

EPISODE 62: THE SHORT STORY MIRACLE MAN – WITH T.S. PAUL

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

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to episode 62 of The Self-Publishing Formula Podcast, with James and Mark. This is kind of old school for us, Mark, isn't it? We're looking at each other through computer screens.

Mark Dawson: Yes.

James Blatch: And we are ... Yeah, go on.

Mark Dawson: We're going back to how we used to do it, because we're running around a little bit to try and get stuff ready for the SPF away two and a half days in Salisbury on Wednesday, where we're going to be talking about self-publishing and setting some plans for the rest of the year.

My wife also is coming onboard to help us, so we're going to have a getting-to-know-you session, and then we've decided to treat ourselves a little bit on Friday afternoon, and we're going to be racing Ferraris around a track in Wiltshire. If there's no podcast next week, it's-

James Blatch: A fire.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: I can tell your manual dexterity already by the way you're knocking stuff around. Well, I think as long as we both give John Dyer a wide berth on the track, should be all right.

Mark Dawson: That won't be difficult, we'll just be much faster than him.

James Blatch: I'm really looking forward to that, they're Ferrari 458's. I'm not a massive car person, I've enjoyed the stuff I've done over time, but this is going to be a real treat, I think, and it's the new Ferrari, it's the brand new really nice one, it's quite limited at the moment.

Excited about that, and yeah we're going to do some planning as you say, Lucy Dawson coming onboard, so we have two Dawsons in SPF this week. We will also get together and record a few more podcasts in a nicer environment than looking down a screen at each other. Although I have got my pink lights on, you can't really see them because it's daytime.

Mark Dawson: Looks like a cat's boudoir.

James Blatch: Yeah, it smells like one too, which is the funny thing. I have a treat for you in terms of lighting.

Mark Dawson: Do you?

James Blatch: Yeah, for Wednesday, so you might be excited about that.

Mark Dawson: Very good.

James Blatch: I shall leave that dangling there. Look, shall we get on with this interview? Because it's an intriguing one, it is an intriguing one, and I don't think either one of us know 100% what to make of it, but it's a really interesting one to listen to.

He is an author called T.S. Paul, it's actually Scott Paul, and this interview came about when one of our SPF-ers, I have a feeling it was Carrie, dropped me an email a long time ago and said, "There's a guy crushing it with short stories."

She's younger than me, so she uses words like "crushing it", so that I thought, "Well, that sounds interesting, short stories," because you often hear people complaining that it's quite difficult to make money just from short stories if you're not using them as a reader magnet.

Anyways, we thought this guy was worth having a listen to. He's been writing for about a year, and his figures are unbelievable. What he does is, shall we say "eccentric" at this stage, but let's have a listen to the interview, and then Mark and I have a chat off the back a bit.

T.S. Paul: I've been writing for a year, my one-year anniversary was actually just five days ago. I fell into it by accident, a fellow author gave me a little push, actually gave me a big push, and I put my first short book out on the 18th of February 2016.

So put my first book out, it sold a few copies, he kind of was like, gave me the push and said, "Hey, write another one." We put that one out, and then a week later, "Write another one," so within three weeks, I had three books out, three titles out, and they started to sell a little bit and make a little bit of money.

I was heartened by that, I mean I once upon a time was a brick and mortar bookstore manager, and I know that new authors don't make any money, so I wasn't expecting anything. I didn't have any preconceived conceptions about what is going to happen as an ebook author, because I didn't know. It was a heck of a surprise that when my first "paycheck" from Amazon in February was \$150, and I'm like, "Hey, that's cool, I can work with that." Then March was \$2,500, and April was \$7,500, and I was like, "Whoa, that's kind of crazy," and then it just kept getting higher and higher and higher.

Then in October, I switched genres and went from science fiction to paranormal, and it just leaped right off the page.

James Blatch: How long are your books?

T.S. Paul: The first few, like the first four, are under 100 pages.

James Blatch: How many words is that?

T.S. Paul: We're talking, well the first one was right at about 17 or 18,000, book two was around 20,000, book three I think was like 25 or 26, and then book four was up in the 30,000 range. It went from 60 pages to like 100 pages.

James Blatch: Because this is unusual I think in our sphere. We talk to lots of authors, and I know there's no precise science on how long a book needs to be, and I think my book is in seven parts for seven days, and I think part one, the first day, is at the moment 28,000 words, longer than any of your books.

T.S. Paul: I did crazy things. People told me I was insane, because I put books at for 60 pages at \$2.99 and made money, and people just told me I was crazy, that there was no way in hell that I was going to make any money that way. I was having five and \$6,000, \$8,000, \$9,000 months with just \$2.99 fiction, all my books, \$2.99. I didn't change the price, I didn't do free promos, I didn't do \$0.99 promos, I didn't do anything. I didn't advertise until my fourth month, all organic.

James Blatch: That was all word of mouth, people reading the book, and presumably Amazon picking up the ...

Were you in KU?

T.S. Paul: I'm in KU, I'm all in.

James Blatch: Okay, so it's page reads you're getting your money from.

T.S. Paul: And sales. Let me see, I just pulled up the figures here. Let me look at last year because I'm in this year. Okay, so last year, according to this, book one, which is The Forgotten Engineer, Forgotten Engineer last year sold, as in sales copies, not KU, 4,263 copies.

James Blatch: Wow.

T.S. Paul: With 415,000 pages read. Remember, that's a 60-page book.

James Blatch: Wow, so first three or four months you say were organic, before you did any advertising.

T.S. Paul: Yes, and it was only Facebook advertising.

