

PODCAST 30 FROM MILLION SELLER TO MOVIE & THE IMPORTANCE OF FAN INTERACTION WITH A.G. RIDDLE

James: The Self Publishing Formula is looking for BETA tester for it's 101 course on self publishing. After the success of the advanced Facebook ads for authors course, Mark Dawson is now creating a course aimed solely at authors who are starting out. If you're trying to launch your first book or trying to become commercially successful with your books, then, this course is for you. It will cover everything you need to set yourself up for success as an Indie author. BETA testers will get the course for free in return for feedback. You can sign up for your chance to become a tester at selfpublishingformula.com and we'll notify those selected.

Hello and welcome to podcast number 30 from the Self Publishing Formula.

Female: 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: Woohoo, we've got to number 30, Mark, where 30 is old. What does that mean?

Female: I wish I was. I'm not 30 years old. I wish I was. If you think about it that's half a year, we've managed to do this every week. That's pretty good, really.

James: Yeah, it is pretty good. We should say we are going to be live, you and me, out and about in the world in the next few weeks. First of all, we should say we are both attending NINC. That's in St. Pete beach in September. You're speaking on Friday in the main conference.

I'm not sure if it's too late to register but, I know that Thursday's open to everybody. The rest of the conference is for NINC membership.

We are going to have a get together for SPF listeners of the podcast and students and anybody who'd like to come along and say hello. About 7:00 in the evening, Wednesday the 21st of September. We will be in the the **Sharktooth Tavern** on Gulf Boulevard in St. Pete Beach in Florida. Come and say hello. Share a drink with us. Share a drink? You might even get one each. It'll be fantastic to have a chat with you. We know we've got quite a few people coming along so it should be a fun evening.

You're going to be speaking, as I say, on Friday. Then, you have been booked somewhere else because you're such an emerging star in this area. Where else are you going? Dublin?

Mark: Emerging?

James: Emerging. Emerged, then, sorry.

Mark: Excuse me. Yes. I will be in Dublin, yes. I don't know much in the way of details yet. It's going to be the 19th of November. More details to come.

James: Dublin, Saturday the 19th of November. If you're in Ireland, that would be a good place to see Mark and listen to Mark and get some of that good advice from him. I've seen him speak. He knows what he's talking about. It's quite impressive. We'd love to see you in Florida, as well.

There's been a lot of love, actually, I have to say, in the Facebook group for the podcast this week, which has been brilliant to hear. That people are enjoying it and, as our key thing that we think about before we record every episode, is this going to be of value listening? Time is precious. There are a few podcasts out there and what we don't want is people listening to us waffling. We want people getting something out of it. We've got that today, haven't we? We've got a great guest today.

Mark: Yes, Jerry Riddle. The author of *The Atlantis Gene*. A really smart guy, very good writer. Has written a very, very successful series of books. I think, over a million copies sold. It's pretty to do the math to work out roughly how he has probably made from those books. Film deals, foreign rights, audio, the works. Jerry has covered everything and done a brilliant job doing it.

James: These are not the sort of film deals where it goes on and on and on and on. I need to actually get a film out of the end of it. These are films that are happening now, bought up by big studios.

We should say Jerry is a laconic character, isn't he, Mark? He's very laid back but it's worth listening to, everything that he says.

In terms of his writing, he got there, apparently, quite quickly. Although, when you listen to him in more detail, obviously, there was a little bit more work than, perhaps, he initially let on about, in terms of getting to the level of success he's had. He's had an inspirational amount of quick success.

Mark: He kind of came out of nowhere. As you rightly point out, it's something that he's, obviously, worked extremely hard at. It's like this one is you got to look graceful and serene on the surface but he's paddling like hell underneath.

James: **AG Riddle** is a polymath who doesn't do a lot of things okay. He does a lot of things right with a series of internet companies behind him, he turned back to fiction writing and in 2013 published *The Atlantis Gene*. Two more novels in that series followed.

To say they were well received by readers is an understatement. Over a million copies sold in the U. S. Alone and two feature films in development. One with Twentieth Century Fox and one with CBS films. Jerry straddles both traditionally published worlds and Indie publishing, a strong showing in Indie publishing world, as well. Jerry, we're delighted

that you've joined us today. Thank you very much for being on the Self Publishing Formula podcast.

Jerry: Thanks for having me.

