comment about it and you snap at them and that's the same thing in a way because you put yourself out there a little bit and you're sensitive.

What's your advice? How do we grow that thick skin or should we just allow the sensitivity to work?

Debra: I think it's both. It's a little different when it's your kids because it's not necessarily public. When we put a book out there, the reviews are public. Everybody can see that.

It can be public humiliation and I think that we're not going to necessarily become less sensitive. People who are sensitive, that's just who they are. What they can do is to learn not to take things personally. It's not so much as growing a thicker skin as it is in letting everybody have their own experience of your work and hopefully you'll have the positive reviews as well as the negative ones and that you focus on the positive.

We tend to focus on the negative. That one person who gave us that low review.

James: Every author seems to do that. I see people who will circulate a negative comment.

They've had 50 positive comments on that book but they'll circulate the one negative comment to say look what someone said.

Debra: Right. It's either don't look at your reviews at all which a lot of people, authors will do. I personally look at my reviews. I think it does give you good feedback. I think you'll find what your readers like and maybe what some of the weaknesses are of your books. If your readers tend to sort of tell things.

For my readers they like the time and the place. It's historical Montana and so my readers say she gives me a sense of, I see the scenery, I see the details, and I get review after review so I need to make sure that I continue to do that because that's what my readers want. If I have a reader that's saying oh you've got too much of this, maybe I need to step back and say do I? Maybe they're right, maybe they're not.

James: You mustn't take every comment to heart, but it can give you some feedback.

Debra: If you have a few that are saying the same thing, then I think it's fine to step back. Again, you're not beating yourself up, you're just saying is there some truth in this that I need to look at? Is there a way, because no writers going to be absolutely perfect, and it's always a learning experience. We should, as authors, continue to grow, continue to learn our craft.

James: There's no firm advice there in terms of do read the reviews or don't read the reviews. You're saying it is up to you and what's going to work for you.

Debra: Right, and you need to see. If you read reviews and it totally throws you off your game and you're upset for days and you're maybe beating yourself up or crawling under a rock or something then you have to not read your reviews.

If you can step back, and I think that is, for me I noticed it was a process. Those first negative reviews definitely were harder for me than they are now. Now I sort of look at it and shrug and go oh whatever, but I also have so many reviews that I think a review is going to be lost. The positive ones are going to way outweigh it so I can just sort of shrug my shoulders and go whatever.

James: You write nonfiction and fiction. Is there a difference because criticism of nonfiction is potentially more serious, particularly in the scientific field whereas nonfiction everybody's got a view and you are going to get mixed views.

Are they different for you?

Debra: For me I've been very blessed because all my nonfiction reviews are positive, which feels very good because that's why I wrote the book. I wrote the book to help people who are grieving, and whatever the loss was, whether it was bereavement or loss of a job, or lost of a marriage, that they can read my book and understand what they were going through and it could help them, so to see a positive review makes me have that feeling of I did it. I helped this person. They are saying in their review that this has changed in their life and that's so gratifying.

James: We talked also about the isolation of writing and the uncertainty that comes with a freelance career, where you're not really sure about your income.

In terms of isolation, actually this is probably a good example of a way to combat isolation, a conference like NINC.

Debra: Right. I've already had writers coming up to me and telling me that it's hard for them. It's hard for them to approach me perhaps because I do tend to be more well known and so they say, "I wanted to meet you but I didn't want to intrude" and I'm like this is what it's for.

Come up to authors. We're all in this together. There's nothing wrong with it. It's that oh I'm introverted and this is hard for me. There's all these people and it's sort of overwhelming because the room is full of people. It's like just go up, one person at a time, introduce yourself, ask them what they write, ask them what they like to read because we all like to read. We have that in common. We all write. We have that in common. It's not like a party where you can up to a person and not have anything in common with them.

James: With NINC you have to be published and you have to have a certain limit of sales or you have to be traditionally published so NINC does seem to be a conference and organization that's more for people who are further along the path, their not necessarily beginners.

For somebody who writes from who, lives that classic, slightly isolated working environment, what are good tips for them?

Debra: Definitely go online and find writers groups. If you have some local ones, sometimes you might have to look and find local writers groups. You have to be careful because if it's a writers group that's all beginners or some of the people like poetry, or in my cases genre fiction can be very much looked down on.

If I go into a group and everyone's going it's not literary, that's going to be very hard on me because they're going to be putting down what I write, so be careful where you go and who the composition of the group is.

Try to find other writers who are writing the same kind of thing you write and that there's a level of expertise. There can be other beginners but make sure it's not the blind leading the blind and that you can form wonderful relationships online with people that you never ever meet. One of my critique partners, we've never met in all these years that we've been together.

James: That's one of the great empowering aspects of the modern digital age is being able to have those relationships. Okay, and finally the uncertainty of the financial side. This goes beyond authoring. I've had freelance careers in my media experience before and it is hard. You don't really know when the work's coming and some months are good, some months are not good.

We know that practical tips about putting some money aside and etc. but from a psychological point of view, how do you tell people to cope with that?