James Blatch: Right, okay, organic Facebook or Facebook ads?

T.S. Paul: Facebook ads.

James Blatch: Facebook ads, okay.

When you did start advertising?

T.S. Paul: I started with boosts and I did some goofy boosty stuff to get likes. The one that I tell people about is, I posted a picture of the cat, of our cat, because we have a very large orange tabby.

James Blatch: Well, that's what the internet's for.

T.S. Paul: Of course it is, people love cat pictures. I targeted it at people who like science fiction and also like cats. Then once I got a ton of likes, I used those same likes to send out pictures of the book, and picked up a

few sales and KU or whatever. It was kind of sneaky, it was kind of a way to get likes on my page without getting likes on my page.

James Blatch: I tell you what's interesting about that, because people don't, you know we all get on our Facebook page, we'll get every day, "I bet you ignore this post," and if you don't ignore, you know all the stuff they're kind of begging you to do something and pass it on.

T.S. Paul: Click-bait.

James Blatch: Actually, and that's the tactic really, isn't it? Because people can then use the likes, and then start marketing towards you. You've used it in a more honest way, because it was a little bit of fun from you, and it was your persona that then followed that up.

T.S. Paul: Well, I don't have a mailing list at all.

James Blatch: Do you still not have a mailing list?

T.S. Paul: I do not have a mailing list.

James Blatch: Scott, basically you've broken every rule there is, and you're making five figures a month.

T.S. Paul: I am, I am, I'm breaking it all. I still don't have a mailing list, because my readers don't want that from me. I've only had one person that I'm aware of ask me if I had a mailing list.

They use my blog, they use my Facebook page, and it's very active, I mean they talk to me and they ask questions. Somebody asked me yesterday, we'll get into this, my new tactic for writing a book, which is very strange, somebody asked me yesterday what do I do now. I said, "Well, you could try reading these," and I posted a big list of books for other people.

They talk to me and ask me questions and stuff, so it's kind of cool. I have a very organic thing with my people.

I've got over 2,000 likes that I'm aware of on my actual Facebook page, and then as for the blog, your guess is as good as mine. I get 2,000 hits a day. I have 62 followers on there, but I get like 2,000 hits a day, so not everybody's officially following me.

James Blatch: Okay, so you're getting strong interest organically.

When you release a new book, you just simply post it on your social media channels.

T.S. Paul: Pretty much. I do run an ad occasionally, but not for a specific book, because you know I'll post the first book in my ads, I will boost it out to my people on Facebook. I'll do a quick three-day boost for \$15, doesn't cost me a whole lot, \$5 a day, and just throw it out there. I generally sell, with the science fiction series, I sell a guaranteed 500 books in two weeks.

James Blatch: When you launch.

T.S. Paul: When I launch. For the paranormal, we're looking at probably four to 5,000 sales. Guaranteed.

James Blatch: Just from people looking for you basically, and waiting for you to announce on your channel. I mean, you know obviously social media has set itself up to make what you're doing much more difficult, so that makes it all the more impressive.

Because they basically want your money and they want you to pay for advertising. The old days of being able to reach easily are gone, so that's very very impressive.

At the heart of this, Scott, must be your writing.

T.S. Paul: I was not a trained writer, I was a crappy English major in both high school and in college, that was not my major, I didn't do well in English. Now, I am a big reader.

Until I started writing, I was reading 10 plus books a week, 40 to 50 books a month, so I mean, I'm one of those people that was blowing KU's numbers out of the water because you know with the KU, they expect you to read four books a month, five books a month, I'm reading 50. They were probably real happy to see me not stop reading, but I still have my KU subscription and I still read books, but I probably read maybe three, and that's in a month, so it's not quite the same anymore, but I'm very well-read. When it was suggested to me to write, it was author Michael Anderly who gave me the push, and we've gotten to be friends, and he was like, "You need to write a book, and you need to write a book," and he kept saying that for like two weeks like, "You need to write a book."

And I'm like, "Fine, fine, I'll write a book." The very first edition of *The Forgotten Engineer* was God-awful. I mean, I put it up online, and it was awful, the formatting was bad, the punctuation was bad, the grammar was bad, and I was still selling books, and I was selling a lot of books.

People would say, "Why is this selling?" If you go back and you look at the reviews on the first book, if you go to the very beginning and you look at the original ones, they'll say awful things about me.

Then there'll be people saying, "Five stars, great story," and then there'll be somebody who says, "God, why did you put this up here, are you four?" Then there'll be another review that says, "Hey, five stars, good story." It's like it's up and down and up and down and up and down. After six months or eight months, if you read my series, it's improved a lot.

My writing has gotten way better. I've actually gone back and repaired the worst of the problems with the early books. *The Forgotten Engineer* that's

out now, if you just now pick it up and not the old one, is 300% better. I actually had a friend look at it, and she thought it had more emotional effect on people than the original one did, she read the awful original one. That's okay because I enjoyed writing it, and it had a good hook to it, and it was a fun, and I didn't think it was going to be a series, so I didn't plan. I was on a two week writing schedule, write a book, throw it out, write a book, throw it out.

James Blatch: The books you're reading, you're reading full-length novels, or do you specifically read shorter stories?

T.S. Paul: I read everything, I read it all.

James Blatch: Because I mean, what I'm curious about - I am struggling writing a book, I mean it's hard writing a book. I'm writing my first book and I'm working closely with an editor, chapter by chapter. This is my first book, I'm learning the craft.