James: You're a writers writer, I think. A lot of people will be very interested in the writing side of it, so, I'm going to let Mark kick off today. He's a bit of a fan.

Mark: You came out of nowhere and one of the questions that we've had was how did that first book, *The Atlantis Gene*, blow up? Was it luck or strategic planning or something else?

Jerry: It's a question I get a lot and I don't know if I have a good answer but I'll say what my opinion is. I think that was a book that was very different from everything else out there in terms of self publishing. It was this look that straddled a few genres.

It was a techno-thriller and a science fiction novel at its heart. It, also, was this action adventure. This mystery novel similar to Dan Brown. It, also, had this romance plot, which I think was not just something that was tangential or a feature.

It really was enough of a part of that story to satisfy a lot of romance readers. I think, science fiction readers liked it. People that liked just Clive Cussler and mystery adventure, action adventure. I think, those, the fact that it was a genre spanning novel, helped it a great deal. I, also, think, the cover and the title and the kind of curb appeal of *The Atlantis Gene*. There's a reason that Hollywood keeps making sequels. I know we're all kind of unhappy about that but, people tend to be curious about something they already know a little something about.

I think Atlantis in the title certainly appealed to a lot of people who have always been curious about it. *The Atlantis Gene*, I think, as a title, implies

that this book is about something. It offers some sort of intellectual journey and, hopefully, a fast paced adventure. Those are the reasons, I think, it succeeded.

I think that in the Amazon store, people would see it and think, "That's kind of interesting." And they would fire it up. The only thing I would add is that in that first book took me two and a half years to write.

I took a lot of chances and a lot of people hated the book. I think, at the end, there was a critical mass of people that got to the end of that book and they were really excited or thought it was remarkable enough to tell a friend.

I think, if you really want to break out, it's very easy to say write a remarkable novel but I think that, as a new writer, I kind of felt like I had to roll the dice and take some chances and really hit out of the park or strike out at the plate. That's what I wanted to do. Perhaps I got lucky or whatever. I've been incredibly impressed with how well that novel has done. That's a long way to say that I don't know exactly what it was but I think those are, somewhere in there, probably, the reason.

Mark: I remember seeing it in the rankings, right at the top. It did come out of nowhere. I remember thinking the cover was particularly brilliant. I hadn't actually thought about the title before. Now, you explain it like that, it is a genius title because it does touch on lots of different ideas, is very suggestive. It's perfect for the genre, very mysterious. I think it was very clever. Everything came together very, very nicely and it had so many reviews early, as well. Really great reviews seemed to come out of nowhere. It was top of the charts for months, as I seem to remember.

James: How much planning was involved in that, Jerry? How much of that happened organically, for you?

Jerry: In terms of the launch?

James: The the launch and the word of mouth, obviously, a lot of that's organic, but, how much did you help it along?

Any techniques or tips?

Jerry: I put so much into writing the novel that I didn't really have a launch plan. I just, some of this was naivete, I really thought if I wrote a great novel and just put it out there that things would happen. Yes and no, it happens that way but I really am a firm believer that you've got to have an early critical mass of readers to find this thing. It has to be the right readers. If they get to the end of it and they're really excited and blown away, that's when I think the magic really starts to happen. You get noticed by the Amazon algorithms and the world opens up.

In terms of what I actually did, I wrote this novel over two and a half years. I did the cover. My mom edited it. I did the formatting, myself.

One of the things I did on Amazon is I wrote three descriptions for the novel. I will tell you that was one of the hardest things, really writing a description for that. I still hate doing it.

I put the three up there and the cool thing about self publishing is I picked the one I thought was best and I put it up there and tested it for a day. Then, I put the other one up there. I would split test. The one that was better, I would use that as my description. I would keep tweaking it. I think that helped a lot. That was back when the conventional wisdom is you launch, you get on bookbub or some of these. Finally, eReader News Today accepted me. I spent 18 bucks or something or small amount, because it was a revenue share. You paid them 25% of whatever you made. I didn't make that much. It was nice for someone to say yes. Not much of a launch strategy.

James: I read that in night school that that was the only promotion that you bought. Which is remarkable to see the success that the book had. You're

bucking the trend almost at every turn. In that your no bookbub, do the cover yourself, I didn't know that. It's an amazing cover. Congrats on that. Then, you have minimal promo and you still caught lightning. That's really amazing. You said that you were split testing the descriptions. That's interesting and I love doing that, too.

