

EPISODE 52: HOLLYWOOD CALLING – WITH CAL MORIARTY

James Blatch: Hello, and welcome to episode 52 from the Self Publishing Formula.

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

James Blatch: Welcome back to our makeshift studio here in Salisbury, Wiltshire, United Kingdom. European Union. Globe. It is the little moments. From here, we talk to you wherever you are, want to wish you a happy Friday if you listen to us on release day. Whether you're in Australia, New Zealand, United States, China, Singapore, wherever you are.

We love to hear from you! From time to time I give out our email address, I should give it out every episode really.

Podcast@selfpublishingformula.com. You can just drop a line and say hello, tell us where you're listening from or tell us that you want to hear something in particular on a podcast. We'll do our very best to bring that do you.

We'd like to bring you some big name authors this year, it's one of aims. We have our feelers out. In fact, if you know a big name author, if you happen to know a world famous author and you reckon you could persuade them that there's a great little indie podcast that they should be on, please get in touch and we'll do the rest. That would be great.

Talking of thinking big, this episode is about the moment that every author dreams about as they're dropping off the sleep one night. Which is when Steven Soderbergh ...

Mark Dawson: Steven Spielberg.

James Blatch: Or Steven Spielberg rings you and says, I love your book! I'm going to make you a star! Or whatever they say in Hollywood. It's when Hollywood comes calling and we joke about it but you know what's going to happen to people who listen to this podcast, is they're going to get that call out of the blue. It's probably going to come from an agent or an agency or a small production team. They'll be, probably, thrown into panic at the prospect of suddenly being on the end of a negotiation about how much you're going to sell your book for to be turned into a film or a TV series.

It's not as far-fetched as it sounds because it's happened to you.

Mark Dawson: It has happened to me. I got an email, I don't know when it would have been. Sometimes last year from the William Morris Agency in Los Angeles saying they're interested in one of my series and were the rights available. Then, I don't know exactly why, I think kind of a jungle drum situation that people heard that I'd been approached and I got several emails over the course of the next couple of weeks.

I handed those over to my agent and we've optioned my series to a very, very big Hollywood producer. I can't say who it is until I've got a bit more details to go but it's a very big Hollywood producer. It's perfect for this particular series.

There's an A-list Director attached to it now and a screenwriter and I think I'm supposed to be having a call with him in the next couple of weeks to talk about how their pictures are going.

It is a dream come true, really but at the same time one that I'm fairly relaxed about. There's nothing I can do to affect whether it's going to work or not work so I might as well just relax and kind of enjoy the day dream that one day I might be able to go to ... I remember at our old job, we could go back and watch the films. It's given its age certificate in the UK.

James Blatch: That's what Mark and I used to do. We used to watch films for a living when we first met.

You say you were relaxed about it but what about the in negotiation. What about you agreeing to a price or coming up with a price? Where did you start?

Mark Dawson: I'm a lawyer so I'm not worried about negotiations or contracts, that's absolutely fine. What I did was went to my agent and my view on that is I'm paying them. They're experts, they've done those kinds of deals all the time. I might, being a lawyer, I can understand kind of conjectural language but at the same time I don't have the context of doing a film deal before. It's not something I've got experience of. I'd much rather leave that to them.

The way I deal with it is, is very hands off. I let them handle all of that. All the communication goes between Hollywood and the agency. They bring me as a when necessary.

James Blatch: That's what today's interview is about. It's with a woman called Cal Moriarty, who is remarkable figure in her own writing. She talks a bit about her own background. She's become a bit of an expert in this area. She's seen a lot, she's been through a lot and she's like the perfect aunt you want to speak to. I'm not trying to age her, she's younger than me but the perfect sort of friend of a friend who will sit down and say to you, don't be a sucker. Don't do this, do do this. Be grateful for that.

Just give you those initial steers that you might need if you suddenly find yourself in a situation where a film production company is interested in the idea, your intellection property. So, let's hear from Cal and then we'll have a little chat off the back of that.

Cal Moriarty: Cal Moriarty, former private eye, the youngest ever private eye in the UK is now a crime thriller writer. Crime mystery writer, eye with a two or an action thriller screenwise.

James Blatch: So, private eye. Just flesh that out a little bit for me. You're not talking about a detective, we're talking about somebody I would hire.

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. Exactly. If you wanted to, I guess, find out things about somebody who didn't want things found out about them you would hire a private eye and they would do their very best to find out whatever it is you wanted to find out.

James Blatch: Obviously, this is the stuff of lots of books and TV series and so on but, actually, not many of us come into contact with people who've done it.

So far, I haven't needed to hire one. I'm not saying, I'm not ruling it out Cal for the future but at the moment I haven't needed to.

In this day and age, we live in an information age now, it must be a bit easier, perhaps than it was in Philip Marlowe's time.

Cal Moriarty: It is. Though, it's also actually a lot easier for people to hide things because you can save it online. You can use a hundred different alias' if you want to. If you had something to hide you probably wouldn't be using your real name online.

