

EPISODE 23: HOW TO INCREASE YOUR WORD COUNT EXPONENTIALLY – WITH RACHEL AARON

James: Hello and welcome to podcast number 23 from The Self Publishing Formula.

Speaker 2: Two writers, one just starting out the other a best seller. 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: Hello and welcome along, well we're in mid-summer here in the Northern Hemisphere, I guess you're mid winter in the South, but summer's coming in the opposite of Game of Thrones. Shall we say hello to anyone in the tropics, Mark in the middle bit.

Mark: You know anyone in the tropics James.

James: I think I've plenty of people in Queensland, probably, listening to this, and who knows through Central Africa. Anyway seasons greetings in the world where there's no seasons. We'll stop rambling and start focusing now. Actually we have a very focused episode today don't we, because we going to talk about writing which is common to everybody, whatever genre you're doing, whatever you're particular stick is in publishing.

The marketing may change but we all need to write and for people it comes, perhaps, more naturally than others. There's no substitute really for, as Adam Croft always said to us in his interview, "Bum on seat, hand on keyboard." We got a great interview today from a woman whose developed a fast writing system and a particular approach to it, which has really worked for her and will get you ... Well she will, in fact her book, her

non fiction book is 2K to T10K in a Day, so try get to 10,000 words a day writing.

Which would obviously would make a massive difference to your writing career. Before we introduce Rachel Aaron, is her name, and people will know who she is I'm sure. Let's just talk about your writing Mark, because you've got successful books behind you.

How do you approach it and how many words do you get done? Do you have a word count aim everyday?

Mark: It depends really, because of what else is going on. If I'm going to do non-fiction stuff I'll tend to do that and marketing in the afternoon. Then kind of devote the mornings to writing.

At the moment if I can get a couple of thousand words a day done I consider that to be a pretty good day. It's a little less than I managed previously, in fact it's less than I managed when I was still working full time. I don't know whose law this is but there is a law that says that, "Work will expand to fill the space available." That's something that certainly that I've found, the more time I have the more things I have to do and as long as 2,000 is enough.

You look at a 70,000 word, 80,000 word novel and you're probably going to be able to do that in six weeks, so maybe even say in a couple of months you can get plenty of novels published if you can hit 2,000 a day no problem.

James: I think you're right, you and I have both had to really focus on time management since we've been running a couple of different ventures, and you're right it's like a bin in a kitchen isn't it? You just fill it up and you get another bin next to it and that will fill up as well. You do need to be aware that you need to be proactive about what's going in the bin and how you spending your time.

That's part of it but Rachel has a particular approach to actual writing, I think it's really interesting. She's a great writer in her own right so to speak, she straddles a couple of genre's actually, science fiction and what you might call romance. She has this dragons series, where the dragons are humans, seems quite Japanese influenced to me, but, very successful in their own area.

I think another thing to take away from this interview and from Rachel Aaron's experience and success is that **you don't have to panic about having a niche genre.** She's very successful in an area that really is not a very wide genre. You can call it romance if you want, but she herself points out in the interview, she's not really a romance author.

Take heart if you do think that your books don't have that wide appeal, there is definitely a market and an audience for you.

Without further ado let's have a listen to what Rachel has to say. Rachel Aaron is the best selling author of separate fantasy and science fiction series, the books include the Heart Striker series, that's Nice Dragon's Finish Last, I notice the latest, The Legend of Eli Monpress, and Heaven's Queen which is the final installment in the Paradox Trilogy.

Many of you will now know her as, in the author community at least, for her non fiction books, especially 2,000 to 10,000 a book helpfully subtitled, How to Write Faster, Write Better and Write More of What You Love. Which sounds like a really good thing to talk about Rachel, welcome to the SPF Podcast.

Rachel: Thank you so much for having me.

James: It's a great pleasure to have you. Let's talk a little bit about your books to start off with and a bit about you. You're over there in the States we should say first of all.

Rachel: I am, I am native of Georgia, which as I used to tell people when I visited the UK is North of Disneyland, North of Disney World actually, by a couple hundred miles.

James: I always say I'm near London because everyone in the UK is near London, and everyone in America is North of Disney World. Apart from, but I suppose if you're in Hawaii.

Rachel: If you're in Hawaii, you can just say Hawaii and then everyone knows.

James: There you are, you're in Georgia, and you've got a couple of series going.

I think you've just come to the end of your science fiction trilogy, but it's more of a, is it urban fantasy? Is that how you described the Dragon series.

Rachel: Yes, well **I started in epic fantasy with The Legend of Eli Monpress, which is five books and they are traditionally published by Orbit**, both in the US and the UK, and in Australia and in other places. Then I switched to Rachel Bach and wrote science fiction, which was my epic fantasy was not a romance at all. It was really a kind of a throw back to that 90's David Eddings fantasy but with a modern pacing, so it's kind of exciting and fast, it's not plodding.

It's still wizards and spirits and giant larger-than-life set pieces. My science fiction is much more of a military sci-fi romance because I love guns and kissing, so I wanted to put them together. That's written as Rachel Bach. And my latest series I'm back to Rachel Aaron, and I tried self publishing, and there are two books out and that's the Heart Striker series. The first one's called Nice Dragon's Finish Last, and the second one is called One Good Dragon Deserves Another. The third which I actually just finished

editing, and will be out in August, is called No Good Dragon Goes Unpunished.