I just expanded, as I said and it's not really a chapter, it was a part, but it's to 28,000 words, and she still come back to me and said, "I don't know the characters well enough, I don't care for them enough yet." I'm thinking, in a quite depressed way, I've got to go back and write even more, possibly write better might be the answer to that.

You've written a complete book that people care about, people follow the characters, people want to know more, all the things that I'm trying to achieve in 100,000 words and struggling, you've done in 20,000 words.

T.S. Paul: Yes. Basically what I did was come up with a single character, a female character seems to work the best for science fiction. People yell at me, I don't really care. Female characters because I'm a fan of people like David Webber and Ringo, and those kind of people, and female characters seem to jive with people, especially when you're writing military fiction.

I picked a female character, I knew what I wanted to write. I knew she was young, because that's what I like to read, is like to read the academy stories and the cadet stories and that kind of stuff. I made her an ensign, made her on her first mission, she's in the engine room and there's an attack. The head engineer looks and he sees her, and he's like, "Why are you here?" She's like, "Because you told me to be here," and he's like, "No, there's this attack going on, you need to be at your station," and she's like, "I don't know where my station is, I've only been on this ship a month."

It's cadet kind of things, so she gets knocked out, she wakes up, the battle's over, she's the only one left alive, and she's in the middle of nowhere with nobody around her. That's the hook.

James Blatch: That's a good hook.

T.S. Paul: It's a very good hook, and a lot of people complain that there's not enough meat to the story, but the thing is, I wasn't setting out to write meat, I was setting out to write something short, because I thought it was kind of fun.

James Blatch: For every person who's complaining about this, there's another 200 who are buying the books, so I wouldn't listen to them.

T.S. Paul: Of course there is, and what happened is that I decided after I got to about book six, I decided I wasn't going to make them more than 180 pages. I keep the length of the Athenas at about 55,000 words, which is about 180 pages. The way I write, that's kind of what it averages out to be, and I don't make anything longer in sci-fi more than 55,000 words.

James Blatch: Yeah, I mean that's getting to novella length, isn't it? I guess.

T.S. Paul: I don't know, I really don't care.

James Blatch: There is a great tradition of science fiction short stories, of course.

I grew up on Isaac Asimov and loved them, but also, science fiction is quite famous for having long books.

T.S. Paul: Of course they are, and I like to get it out. People would say, "That's terrible, and you should write it longer," and stuff like that, but I'd rather get paid now, not six years from now.

It would take me forever to write something that long, and I don't want to do it, not for the sci-fi series. I like them short, to the point, less Robert Jordan-y. I don't like it to have all the details, let your mind tell you what the engine room looks like. You don't need to know that there's grease on the engineer's tools, it's details that are not necessary for my series, straight, to the point, less extravagance, let's get to the point and see what's going on and watch the adventure.

The first few books were like that, and I worked my way through the series and built my character, because see, I'm a pantsler, well, I'm kind of a hybrid pantsler.

I know how I'm going to start the book, I know how I'm going to end the book and I know who the characters are, but I don't know anything else in the middle. I'll get halfway through and start giggling because I'm like, "Oh, this instead of that, and do something fun."

Now the book's made it all the way to book 10, but then I did a spinoff series, which I'm working on now, it's the second book, and then I have two short story collections, and then there's the short stories, because I decided early on to write a short story a week and post it for free on my blog. I've written over 50 short stories, short short, like between one and 3,000 word short stories, plus the books.

James Blatch: You're doing that, and you're giving those away for free, but you'll bundle those presumably onto KU or something?

T.S. Paul: Yes, once I get a dozen, I'll pull them off the blog, delete them off the blog completely, put them in a bundle, write an anchor story. I'd write something longer, like a five or 6,000 word anchor story that nobody's seen ever, didn't post anything about it, and throw it up there with the others in the book.

James Blatch: How many books have you written now?

T.S. Paul: We have 25 last year, and then this year, once a couple more come out, it'll be like 28. I've got two short story, call it 25 that are mine, 26 if you count the one that I co-wrote without Michael Anderly, but I wrote probably 80% of that, 90% of that.

James Blatch: Okay, and that's year one?

T.S. Paul: That's year one.

James Blatch: In your author career, you're going to have 100 books out within four or five years.

T.S. Paul: Works for me.

James Blatch: Yeah, well it obviously does work for you, and that's what's fascinating about this, Scott.

Congratulations on a stellar launch into this world.

T.S. Paul: See, that's just science fiction. I've jumped to paranormal, and paranormal's longer. Those are longer, those are between 275 and 375 pages.

James Blatch: Okay, so they're, yeah, getting up to more traditional length, but that's fascinating and really interesting. It's got my mind turning over. So like I say, I went back to those days as a teenager reading the short stories which I loved.

There was a guy called Jeffery Archer, funny enough, quite a controversial figure in the UK, sort of politician, but he specialized in short stories, and I can remember almost every word of those. You can have an impact with a short story that I think you cannot have with a novel, and vice versa of course.

T.S. Paul: Well, look at Ellery Queen, if you get into the mysteries, or some of those, or even look at what people consider the great fiction of the 20th century.

Breakfast at Tiffany's or the Old Man and the Sea, those are short. If you look at the word length on those, they're less than 30,000 words.

James Blatch: Yeah, Catcher in the Rye I think is short, isn't it?

T.S. Paul: People get all excited, and they're like, "Oh, you can't write that. I mean, that's awful, those are so short, get those offline." It's like, "Take those other ones off too."

James Blatch: Yeah, exactly.