But if you're a bad person, you're putting up and using your name online since you ever went online, whether it was 10, 15 years ago, however long.

Yeah, it is easier and it's actually easier for people to move around and create a kind of new life for themselves in a place where it wasn't so easy to do that before.

If you're occurring from the UK, there's many, many places that you could go and hide all around the world because you've got a British passport you can travel anywhere. If you're a really bad guy then, of course, you know where to get a fake passport and fake I.D and you'll know the kind of people to go and see when you end up in, lets say, Bermuda.

James Blatch: Okay. For example.

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. For example. If you want to run away and hide. It might as well be somewhere sunny. I think the only places that don't have proper extradition treaties with the UK are, bizarrely, I think it's like a Spaniard island or something.

James Blatch: I can remember. Spain has long been a hide away for your type of East End villain. But in a rather darker episode, when I was a reporter, I was also told that it's also a place where child abusers would go and hide.

It's somewhere that is, for somewhere, on our doorstep in Europe but slightly out of reach or difficult for the legal people to get ahold of them.

Cal Moriarty: I saw that the other day actually. There was a guy, I think they just caught him and he was in somewhere like Malika and that is Britain's number one wanted criminal and he is a child abuser. There was a picture of him while he was in Spain.

If I was going to hide from anyone, I wouldn't go to Spain because there's a lot of people kind of on the look out for bad guys in Spain.

You go somewhere completely different by some, I guess him and other people, they figure okay, there's lots of English ex-pats here. We can hide much easier than say if you went somewhere like Mombasa. There's not many ex-pats, young ex-pats hiding there, so you're sticking out like a sore thumb because people they to go, who is this person. This person that's just shown up.

It's not as if you go to Spain. There's so many people going there for a week, two weeks, a month. It's much easier to fit in.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Cal Moriarty: You could be kind of like Lord Lucan and maybe you end up in Africa and apparently you live out your life and then you die nice and quietly.

James Blatch: Is that what happened to him? He was in Africa?

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. I do know there was a story in the paper, a few months back. It was his secretary or the PA that she had arranged for the children to go out to see him in Africa. I don't know if she was trying to sell a book or if that's actually accurate.

James Blatch: We should say to our American listeners that Lord Lucan was a notorious case in the UK of a Lord, obviously a peer, whose nanny was brutally beaten to death in the house and he mysteriously disappeared that night and was never seen again. Rumors have rebound to this day that he was hiding out South America or Africa or somewhere so who knows.

I think there was a dramatization on TV a couple of years ago, where he was killed on his crossing by his group. His honorable group of friends who said, you just don't do this sort of thing I'm afraid, chum. They pushed him over the side of the boat, which also sounds plausible but anyway. Who knows?

But the stuff of books and films and TV series and so on, which is where we're going to come onto your story sick house. You had an extraordinary start in life. I don't really know how that begins, I don't know whether you go to the careers advice and say I want to be a private eye and school but there's obviously some spark in you that is not conventional, in that sense, if you don't mind me saying.

Story telling and stories and films has been your background, really, from there until now.

Tell me how that transition happened from private eye to Hollywood.

Cal Moriarty: From private eye to Hollywood. You start back a bit earlier from that. When I was at school, I was selected by the head of English to be part of this course that picked three or four of the kids out of the school to be taught for a week by people from the Royal Court Theater. Which was in London, it was pretty near where the school was. At the same times I wanted to be a private eye, she wanted to be a policewoman as well.

We had a policeman come into the school and I said I want to be a private eye. He basically burst out laughing. I just faced him and go, I'll show you. The same time as I've got these bonkers private eye fantasies, I'd hoped to be was a writer. You couldn't pick two more odd jobs that someone is probably never allow to take in a life. At the same time, I'm trying to achieve both of these things at once.

Fast forward, I left school at 16. Which is quite unusual now but wasn't unusual back then and I went to work at the Society of Genealogists in London, tracing family trees. I had two jobs in that place. One half of the time I was on a, it's called the International Genealogical Index and it's basically the Mormon database of anyone who has ever died, the Mormon church will make you a Mormon after your death. They would go around to all the church yards, the grave yards, in essentially all the world. Wherever

there are Mormon people living, they will go to their graveyard and write down Rebekah Booth, born 1783, died in 1813 or whatever and write them down.

I think, in doing that, writing down in the register, you somehow become Mormon or you have service or something. I'm sure that's what it is. It's actually a great resource for Genealogists but you do have to remember that these people are lay people. They're not use to inscribing stuff off grave sites so you do get errors. Everything has to be taken with a pinch of salt.

If you're looking for your relative who was named Booth and they were born such and such you think, you have to really come about taking that information and come running with it. You have to have other means of double checking it. We used to have clients from all over the world who can access this database. I was kind of in charge of that, in charge in Genealogists.