That series, which again, self published has been doing amazingly. I actually won the RT Editors Choice Award for One Good Dragon Deserves Another, which was a giant shock to me because I'm not really a romance author. There's a love story in the book, but they're not romance, and two this is a very prestigious romance industry award for a little self published book that's just me. I was extremely excited I was up on a stage with a whole bunch of really famous people getting an award. It's beautiful, it's on my shelf, I love it.

James: That is great.

Rachel: Super exciting.

James: With romance you choose a pretty crowded sector as well, so to stand out and pick up awards in that is truly awesome.

Rachel: Oh yes, well I was blown away. I'm actually a very big fan of Romantic Times magazine, the magazine that does it. **A lot of traditional publishing has had their head in the dirt about the changes that are going through out industry. The romance sector has always been right there on the cutting edge.** Romantic Times the magazine is part of that, also the romance publishers.

I went to the RT Convention which is where the awards ceremony was, and we've been talking about it a great deal on my blog. Which, by the way is, rachelaaron.net is my website, I run a blog there with my husband who actually does a lot of my marketing. We're a pair, he works for me know. We both do this publishing thing full time, we went there together and we learnt so much about what's new and marketing, and publication, and what's coming down the line, and what the trends are.

It was amazing and I absolutely recommend going to Romantic Times Convention because again, romance, they get it. It's so funny because I go back to science fiction fantasy which is my genre, that's where I am. It's like going back 20 years in the past, I'm like, "Guys, it's time to move forward and embrace the change and learn how we can all make a great deal of money from it." Apparently they don't like money, I don't know.

James: Not everyone wants to buy a ticket to the races, do they in this? That's partly what we're doing here in our podcast, there's enough people who do. I suppose, it's kind of good for those people who've made this first step of deciding to embrace the marketing side a bit.

It's good for them, but not everyone's onto it just yet, gives us a bit of space.

Rachel: **It's always kind of fun to be the first out the gate.**

James: Yeah exactly, and romance, you're absolutely right. Romance, and I would say erotica's well, they're the ones that are really forging ahead. They've really enjoyed the self publishing space and it's been quite a democratic enabling system for them. **Whereas maybe they had snootiness or whatever with the Trad industry before that, that doesn't exist in the self publishing world. You want to do it, you do it.**

Rachel: Yeah, and also I think it has a lot to do with the romance readership. Romance readers are very particular, they know what they want, but **they are a very loyal group of readers who read voraciously.** They were the first group of consumers to pick up e-readers, and really move to e-books simply because, **the average American for example reads 12 books a year. The average romance reader will read 100.**

There are women there who talked about reading 600 books in a year. I was like wow, no wonder you went to e-book if you didn't, your garage would be full within a year of books.

James: Which ones do you enjoy? I get the feeling you love your science fiction, don't you?

Rachel: I love science fiction. I grew up in a very nerdy household, we watched Babylon 5, I've seen all of Doctor Who, I've watched all of Star Trek. I'm actually more of a Star Trek girl than a Star Wars girl I think. Although we're recording on May the 4th, so may the forth be with you.

James: Indeed, may the forth be with you. I'm more of Star Wars than a Star Trek, but I've got some good friends on the Star Trek side, so that's okay.

Rachel: I always loved the hopefulness of Star Trek. I always felt that Star Trek was a wonderfully, at it's core, kind of very optimistic and humanish show about the endless determination of the human spirit. I always liked it.

James: What I loved about Star Trek is they always hinted at this, they never really explained it, but they hinted at the moving on of civilization. The occasional references to, "We don't use money anymore."

Rachel: They were in Utopia pretty much.

James: Yeah, the Utopia, they never really explained it and that was the really interesting aspect of Star Trek. That was just taken for granted, a bit like The Culture Series by Ian M Banks, is the closest that I'm reading at the moment to that back story to Star Trek. Which was so fascinating, I agree there's a sophistication to Star Trek, which as a complete Star Wars nerd I will admit is not really there for most of Star Wars, so I'll give you that.

Rachel: Well actually and I might get some hate for this, but **always felt that Star Wars was more fantasy than science fiction.** If you remove the space ships it's really almost, the story itself is much more of a fantasy type story and a story arc. It's more of a personal journey and less the story of civilizations which is what I tend to think of as a science fiction.

I'm actually a big fan of the grittier, no I say I like Star Trek, but my favorite Star Trek was Deep Space Nine. You know, just like I love Babylon 5 which is all about the personal drama's of these two stations, Deep Space Nine and Babylon 5 accordingly.

I love, I guess like slice of life in space. I also like military sci-fi, I'm a big fan get out there and shoot anything that's got more than two legs.

James: Yeah, well you'd do well in Hollywood, because that's pretty much the plot every science fiction film that comes out of Hollywood.

Rachel: I love it.

James: Well that's a fantastic canon of books behind you, and you're a voracious writer, by the looks of things. That's very much your stick, I guess, in the author community.

You've got a system. Which I guess is the system you use is the one you preach about, in terms of how to organize yourself and get writing.

Rachel: As you mentioned in my lovely intro, thank you very much. **I'm the author of what I call, 2K to 10K, which is basically the three steps I use to go from writing about 2,000 words a day, in six hours, to writing over 10,000 words a day in about the same amount of time.**

That sounds really incredible and believe me at the time it was a miracle, I felt like I had cured cancer. I was so excited because I went from traditional publishing, my first two series, again where with Orbit which is a division of Hachet.

I went from this very kind of slow six month deadline world, but the deadlines are very hard, if you missed your deadline every other part of the publication process would be thrown off. Like you had your time when you were going to get your cover design, if your book wasn't ready well then you lost your slot, you had to wait until there was another slot. Even if you

were two weeks late, your stuff might be months late, and you lost your slot with your editor and so forth. You get on shuffled down the line, it was a very big deal to miss your deadline, and so I got myself into a position where I was right up against a deadline and I had to get this book done.