T.S. Paul: Because if you're going to complain about mine, complain about those. I really don't define what books are, people get all upset with me and they're like, "Oh, you're not even writing a novelette or something like that," and it's like I don't want to call it that.

James Blatch: Yeah, who cares.

T.S. Paul: People read what they want to read.

James Blatch: I love the fact that you don't care about convention, and exactly right, in this modern era, the technology enables people to read what they want to read.

Do you know who decides whether you've written a book or not? It's that bottom line, people buying it and reading it.

T.S. Paul: I've seen 15-page books on Amazon, I mean come on, you're going to give me a hard time, give them a hard time too.

James Blatch: Tell me about when you did start advertising, you built up this organic reach, and you've obviously got a fan base and people know where to find you.

I was just going to ask you about how when you then started to run paid ads, when you went beyond boosting.

T.S. Paul: Well, I didn't have any money. I mean, when I did this, I was unemployed, my wife made just enough money to cover all of our expenses and not have anything left over. So we were living on the edge. I had to borrow \$50 from her so I could run my first ad.

I did a Facebook ad, and it was a boost and it wasn't that exciting, so then I fine tuned it a little bit and stared at it for awhile and messed around with it, and just did the simple boost, like I said, with the thing with the cat, and then a few others just out to my fans and out to my readers.

I did try a giveaway, which didn't work at that time, and then I did do, everyone's like, "Oh, do a BK Knights's."

Well, the thing is, I don't discount my books, so I did pay them the \$10 or whatever it was to do that, but I didn't get very much from it because I don't discount my books to free, and I don't believe in free.

Now, people would say, "What the hell?", and I have done one free promo, and that was only because someone asked, is that I was asked to put it in something. It wasn't even one of my regular books, it was one of my paranormal, it was my very first prequel.

I threw in up in there, and actually gave away three times what I'm supposed to give away, so it was kind of funny. Because I asked, I said, "What's the most they give away?" "Oh, people give out 2,000 books." I'm like, "Great, I did 6,500, holy crap." All I could think about was losing the money, I really couldn't think about the other part.

James Blatch: That doesn't surprise me. I think the giveaway does unquestionably, and we follow this closely, it does work for lots and lots of people, but it does not surprise me at all, because you've done everything upside down, and everything has worked brilliantly for you.

It doesn't surprise me at all that some of the conventional things for you are not working in that area, but that's really exciting for people to hear about the way you've worked.

I come back to the fact that your writing must be very very good and gripping, compelling, and that is what's bringing people back to you, ultimately.

T.S. Paul: People like it, and I've seen a huge upswing once the paranormal came out. That was funny, there's a funny story for you.

My wife just does not read sci-fi, so she wanted to read paranormal, and she wanted me to write a paranormal. I planned, I actually spent money and ordered the covers and had them in process.

James Blatch: What, before you'd written the books?

T.S. Paul: Before I'd written the books. I didn't even have titles or plots, I didn't have a character name, I didn't have anything, no plots, no characters, no nothing, so I ordered the covers.

James Blatch: Did you anything in a remotely normal way?

T.S. Paul: No.

James Blatch: Okay, let's just get that out there, just so we know.

T.S. Paul: I was going to release the first book, see remember, I can knock out a book a month, so I was going to do the very first book in September, I was going to write it and release it like first week/second week of October so I can get attention with the Halloween release, my wife wanted a Halloween release.

It's the Witch series, the Federal Witch series, so this is in like late August, so I'm driving my wife to work and I drop her off, and I'm on my way home and I'm thinking, "You know what? Let's write a prequel, just for the hell of it, just to see if people of my readers would follow me to paranormal."

In the space of 24 hours, I wrote a 10,000 word prequel in three chapters, and I dropped each chapter to my editors, and they were quick, gave it back to me.

I bought a cover online, I bought something off the shelf because I didn't have a prequel, I didn't plan to write a prequel, so I didn't have a cover ready. I didn't want to use a face, because I had a face already picked out. I bought an off-the-shelf cover, threw it up on Amazon, and it took off like a rocket.

This was like September, so in the space ... I gave away 6,500 of that mid-year in October, because it had been out a month, Erica Conroy over at South Publishing Roundtable asked me if I would like to put my book in

their thing. I'm like, "Fine, whatever, we can do that," because at that point, it had already sold 7,000 copies at \$0.99, so I was like, "Sure, why not?" Then I'm like, "How many copies can I give away?" She goes, "Oh, you'll give away about 2,000."

Well, I gave away 6,500, so I was kind of freaking out. Then when it came off the promo, I put it back to \$0.99 and sold another 4,000, so that book alone sold like 15,000 since last year.

James Blatch: When you took part in those giveaways, you're not getting the email addresses back, or you don't have a list?

T.S. Paul: She gave me the emails, but I don't want them, I didn't even open the email.

James Blatch: Which is why the giveaway doesn't really work for you, if you're not doing that conventional system.

T.S. Paul: No, and I did it for fun, I just did it for exposure, I didn't do it for anything else. To be truthful, I only heard back from like two people that got it for free and got addicted to the series, if there's more I don't know. But I did it for fun. The prequel was kind of fun, so because it did so well all of the sudden, it's selling like 4,000 copies in two weeks and I'm like, "Holy crap." I was in the middle of writing the new Athena book, which was book 10, so I dropped it.

I mean, I clicked and turned it off and opened up Scrivener and started writing a new first Witch book, which I wasn't going to write for a month, and knocked it out really quick. The first cover was ready, slapped it on there, put a title on it, and sent it up, and it took off like a rocket, and that was October. Then I just worked on the next one and got it out in November.