I saw this job, private eyes wanted. Back in the day, I phoned up and I said, you don't take girls do you? Not the best idea if you're trying to go for a job. Britain was even more sexist than it is now. He said, no, we do. We do. Please come for an interview because once I told him that I was used to tracing dead people, he probably figured I could trace living people as well.

I went there and it was very, very interesting. There were lots of businesses hired them, you wouldn't even think of them. Lots of business that are getting stolen from, they think people are embezzling money from them, they want interest and information about their rivals. Whether it's the individuals running the business or who the shareholders are. All of this kind of information that is just invaluable if you're running a business and you want to know about your rivals.

That was it. I stayed there and then I ... can't remember how it went. I really wanted in the film business and I knew that the only place to be in the film business was ... England was in a recession then, I was to move to LA. That's what I did. I packed my typewriter and off I went.

James Blatch: You just up sticks and went to LA as you do.

Cal Moriarty: I didn't even know where LA was. I had to look it up on the map. I found it was by the sea, I was, great! This is going to be amazing.

James Blatch: What happens when you hit the ground in LA. Let's face it, a lot of people have, I guess over the years, landed at LAX or arrived at the train station with plans of grand career. Some of them, most of them were actors. Aren't they?

Cal Moriarty: Yeah.

James Blatch: They end up as dancers or whatever and a few make it into Hollywood.

Where did you start?

Cal Moriarty: I started off in a B&B. In America, when they say B&B it's actually quite posh. You're staying in someone's house, it's a bit like Air B&B is now. You would often stay in a house with a host, they have like one spare room they rent out. Actually, it was a really nice elderly couple. They were both artists and beautiful art work.

Honestly, to make ends meet they were renting out one of their rooms. I thought, actually this is really good.

I got an interview with Charlie Sheen, Martin Sheen and Emilio Estevez. I was doing a little bit of side journalism as well. I had got this great interview lined up and as I was flying over from London to LA the interview got canceled because Young Guns 2 was running behind schedule and Emilio

Estevez wasn't going to be able to make it. The interview was about the three of them. That's what I'd got the gig on the back of, the three of them. Emilio he was the reason it fell through. I was kind of hanging around in LA just trying to get this interview back on. I could see it was going to take ages. At which at the time, I didn't know, and that was obviously Charlie Sheen having his own problems. Probably was nothing to do with Young Guns running behind that the interview was canceled. Much more to do with Charlie Sheen.

Now that we see that, we see. He's got problems. I thought, okay. I can bloody make this work but I can't spend \$100 a night in a B&B for a month. I just got the local paper and I found a flat share in a place called Marina Del Rey with this really nice couple of girls. One was a cinematographer, one was a producer in the film business and that was it. I just decided to stay.

I stayed. I was working a job I probably shouldn't have been but I was. It was a great job in a luxury charter company and in the evening and the weekends, I go and work at the American Film Institute with the students there. Just working on the films with them and helping them.

One of the first films I worked on was Secretary, which back then was a 30 minute short with Jennifer Jason Leigh in the lead. That was great. To work with people like that and Steve Schaumburg, who at the time was a partner. He obviously directed Secretary and directed a few other films as well. But you know, that was obviously amazing she was well known then but no one had heard of him.

A few other directors and people that were coming up, it was just a fantastic opportunity. I couldn't have really gotten that experience in London because I can't imagine they let the film schools open to outsiders to come and help the students, on the film sets. But there, they do because they've got so many film sets and they need so many people to help them

that the opportunities were very wide and open and I was ready to grab them.

I was learning, also, at the same time I was learning script supervision. Which is, you work alongside the director and you're keeping your eye on everything. You've got to keep your eye on the ball about what's going where, who is wearing what, who said what, where they sat when they said it. I really thought, if you want to learn about the film business, this is really the place to learn. I was just like a sponge, mopping it all up.

James Blatch: You had your writer instincts right from the beginning because you said one of your ambitions was to be a writer. I guess you were also drawn to the script in that way. When you sat there working out what was side somebody's parting was, whatever, for the next shot.

Were you also thinking about the narrative and the story? Was that rubbing off on you?

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. Of course. Before that you get sent loads of scripts because people in the states, that are so many opportunities and you get sent work from all over the place. You're reading a lot of scripts and things that are really important if you're script supervisor, is the timing of the script and how long things are going to take. If you see pages of words, if you see lots of black and white, that's a problem when you're filming. It slows everything down, essentially.

That's a really good technique that I learned, is how to time a script. If it's a comedy, how long each page should be because the page is the same size it's just the writing.

James Blatch: The first couple of pages in every Tarantino film must put everyone off them when they see that but some people, also, you get the people who break the rules. Right?

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. You get the really genius people who you can break the rules because they are so brilliant. Hollywood is the afraid you've got a place outside the box. They have to commandeer to 45 seconds a page. Drama is a minute. Those constraints can actually be really useful to you as a writer.

If you know what the rules are, you can stick to them but you can turn them on their head and use them to your advantage. Once you know kind of the commandments of 45 seconds a page, as a writer, then that's a gift to you because you know what you should be putting on that page essentially to make it 45 seconds.