I was like if I didn't get this book done, it was going to be bad. It all kind of came about, I had one of those scenes where the scene and nothing is working. You're banging your head against the scene and you don't know what's going to happen, the whole things just a mess, and I had worked on it for 5 hours it had to be. Actually I think it was days, that I worked on this stupid scene, one conversation and so I finally got so frustrated I just closed my laptop, and I got out my notebook and I just wrote down what I wanted to say.

I didn't bother with the right language, I didn't bother with descriptions, I just did it like a transcript for a conversation. I sat there until I figured it out, it took me probably about maybe 20 minutes of just writing in the book. Then I figured it out, and **once I figured that out I was able to go back and write that whole scene in 30 minutes.**

That was the beginning, that was the a-ha moment, is that if you know what you're writing before you write it you will write it at least two times faster.

James: That's the key.

Rachel: That's the million dollar secret right there.

James: I have bought the book, I should tell you. As soon as we got you on our list I started doing my research and I couldn't, I mean for me, writing a book for the first time and I do struggle. I haven't written today for no good reason.

Rachel: Bad, very bad.

James: There's no good reason.

Rachel: I want you to know I am deeply, personally disappointed in you.

James: Yeah, thank you. That will help. I know that, funnily enough you sort of describe it, I've this scene, I've got to this point now and I don't really know what I'm going to be doing in it, and that's enough of a subconscious block for me to do other things than turn to the book.

I never talk about this seat of the pants writing, writing pens or whatever and structuralist but there's got to be, I don't ever want to be somebody who sits out, I mean some people do. They'll fill out 20 pages describing their book before they start writing it.

Particularly if people work in teams. I don't think I could do that, but **I am drawn to the idea of writing down, even if it's bullet points what your scene is.**

Which is going to make it easier then, isn't it?

Rachel: **I think everybody writes in their own way.** Writing is very personal, I've never met two authors who have described the writing process in the same way. I really do think it's sort of a wheel everyone has to invent for themselves. **That said, there are definitely some best practices you can follow especially if you find yourself getting in trouble.**

For example, if you have days where you find yourself not writing, that's often the sign that something is maybe a little wrong with your book. Maybe you're not excited about your book, as you should be, because writing should be the most fun thing you do every day. **I'm a firm believer of, if you don't love it you're doing it wrong,** because if you think about writing. Writing is pure creativity, it's telling your story, this thing you love and sitting down to do it should be the high point of your day.

If it's not, you need to ask yourself, "Why not? Why am I not excited about what I'm supposed to write today?" That's actually another one of my

points, because once I discovered that things went faster if I wrote them down. I started every day, before I would write a scene I would take five minutes and I would just write on my notebook what was going to happen in this scene.

It could something as simple as Marcy talks to Julius. What do they say? Marcy and Julius are two characters in the series I'm writing right now, and I would just write it out like a transcript what they said. I didn't worry about details, I just wrote down what I wanted to say and if I found the conversation was going south I could just exit out and start over again.

Rather than losing 300 words I would just jump back up the page and when it was done, **I would have this beautiful little, like a sketch, like I was sketching for a painting of what the scene would be.**

Then when I sat down to write the scene, all the hard work, all that kind of back and forth thinking, and what am I going to say was pretty much already done. I was able to just get the scene out very very quickly and this was the number one thing that doubled my word count. From that point, I then discovered that there were days where I wrote enormously more than other days.

I was like, "Why?" "I'm doing the same process, why are some days better than other days." I'm scientifically minded. I was also keeping track of how much I was writing at this point because I was trying to figure out how can I get better.

I talk about all of this, by the way, on the blog if you go to rachelaaaron.net and you click on my blog, on the side bar there's a thing called how I went from 2,000 words a day to 10,000 words a day. Which was the original blog post, and everything I'm saying is written down there so you don't have to worry about taking notes. It's all down there, and it's all in the book, which is only 99 cents, even less in pence so it's great.

The next thing I had to figure out was why some days are better than others?

The answer to that turned out to be, I wrote more words on the days where I was excited about what I was writing. Which is again, kind of head smackingly obvious, of course you write more when you're excited. That has a dark side too, that implies the days where I'm not excited about writing, what is wrong with those scenes?

I don't want boring scenes in my book, if I'm not excited about it, no ones going to be, I mean this is my baby. That encouraged me to asking myself how can I make this cooler? Where are the rock star moments in this scene? If it's just a hum drum little scene to move the book forward, well that's no fun for anyone, why do we want that?

If the first step is know what you going to write before you write it, the next step is enthusiasm. Being excited about what you're going to write before write it.

Now what I do to make myself go even faster is when I'm doing that five minutes or I'm just sort of sketching out what I'm going to write, I ask myself what's exciting about this scene? What am I excited to write here? What is happening that is cool? Then I get myself pumped, I get myself pumped up about that so by the time I'm ready to write not only do I know what I'm going to do, I'm very excited about it. Obviously, I'm a plotter, I plot in advance, but I don't see why you couldn't do this as a pantsers.

You may get to a scene and not know what's going to happen, but you can still discover that, not in the writing. **The whole point of this method, is to not discover things while you're writing because that is the most time consuming and wasteful way to do it.**

If I make a mistake when I'm writing and I realize that this whole conversation been going in the wrong direction I have to lose sometimes

500, sometimes 1,000 otherwise perfectly good words just because they're going in the wrong direction.