James Blatch: You say your wife reads paranormal. Do you read paranormal?

T.S. Paul: Oh yeah, I read paranormal, I'm a big paranormal guy.

James Blatch: So you're very familiar with the genre.

T.S. Paul: Oh yeah, and I created a world off the cuff. Remember I didn't have anything in August, I didn't have anything. I mean, I had a title, I knew what the titles were going to be. My titles reflect the plot, all of my titles. Any title on my book, if I put a title on there, it reflects how the story's going to be or the plot, it's something I do. If I have a title, I know what I want to do, sort of kind of.

James Blatch: Can you give me an example?

T.S. Paul: Conjuring Quantico was all about a young witch going to the FBI, and the FBI's in Quantico, Virginia. The Forgotten Engineer, of course she's forgotten, Engineering Murder, which is book two of that series, she's an engineer, she's targeted, somebody's trying to kill her.

James Blatch: Is Athena the character name?

T.S. Paul: Athena Lee is the character for the Athena Lee science fiction series, Agatha Blackmore is the name of the character for the fantasy series. I do not recommend using double A names, and I didn't realize I did it until I wrote the first book, and I'm like, "Crap," because it's one of the reasons I can't write two books at once, because I get them confused.

I have written Agatha when I meant to write Athena and vice versa, so I don't recommend doing that, but it happened by accident. Yeah, so all of my titles reflect each other, like there's a short story collection that's about Wilson, he's the sidekick character for the science fiction series, his book is

called Wilson's War, and there is a story in there that does reflect Wilson's War, talking about him in battle.

Like I said, all my titles reflect the plot, so if I put a title out there, I kind of know what the plot's going to be. It gives maybe a hint, because most of the time I don't have a clue.

James Blatch: The title is your starting point.

T.S. Paul: It is. I've actually ordered more covers for the Federal Witch series. I have covers up to book eight, and I have like two-line plot references so I kind of know where I'm going, but I don't have any idea what I'm going to write yet, and I'm only on book three.

James Blatch: You're writing on Scrivener, you say?

T.S. Paul: Yes.

James Blatch: You write at home.

Do you have a particular routine for writing?

T.S. Paul: I write in the morning, I write in the evening, I write in the afternoon if nobody's around.

James Blatch: Standing desk, sitting down?

T.S. Paul: Really, I'll put headphones on, yeah I've got a fancy desk. Well now, before I used to just, I wrote the first eight books sitting in the living room chair on a tray table with my computer in front of me.

Now I have a real actual physical desk, but before I just didn't have anything. I've got my own little office now, it's nice and quiet, nobody's in here except for the cat. It's been a real challenge. I had never written

before, I was suddenly thrust into this, and all of the sudden people are like, "Hey, when's the next book?", and I'm like "Uhh."

James Blatch: "I've got to write that." Do you mind me asking: you gave us some figures earlier of how much you're doing month on month. Has that settled down to a kind of, I mean I'm assuming a very healthy income?

T.S. Paul: In October, I was making about \$9,000 a month in August/September-ish, so that's kind of what I was expecting for the rest of the year. Conjuring Quantico took off like a rocket and made \$26,000 all by itself, so I did \$39,000 in October.

James Blatch: Wow.

T.S. Paul: That's just straight up by itself, and then each month was somewhat the same since then.

James Blatch: Really?

T.S. Paul: Yes.

James Blatch: Wow, so you're talking, you are approaching kind of half a million dollars a year, I mean 12 times 39 is just-

T.S. Paul: This year, probably.

James Blatch: You're not spending a lot on advertising.

T.S. Paul: I spent \$10,000 on Facebook advertisements last year.

James Blatch: Some people do that in a month, or in a week sometimes if it's a big week.

T.S. Paul: I'm doing about \$1,000 a week. I was just looking at those numbers actually just before you clicked on, I was messing around with Facebook ads, and that's about what I'm doing.

James Blatch: Well, that's incredible, and you know I'm so happy for you. It seems like you found something that's really changed your life and you're enjoying it, and why wouldn't you enjoy it?

T.S. Paul: So far it has been a real challenge. Some of the things that I've done do seem a little strange sometimes, but you know, I get really good response from it, and I still do off the cuff kind of crazy things, and it seems to work, I mean for me.

I don't know if it's necessarily going to work for somebody else, because I don't do promos. I've done a couple, I mean I was on Book Barbarian and that's about the only one I've ever really tried.

James Blatch: You haven't done BookBub?

T.S. Paul: I've been turned down a whole bunch of times for BookBub. See, I won't do free.

James Blatch: Yeah, you won't do free, and you don't discount.

T.S. Paul: I've done \$0.99 a couple of times, I did it for Book Barbarian, but that was just book one. It was just Forgotten Engineer, and to be truthful, I did it three weeks before I made it \$0.99 permanently, because I did drop the price to \$0.99, along with book two, but everything else is still \$2.99 and I still make money off of it every day.

James Blatch: I guess you're not looking around scratching your head wondering why it's not working, which is when people do try, and they move into things like the list. I mean, you are well set up to do a freebie at the beginning of both your series, and run Facebook ads, and build a list

and market to your list, but then you're thinking, "Why should I? Because I'm making \$39,000 a month."

T.S. Paul: I was seriously thinking about making *The Forgotten Engineer* free, and I was talking about it and I kicked around. My wife is against it completely, and she's like, "Why would you do that?"

I talked to a couple of authors, and they were like, "You know, you're kind of like going to screw yourself on that, because you said so emphatically last year that you wouldn't do free, and all of the sudden you're doing free," and I'm like, "Yeah, that's true."