Instead of worrying about stuff like that, you can worry about the rhythm of the lines with comedy and the way you're setting up, how you're going to set up so you can have a fantastic drop line where it floors the audience.

You don't have to worry about, is my script 120 pages, is it 10 pages too long? It's comedy dear, it's 45 seconds a page. Just understand that and run with it. That's why when people say there are no rules, but there are. If you're working in Hollywood there are very strict rules but you just have to know how to harness them to get what you want over.

You are writing comedy, write a great comedy. If you gonna write a drama the tension has to be in the right places, same a thriller. All the set pieces for action adventure and action thriller, you have to know what you want to do, what the rules are and how you can best show off your skills. It's essentially what it is, isn't it? Showing off.

Showing off your skills as a writer so that they hire you. Somewhat like Quentin Tarantino, is absolutely committed to their style of story telling but lucky for him he does it really, really well. Whereas if you had read, you know, a jam packed first or second page that just had black ink all over it. First of all, they might not even pick it up and read because they'll say, this

person doesn't know what they're doing. Why the hell am I going to read a script, this person shown me that they don't know how to do their job. It's the same thing if you're an artist, an art critic, you like certain things a certain way and if someone does something and you think that actually shows that they're bad at your drawing, bad at writing then you're not going to waste your time. Unless you're reading scripts in their spare time, on the weekends and people go home with like 25 scripts to read over a weekend and it used to be paper.

James Blatch: Good lord. It is fascinating how Hollywood has its way of doing this. We recently were in LA doing some filming for SPF and on a day off being film gigs, we did a couple of the studio tours.

I was looking at the sitcom sets at Warner's. The guy was saying, I think it was Big Bang Theory so you know we were looking at the set. He was saying, what they do is they come in, they rehearse Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday for the episode, they shoot the exteriors on Thursday and then with the audience on Friday and then they shoot the episode.

I said oh, that's what they do on Big Bang Theory. How did they do Friends? They did Friends exactly the same way and they did the Mary Tyler Moore Show in that way and they did Rhoda in that way.

As long as you can go back because that's how we shoot sitcoms. No one was going to come in and say we've got a sitcom, by the way we're going to shoot it slightly differently they go, oh no. It doesn't work. That's amazing.

Cal Moriarty: I use to work for Warner Brothers and Friends was one of our shows at the time. I know Matt from back in the day when my boss was working on another show that Matt was on, they were the two co-stars of the show. It was a spin off from Married with Friends, it's called Top of the Heap. It was top of the crap heap. I probably shouldn't be saying that, it was not good.

One, it's essentially a business. Obviously, it's an entertainment business but it is a factory and everything has to work and be the same when you are distributing it. There's not point in you having a 45 minutes comedy that's somehow supposed to be in the sitcom slot because the sitcom slot is 30 minutes, 22 pages, you know who you're with. 20 minutes.

You can't really do anything different. That's why if you see something like Big Bang Theory that is so different but it's still the same.

James Blatch: Yeah. It's filmed and set up and produced it exactly the same way as the previous 100 sitcoms. That's really interesting and you've got a foot in both camps in terms of writing because you're a novelist and we'll come onto that in a moment. I'm interested because we do have, in fact, Mark is in this position at the moment where film companies come to novelists. We want to talk about optioning it and people don't know where to start in that conversation.

One of the things might be as a writer that you will think right from the beginning can I write the film script. But as you are explaining here, quite a significant difference between the writing styles.

Cal Moriarty: They are completely different. Novels allow you, in a way, to be exceptionally self-indulgent with your words. You can put down, let's just say 85,000 words to tell us a story in a novel or one characters story within a novel but in a film script, if you've got 20,000 words that's probably 3,000-4,000 too many.

James Blatch: Of the whole film.

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. You have to condense everything down. You have to boil it down to its absolute necessity. Also, what you have to do is that, most of the audience understand this, a film isn't a novel or a book. Say, you've

written a nonfiction book that gets picked up. They're buying it for the story and most likely because it's been a massive success.

Firstly, most producers, let's go for 98%-99% producers are not going to want the novelist adapting their own work because they figure, you don't know what you're doing and because they have somebody who is maybe Oscar nominated, Emmy nominated, had a great short film or whatever as a writer or writer-director.

Because they work in a particular way, they'd rather use that person. That specialist to do the work. It's a bit like if you have your colon taking out or something, you'd rather the guy who's a colon expert do it than the heart guy.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Cal Moriarty: Or even the GP, the General Practitioner of Medicine, having a go for the sake of it. Hey, it's my colon, back off.

I think that that's what they prefer to work in that very particular way but as a writer if you feel that you could write a great screenplay I think it's to get prepared before the question comes up. Actually, I teach very, very successful novelists, way more successful novelists than me, how to adapt their own work into a screenplay. That's one of my specializations doing that for work and for teaching.