Is that something that's come from your previous history before you took up writing?

Jerry: Yeah, definitely. I really have approached writing the way I approached my business career. I started a company in college with a childhood friend. We started a bunch of them. We started like 12 companies. The vast majority went absolutely nowhere. We always learned something from it.

The biggest lesson out of the start up world was to iterate and to learn from your failures. Those are the companies that really succeed. The ones that take risk, learn from it and have this perspective of "Man, you pick yourself and you go on."

I think it's a lot tougher with writing because in a start up, in a business, you're saying, "Yeah, this is a business." You're going to see a lot of consumers and it won't be for a lot of people but I think with writing you're so personally invested in it. You're emotionally invested in this work of whatever you want to call it, art. To see it get rejected, I think, is very tough. You have to develop a certain amount of mental toughness. That was a big obstacle for me to overcome.

James: Quite a few of our authors and, in fact, Mark's a bit like this himself, aren't you, Mark? Is almost split the day so you have you're writing in the morning or whenever and you do your marketing in the afternoon. That point to try and mentally split yourself away. You do break that emotional link. Otherwise, as you say, you can't really be in business.

If you're going to be personally wounded when something doesn't work and take it as a rejection, rather than being clinical about what's not gone wrong, why's it not worked and let's try something else.

Jerry: I think that's right. That's exactly it. I write in the morning. In the afternoon, I try to follow up on the emails and do whatever else is going on. I think the mental toughness comes with time. It's quite a culture shock.
James: We emailed before. This was after I heard you were on Simon's podcast way back.

When things started to take off for you and you started to get sales, you were checking your KDP dashboard every spare minute?

Jerry: Definitely. Very early, you're looking for any sort of confirmation that it's going well or some definitive validation to not give this up and do something else. I launched the book and it was not doing well. I didn't think it was.

We had run companies that had been pretty successful. A couple got pretty successful, then, a bunch went nowhere. The ones that get successful, those are the ones that you can tell when it's happening. There's this algorithmic spreading, like a virus. I was waiting and hoping that would happen.

My parents came up for dinner in North Carolina and asked, "How's it going?" I'm like, "It's not going well." I remember I was constantly checking my stats at dinner. They were like, "What has happened to you?" I was like, "Well, you know, it's hard to explain." I think it's one of those things that unless you've been through it, it is very hard to relate but, you get pretty obsessive. I did, anyway.

James: It's compulsive. I used to get in trouble. I'd go to the toilet and check my stats. Then, come back and say, "I've sold a book." You're actually right. It's that validation. Until that point, maybe for you, you would have

shown it to your girlfriend. I showed it to my wife. They can say this book is amazing but in the back of your mind you're still thinking, "You're going to say that because you're invested in saying that."

When you get people you've never met before buying the book, and then, again, one step further in reviewing the book, it's exactly why we're all reasonably precious flowers when it comes to this kind of stuff. That is the validation that you need to give you the belief that maybe you got a bit of talent after all.

Jerry: I think that's it. I think for every human being, it's sort of like you need some daily dose of success or you need at some regular interval to maintain your motivation or you figure this is not working out. I've got to go do something else.

I do think that's one of the powerful things of self publishing is that you get data. It's a double-edged sword. You get data instantly. I do think one of the key skills here is mental toughness. I think it develops over time and then, discipline. You talked about routines and stuff like that. It's certainly helped me a lot.

James: What does your typical day look like, now, in terms of writing and marketing and production?

Jerry: I write in the morning and do everything else in the afternoon. I'm an outliner. I write pretty detailed character histories. Then, I'll write an outline of the novel. I do it for my own self-confidence. I want to know that when I'm writing something that I've got this big pay off at the end. The nightmare scenario where I wake up in a cold sweat at night is I've written two-thirds of a novel and there's not this blockbuster ending. That would terrify me.

James: It's funny how many mysteries or horror films or things you do go to see, where they've really gone ahead and made the work but they still don't have an ending for it.

Jerry: That's exactly right. I hate it and I know readers would hate it. At the same time, when I start writing, so many things change.

When I wrote my first novel, my outline was so detailed. It was over detailed. About half way through, I threw the whole thing out and rewrote it.

Now, my outlines are loose enough to allow for things to happen as the story unfolds. I still have that ending is going to be there. I find that characters that I thought were going to be great weren't that interesting or the story takes a turn. That's fun.

