

EPISODE 66: THE ONE THING I WISH I'D KNOWN WHEN STARTING MY INDIE AUTHOR CAREER – WITH MARK DAWSON

Speaker 1: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blanch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Hello and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula. Yes, it's James and Mark. And a special night time edition. Hello to all you truckers out there. It's why a love radio.

Mark: I guess I see you've got your pink lights on.

James: I've got my pink lights on. Are they pink or purple? They are sort of pink.

Mark: Lilac.

James: The color scheme is called Pink Floyd so it's a bit of a giveaway. And we've had some technic als today which is why Mark is very blocky like a 1980's Nintendo Game Cube game. But that's okay. It's quite retro. You're so cool.

Mark: Not very cool.

James: So zeitgeist.

Mark: Yeah. So this will be the smoothest podcast ever because we've done it three times now so this, yes, I'll take over. We've got a packed episode. I

know what you're going to say, James, because you've said it twice already. Yes, it's going to be a packed episode.

We think this could be quite popular with listeners because we're going to look at the one thing that I, actually say the one thing, the several one things that I would have wished that I'd had known when I started self-publishing six years ago. So, looking forward to jumping into some of those.

I think sometimes people need to just kind of take a step back and just think about the things, the important things, the essential things that need to be caught right before you launch into some of the other things that we deal with advertising and marketing and all that kind of stuff. It's getting the platform right.

James: It's the one thing for multiple people and it's a really good episode and I was saying to Mark earlier that I know that this will be one of the spike episodes on our downloads. It's one people will gravitate to because it's really useful, full of value.

However, before we get going, I just want to get some housekeeping out of the way.

For podcasts regulars we've had a couple of competitions running. You'll remember that Dave Chesson came on to the podcast. He is the author of the KDP Rocket Software which is an idea validation software and we ran a contest. Dave very kindly donated three licenses and they have been won. So we've done the electronic draw.

They've been won by Adriana Descalo, Terry Miles, I think it's Terry Miles, I've sort of deduced his name from his email address and Camilla Allens. So well done to Adriana, Terry and Camilla. They've got their licenses and are getting going with that. And thank you to everybody else who took part.

You've got one week left on the Pat Mills competition. So you might remember Pat Mills the creator of 2000 AD and Judge Dredd is giving away a signed copy of his paperback which is called Serial Killer. And in addition to that you get a signed 2000 AD script. I think you even get to choose which one it is. So one week left on that. And the URL for that is selfpublishingformula.com/patmills.

And we're going to have another important URL to give you in a moment because we've put together a really good useful handout for today's episode. And as a special bonus for that handout, one person who downloads it will be offered a free enrollment in our 101 course. And the reason we can say that is because, Mark, we are seven days away, aren't we?

Mark: Yes, seven days away, yes we go live on Friday, the 7th, is that right? Friday the 7th? No, that's not right, the 2nd of June at 10 p.m. UK time. So, we're kind of running around like crazy and getting everything ready for that. We had the last launch was fantastic. We had 1,200 students, I think, enroll last time slightly. We underestimated how popular the course was going to be. So, we're ready this time. We are girding our loins or at least you and me are. James, John, I'm not sure what John is doing, he's probably relaxing.

James: He's drunk now.

Mark: Yeah, so, we're ready to go. So, definitely looking forward to getting the doors open so people will start to get emails towards the middle of next week to tell people what they can get in the course and the cost and bonuses and all that kind of good stuff.

James: Yep, so Mark Dawson self-publishing 101 course, doors open Friday, June 2nd, 10 p.m. UK which is 5 p.m. in New York, 3 p.m. on the west coast, I think. Other time zones are available. I can't from the top of my

head do Australia and the Far East but Google will give you the answers to that.

We did take on 1,200 which is right, I mean we kept it open because people were still interested beyond where we, perhaps, should have done. It's been a very busy time for us which is fine but we won't keep it open probably for that same period of time. So June 2nd we'll on board not quite as many this time.

But I can tell you because I've been doing the testimonial interviews. I did one this afternoon in Quebec and Nadine in Quebec, Nadine Travers, and I spoke to David yesterday in LA. David has a cool job. Now I meant to mention him to you Mark. We might get him on as a guest in the future.

He cuts the trailers for Fox. It's his job. So, he cuts Simpsons trailers and I talked to him about Futurama. It's one of my favorite shows, Futurama, when Fox had it. And he cuts some film trailers, some TV episodes.