It's good to get pre-prepared. If you're writing a novel, think about that day when the production company is going to call. First of all, you're going to be outwardly delighted, you won't even be able to think straight, probably, that somebody has actually read your book and wants to pay good money to option it.

There's much more money to be earned as well, another 5% of the budget in the movie, as much as between 3%-5% of the budget in the movie for you to be employed as the screenwriter.

Also, talking about this is to another friend of mine who is hugely successful novelist in America and here. We were saying, you want to do your best work as a novelist but when ... you have no idea when your novelist career is going to end. It could be this book, it could be the next book, it could be three books time. In a way, what's your kind of plan for when that runs out, your time runs out essentially.

You may go on to write 60 novels but that's pretty not that likely these days, for various reasons. There's a lot more competition in the market place would be a main one. You've got to think, I have a chance here maybe to have two careers and one of them could send me in me on a whole completely different path.

First of all, it takes heck of a lot less time to write a screenplay than it does to write a novel and it's much more lucrative if you can get it right and get yourself finagled into a career in Hollywood.

You are doing that, essentially, off of the back of successful novels. You're basically using those novels to shoe horn yourself into a career as a screenwriter.

Screenwriting is a completely different art but if you've done novel writing and you can do it properly, then you understand the basic tenants of what a dramatic screenplay needs. Whether it's a comedy screenplay, or an action thriller or a cop TV show, that kind of thing.

Those same elements that are in a scene for a screenplay are exactly the same elements that are in a novel. As a novelist, you should have the confidence, that's what I say to people, it's a confidence trick, writing. You have to fool yourself into the fact that, yes I can do this every single day.

People still do that when they've written 10 novels. Still everyday going, I can do this, I can do this because I've had good comments about my previous 9 novels so hopefully I can do in a 10 one.

Once you get that, once you understand that and if you can understand how a screenplay works, adaptation works, then you can hopefully get that other 5% essentially out of the production company.

Then, if that film is a success or even the screenplay goes and goes up, it gets option, it gets green lit, then you're much more likely to get hired again maybe as a stand in and screenwriter for a project that's not yours that somebody else is at, they're looking for a screenwriter for. Unless you've got that novel to start that conversation off with, the first novel or second novel you've written or even if it's the 10 novel you've written. Then you use that to get your screenwriter career going.

If you wait until the production company phones you, it's much trickier because then you're already behind the curve. If you've gone on a screenwriting course prior, even if it's a short one, one of the ones I run, you've read maybe five screenplay books, you are the biggest fan of certain authors or brilliant, you've kind of studied there even if it's just in your own head.

If you understand how screenwriting works, then you're already ahead of the curve when these people call but if you wait, they'll just try and get rid of you as soon as possible because most producers don't want the headache of bringing the novelist to write the screenplay because it slows everything down.

James Blatch: I imagine that for some writers, they'll find that process difficult if not impossible to condense down and simplify because some writers find it very difficult to edit and chop their books down when they should be chopped down as a novel, let alone, pairing it down to 20,000 words the bare minimum.

Killing your babies, classically, some people find it easy. They can disassociate themselves from it emotionally, some people can't do that.

Cal Moriarty: No. Some people can't. Really is that child. Some people take 10 years slogging on a novel and if you have to turn around your screenplay in four to six weeks, the same work. If you've got the same approach that it's taken you forever and you want to get everything right and every single word right, it's going to be really difficult for you to take what you need to do, which is you've got to step back, get out of the room and come back into the room and when you come back into the room, you are a screenwriter and you're adapting material.

You may have written it, you may have not but you've got to get that out of your head. You just looking at an exceptionally forensic way and which way, especially if it's for TV or film, is it going to be fairly in a massive, can you make this a very cinematic experience for people. Is there going to be not much talking because that's what a film is, not much talking, mostly.

One of kind of cinematic thrillers on TV or cinematic cop shows, it's still lots of talking probably much more so than most films. Then, I know you know in a novel, most novelist that I meet are absolutely terrified of writing dialog. If you're writing a screenplay, you have to write dialog. It can't all be picture even if it's for beautiful landscape, something *The Revenant*. There's still dialog in it.

James Blatch: I wonder how many people now write books. I read the book everyone read last summer, *I Am Pilgrim* by Terry Hayes and I was reading it thinking this guy has written this book to be a film. It didn't feel like a normal novel.

It felt like a series of scenes that were going to be filmed and it was no surprise when I looked him up, Hayes, afterwards and he's a screenwriter who's written a novel.

He's coming the other way around but I wonder if that's not a bad little thing for novelist to do in this day and age. Lots of people go to the cinema. My editor quotes lots of films that makes us think about how the story works in this film seems to be how people think more than they think about books.

Right from the beginning, plan your book as a possible film.

Cal Moriarty: Exactly. Be aware that you're writing a novel, which is completely different but do you have in mind, what's going to happen when they call me from Hollywood or TV and they say, we want to buy your book, take a literal option out on it, which obviously you get paid for separately to being a screenwriter.