I think that if you are really religious to the outline and you write something that doesn't make sense or strikes readers as odd, I think you hurt the story. What I've found is, when you're writing the story, to make sure it's logical and believable because if you lose that believability, it doesn't really matter what happens after that. That's my process.

James: Did you say you start with the characters and then do the outline?

Jerry: Yes. For me, the kind of books I'm writing, I really start with a scientific or historical mystery that intrigues me or some kind of premise that I really personally am intrigued by and get excited about. That's really what gets me started. Then, I start to think about what's a fresh character that might be involved in that, somebody that I would like to learn more about. Then, I start to flush out, "Okay, what's their personal history?" The plot almost comes from that. It's like, "Why are they involved? What's happening around them?" The arc of the story starts to unfold for me.

James: Do you write in Word or Scrivener?

Jerry: I write on a neo writer. I don't know if you guys are familiar with that?

James: Yeah.

Jerry: The Neo writer is basically a key board with about four or five lines in monochrome text. It's got no internet connection, no spell check or anything like that. It operates on four double A batteries. It lasts for weeks at a time.

You can get them on eBay for 40 or 50 bucks or something. I write on the Neo because I find that it's nice to not have the internet or somebody telling me I'm misspelling. I'm a terrible speller. I'm a little obsessive. If I saw that I'd misspelled a word, I would correct it.

I write all my drafts there. I, also, think that Neo helps me to write shorter sentences and tighter prose. I tend to write longer prose, which I don't like, in Word or Scrivener. I take my drafts and I put them in Scrivener. In Scrivener, I organize all my outlines and all the other stuff. Then, I work it from there.

James: The Atlantis Gene took two and a half years to write. You've picked up speed since then.

The second and third books, were they faster work because you got your legs underneath you and you knew where you were going?

Jerry: Yes. The second and third were quicker to write. It took me two and a half years but I'd done a lot of the trilogy research and backstory. I had a lot for those second and third books already done.

I think the second one took me eight or nine months. When The Atlantis Gene came out, I had pretty good headstart on The Atlantis Plague. Although, I did rewrite The Atlantis Gene and it was just a ton of stuff

happening, while I was writing Plague. I've gotten a little faster. My last book came out December of 2014, Departure, which was a stand alone. Since, then, I've been writing a lot but I haven't published anything. James: I've got to say your books are clumped in what looks like a tremendously busy 18 months in your life.

Jerry: Yeah, it does look that way but I've been writing a lot now and I got a lot of stuff in terms of outlines, character bios and have a lot written that's stock piled that will come out at some point. It's just been a lot going on here. We're building a house and my wife is pregnant. There's just life stuff going on. What I'm trying to do is get a lot of my research and planning done ahead of time so when the baby comes I can just write every day and start putting this stuff out there.

James: The readers are going to be pleased to hear that. You have a loyal following, a huge, loyal following, I should say. I know that you value your contact with readers. It's certainly something that comes across in the interviews I've heard and the bits I've read about you.

How do you approach that and how important is it to you?

Jerry: It's huge. I think it's important for me. I learn a lot from readers. They're also a source of inspiration and just daily encouragement. When I set out to write my first book I'd always loved science fiction and I'd always loved reading it. It'd been this source of calm and escape in my life and was really one of the sources of joy. I thought, "I'm going to write this novel and if it takes off, this is going to be my second career." It's going to be something that I really am into and feel is this really valuable thing for the world. If it didn't workout or wasn't a huge success, I thought, "This might be a hobby or maybe I'll go do something else." I remember very early I got a reader email that said, "I've been in the hospital for a few weeks. I read your book. It was just this thing that took me out of what was going on and this real source of happiness in my life." That's when it came full circle.

I had become this role for this reader that other great writers had been for me. That's when I knew I was going to keep doing it no matter what. The reader interaction is very important for me. I think it varies for each writer but I still like doing it.

James: Did you, straight out of the gate, have a mailing list set up?

Jerry: I did.

James: Do you think that's a benefit from your previous experience that you knew, immediately, that that was going to be crucially important?

Jerry: I knew right off the bat I wanted to have a mailing list. I knew I needed it. I obviously did my own website. I wanted that to be a big role. I'm going to do more with the website.

When the first book came out, I had this fact versus fiction piece. With *Departure*, we did this Easter egg hunt with all these sites. On the website we had all this bonus feature content and stuff and an epilogue, which hadn't appeared before.