I didn't do it, but I still sell, because I just had the one year anniversary of *The Forgotten Engineer*, it's been out a year, so I gave away 50 copies. I bought them myself and did a giveaway on Amazon and gave away 50 copies, and they were gone in a day. I mean, that's quick.

I still sell between 30 and 50 every single day of the first book, and my sell through rate, book two, they sell about 20, book three I'm down to about 10, but then after book four, I'm still getting 10, 12, 14 people every single day from book four to book 10. The way I figured it with the 50 free copies is that if three people read the whole series, that paid for it.

James Blatch: Who's your audience, do you know?

T.S. Paul: Primarily women, and I know that from doing the giveaways, and also who's responding to the ads on Facebook. I mean, there are a lot of men too, but it's primarily women.

James Blatch: That doesn't surprise me in terms of those numbers, because women buy more books and read more books.

T.S. Paul: Well then after book four, I was trying to come up with different things to write about in my series, because you know I wasn't expecting to

be writing four books in that series, and I put an LGBT hook to it, gave my main character a girlfriend.

But see, there's no bad language in my books, there's no sex in my books. They're pretty much teen-friendly, so I mean there's a relationship there, but it's just girlfriend and girlfriend, they're not, you know you're not seeing the sex stuff.

James Blatch: Now, was that the first hint at romance, or was there romance in the series at all?

T.S. Paul: Yeah, that was in book three. Book three I kind of had a little tease to it, and then book four, which is called Revolutionary, which is actually more like four different revolutionary things, it's her with a girlfriend, it's her going home for the first time and confronting her father and talking back to her father, she has an invention that she's trying to push in the military, and then there's a literal revolution on the planet.

It's kind of a four stage kind of deal, and that book is still selling high and that's a good one. Like I said, the girlfriend/girlfriend thing has gone through now to book 10, and nobody seems to care. Nobody cares, it's just a character thing, and people love the book and they still read it. There's no bad language in it, I'm in the teen of teens basically for ranking, I think I'm like number 14 right now or 15 or something for teens, because of the Athena Lee series.

James Blatch: Strong female lead, well that's a great thing as well for young women to be reading and enjoying.

T.S. Paul: And they're short.

James Blatch: They're short; we come back to that.

Are you in print as well? Do you use CreateSpace or anything like that?

T.S. Paul: I did one book in print, and that was in the middle of the series. The only reason I did it in print, it was the first book that was more than 150 pages, and I did it for Christmas, and to be truthful, I think I've only sold like one.

I bought five, and of those five, I gave away two, so I think my five are the only five in existence. I really don't care, I do intend to make the Federal Witch series in print, but the sci-fi ones, some of them are just too short, they're all just comic book length, and I don't know that that needs to be printed. I think it'll cost me more money to print them than it would be to-

James Blatch: Yeah, well it costs. Amazon are introducing, in fact they've just announced in the last couple of days a print service that'll be print on demand and just a slightly different set of fees, but yeah, it'll be interesting.

They're trying to make it as easy as possible for your print just to sit alongside your Kindle version if people want it, it gets printed by the robots when they order it.

T.S. Paul: I do intend audio for them. My audio publisher wants them, and I don't care, I told her, "Go ahead." It's going to be a little bit, because they're working on the paranormal first.

James Blatch: Have you been approached by any traditional publishers?

T.S. Paul: I've been approached by four audio publishers, all of them came after me going, "Has this book ... Do you need ..." I've already signed with somebody, and I signed with somebody for a 20% cut, everybody else was offering me seven or less.

James Blatch: Well, it's an incredible story Scott, I'm so pleased that you've come on. I think it's convention-busting. But do you know what? We're in a

pioneering industry, we're in a period of transformation and nobody really knows what the rules are, and it may take another 50 years before anyone even starts to work out there are rules.

T.S. Paul: See, I don't believe in reviews.

James Blatch: No? Oh really?

T.S. Paul: I don't believe in reviews, I don't think they matter, so I don't actively pursue them, I don't do anything to actively pursue them. Any reviews that I've gotten were either people who feel like they want to troll me, or organic. I don't do anything to get reviews, nothing, I don't care.

James Blatch: You have a gift for writing, and it's your writing that speaks for itself, and I guess some people want to respond to that.

T.S. Paul: People will read it or they won't read it, or they can hate me or they won't hate me, or whatever, and I get a lot of that too. My favorite is, yes there's typos, everyone has typos, but I have a preponderance of them. The books are fine, but I get a preponderance of them.

I had one gentleman, he ripped my books off of Amazon and re-edited them himself, and then emailed them back to me with a note, "Please use these, just put my name in the front as an editor," and I'm like, "No." I get a lot of emails like that, which I think is funny, I save them. Beyond that, this is my theory on the typos, and people can yell at me or not, I really don't care.

My theory on the typos and the reason why I sell so well with books that are filled with typos and people would freak out, they're like, "You sell books that aren't perfect," the way people read today, they are so used to having some sort of device in their hand like a phone or a tablet or whatever, and they've been texting for so much that their eyes go right across it, and they don't even see the typo. It's only people who are like English majors or spellcheck Nazis that go crazy over that stuff, and other authors.

James Blatch: We know, don't we, from those sentences where they leave out the vowels, that your brain fills in everything anyway, which is what's happening there.

T.S. Paul: Of course it does, so most people don't even see it. I mean, the readers, you'll get a few that'll complain about, "Oh, it's filled with typos. Don't read this, it's awful," and then you know the next person says, "This is a wonderful series," and I laugh and I think it's funny. That's why I don't believe in reviews, but people don't even see it. The younger people, people 20-somethings and teen-somethings, they don't even see it because they've been texting for so long.