Once you think about where you want to go with your career and if you're really gung ho about being a writer then why not try and be two kinds of writer rather than just one. Because if you still want to do writing in five years time, first of all, there's not guarantee of that. Even if you have New York Times best sellers or the Sunday Times best sellers or any of that. There's no guarantee you will be doing that job in five years time because you're only as good as your last gig.

Maybe there's a different part you can take it on and the next 18 months for two years, you can set yourself up with your own new career but then two careers can run alongside one another. Don't put yourself out of a job that you might get ... don't turn a job down that might turn into something totally amazing for you. You might get stuck with an awful producer who you hate and it just puts you off the whole process forever by some ... why not.

It's almost free these days to train and do these things so why not do it? It's not like you have to spend 30,000 pounds whatever it is to get an undergraduate degree when you can do a summer course.

James Blatch: It would probably help your writing anyway.

Cal Moriarty: Also, everybody, you were saying about your own stuff. Everyone makes references to films because many more people have seen many more films than they've read books. There's so many comparisons that you can make.

Also, the audience and read of your book, they have read a ton as well. That language of film is much more in our heads, most peoples heads, even novelists than novel writing unless you've not seen any films and not seen any TV shows.

I don't watch much TV, I still write TV but I don't watch a ton of it because I'm too busy writing novels because they take forever.

James Blatch: We notice that.

Cal Moriarty: TV watching. Obviously, you have to be fairly committed to being a novelist and actually, it's hard slog. Screenwriting, I was talking to another friend the other day, it's so much fun because you're collaborating with other people. You have to leave the house. You work with actors, you're developing the work, when you work with a good producer it's a god send because you learn so much about how to do your own job. It's a free master class with a producer.

You get a great director, if you can work with at least with a good director and maybe even a great director, again, you're learning all the time. Whereas with novels it's just you and an editor. A lot of it, obviously, is on you like 99% of the work is down to you and there's no hiding place.

Whereas in screenplays, it's much quicker and it's more immediate fun because it's collaborative. But if you end up with the wrong crew, the wrong set of people, the wrong producer, the wrong director, the wrong cast, the wrong executive producer, it's absolutely living hell.

There's nothing you can do about it. As a screenwriter, you're like the caterer. They'll get rid of you pretty quick and then the guy who makes the tea. You have to have a good agent a good contract and when you get that opportunity, ideally, if one person is interested in your novel turning it into a screenplay and maybe there's some other people who are interested and then you can go and essentially interview them and see, which one of them you might work with.

Who might be a better fit personality wise, it all comes down to personality, who is going to work with you maybe the person who is a bit brusque and is not really listening to what you're saying in a meeting or any of that nonsense. That's the people you don't want to work with, even if they're totally amazing.

The person that treats you with respect but is also bringing something to the table for previous success or money or both, ideally. That's pretty ... that might be a benefit for you.

James Blatch: I'm reminded of this, was it Christian Bale who was taped screaming at the DOP at the set of a film and I remember thinking I don't want to work in that environment. I think he did apologize afterwards but there was that.

You do have to pick your people carefully.

Cal Moriarty: That goes on all the time but most people haven't got their phone on in the set because it's messing up the signals. That happens all the time. Actors have melt downs, directors are just winging it because

some of them, lots of actors I say most of them. They know what they're doing and they're hoping not to be discovered that they have no idea.

James Blatch: That's all of us, isn't it?

Cal Moriarty: Exactly. Imagine being like that on a film set having producers breathing down your neck at you. You've got to do two and a half pages per day of script, film it and it's got to be ready to show an audience and it's just pressure, it's a pressure cooker. Of course, people go off the deep end.

James Blatch: Before we leave Hollywood. I just want to talk about, briefly, about writers who don't have ambitions or interest in being a screenwriter but are approached about an option. You talked about the screenwriter potentially getting 3%-5% of the budget of a film.

What's the case of the novelist whose book the film is based on, what can they expect out of this?

Cal Moriarty: It depends how big a success the book has been. How good your agent is at getting the money, how many other people are interested in the material because ideally you want an auction. You want people falling over themselves and writing much larger checks than they should be because as a writer the only thing you can ever be guaranteed is getting that money for the option check.

If you go with somebody who maybe is saying, we've got all the money in the world and we've got George Clooney! Not that he would do anyone else's script often.

We've got all of these amazing writers and directors and people that want to do your work. Then, if they can't get it made and that's all hot air then the only thing you're left with is that check. That little beginning check.

They want, obviously, your material. Let's just say they agree that when they make it, they're going to give you \$250,000 when they make it. That's a long way off.

Your option fee should be 10% of the \$250,000 you're going to get ultimately. That's the Writers Guild of America and if you are interested you should look up their website. They've got loads of the contracts on there, it's very open system because most the people who are selling script in Hollywood are selling to good producers, are selling them to people who are members of the Producers Guild of America, it's all unionized. It's not just like anybody can join. You have to have a track record, you have to be respected, you can't just be anybody sticking that label at the end of your name.