I talked to him a bit about whether, "Do you watch the whole episode or just a little bit of it?" He said, "No, we always watch the whole thing which isn't necessarily complete at that stage," before they work out what the narrative and how the trailer's going to work. And turning that into a 10 second, 20 second TV spot is quite an art form. So, I thought in terms of story and approach of story, it would be an interesting conversation. Really interesting guy.

Anyway, Dave is one of many people I've spoken to recently who took the 101 course and have absolutely loved it and have said it was what they needed in terms of finding their way through the bit of jungle that faces you when you first start self-publishing. So, we've been really pleased with 101 course and I think it's going to go well next Friday.

Okay, enough of a plug for the 101 Course. Let's move on to our topic today. It's called The One Thing and the URL you're going to need to

download the PDF and enter the contest for a free spot on 101 is selfpublishingformula.com/theonething. And what we did, we went out far and wide and asked people who are down the line with self-publishing, we asked them what was that one thing that when they look back with hindsight and thought, "You know, if I'd know that, life would have been easier."

So, let's get that out to people like me who are at the beginning of our careers.

Mark, how are we going to start this? I know we've partitioned the answers, haven't we, into various groups?

Mark: A little bit, yeah. The idea I had was to ask the question. The answers that we're going to go through are things that I think are important and things I would have liked to have known as some of the important things I wish I'd known when I got started.

The first one I'd say is to consider all forms of publication. Don't dismiss self-publishing. We still see that quite a lot.

I was interviewed by The Guardian, a fairly big UK newspaper last week. It got lots of traction and the comments were very busy. I kind of braved it to go down below the line and start to answer some of those comments.

Something that came out more than once was people who profess themselves to be writers saying they wouldn't consider self-publishing for a number of reasons. I think some people still think it's vanity, others don't realize what's available financially and otherwise.

And I was like that when I started out after being traditionally published at the turn of the millennium. I wrote another book and even though I knew that self-publishing was interesting. And, even though it was kind of the

impetus that got me back to writing again, my initial impetus was to go to my agent and ask her to ship it around the traditional publishers in London. I think I did that because I was still misguided because I thought that was the prestige form of publications. So this was seven or eight years so times were a little bit different then and things have changed since.

But, there are still plenty of authors like I was and as I saw in the comments to that Guardian article, who will just dismiss self-publishing as a second best way of getting their stories out there. And what I would say, I think this is probably the most important thing, and I know I'm preaching to the choir because most of our audience will be self-publishing or thinking about it, is to just remember that the story is the most important thing.

The means of distribution, so the mechanism you use to get your story into the hands of readers is largely irrelevant. And when you think of it that way and then when you start to look at the financial benefits of self-publishing and the freedom and the independence and being responsible for everything, which of course is a blessing and a curse, but when you start to take all those things on board, it's an easier decision, I think, to consider doing it yourself rather than relying on gatekeepers. That model is dying out now or changing.

James: I interviewed an author called Suzy K. Quinn who lives quite nearby actually here in the UK and has written a very successful novel that's doing well, it's probably in the top 10 of Amazon a couple of days ago. Her third novel, she has another one coming out. It's a really great interview.

I don't want to give too much of it away now but she goes into the figures a bit like you've done in the past, Mark. She said how much she made from her first traditional deal and then how much she was offered for her second book by which point she had this one eye now on self-publishing and for her it was a natural draw she sort of wanted.

Because she already had arguments with them about the cover they chose for her book she didn't think worked and she was despondent about the lack of marketing that she saw behind the book. She didn't feel inspired, really, to sign that deal again.

Now she's gone down the self-publishing route. She was crystal clear about it in terms of the figures that she gives out in the interview.

She says when she signed that initial deal she was writing a book 75% of which was paying for a building in London and now that 75% is paying for her house. That is a no-brainer, right?

Mark: Yeah, I think when you start looking at it in that way, it does make sense. I got decent advances when I started out but when I released my last Milton but within the first month I'd made the advance for two traditionally published books.

So, for me, it's a bit of a no-brainer now. I'm pretty much wedded to doing this myself. You know, it's not to say that going traditional is something that no one should consider because it's quite clear that some authors are better suited for that.

Literary fiction is probably still better served by traditional publishing. Not necessary completely, but I think there's some advantages there.

And also, most importantly, if you are not interested in becoming the publisher, and being in charge of marketing, covers, sources editors, all that kind of background stuff that's incredibly important, if that's not of any interest to you or you just don't think you've got the skill for it or the patience, then there is something to be said for going traditional.