James Blatch: Do you think that's partly also responsible for why your shorter books and short stories have done well? Because there's an attention span that's changed from our parent's generation?

T.S. Paul: Well, not so much the attention span, but the fact that what they're reading it on, I mean our parents would read a physical book, or if you're talking to someone my age, you know maybe you're reading it on your tablet.

I don't read books on it much anymore, but I have a tablet, but most people are reading books on their phone. If you're reading it on your phone, do you want to read a 700-page book, or do you want to read a 50-page book on your phone?

Because maybe you're standing in line at the bank, or you're on your 30-minute break from school, or you're between classes, or hopefully not at a red light in traffic, but I've seen that. You know, people want something quick they can read on their phone, and my books work great for that.

James Blatch: It's been awesome talking to you. We've clocked up three quarters of an hour very quickly. It's gripping story, you've defied pretty

much everything, there's bits, still my mind is swimming with some of the things you've said in this interview.

I'm going to chat to Mark in a minute about this. Some of the things that you've done are just totally out there, and the opposite in terms of many ways other people are approaching their indie careers, and yet you are killing it.

T.S. Paul: You could say I'm insane. People tell me all the time, "You're out of your mind," but it works. If it's crazy and it works, it's not crazy.

James Blatch: Exactly, it's not crazy. You're out of your mind with a bank balance going like this, that shows that there's some sanity there, so that's great.

T.S. Paul: The IRS is going to get me good this year though, you know.

James Blatch: That's going to be painful.

T.S. Paul: Well, that's one of the reasons I moved to Florida.

James Blatch: Is it to do with taxes, is it?

T.S. Paul: Florida doesn't have state income tax, so the state can't get me here, but the state is going to get me in Missouri for last year.

James Blatch: Okay, well don't move to France, they've got a wealth tax on at the moment.

T.S. Paul: No, that's not going to happen. Johnny Depp doesn't need to be my neighbor.

James Blatch: We'd love to keep in touch with you, Scott, so we'll follow your career, if you don't mind, and I'll be knocking on your door in six to 12 months again, and we'll catch up with you if that's okay, see where you are.

T.S. Paul: That's fine, works for me.

James Blatch: In the meantime, I can't wait to see you continuing with your success, because that's great.

So Mark, T.S. Paul, crushing it by doing almost everything in bizarre-o land, the opposite way that most people in indie publishing are doing well do it.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, that's pretty much the scale of it.

I hadn't heard of Scott before you spoke to him. I've listen to the interview now, and I've done a little bit of digging around, and his rank is where I expect it to be for someone who's selling that kind of good level.

He is clearly doing really well, and it's something that we'll be able to kind of dig into a little bit more next week when we have the interview with Michael Anderle, who is someone that I have heard of, and Scott mentioned him in the interview earlier.

Yeah, but it's legit, he's doing almost everything that I would say not to do, and is doing really well. On the one hand, I'm very pleased for him, he sounds like a really good guy, is doing really really well.

On the other hand, my view is that I think he's probably, "lucky" is not the right word, I think he's probably making his own luck to an extent. He's obviously a hard worker, puts in loads of hours writing content that readers love. That's always going to be the most important thing.

But my key pieces of advice I think still stand, you've got to treat your product professionally, and that means that from my perspective, you can't

afford to have typos and kind of amateur-ish errors, because that will turn off some readers.

And you need to have a mailing list, I think that's still fundamentally important, and 99.9% of indie authors will do that, especially when they listen to people like me waffle on about how useful they are.

Scott's doing this all ass about face, as we'd say down here in Salisbury, but doing really well. I think the takeaway is that there are other ways to do things.

I would say you can maximize your odds by following a pattern that's followed by most successful indie authors, but that doesn't mean that that's the only way, there are other ways that you can also do really well.

James Blatch: I suppose a couple of things that struck me, one is that he is a volume writer, and that's always going to make up for some inadequacies in other areas of your marketing, if you've simply got something else to go to for readers, very very important, and the one thing that lots of us struggle with in terms of volume.

The other thing I'd say is that I did read his first book in the series, and I mean it does have typos in it, it's not the best-formatted book I've ever seen on an e-reader, and there's an aspect of the way the book is written that's a little bit, like I'll say "eccentric" again, and I think Scott would admit that, he kind of said that. Yet, I really enjoyed it, it's actually quite a nice scenario, it was quite a tough write for him in some ways.

He set himself up with this scenario where there's a single character on her own for many years, and that's the main bulk of the book, and that's quite a difficult book to write, if you think about it. I enjoyed it, and there was something about it, and do you know what? Ultimately, that's kind of it for readers. If you've hit something that you've got lots of volume of and

people like reading it, you probably could bumble your way through the rest of it.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, story is the most important thing, and this is something we'll come out in next week's interview with Michael is about getting something that readers continue to flip the pages, and then once they're finished that book, is to get into the next thing and read that too. That is fundamentally important, if you don't write those kinds of compelling stories, it doesn't really matter how polished your work is, because no one will read the next book, because they didn't enjoy it. My counter to that would be that you will lose some readers by having typos, and by not formatting properly, and I looked at the "look inside", and I would never have got any further than that, because it's just the formatting is crazy.

I don't know, sometimes Amazon screws that up, so it's possible that something funny has happened in the translation from the mobile file to the "look inside" sample, but it was really, it was all kind of centrally aligned.