They're only allowed to work with people who are kind of accredited, as they were, for the Writers Guild of America. Sure they take on freelancers etc, there's slightly different rules for that.

A lot of the screenplays are getting optioned by people who have got good Hollywood careers and are working with good Hollywood companies. They will always be able to write you a check because they have the money and that's how they act and produce. They've got big studios, they're getting discretionary funds from the studios so they can write their own check.

The alternative, they have to go in and present the work and you sell it and see if they can get the check but they have money. You can get your option money. I hear people doing it, people that are even big selling, best selling novelist here in the UK singing up for free options with producers.

People do that because they're desperate because after maybe 20 years or 25 years of writing this is the first that someone has come along and wanting to option it. There's nobody else interested and because of that you can't get any kind of auction going.

Then you option for free but then who is you're optioning the work to because most producers should be able to pay. Always think of it like this, if a producer can't pay to option your work, even if it's for \$1,000 or 1,000 pounds or 1,500 pound whatever, a very small tiny amount of money, kind of looks the option where they're going to take it around for 18 months and don't sign an option for longer than that. When you realize this person is a joker basically, you want to get your option back as soon as possible. If they can't pay the writer that tiny little bit of money, then how are you going to run a business? How are you going to get an assistant? How are they going to take people to the Ivy to wine and dine them to get them to put money into your film.

Always think of that because if they haven't got money to pay you, you can guarantee they have no money to pay anybody else and they should always be paying the writer because without the writer, I love writers; without the writer there is nothing. There is no production companies, there is no directors, there's not producers, there's no audience because you've got nothing to show them.

To me, it's all about the writer. I used to be a producer. It's all about the writer and if you can't treat a writer right, that doesn't really say much for your company or you as a producer. Even in the game, it's a very expensive game the film business and novel writing, as you know, it's expensive. You have to give up time from your other job to go and do this job, which I'm not being paid for and you might not get any money at the end of it either.

I think writers is underpaid, they should be an absolute moratorium in the UK about writers signing free options. It's completely exploitative and should be stopped. Just like you can't go and work in an office for free, you have to get paid minimum wage. Even if you're a teenager, you have to get paid a minimum amount of money. Why are writers different to that? Are they a different species?

James Blatch: They don't eat.

Cal Moriarty: They don't eat. Exactly. Don't eat, don't need any rent paid, don't need to get a car to work or anything, the bus. I just think it's pretty disgraceful. I would like to see the Writers Guild of Great Britain come out and say that. No more free options.

Are you listening Writers Guild of Great Britain?

James Blatch: We'll make sure they are. That's brilliant Cal, that section of the interview I think will be really illuminating for people because it is an area that most people don't know much about. What they know about is what they see in comedy satire films about Hollywood.

Cal Moriarty: They've all being written by starving writers.

James Blatch: Exactly. The producers and everything else. Let's finish off about you as a novelist because you've been traditionally published by Faber.

I know that you're considering you've got a great, fascinating book in the pipeline, which you're considering self-publishing.

Cal Moriarty: Yeah. I've got this book called the First Detective, which is about Dickens as a detective with his friend, inspector Field. He was essentially the first or the second, maybe, detective at New Scotland Yard. They used to go around and solve mysteries and crimes and get up to all kinds of no good stuff, back in the day. It's about that.

One stage a few years ago, when I had first written it it was getting loads of attention from people. Somebody actually wanted to make it into a television series as well. It was being, you know, chartered as a \$200 million dollar replacement for Sherlock Holmes franchise, which had gone missing somewhere. I still haven't done the third one of it.

This other producer, a fantastic British producer, wanted to make it into a television series and she sent it off to a production company. I won't let you know, it's a massive one and they even sent this thing back saying haven't you heard about this? I haven't heard about it and neither had she. The BBC were putting on a Dickens show, I can't even remember the name, I didn't watch it. I was so upset that it was a tiny bit similar to mine. It was TV series but it got canned. It costs loads and loads and loads of money to make, of course, then that puts producers off. They see something that someone is part of the whole. They've built these sets on 40,000 square foot warehouse or something. You're talking serious, serious money and I think there was only about 6 episodes of it last Christmas time, just under a year. It just kind of stalled.

I had already written the novel of it and there's a play of it as well. Lots of things have been a bit haywire in life so everything got put back on the back burner. I'm coming to it again now and I really want to self-publish it. So much so that even though I don't know a bit about self-publishing, I've downloaded Mark's course.

James Blatch: Yep.

Cal Moriarty: I'm going to follow that by the book and give it its best shot. I'm going to get a professional cover, use a professional editor. Even though I edit other peoples work. I just think that we should self-edit your work. Sounds like lunacy doesn't it?

Kind of like people who aren't mechanics shouldn't fix their own cars.

James Blatch: Or surgeons should remove their own colons.