If I know I'm going the wrong direction before I write those words, it is so much easier, just x out a paragraph I wrote on paper than to x out the five paragraphs that describes in my novel. That's really what my system does, this isn't some cheat, this isn't being a hack, I hate it when people, "Oh you write fast, you must throw away half the words you write."

Bitch please. If I did that what would be the point if I threw away half the words I wrote? I do this for a living, I don't have time to waste on that crap, ain't no one got time for that, it's ridiculous.

I get good words, and I've often found that the faster I go the better the words are because I know exactly where I'm going. **It's less like writing and more like I'm actually reading the book as I produce it**, and that is just the most amazing feeling in the world. It feels like you're flying, when that happens the story just picks up and takes you away. It really is kind of magical. It that magic of creation thing, it's wonderful.

James: That's great and I can certainly reflect that and the parts of the story, and the first, once I wrote 10,000 words to 30,000 words I really knew what I was doing. It just came together after 10,000 words and those next 20,000 words I did in a few days. I did them really quickly and now I need to engineer that situation again. And you're absolutely write, get excited about it.

Rachel: **Even if right before you go to bed, and you haven't written today, just get out a notebook or any paper or your laptop, or whatever you use to jot things down quickly.** Your phone or whatever. Just make notes about what you're going to write the next day, get yourself excited. Try to get yourself pumped about it, remind yourself why you're doing this, and not just because I want to publish a book, but why are you

telling the story? When you get yourself excited about your own work, writing becomes that much easier.

James: **What I find interesting about this, I think a lot of pantsers think that they are doing it quickly.** They think the reason they can't be bothered to slow the process down and they just want to crack out and crack on with the book, and they can then get an edit and a redraft done. What you're really saying is actually that's a false economy and that a little bit of planning is going to make you go three or four times faster.

Rachel: I absolutely believe that. **It's that whole a pint of sweat saves a gallon of blood kind of thing.** A little bit of work now will save you enormous pain later because it's always easier to fix things before you write them.

That said however, I fully respect people who write as pantsers, people who enjoy writing the paragraph then learning through the paragraph that that's not how they were supposed to go. They learn something about their characters through the failure, and that is definitely a valid method of writing.

It's not my method, I'm a plotter to the nth degree. I like to think of myself as a story architect. I plan everything out, all the arcs, all the change, I plan it all because I like to know where I'm going. If I don't know where I'm going I get kind of paralyzed and I can't move. But that's just me, everyone's different. If you're a pantser please don't think I'm talking down to you. I'm really not. You do something I can't do and I respect that.

James: The other thing is the writing you end up with when you've done your scribbling in your notebook, you know what you're going to do, you're excited about and you get going.

Does that have an impact on how finished, how completed the writing is? Are you still looking at this as pressing one and writing as you want and then worry about polishing later?

Rachel: **I would definitely say it is more polished than it used to be when I just figured stuff out in the text.** It is not yet as polished as it will be after a good edit.

My rule is that the first draft is the draft you write to learn how to write the book, and then your edit is when you actually write it. That said, planning things ahead, I think definitely skips a little step, I used to just write everything out and then it would be a giant mess and then I would go through and I'd do all the stuff and I'd fix it.

There was this giant editorial process, I just finished my 13th book, and for this novel I plotted the whole thing, I wrote it, I realized I had the plot wrong. I rearranged all the pieces, I finished it, and then I went back and I edited the big parts I knew where wrong.

Once I did all the big edits and went back to the beginning and edit the whole thing through, and now it's pretty much done. I'm very very happy with it, it's with my husband whose editing it right now and it's going to the actual editor on the 13th.

I don't foresee any major changes at all. I mean everything's going to be very minor because the book is pretty much done. It's exactly what I want and that was only a total of about three passes. Once to write it, kind of one in the middle where I fixed all the big parts, then a final pass, so two point five, but that's really good. That's really short for a book that's 187,000 words, oh my God.

James: Oh, that's a lot of words.

Rachel: It is the second longest book I've ever written, the first longest book I've ever written actually was never published. It was my very first novel, which was 220,000, so that was quite the first novel. It was YA fantasy too, let me tell you how much that got rejected. A lot. By everyone.

James: In the self publishing area that is a couple of series there, just that one novel.

Rachel: **I'm a weird self published author, maybe because I came from traditional but I like big books and I cannot lie.** I like to write them long.

James: We'll just finish off on the writing, I think it's fascinating and I'm really interested in it as well. In fact one of the things I've had to do because I come from a news journalism background. I wrote for broadcasting which had two downsides, one downside was that we wrote really frugally, so my average TV news report would have about 45 seconds of speech in it.

Rachel: You must be good at Twitter then.

James: I am good at Twitter. **I can condense stories, I can go to a complicated story involving politicians, and unions, and you know what and then have 45 seconds explains the story, has a middle, beginning, and end.** I can do that.

That turns out to be really rubbish skill for novel writing, where you want to enjoy the journey more.

Rachel: I don't know, it kind of depends on the story you're telling. I'm actually a giant fan of George Orwell who was also a reporter, and I actually really love his sparse reporter style in the fiction, because it makes it feel more real. A little tip of my English major hat there.

James: I love Orwell, if I could write a book like ... I can read his books today, and do read his books today.

Rachel: They're lovely.

James: That was one thing, the other thing is that in a news room, for a decade you're beaten over the head if a small mistake gets through on air, or anywhere near on air you're in trouble. It's drummed into you through brutal episodes early on and I find it very difficult to write something that I know has got mistakes in it, is not quite right. For that reason it's actually taken me a long time to work out, do you know what I'm going to read this again and go through it at a later date and make it better.