But the one thing to take away from that is it's going to cost you 90% of everything that you make probably once the advance has been earned out.

Because that is going to be the royalty that the traditional publisher gives you.

So, when you think about it in that sense, I think it's, well, you know, as I say, for me self-publishing is the most interesting way of doing things these days. But others may have different views.

James: We'll move on in a moment. Just the last point I want to make about this is I know, well first of all, I realize that some of the audience including me are excluded from this point because Harper, Bloomsbury or whatever are not going to be breathing down our necks offering us deals. So this isn't a choice.

But there is a choice for some people and I know one thing that people thing is, "I can't do self-publishing because it's too complicated and I'm not good with computers."

I would just say to you look at some of the people who we've interviewed and put forward who've taken our course. People like Andrew Domanski. Andrew's doing really well. Riley Edgewood is another one who have really found their way in self-publishing. Okay, they've used Mark's courses and I'm not an advert for your course, the point I'm making is that they are, I mean Andrew in particular would tell you that he's a technophobe in every way, I think it's the word he used to me. And yet, when you start to work some of this stuff out, she can achieve it. And of course, you can.

Just like all of us, we'll look at something to start off with and think we can't climb that mountain and then you start at the bottom and you do bits and pieces and suddenly, you quite enjoy it and you're doing well at it.

So, don't rule out self-publishing on that ground. At least until you've properly looked into it. We've got a few husband and wife teams, haven't we, where one of them writes and the other one does the marketing and that might work for you as well.

So that is the that is the trad thing. Trad versus self-publishing and it's slightly mixed advice. As you say, I think foreign rights you still would say is a good traditional route for you.

Self-publishing terms of commercial return of kind of quitting your nine-to-five self-publishing, at the moment, is an exciting opportunity.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. I'll move on to the next thing now. This we can deal with quite briefly because we've dealt with it ad infinitum so it is:

The readers don't come to you, you have to go to your readers.

And the best way to do that is to implement a mailing list straight away and then to work on the rest of your platform. So have a Facebook page, have a website, get Twitter sorted out. Whatever your social media channels are going to be, you need to work on those.

I spun my wheels for a good six months because I didn't start doing this properly which is ironic given that it's probably the thing that I'm best known for now in that mainly is building and the managing the relationship between fans and writer.

So, there's no excuse. I won't go into it in too much detail now because we've already done three episodes on kind of mailing list 101 which I think it's in 41, 42 and 43 possibly but we can pop those references in the show notes. Just so people can go back and look at that. But it is very important. I'll skip over that quickly.

The next thing is kind of a craft thing.

It's very important to know how to write in a fashion that is on the one hand enjoyable for you and on the other hand, likely to be attractive to be a decent number of readers.

So this is a theory is called Write to Market. It's been propagated by a writer called Chris Fox who we should probably get on the show. It's not a new thing but Chris has done lots of work to show how it can be effective.

Again, we've talked about this before but it is, if you think about two circles, on the one hand is what you like and you like writing and the other hand is what readers want. And you need to find that spot where the two circles intersect. In that kind of cross-section, that is your sweet spot.

It might be that as Chris writes kind of military sci-fi, he also likes writing that and his readers like buying it and reading it. That's the spot that he's hit.

One of the things that I knew when I started out was I wanted to write a 1940's James Ellroy style noir thriller set in London during the blitz. I had this idea, this was going to be my thing. I wrote it. It took me 18 months to two years maybe to write the book which is kind of glacial by the pace that I write these days.

James: Seems quite quick to me.

Mark: Quick for you, maybe, but pretty slow to me.

I wrote the book. I'm quite proud of it. I think it's one of my better books even though it was one of the early ones but it doesn't sell a tenth of the amount of my Milton and my Rose books sell.

The lesson I learned from that was I needed to shift a bit. So it isn't necessarily about just writing what I wanted to write. Something about writing in that sweet spot.

As soon as I moved onto the Milton series, it has lots of things that I love: the tortured hero harking back to things like the Equalizer and things of

that. The overlap was with people like Jack Reacher, David Baldacci, Alex Cross, James Patterson's character, I knew there was a market there for a character like Milton.

I also really enjoyed writing him and that's one of the reasons why we talk about pace. That's one of the reasons why it's not taking me two years to write anymore because I love writing these books. They're not massive in terms of detailed research and going to Colindale for newspaper archive and researching stuff.