It was very strange, and that for me would be the reason I wouldn't download it, just because I'm a bit anal when it comes to that kind of thing, but obviously thousands of readers don't have my hangups, and are buying his books, loving his books, leaving great reviews, buying the next book, all the things that you need to develop a successful career like he very clearly has developed. Kudos, my hat's off to him.

James Blatch: A great interview, really interesting, but a kind of, "Don't try this at home, kids," that we say at the end, or make of it what you will. I think it's going to be a bit of a talking point anyway.

Okay, let's put out a couple of things. We've been busy in the background over recent weeks. You've put together a really good book on the undoubted hot topic of the moment, Mark, AMS ads.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, so it was a very short book, it's about four and a half, 5,000 words. It was written primarily by a guy called Joseph Alexander who we've had on the podcast before, he sold over a million pounds worth of guitar tutorial books. He's a real success story, starting to speak at Amazon panels with me now, which is lovely.

One of the most important parts of his marketing arsenal is Amazon Ads. He was the first person I thought of to go to to say, "Would you like to write a book with me on that?" Joseph and I put that together, it's been edited, we've got a Stewart cover on it, and it's available for people to download. It's free, and I've also shot a half an hour video masterclass where we go through some of the things in the book, demonstrate where the screen flow, how exactly to do it, how to find keywords, those kinds of things that you'll need to be able to get your head around if you want to start running these ads.

They are as you say, a real talking point because they're potentially super powerful, because they appear on your retail platform rather than on another platform that you've then got to send traffic to Amazon. We've got that, it's available, I will relay the URL, which is selfpublishingformula.com/Amazonads, all one word, Amazon A-D-S, all one word. You can sign up there, the book will be sent back to you with details of how to get the video masterclass as well.

James Blatch: Yeah, that's great. Okay, and if you want to go back to last week's episode, the competition that we talked about with Dave Chesson is still open, you've got a few more weeks to enter that.

We're going to pull the winners out at the end of May, and that's to win a license to his software, KDP Rocket the Book, Idea of Validation. We should say, we subconsciously, and it was completely subconsciously, came up with a tagline for that podcast episode kind of at the last minute as we put out the thumbnail on the front of it called "Will it Fly?", which we thought was a great word and title, and sort of maybe rang a vague bell, and then

suddenly realized that it's what Pat Flynn calls his book. It was absolutely a no-brainer for us, we've changed that, and Pat was so nice about it, as he always is, but that was inadvertent, and we should say that that interview was about Dave Chesson.

We came up with Will it Fly, not Dave, and I have a couple of your emails just saying, "Is Dave doing what Pat Flynn's doing?", but that was us. We came up with Will it Fly, it's not mentioned in the interview in any way, shape or form, it was simply on the front page, but we've changed that, haven't we, Mark?

Mark Dawson: We have, yes. I got a lovely email from Pat Wasso, while I was in Toys-R-Us with my daughter yesterday, so we moved quickly and got that changed in about half an hour, and that's nimble in SPF-land.

James Blatch: Yeah, it is, and that is one of the things we've talked about, IP and rights and so on, in the past, and it's a subject we'll come back to in the future, but it's something as writers we all have to be aware of, just a second to think of things.

We do produce a lot though, we produce a lot of volume in SPF, so sometimes that sort of thing is going to happen, but it wasn't, as they say at Sky News, not wrong for long.

Mark Dawson: Very good.

James Blatch: That's the way to do it. Finally, let me just mention The Vault, which is a fantastic ebook we've put together. This is not a 5,000 word ebook, this is ... Have you counted the words in that Vault book?

Mark Dawson: Oh, hundreds of thousands.

James Blatch: Yeah, it's a big book, and too big actually for our size, it's Moby at one point, I noticed. Anyway, you can get that, it goes back over all our podcasts, it's indexed so that you can search on specific topics, it's a

really useful thing to have. You can pick that up simply by going to selfpublishingformula.com/vault, V-A-U-L-T.

Mark Dawson: You could if you wanted, you could search it for every time we take the mick out of John Dyer.

James Blatch: Yeah, just someone create a Pinterest thing or Tumblr. Is Tumblr still going?

Mark Dawson: I don't know, James. You need to get with it, you're not with the kids.

James Blatch: Yeah, that was a long time ago, Tumblr. Okay look, I need to go and prepare because I've got my driving lessons just to get myself race-fit for next week. What are you doing this afternoon?

Mark Dawson: I'm writing.

James Blatch: Oh, you're writing.

Mark Dawson: I'm deep in writing mode.

James Blatch: I thought you wrote in the mornings.

Mark Dawson: I do, but I'm writing in the afternoon as well today, trying to get a few thousand words in because I've got a short week, because we will be SPF-ing from Wednesday onwards.

James Blatch: I love your discipline. Good, thank you very much indeed, Mark. It's not been a fantastic line, I should say, between us audio-wise, but it hasn't been too bad, just the odd pop and crackle, but next week we'll be in the same room together, and we've got some natty new little screens to make the sound even better, haven't we? Have they arrived?

Mark Dawson: They have, they're in my study.

James Blatch: Excellent, don't forget them.

Mark Dawson: No, I won't.

James Blatch: Thank you very much for listening, we'll speak to you next Friday.

Announcer: You've been listening to The Self-Publishing Formula Podcast, visit us at selfpublishingformula.com for more information, show notes, and links on today's topics. You can also sign up for our free video series on using Facebook ads to grow your mailing list. If you've enjoyed the show, please consider leaving us a review on iTunes. We'll see you next time.