I've got some other ideas that I'm going to do for the web site that I think will be pretty cool. I would encourage writers and I think the website, depending on what kind of books you write, for my genre, for techno thrillers, I hope they lead people who are intellectually curious and they want to go on the website and say, "I wonder how much of that was real?" and read more and things like that.

James: Regarding the bonus content and the Easter eggs, was that something that was driven by Harper Collins or had you said to them that you wanted to do something like that?

Jerry: It was something that I wanted to do. The book, *Departure*, came out in December '14 and they were doing this rerelease. The book had been edited. There was a new chapter.

I was not convinced that people who had read the self published version would get a lot out of reading the rerelease. It was edited and remastered. It had that new chapter but if they did want to revisit the story, I wanted to give them a little more to enhance it.

James: There is the George Lucas approach to a work of art as you, then, repackage it every 18 months for 12 years.

Jerry: It's not an approach I intend to take.

Mark: Mugs like me keep buying it. That's the thing, isn't it? If you become a fan of something, a fan of an author, you are up for that. Even if dear old Douglas Adams was still alive, one of my favorite authors, it would be joyous for him to revisit some of the early books and rewrite bits and pieces of it. I'd be completely up for that.

I guess you're talking about the difference in your super fans and your more casual fans. For you, it seems to be you do have a loyal following, which is why I'm probably pleased on their behalf to hear that there's more stuff coming out.

Jerry: Yeah, there's a lot more coming.

Mark: Where are you, now, in terms of the Indie and traditionally published split. I noticed with Departure you Indie launched that but it was very quickly picked up.

Jerry: Departure came out in December of 2014. It did well, sold about a quarter of a million copies in four or five months. Fox bought the movie rights. Then, they called Harper Collins and they bought the print rights. I don't think I would have gone the traditional publishing route, initially, but, it was a situation where I thought, "Well, my core audience, a lot of my

readers, have read *Departure*. I'm going to be able to leave it up for another month or two months or whatever, while we sort this contract out." I thought this might be a good way to test the water. It's a nice experiment in that you get pretty clear data. My self publishing audience had largely read it. Then, the question becomes "How many people that are reading print and reading in other retailers have this appetite for the work?" I'm still waiting on that data from Harper Collins.

I'll say that I prefer self publishing for a couple of reasons. I think it may just be an issue of work flow and personality. I ran a series of internet companies and when you're in that situation, you're very used to making all the decisions, for better or worse, and having control your own destiny. There's nobody who actually controls their own destiny. When you have that kind of delusion and you get to make the calls and you get to iterate fast. I like that. I think that's where the world's going.

The other thing I didn't really appreciate when they bought the rights, is that the book would come out and it'd be \$9.99 for an ebook. I don't know when it went up on Amazon, the other retailers, I just sort of felt like, "Man, that I think is a lot of money to pay for the average person." For the person, here in North Carolina, who makes \$10 or \$12 an hour, works full time 40 hour week and that's \$480 a week and you want them to give two percent of their whole paycheck. After you pay taxes, it becomes I think pretty real. I don't know.

I'm pretty financially secure at this point in my life so I'm writing these books because it's an outlet for me and it's something that I get a lot out of. I certainly want them to be read. That's what I was after with traditional publishing is to find a wider audience.

With all that being said, I always encourage authors to figure out what they want from writing, what's important for them. I'm not someone who thinks there's one answer. I certainly think the criteria for traditionally publishing is getting a little more narrow by the day.

Mark: Let's just go back to the Atlantis series, you self published those and they started to sell huge amounts.

How did the traditional world hinge on that? Did you have an agent or did they come straight to you? What happened?

Jerry: Both. When the books really started to break out, the big major publishers never contacted me but some smaller ones did. Then, agents really started to inquire. I considered traditionally publishing them but I really felt like, at that point in my career, what I needed to do was to learn and to continue to get better at writing.

I didn't want to take the books out of the market because I was getting so many reviews. I was getting a lot of email, and a lot of feedback. I also didn't want to mess with what worked. The book was selling. Things were happening. There's a lot more risk in upsetting the apple cart here than staying the course. What I did was I decided I'm going to sell foreign rights and that's what we've done since then, with the exception of Departure.

Mark: You think from now on, you've got these other books in the pipeline, that you're fairly set at this stage on keeping control and doing your own thing?