So that's totally alien to me, where I've had to really learn that. I'm not sure how many other people who come to writing for the first time understand that there is this intermediate process, and the editing. I've loved the editing side it. You're absolutely right, that's where the story happened for me, I mean **I wrote 80,000 words of this book and then started again.**

Now I'm writing it, and that's the editing stage.

You've completely described my experience. But it was weird for me to try and write something that I'm going to get hit for.

Rachel: **I think what you're describing is a very common phenomenon.** I actually experienced myself, because I am a perfectionist, I hated knowing that things are wrong, it just bothers me I can't let it go.

What I finally ended up doing was that I have a rule, which is that no one has to see it. No one will see this until I give the okay. I just keep telling myself that. It's okay no one has to see it. I make myself giant notes inside the text so that I know it's not going to go out because it has this giant note in it. Therefore no one's going to see it but me, this is all just for me.

I do all these things to remind myself that this is not a final version, it is okay to make mistakes and have stuff be out. You have to get used to it, you have to ease yourself into it. It's like easing yourself into hot water, you just got to get used to the idea, that is okay to make mistakes, to not know things.

One of the ways you will murder a book, and I've murdered several, is going back and editing the first two chapters over, and over, and over again rather than finishing.

That will kill your momentum. **Writing is daily practice and creativity and excitement, but it also momentum.** My favorite saying is that, "Writing begets writing." The more you write, the more you want to write, and the faster you go, the faster you want to go and the better the story flows. **I actually read a very good fast writing book by Chris Fox which I think is called, 5,000 Words Per Hour, which I have never hit, ever.**

James: That's ambitious.

Rachel: It's crazy but the way he does it is, it blows my mind. His method is that he refused to hit backspace, he writes for a set period of, I don't remember how long he writes, like an hour or something, and he'll just write. He's not allowed to hit backspace while he's typing.

James: Even typo's?

Rachel: No nothing, he just keeps going because he's never allowed to look back.

James: I would struggle with that, I think you probably would as well.

Rachel: I can't do it, I don't know how he does it. I absolutely believe that he is going a million miles an hour, I've actually implemented a little bit of that where I've just like, I know it's wrong make a note I'll fix it later, move on. I especially had to do that with the second book in my self published series, which was the biggest bear I've ever had to write, I've never struggled with any book like I struggled with that one.

Which is weird because it's everyone favorite book and it's the one that won all the awards, so apparently I pulled it off, but I hated that book for so

long. There were times that I'm like this is so wrong, and I don't know how to fix it, but I'm just going to move on because if I keep banging my head against this wall I'm going to hate this book and never finish it.

That I think is especially true for writers like you at the very beginning, because just finish that book and a lot of the problems that seemed insurmountable in the middle, will be crystal clear to you by the time you reach the end. There's no point in investing all that energy trying to solve them, if you can at all move ahead.

It is always better to move ahead than to fix things behind you, because by the time you reach the end the things you were worried about fixing might not be even be problems anymore. You might have decided to go a totally different route.

James: That's a natural procedure, that's really really interesting, I'm lapping this up, Rachel thank you.

Rachel: I hope it's helpful.

James: I haven't read the book yet, so I'm going to get that on top of it. Just to round up the writing side, because I want to move onto marketing and a couple of other things in a moment. The book is from 2K to 10K, and it's Amazon.co.uk and Amazon.com, so about a pound, about a buck, so really good.

Rachel: It's a very short, very fast book. It's about 30,000 words actually, which makes it the shortest thing I've written.

James: A novel for other people, but for you a pamphlet.

Rachel: When I was at Orbit they asked me to write a short story and I gave them a 40,000 word novella and they never asked me for a short story again.

James: **Let's talk about a bit about trad publishing and self publishing.** The transition for you: what motivated it, and where are you now in terms of how you see your future?

Rachel: **The motivation was half simple, half complex.** The simple part was money, plain old. Self publishing pays four times better than Trad publishing, just straight out. **I make four times as much on a book that costs half as much, so you can't beat that math.** I have to do a lot more work myself, but that's a one time investment, I do the work and then it's done, and then the book makes me money forever.

Versus giving up 90 to 95% of my income for my life plus 70 years, because nothing goes out of print anymore, since it's all in digital. You never get your rights back and that's definitely not worth the advance in my mind. That was a big big factor of why I jumped, because I am in this to make money. I've got a house and a kid, and a husband to support, two cars all that kind of stuff, the American dream.

The other part of it which was very very important to me, actually almost more important than the money was because the book I wanted to write. Which was the first in my Heart Striker series, it's a very weird book. It's about dragons in Detroit, and it is urban fantasy but also kind of sci-fi and kind of post apocalyptic and there definitely fantasy elements but also near future elements, and there are spirits and dragons, and majors, and the whole thing is giant political drama. It's a odd little beast.

One of the problems that I've always had is that I've kind of write these books that straddle genre's. My Paradox Trilogy, my sci-fi books, they were sci-fi and romance, my Eli novels where epic fantasy that was light hearted and moved at a very fast snappy urban fantasy pace. They actually are much more like a comic book than they are like any of the grim dark tomb's that are very popular right now.

It's this very weird fantasy, so everything I've written hasn't neatly fit on a shelf, and that has always been one of my problems. **When you're traditionally published you have to fit on a shelf.** They have to tell that bookstore, buyer where you belong, and I didn't really belong anywhere. In self publishing so long as you can fit into seven categories you're good, and I've had enormous success with *Nice Dragons Finish Last*, in part because it's so different and people have said, "I thought I had read every urban fantasy that there was. I thought that the genre was dead and then Rachel Aaron came along and did something totally new."