I'm also getting great feedback from readers both in terms of reviews and sales and then royalties, money coming back from Amazon. It's that real conflation of motivations that just mean that I write more quickly.

And it wouldn't be that way if I decided to continue to writing that 1940's series. Even though I enjoy it, I wouldn't be selling as much. I wouldn't be getting that kind of feedback and probably if I was still writing that, we might not be having this podcast because it's quite unlikely that I would be doing as well as I've done. And no one would have heard of me. Moving into that space has been great on a number of different levels for me.

James: That's really good insight, Mark. I think some people might look at your Milton books and Beatrix Rose and think they're the books you were kind of born to write and it was natural and it was a coincidence they happen to be commercial, but it aligns with what you like doing but it was still a conscious decision of you, a commercial decision of you, to move into those and move away from ultimately what's pleasurable but perhaps self-indulgent when it comes to money-making with the Soho Noir. Although I did read that book. It's very good.

Mark: Thank you very much. I got good reviews for it but it's never going to sell as much. I occasionally get readers emailing saying, "When are you going to continue that story?" And I have to to be honest to say that no

plans in the immediate future. One day maybe but I'm having too much fun writing Milton and Rose books at the moment so that's in the background.

Okay. So, the next thing. We've had this for a number of writers. And, in fact, Joanna Penn put this into the Facebook group when we discussed this episode and I agree with her 100%. It's that you only really find your voice after several books. So, that's not to say that your first book is going to be one that you should never publish. But what it does mean is that you're only going to be confident in your voice once you've got a few hundred thousand words probably behind you.

So, from my own personal perspective, when I started writing '97, '98, I was very, very keen to emulate writers like Martin Amis, Bret Easton Ellis, Jay McInerney, Will Self, people like that.

I wanted to be a pro stylist. I wanted to be wearing a tuxedo at the Booker Prize Awards and hearing my name called. Now that is ludicrous on a number of different fronts. I am not any of those writers. I'm trying to force myself into their style. It just comes across as a really bad pastiche. And winning the Booker Prize is not really, I think it's \$50,000 is it? I think you can win and say the odds are long but you're going to win something like that. Even if you do, it's not exactly life changing in money.

I would much rather be entertaining readers now and making a decent living doing it. And the only way I can do that is to be myself and to write my kind of stories. Tell them the way that I tell them in my distinctive voice which I'm now very confident in. I've got over 25 novels published now. So if I'm not confident now in the way that I write my books, well, frankly, I'm never going to be confident.

But the take-away from this is I don't want people to feel discouraged after the first couple of books because they still feel they lack confidence. They still feel their writing can't be compared with other writers writing in their genres. Because that isn't true.

You're a bad judge of your books in any event but you do need that practice. You need to work on your craft and that's something that does come with getting your sitting down everyday writing a few hundred or a few thousand words and then just repeating that again and again. And then, eventually, you'll be confident in your voice and you'll be ready to go. James: Yeah, it is a slightly depressing thing to hear that it takes as long as that to sort of find your voice and get into your swing of things. And actually we have another one thing I wish I'd know coming up which correlates with this a little bit about at the point at which you just publish rather than refine. But, it needs to be said.

This is a craft that's along side carpentry or sculpture or something without being too laudy about it, you don't turn into Rodin on day one. It stands to reason you spent an apprenticeship so why would you be able to write your first book as a great novel?

There are outliers in the world but for the vast majority of us there's an apprenticeship, right?

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. My first books, my first traditionally published books are dreadful. I don't really know how they got published to be honest. But the books I write now, I'm quite proud of so that's just practice and confidence which comes with time.

James: Apart from having an airliner at 31,000 feet five minutes from landing in Las Vegas, I quite like the art of falling down which I think is your first book, isn't it?

Mark: It's The Art of Falling Apart. Yep.

James: The Art of Falling Apart. The Art of Falling Down, that was a good book. I don't know who wrote that, but. No, The Art of Falling Apart. I felt it was a vicarious Mark Dawson book and there's some other Mark Dawson

somewhere who grew up on the wrong side of the tracks, joined a rock band and murdered somebody. I could sense that coming out from within you but anyway. I've given away the plot.

Okay. Good stuff. Is that that first section, I'm not sure what we called the first section, done?

Mark: Yes, it is. Those are kind of foundational things. The next thing is kind of, these are very, very loose headlines, not really to pay too much attention to them.

The next one is mindset.