Cal Moriarty: Exactly. Even though it's free. That's where that's going and it's a series, it's setting up a franchise and then hopefully if I can make this successful I'll go back to the producers who were interested in making it

into a big budget movie for \$200 million, thank you. I go back to them and say, look, now it's been a success. Now you can see that people are interested in it.

I think it's the self-publishing thing that Mark and you were saying, you have to do everything so professionally. It has to be as if Faber have done it but it's just got your name as publisher on the cover instead.

You have to do a cover, you have get an editor, you have to get a copy editor, you have to employ the street team. All of those things, it's so important. I'm hoping Mark's course is going to flag up a few other things that I've probably forgotten.

James Blatch: Obviously, I couldn't agree more. Mark did a radio interview recently and when I talk to people, they immediately say, when I talk about an editor they say, I thought you were self-published. How have you got an editor?

I think people have no idea about the professionalism that goes into self-published books. In fact, there are so many smaller publishers these days, I dare say, that a fairly big chunk of self-published work is more professionally worked on than some of these small outfits that are turning around things very quickly.

We've come to our 45 minutes bit, which is where we try and cap the interviews. It's been really illuminating Cal.

Are you going to be in the one on one Facebook group, the genius groups?

Cal Moriarty: I may have signed up. I haven't been online probably for a couple of weeks. If I haven't signed up for them, I will.

James Blatch: I think it would be great to know you're there, first of all because we'll follow your journey and check out the book when it comes out but also, people may poke the old question at you. Saying, I've just had a call from Mr. Tarantino, what do I do next?

Cal Moriarty: Yeah, please do. I like to spend my life stopping writers from getting ripped off. That is the danger. People say, you don't need an agent or you don't need a lawyer and you just sign a contract and you're basically signing your life away to someone who knows way better than you what you're signing. If you get that call, I want the one on one page, just ask me. I'll tell you what to say to them, politely.

James Blatch: The film industries exploitative and full of sharks. Who knew?

Cal Moriarty: Who knew? Fancy that! The one that's calling you may be the same.

Mark Dawson: Great name. Cal Moriarty. It sounds like a film name, doesn't it? Erin Brockovich, Cal Moriarty, do you remember ...

James Blatch: It sounds like a film villain. Sherlock Holmes novel. No, she's great. She actually lives very, very near here. Couple weeks ago she came down to have coffee with me in a coffee shop just down the road that I go to quite a bit and we sat down and had a chat for an hour or so. She's a very good novelist in her own right. Obviously, lots and lots of experience. I didn't know that she was a private detective, that was interesting. Very, very switched on.

Runs courses, as she said. Has lots of high profiled authors go on those courses too. Certainly, someone I would rely on if I needed something clarified in the process that I'm going through, she would be on my speed dial definitely.

James Blatch: It stands to reason, doesn't it, that having a big film deal and this sort of thing that's in the background for you may or may not happen would be a transformative moment in your career.

Mark Dawson: Hell yes. My wife is already looking on property websites for the house that we might be able to buy if this ...

James Blatch: In Beverly Hills.

Mark Dawson: Probably, yeah. We may be getting another one, two houses. Obviously the money that can be made is potentially vast. If you're looking at, lets say, I think to do this series that we're thinking about would be a minimum of \$50 million. Probably up towards \$100 million and then you're talking 1%-2% of that. It's pretty easy to work out you're looking at a very, very decent some.

I still think it's a bit of pipe dream. I don't think it will come off but I'm happy to imagine.

James Blatch: One of the people we're chasing is Lee Child to try and get on this podcast.

Mark Dawson: Not literally.

James Blatch: No, not literally. Well, maybe at some point literally. I'm going to put that out there, try and crowd source to get Lee on. I know a couple of our listeners do vaguely know Lee. He's going to Thriller Fest in New York and I think if he agreed to do an interview with us, one of us would hop on a plane and go and do it there and make it easy for him.

He's somebody whose life probably was transformed by that moment as well. A very good writer, well known books but, it just goes that ... it's exponential with Hollywood. Not everyone reads books but virtually everybody sits down and watches a film at some point. If you ask people

before the films who'd heard of Jack Reacher and afterwards you will find there's an explosion afterwards.

The same for Hunger Games and so on. Lets all hope for that moment that Hollywood comes calling him. I just think that there's, for me, if I want to go to cinema, I'd be looking for maybe a 1960's Cold War thriller. That's what I, personally, think would be a great film to make. Maybe the Vulcan Jet in it and slightly floored but young, quite good looking hero. If anybody would like to make that film, Podcast that Self Publishing Formula.

What do you think the chances are?

Mark Dawson: Hollywood producers are listening to this.

James Blatch: That was a fantastic elevator pitch. I'd be up for that.

Mark Dawson: We're done. I'm with you. \$50 million, 1%. 1.5%, let's start there. I'm down to 1.25. Great. Thank you very much indeed for watching, have a great week writing, have a great week reading because we're all readers. Have a great week selling.

We're going to speak to you for episode 53 next week, until then. Good bye.

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