Jerry: I think it's what's right for me. With that being said, I'm not an absolutist. If somebody comes to me with some offer, I'll certainly entertain it. I'm an open minded person but, I think, that contractually, Harper Collins has 30 days to bid on my next book. I have to fulfill my obligation there. I don't have anything bad to say about them. I think they're fine hardworking people. I think for me, it gets down to what I value and what I'm trying to get out of the market.

Mark: Tell us about the films, briefly. I know we'll go back to books in a minute. That's always an exciting thing for any author to imagine a film deal. Again, I have to quote Douglas Adams. I remember he died in the 20 years between selling the film rights and the film being made. I remember him

saying in the intro to one of his books, "The film is in production and will be made any decade now."

These are live projects for you, aren't they?

Jerry: Yeah, they are. I'll admit I'm not intimately involved in the projects and don't have a lot to report there. I talk with them every now and then. They keep me updated. I think out of them being polite to me. I don't know. I'm very optimistic. I hope that the movies will get made. The way I look at it is it may or may not happen. They've invested a lot of money into and quite a lot of time. The way it's set up is that these are all options that expire. The clock's ticking. I don't know what will happen.

Mark: Have people been attached?

Jerry: They have. I don't know that it's been announced.

Mark: I'm in a similar position. I optioned one of my series to Hollywood and producers have attached writers and directors but I can't say either. I think I agree with you. My view on that is if it comes off, fantastic but it's not something I'm going to bank on or expect. It would be a nice thing. It would be an amazing thing if it came off.

Jerry: Yeah, exactly.

Mark: It's going to need a lot of work.

Jerry: The contract negotiations. I was trying to figure that out. I was like, "Are they trying to make a movie of the week or what is this?" The lawyer is like, "They're thinking summer blockbuster with lots of fire and explosions." I was like, "Oh, that's what I'm looking for."

Mark: A fantastic way off the success of *The Martian* of being Indie published originally by Andy Weir and it's a great trailblazing film for you to follow on. Hopefully, it certainly sets the scene for Hollywood.

Jerry: Yeah, he set the bar pretty high. That's just an amazing success story and an amazing fictional story.

Mark: Well, deserved.

Jerry: Let's don't make any of those comparisons.

James: We've got up to the morning, in terms of how you work. How many words do you tend to shoot for each day?

Jerry: I get as many as I can. I find that I have two phases. There's this phase where I'm planning a novel and doing a ton of research and character bios. That's oftentimes when I'm first starting. Really happy in that phase. Then, I really start to wear out because I'm not writing. I don't feel like I'm getting anywhere. Most days, I can get three or 4000 words, when I'm actively writing. After that, I find that my mental stamina, I'm just not as fresh and I don't think the writing is quite as good. I've gone past that some days. I'm sprinting to the finish but I find I do more rewrites on that stuff. At some point, I just have to bag it everyday and say, "That's as much good stuff as I'm going to get."

James: You talk about being an outliner. At some point, throwing some of those ideas away. The guys and girls who are writing a book and getting quite excited about wondering where this is going to go during a writing session.

Do you ever get to that stage in your characters or plots or is it all planned?

Jerry: Certainly, those moments. I won't say that it's the majority of the time or even a large part of the time but there are those moments when things happen.

I think that's part of the magic and part of the reason we all do this is you get to some point and the novel just starts writing itself and things start happening. Things that you never planned or imagined and you're like, "Oh, that's really cool." I think those are some of the most fun times. I'm writing techno thrillers and oftentimes there's a lot of dense stuff in there and you kind of worry and wonder if readers are as into it as you are and as much of a geek as I am.

Those moments when the plot really takes those twists and those turns and you know that almost universally, all the readers are going to like it because you're so blown away. Those are the things that I certainly get excited about. In fact, when I'm outlining, some scenes will come up and I think they're so good. I'll go ahead and write them. Obviously, I rewrite it when you get to that point. There are points in the story that I look forward to writing and things that I know are going to happen and readers are going to love. Yeah, I totally agree.

James: We want to get through a few of the questions that have come from our Facebook group. Karen O'Connor, I think you more or less answered both of these but she wants to know about, because the plots are full of twists and turns and loads of action, how much planning goes into the books? We've pretty much covered that.

The other question from her, also, you've sort of alluded to, is whether you deliberately picked techno thriller as a genre to write in because it was a niche market or because of something that you love to write?