That's one of the best compliments I've been paid because I love urban fantasy, and I've read a lot of it. I also got kind of bored with it and so I wanted to write something that's new, and my books are like shadow run meets dragon drama, it's bizarre.

James: We often get asked, in fact this week, we had a note on our Facebook page from somebody saying that they thought their books were too niche, and that they would struggle to find their audience. They write in I think, a lesbian erotica, two or three sub clauses to that, of what kind of genre it was. Actually she's had great success because of the targeting she's been doing on social media, and here you are saying, "Don't panic about that."

In fact, I think you've done a blog this week on this subject haven't you, about niche?

Rachel: We did, my husband Travis, who by the way has thrown himself into doing research on self publishing and has become, I would say even much more knowledgeable than I ever was. You guys should actually have him on here, he's the one that knows all this stuff, I'm just parroting what he has researched and looked up.

When we went to Romantic Times he hit, I think 15 marketing panels. It was ridiculous. The man is a machine, but he wrote this absolutely amazing - I

don't say that as his wife, I say that as an author - an absolutely amazing post about branding yourself and one about how to reach a niche audience.

Which is something a lot of indie authors, I feel, struggle with because a lot of authors go indie because their books were just too niche for New York to care about. New York doesn't care if you're only going to sell 10,000 books, but in self publishing you sell 10,000 books that can be 40,000 dollars at the right price point. That's not chump change, that's definitely an audience worth having. And New York didn't even want to bother so we'll just happily take the money. Yeah, it's on the blog rachelaaron.net just click blog, it's right there, shout out.

James: **How to read niche audiences, May 2nd is the date of that publication**, because as I speak now I'm not sure when this is going to be broadcast, but people will be able to find it on there. In fact your blog is excellent and very focused.

Rachel: Well thank you.

James: I think it's really good. I can see Travis gets his name in there quite a lot, which is good, so you not taking all the credit.

Rachel: We've really been trying to bring him into the blog more, one because I just don't have time to write two blog posts a week, I've got to write these books, and two because he really does know an enormous amount. He keeps giving me these great blog ideas, and I'm like, "I don't have time to write this blog, why don't you write it? You're brilliant, do this."

He was a better story teller than I was when we met. This is hilarious. He was a GM, he was game master; he ran table top role playing for years. I'd never even heard of it until college, and I came in and I started dating him. We started role playing together and I loved it, but he had been doing this since middle school, so he had these amazing stories that he'd been telling.

He actually helped me a lot on my early novels, he's always been my first editor and just really fantastically great. He's going to blush like crazy when he hears this, he's way too modest but he's awesome.

James: Where are his books?

Rachel: **He has actually just finished his first novel.** He kept having these amazing stories and he wanted to make games out of them, and I was like, "No, games don't make money, make a novel." He finally did, I'm very very hopeful, he hasn't let me read it yet, but we will see. I bet it's going to be good.

James: It's got to be a story about a GM that corrects the universe and ends up in it.

Rachel: I don't think it's quite that, but it is trapped in a video game type thing, but it's great. It's kind of like Sword.online if you've ever watched it. It's awesome.

James: When you say trapped in video game I'm just thinking Tron at this stage.

Rachel: Not that, that's awful.

James: What, we may have to disagree on that one.

Rachel: We may have just lost half the audience.

James: I love my Tron.

Rachel: I was never a really big fan of Tron.

James: Oh, where you not? Okay, I think it was an age thing, it was bad at the time but I was young so it looked great. Let's press on, we've got a

couple more minutes, I don't want to go very much past 40 minutes for you. You look forward in terms of self publishing, you've really got to grips with this, is something you've thrown yourself into.

The Trad deals are still there with you, you're still Trad publishing?

Rachel: **I actually have a couple of Trad contract writing deals**, where I've contracted to write books for them that are not really within my own sphere that I cannot talk about yet. We'll hopefully be talking about soon, as soon as I can sign these stupid contracts.

All of this is not to trash talk Trad, I actually love being Trad, I especially love the editorial help I got. I've had some good editors that I've hired but I am the writer I am, because of my agent and my editors at Orbit. Here's the thing: **when you're indie, you are the one hiring the editor, which means if the editor says something you don't like you can fire them or you can ignore it.**

When you are traditionally published your editor is your boss. They're the one doing the hiring and so if they tell you to do something you just have to figure out how to do it. You can argue your case and sometimes you win, but generally speaking if your editor says, "I hate this. Fix it." You've just got to fix it.

That kind of iron clad, just make it work moment that is a very good teacher for being a good writer. I think one of the reasons I am as tight a writer as I am, I pride myself on being a pretty meticulous writer, is because I had so many problems that my editor was just like, "Fix it."

I'm not telling you how, you're the author fix it, and so I fixed it, I made it happen. That's not to say I rolled over or that my editor dictated, my editor actually worked with me a great deal. There were times for example in my fourth Eli novel, *The Spirit War*, that book was about 170,000 words and my editor was like, "This book is too long for mass market paperback. You can't

print a book that long in this format. You have to fix it. Cut 40,000 words out and come back to me." I was like, "I can't cut 40,000." I really really tried, I think I cut maybe 12,000 of editing sentences to be smaller that kind of thing.