The way we think about being an author. You hinted to it so I'll just do this one first. It is kind of related to a Seth Godin quote. My wife, Lucy, loves Seth Godin and this is one of my favorite quotes from him and it is that, "Done is better than perfect." There's a variation on that the perfection is the enemy of something, I can't remember the rest of it.

But the gist of it is if you insist on making your book perfect, so if you revise and revise and revise, eventually, you'll edit the soul out of the book and also the more time you spend revising something, your changes will become smaller and smaller and the effect that they have on how good the book is will also end up being smaller and smaller and smaller.

To the extent that as you keep doing stuff you'll literally be moving punctuation around and at that point, that is, if you needed a sign, that is a sign that you need to stop prevaricating and get it published, get it out there.

You should aim for perfection but also know that it's almost completely unattainable. You need to know when it is good enough to go and then when you're confident that you've got it there and you can validate that with an advance team with beta readers whatever you like.

But when you're confident enough that it's ready, it's good enough to go then that is your signal to upload it to the retail platforms and hit publish and away you go.

James: I think this plays into one or two of the other tips we're going to come onto in a moment about author mindset of that nagging self-doubt that people have which is a big hurdle when it comes to your very first book.

I know that because I'm there now in releasing it and letting somebody else read it and so on. But there's good advice from people who've been there and done it, get it out there, move on to the next one.

I mean the great thing also we should mention in this day and age is you can revise books and re-upload them. People do that all the time. It's not the end of the world. It's not like in the old days where this massive print run went ahead.

In this day and age, you can change something seven days later if you think that there's errors in it. You should strive for it being professional but ultimately a book unpublished is no good regardless of how good you think it is.

Mark: Absolutely. The next thing.

James: On to more mindset stuff.

Mark: The next thing to avoid is comparitivitis.

It is very easy in this day and age to look at where you are in your career and to try and compare yourself to where someone else is. It's not healthy to do that. It's not helpful.

And you're also not comparing apples with apples. It would be easy for me seven years ago to look at someone like Hugh Howey. Hugh had just broken out with *Wool* and to think, "God, I wish, it's so unfair, he's just come out of nowhere and look what's happened. He sold his film rights. He's got deals around the world." All of that kind of stuff.

But what you don't necessarily notice unless you know Hugh's story is that he worked very hard on 6, 7, 8 novels before *Wool* became a popular book. So it wasn't as if he just came out of nowhere. Just to compare yourself as a new writer with that would be unhelpful. Generally, that kind of comparison is just not a helpful thing.

The most important thing, I think, is to concentrate on your own books, to concentrate on your own platform, your own mailing list, how you're building your career, the foundations that you're laying down. Do your thing.

By all means, take inspiration from others. You can look at, I do this all the time, looking at successful romance writers, for example. People like Bella Andre, Marie Force, Barbara Freethy, writers that we've had on the podcast. I will often look at things that they've done.

Bella Forrest is another good example. Bella writes really fast, fantasy books and I'm on her mailing list because I want to see what she does because I'm fairly sure there are some things I can learn from her. And lo and behold there have been some things that I've seen that I've started to use and I've started to see some success with as well.

By all means, emulate, look at how other people are doing things and then try and take those ideas for yourself, make them better, use them in your own way. But to become depressed by looking at how many books Bella Forrest sells or Barbara Freethy sells, that's not going to get you anywhere, it's just another reason that you're going to not publish. You're not going to be enthused to write.

You need to insulate yourself from that kind of negative thinking and just do your own thing.

James: I think it's something we come back to occasionally in the podcast is that it's not magic what makes people successful, it's that type of attitude that you're going to plan and look at how things work and make mistakes and get over that and move on.

There are people who will say exactly what you just said, Mark, they'll look at you actually and they'll say, "Well, it was lucky for Mark. If only I was Mark Dawson having that success. It's easy for him to say that about his mailing list. It's easy for him to say that about Facebook advertising."

As if, you've got magic fairy dust that they haven't got. Well you haven't got that, what you've got is a kind of belligerent attitude that you're going to make it work and a competitive attitude that you want to be successful and that means that you do stuff and if it doesn't work, you move it and you shift it and you work out why it's not going to work and you do that. So, that's obtainable. All of us can obtain that. All of us can do that.

Mark: Yeah, that's right. It's a mindset thing too. If people want to take anything away from my example is just bloody mindedness and determination and motivation and I will continue to work hard. Fortunately, I love all of it. But it didn't fall out of the sky.

I had to work very hard to sell books. People can definitely take that away and look at some things that I do. Of course, the 101 course lays everything out in terms of the steps that I take and the strategies that I use. People can certainly learn from that and emulate it just as I'm learning from other authors. But don't let it get you down.