Jerry: It's something that I really love. When I started, I considered two genres. One was space adventure and the other was techno thrillers. I really felt like for space adventure, there was a lot of writers doing it. I thought that the competition would probably be more intense. Star Trek and Star Wars, those are the things I grew up, and the X-Files, that was huge. I also, felt like, because a writer starting out, for myself, I wanted to do something

where, even if my writing or my characters weren't as good, the novel could stand out.

James: I think, also, because you addressed this earlier and you did talk about you loved to write in the genre, obviously, that to an extent, answered the question, which was have you chosen this commercially or have you chosen it because it's what you want to do. Obviously, most authors will say, quite rightly, it's got to be a combination of the two, right? You've got to not be silly and choose something that nobody's going to want to read. On the other hand, if you don't enjoy it, if you don't want to know the story, how can you put your heart and soul into it and make other people want it.

Jerry: I think that's right. The core of my feeling is that you choose something that you're passionate about because that comes through in the writing. For me, techno thrillers was a perfect genre to start in because I knew my writing and my character development and all these things would develop over time. That earlier, it wouldn't be nearly as good as what I really wanted it to be.

I felt, doing a techno thriller, something with a lot of science and history, there was a lot there for readers. I felt good about doing that. I considered doing a techno thriller or a space adventure very early in my career. Although, the third book in the series, *The Atlantis World*, is very much a space adventure, which has been hit and a miss with varying groups of readers. I eventually got there, I guess.

James: We've got a few other questions. Jeff Shelby, who asked that one, he's asked a couple, actually. I noticed there's a reasonable amount of jealousy coming out through these questions. I guess because it looks, from the outside, that things happened very quickly for you without too much effort, which is not quite the case, at all.

Dean Crawford saying, "Can you ask him to get out of my way on the Amazon Bestseller ranking? Send some of his fans over with their wallets." I'm sure you'll be happy to do that.

Jerry: A great guy. I love that.

James: One last question from him and you have already addressed this as well, which is about the price that Harper Collins set for Departure. He's pegged it at 4.99. I know it's nine pounds 99 in the U. K. which is knocking on 13.50, 14 bucks equivalent.

He wanted to know if this is a new strategy and whether you had a voice in that?

Jerry: I did. I've had a voice since the launch, encouraging them to lower the price and they've agreed. I've been very happy about that. The paperbacks coming out this summer and I hope they'll continue to keep the price at 4.99 or less in the U. S. I haven't seen the U. K. Price but that feels pretty exorbitant.

Mark: I'm with you on that one. I think 4.99 is almost the perfect price for an ebook. The thing is it's perfect convergence of volume and price. You're going to sell more copies at that level and still getting a pretty decent at 3.60 royalty, something along those lines, certainly from self publishing. That does seem to be the sweet spot. Pushing things higher than the paper cost is just ridiculous.

James: That seems to be the case for Departure in the U. K. Nine pounds 99 kindle edition, 7.99 paperback, 15.19 hardcover.

When you go with a traditional publishing deal there's different contracts for different territories. It starts to become more complicated to have control or have a say over it.

Jerry: That's right. You get your say but you don't get the decision.

James: No, it's been really brilliant from my point of view. Talking to you is quite inspirational, as well. You seem like a really nice guy. You've been very elegant about some of your motivations, which, Mark, may have explained in the beginning at the interview. I'm writing my first book, now. I'm lapping up these stories about approach and word counts and plots and outlines and so on. I found it great. Mark, you hero worship Jerry anyway, don't you sir?

Mark: Absolutely. It's really great. Thanks for coming on Jerry. We really appreciate you giving us the time.

James: He's the most laconic person I think we've ever interviewed. I really loved his story and I like his approach. He's got a correct mix between being enthusiastic about his subject but thoughtful about what's going to work and what's not commercial. Boy, did he get that bit right.

Mark: He did. He picked a subject that is very commercial, but, he obviously has a lot of enthusiasm for and a lot of knowledge about and knocked it out of the park. Really interesting interview with Jerry.

James: Great to listen to Jerry Riddle. Thank you very much indeed for listening to episode 30 and Jerry Riddle this week. It's been great to have you onboard. We will be back in a weeks time. Enjoy the last vestiges of sunshine, if you've got that. It's still hot here, hence, the background noise you hear as these fans try to keep our computers cold. We've actually had an unseasonably warm summer in the U. K. which has been nice. We will try and cool down and we'll see you next