I finally went back to her, and I was look I've done my best, I will make you a deal, you tell me what to cut. You read this book if you tell me to cut something and I will not fight you, I will cut it with no questions asked, but you just tell me what to cut to get it down to the right size and I'll do it. She couldn't do it, she couldn't cut it, because the story was too locked together. She liked the story too much and so we ended up going to the trade paper, the bigger format just because she couldn't do it.

That was my biggest victory I every won. I was like, ha. But I don't recommend doing that. It makes your editor very mad.

James: When it's rare as well that's the dream, and I had this in the news and obviously you say to your editor, "Well look I can't do it, this is it, it can't be cut." They read it and they work out that it can't, but it doesn't happen very often because normally the editors are good.

Rachel: Normally you are wrong.

James: Normally you're wrong and that's the whole process of learning that isn't it?

Rachel: That's one thing that I think a lot of authors miss by going indie. I'm not saying that you shouldn't go indie, but you do need to be cognizant of what you are giving up. And one of the things that you are giving up is that the editors working at the major publishing houses are the best in the business. They are amazing they have their jobs for a reason and they don't have to take your shit, quite frankly.

Authors think we know best, and a lot of times we don't. When you're self publishing your editor can tell you, "I think you need to fix this." You can say, "I think you need to fix your face. Goodbye." You can't do that in New York, you can't do that in Trad and I think there is a lot of merit in that and some indie authors say that's a good part.

I don't know, artistically speaking sometimes it's not good to have someone who can tell you no. That's why even now with an editor I hire I have a rule that whatever my editor says I have to try it at least once. If I try it and I hate it then I can say, "No." **I've found that when I try the editors advice even if it sounds crazy, if I try it I will often find that she was actually right.**

James: Everyone needs an editor and in the creative processes there's always going to be a tension, because when you create you put yourself into it. It's not just blood, sweat and tears, there's ego that goes into it. You're quite right and it's difficult not to feel hurt, isn't it?

Rachel: Writing a novel is the most egotistical thing you could do. You are literally sitting here and writing a giant lie and then asking people to pay money to read it. It's the huberistic act that we can do, you're like, "Here is the product of my brain, pay me money, you don't even get to own it you're just enjoying the experience." **There's a lot of ego, and it's funny because writers are not as flamboyant as other artists.**

We don't get the red carpet treatment, we don't get the big gallery shows, so I think a lot of writers think they're not temperamental egoistical artist that you see in the stereotypes but a lot of us are. You go to any writers' convention and there are some ego's, and that's fine, that's good. **You need an ego in this business because if you don't believe in yourself no one is going to.** This is the ultimate fake it till you make it kind of business.

At the same time you have to be aware of that, you have to be aware of your own shortcomings and be ready to check them when they start running out of control.

James: Final question, final area.

What's working for you right now in self-publishing marketing?

Rachel: We don't actually do a lot of direct marketing, and the reason for that being that I'm extraordinarily lucky and very very happy to have a very nice fan base that eats up my books. **The way I got that fan base was I wrote good books.**

I have a very high internal standard of quality. If I don't like a book it doesn't go out, I don't care if it's late, a book will be late for six months but it will be bad forever. I never put out anything I'm not 100% proud of and 100% ready to put my name on.

That sometimes means that books come out six months late, but that quality has won me an extremely loyal fan base who has followed me through some pretty weird genres, like Nice Dragon's finish Last. The fact that I continuously keep the quality very high and really really worked to make sure that these books are not just have quality production. Meaning they not full of typos they've got nice covers and all that kind of stuff.

My goal with my self publishing works was to make them indistinguishable from my New York works. Most readers have no idea if your book is self published or not unless looks really bad.

They're not there looking at the publisher. They just want the book that looks fun. **If you invest the money and the time into making your book look like a really beautiful finished product to look professional, then most readers won't even notice you're self published.** They'll just notice

you look like a great book for a good price and that's an instant sell right there.

For our marketing strategy, and we're doing some Facebook ads and that kind of stuff, but unlike a lot of authors who have these really complicated marketing strategies, our strategy is really to get the book as in front of many eyeballs as possible. We do that through being in Kindle Unlimited which has been very successful for us, and just say straight up get it out there, we're giant Amazon fans. Amazon have been very very good to us, Kindle Unlimited has been cutting their price, but it is still making me way more than I was making when I was in other markets.

For me and for my books, being Amazon exclusive has been very good. I don't know how long we'll stay there, but Kindle Unlimited is amazing because it removes the barrier to entry for new people trying your books. What we've discovered especially if you work hard to product a quality product, is that once a person enters the Rachel Aaron matrix they tend to read all my books.

James: Like a web.

Rachel: Yeah, they'll start with Heart Strikers, and they'll read the next Heart Strikers book, and then they'll be, "Oh no, I'm out of Rachel Aaron books, I going to go read her other series." Then they'll go buy Eli or they buy Paradox and so once you get that customer our goal is to keep that customer for life. At the end of my book I have a little letter, which says, "Hey, thank you so much for reading please leave a review, sign up for my newsletter. Oh my God, I appreciate you so much."

That letter has gotten me so many reviews and so many news letter sign ups because when a reader reaches the end of your book, that is the moment when they are most willing to do anything for you. That is when they are happiest with you and they want to express their gratitude.

It's a nice self selection process because the people who make it to the end of the book are generally speaking the people who liked it, so you get good reviews. It all works out, and so that's the letter at the end of the book, a quality product, and the other thing we do, is of course, we do book club.

Which everyone talks about, but it really is that good, it's really amazing. There is nothing better right now than getting in front of eyeballs. There are lots of other smaller services and for us they weren't really worth the time, if you're still kind of building. But once you get over your first 1,000 or 2,000 or so sales. You start going up exponentially if your books are really good and it wasn't just a flash in the pan kind of thing.