Debra: I think part of it is that awareness that it is going to be uncertain. I know when self-publishing first became very popular a lot of people, including myself, who had not sold books before all of a sudden have this income. And maybe it's a bigger income than they've ever had before and so what they did is they went out and bought big extravagant gifts or they bought a house that they didn't stop to think about what happens if this goes down.

Part of it is your own psychological way of looking at money and at looking at the future and that part of it has to be yes live now as well as plan for the future. Enjoy the good royalties but also plan to live as what would happen if they dropped. It's your own thinking and your own awareness of oh a shiny thing I want to go buy because now I have money to do that.

James: That's pretty much me. Anything Apple release I have to buy.

Debra: You have to buy the toys. Part of it maybe is okay if I'm going to buy the toy I'm also going to take that same amount of money and put it into savings or making sure that the debts are paid off, making sure that you've got some investment money so that it's not all about royalties. Do you have an income someplace else that you're doing some investing as well?

James: There's an old poker expression about not playing with scared money, so you should always play poker when it doesn't matter if you lose. If you're writing because you're desperate that this has got to pay the bills, that's not a good place to be.

Debra: That's life. It's not just about writing and it's not just about money, it's about anything. It's like you don't make decisions out of fear because fear, most of the time, is all in our heads. It's something that we've conjured up and as writers especially we have these very vivid imaginations so we can vividly imagine this horrible thing that makes us afraid.

Then we make a decision based on this thing that might never ever come true but it feels very real in our heads and when our brain has a very vivid picture and it makes our body react. Like our heart will speed up or you're short of breath, that tells your brain that this is really real and then you have the emotions about it that makes it feel very real. Your brain has a hard time distinguishing between your fantasy in your head and reality.

James: Now that's something writers have that not many other people have.

Debra: I say this is the good side is a creative imagination is that you can put it into your books. The bad side is that creative imaginations makes you create fear fantasies in your mind. A lot of times it's the other way. I'll be working with somebody and I start to hear what their fear fantasy is and they're not a writer perhaps. I might not know anything about them and I say that, are you a creative person? Most of the time they'll say yes

and they'll say oh I like to do this or I like to make this and sometimes they'll say no and then I actually might probe a little.

Really, well what do you work on? What do you with hobbies? Then their creativity might be in motors. They are really good at putting motors and a particular part in doing something new with that motor or whatever, that they don't think of as creative but they can imagine it in their heads and make it happen. It's, again, there's the imagination. I help them see that imagination, which is so good for you with making new motors, is handicapping you here.

James: So, Debra, who's written on grief and other matters of psychology and thinks a lot about the author's life, I thought some really useful advice there, Mark, about, as we talked about earlier in terms of the criticism, either taking it on board or potentially avoiding it if it's something that's just not going to work for you.

She also talked about the financial pressures when you run your own business and you rely on income from the work that you're doing and how you deal with that. I thought very good of Debra to talk to us about that and it's an important subject for people listening.

You seem to be quite a sorted kind of guy in those terms. I think you're quite sensible with money and so on.

You're not somebody who's ever been very stressed about the financial situation?

Mark: No, never. I always live pretty much within my means. Even when I started doing quite well in 2014 I probably could have left the job that we were both at, at the time, in January 2014. I was certainly making the same kind of money as I was in my day job but I waited until November because I wanted to ensure that the money was consistent and I could sustain it over the course of 12 months.

At it turned out money was kind of doubling every month almost to the extent that by the end of it I was making about 10 times more than I was in the day job. I couldn't really put that off anymore but I am actually quite cautious. I've got 2 kids, I'm married, I've got a mortgage, those kinds of things need to be respected, so yeah I'm fairly careful.

James: Lots of people, 2 kids and a mortgage, aren't cautious but it is a reason perhaps to be so, but how you deal with those. I thought that was very interesting from Deborah Holland, an author herself.

Okay let's just remind you that we have a contest running at the moment. Still got a couple weeks to go and that's your opportunity to win \$3,000 worth of professional book production services with reedsy.com. We've been talking tonight about editing and professional services that will turn your attempt at a book into something that might actually end up on someone's Kindle through these professional editing services, \$3,000 buys you a lot of that. Fantastic opportunity.

If you want to enter that, go to our website, selfpublishingformula.com/reedsy, and you'll see there that there's also three runners up prizes of \$600 which will buy you a decent amount of services from Reedsy as well. You can get multiple entries into the contest simply by sharing and getting other people to enter using your social media and other URL type links.

I think that's it. Oh yes I will just say that the blog that I mentioned earlier that I'm writing about the book is also available at selfpublishingformula.com. You can follow along the process of getting my first novel to some kind of fit state to release, and then you can follow in the next 2 or 3 years as I overtake Mark and become the doyen of the thriller writing year. Thought I'd make a lame attempt at banter.

Mark: Aim high. Aim low.

James: I've set out my exact financial aims in one of my blogs so I am doing everything. I'm laying myself bare here, but that's part of this process.

Mark: I warned you about that.

James: Yes. I am, again, just to reiterate, fully clothed. Thank you Mark.

Mark: Thank you James.

James: We'll see you next week.

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