If you actually writing books you really care about and you start getting over a 100, then 200, then 1,000, and 2,000 sales, things start going up exponentially. But those first 100 sales are really hard to get. You have to almost hand sell the thing because no one knows who you are.

So if you're still in that stage then the smaller lists like Fussy Librarian, I know is a very popular one, there's tons of them. The smaller lists can be very good. It's also good to go on a lot of these lists at the same time. That's one the things that we learned at this Romantic Times marketing panel that Travis went to.

They took notes for me, thank you honey. **You have to touch, this is a very well known marketing phenomenon, you have to touch someone seven or eight times before your product starts feeling familiar.** You don't just want to hit them with marketing once in one way. You want to hit them, you want them to see you in their email, you want them to see you on Facebook, you want them to see you anywhere you can see them. To touch them as many times as possible and the more times you touch them, the more times they see your cover or see you on a blog or see you somewhere, the more likely they are to feel familiar with you and to actually buy your book.

James: Yeah, quite a traditional goal thing, the seven steps of selling, the first touch through purchase.

Rachel: Exactly, and you know **just because we're in this wild west front frontier doesn't mean the old tricks don't work**. Everything old is new again, I hear.

James: Rachel that's absolutely brilliant and so much to take away, I think. Particularly for me and I know for our audience, and I really loved because it resonated very much with what Mark says, "When you talk about looking professional, setting high standards, being indistinguishable from traditional publishing." In fact, frankly, looking better than traditional publishers because when they start advertising and doing some of the things we do, they don't do it very well.

Rachel: They do not, they could take some lessons from some indies and I think a lot of the big houses are starting to do that.

James: I think they are as well. That's great, thank you so much for joining us from North of Disney. I think I'm North of Disney World as well.

Rachel: I think half the world is North of Disney World.

James: We're very happy to talk to people South of Disney World as well, we should say.

Rachel: Absolutely wherever in relation to Disney World you are, we're happy to talk to you.

James: East, West or in Orlando. Thank you so much Rachel Aaron Bach, your various author names and people will find you at rachelaaron.net?

Rachel: That is correct, rachelaaron.net, there's a link to the blog is up at the top, just click it, it takes you to my blog, everything is organized by writing, business, whatever you want. Click the tag it will take you right to it.

James: Rachel Aaron, full of energy, full of American sunshine and what a good system and a good approach and yeah, Two K to Ten K is how she pronounces the book. I think I rather clumsily said, "Two Thousand to Ten Thousand." Because I'm British.

An interesting approach. Mark do you think you're going to take anything on board from that. You said earlier, before we started the interview, "That 2,000 words a day is going to suit you." You've got to remember that you've got a good series behind you, good box sets behind and you're adding to that.

There are lots of people out there who are just coming towards the end of the first novel and they are painfully aware that they really want to two, three, four novels to get their business up and running and for them that could be a really important step towards that.

Mark: Exactly, and the thing for me is it took me two years to write the first published book that I put out five or six years ago, *The Black Mile*. I'm obviously a lot quicker than that these days even though I may have slowed the pace a little touch. But it's just the benefit of experience and I know the time of day that I'm best suited to writing.

I've got systems in place that enable me to write reasonably quickly, so it's not really systems are great and I think most writers will get a lot of that interview but it's one of the things that I take away from is, just take the things that suit you.

Then put together in a combination that suits you best. That is what I'll do and I'll look at that and **I'm interested in things like eliminating distractions at the moment.** I tend to find the newest shiny thing tends to

interest me. You know the internet is pretty tempting especially when you have the closed seasons cricket coming on, I know you're following that James, at the moment.

There's lots of things that can distract you, so it is a question of getting a system and then devoting yourself to it, and to the exclusion of all those tempting distraction that can take our focus away.

James: Are you still using that mystic whale music in your ears?

Mark: I do, brain FM, I use it now and again. I'll do a 30 minute session.

Speaker 5: I couldn't find mystic whale in your music.

James: Oh my God, what was it called a ...

Mark: Siri

James: What did I say?

Mark: Siri doesn't know what mystic brain music is.

James: Yes, I am still using mystic brain music James, brain FM. You can set it to 30 minute or an hour and then just basically use that almost like a pomodoro technique, so you just kind of focus on that for half an hour. Then take a 10 minute break, go for a walk, stretch your legs, watch the cricket if it's you, or if it's me and then do another half hour.

James: Well I always invite you to the cricket don't I, because I have a friend with a similar email address as you and you get strange frequently get strange invites to go and watch a test match.

Mark: Well we have the same first name, I'm not sure, I think it's about as similar as it gets.

James: I only ever type Mark into my email program and then hit return and get on with it.

Before we go I wanted to point out we have a really super episode next week for Facebook advertising in particular. A man called Dipash Mandalia and he is a real guru when it comes to social media advertising, particularly Facebook advertising. He's the guy start up companies bring in to organize their campaigns, to shake focus optimize them, big campaigns he puts thousands of dollars into them.

He understands how the system works, it was a brilliant brilliant interview. We had a few technical issues, there's been a big broadband issue in Britain over the last couple of weeks but I'm sorting that out. It's going to be a really useful interview to listen too if you are into social media advertising, particularly Facebook ads. That will be episode 24 next week, but until then watch some cricket and quite possibly baseball and enjoy yourselves, and get some of that writing done.

Mark: Bye Siri, bye James.

Speaker 2: You've been listening to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast. Visit us at [Self Publishing Formula.com](http://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.