James: There's an old quote attributed to Gary Player. I'm not sure if it is Gary Player who had a bit of luck on the green and the ball went in and he

heard someone saying that was lucky. And he said, "It's funny, the harder I try, the luckier I get." Which is the point he was making of 30 years of working hard to become a good golfer goes your way.

What's next?

Mark: Last couple of things. We'll keep this fairly brief now because we're getting up toward the 45 minute mark.

Be prepared to invest in your career.

There are a number of ways that you can do that. You can invest in education. I'm not going to go into that right now because it will very quickly become a sales pitch and I'm not interested in doing that.

But what I would say is you don't have to spend anything, really, to self-publish. You need a word processor or writing software, whatever, and an internet connection. That is enough to upload a book which you formatted yourself with something free like the Reedsy formatter. You can use Canva to put together a cover for free and you can get things out there with no financial barriers to entry whatsoever.

The caveat that I would say to that is that most successful businesses will require some form of capital investment at the start. Fortunately, for us as writers, it doesn't have to be a very significant one.

I would say the two most important are financial investments and these are things actually that I didn't do when I started. So this is one of the one things that I wish I'd known when I got started with writing is that it's important to invest in as good a cover as you can get and to invest in either or both if you can afford it, but a good copy editor and/or a good proofreader. Certainly, a proofreader. If you can afford a copy editor too, that's great. But I think those two are important.

Maybe you can't spring for a \$300 or \$400 cover. Fair enough, maybe there's another way that you can get a cover done. You can use a pre-made cover so Stuart Bache who's a friend and has a series of free covers or pre-made covers that I think cost around 150 pounds.

You could swap services with another author. Perhaps you know someone who is a talented user of Photoshop. You could offer to proof read their novel in exchange for them doing a cover for you. There's lots of ways you can be creative with that kind of thing.

The other thing is just getting your manuscript as clean as possible. The reason I say that's important and again, I didn't do this when I started, was that you should do it even if you really have to push yourself to do it. You have to stretch your finances together and place.

Because first impressions are really, really hard to undo and the proof of that, if you go to *The Black Mile* or even go to the first Milton book, *The Cleaner*, if you look all the way back to the start of those books' lives and you look at some of the reviews, there are more than a few one star reviews complaining that the books are full of typos. That's absolutely true and obviously I've changed them subsequently. As you said earlier you can always re-upload cleaner manuscripts.

But I thought, in the early days I could proof read those books myself which is one of the stupidest things an author can say because you just won't see it as errors. So I put those up there and maybe I had some promotions in the early days where I had 40,000 or 50,000 free downloads of *The Black Mile* over the course of a weekend and a very good chance a good number of the readers who got those books and started to read them would have stopped reading because they would have been thrown out of the narrative by the fact that I kept having typos in the book that I just hadn't seen.

You're not serving yourself at all by cutting corners on something like that. It is something that is worth saving up for so that you can get someone who isn't you, a professional with an independent eye just to look at that manuscript and strip out as many errors as they can.

James: Just going back to the invest in your career point and whilst you're absolutely right, there are lots of ways and this podcast and other resources will point you in the direction of doing things for zero or very little costs.

Just to reiterate another point that you made there, Mark, is that you have to invest in the business and we always say to people you should look at your publishing career as a business as well as a vocation and there's no business that doesn't require some help at the beginning. What you don't want is people say, "Well, I can't afford \$300 for this, that and the other."

I've been at points like that in my life. I jacked in my first career which was lucrative. I was in debt, just taken a big mortgage and I took a job because I wanted to work for the BBC, salary cut in half. I could not do it financially. I did not discuss it with my parents because I knew they would be upset and angry about it and put out to me the bleeding obvious which is you can't afford to do this, to make this decision. But I did it anyway.

I worked hard at the BBC and eventually my salary got up and I recovered myself. They're scary moments. Without question, they're scary moments. But, you know what, what you don't want to do is to be three years down the line, have done things quite badly at the beginning, done your own cover rather than invested in a professional cover, not had your author career get off the ground for the want of what? For the want of \$1,000 in one year, spread over a couple of years, maybe, to get yourself going?

Mark: Absolutely, yeah. It's a false economy to try and save that much money. You spend, as you said, a lot of time working on something. Maybe a couple of years writing a novel. If you put it out there without a cover, unfortunately, people do judge books by their covers, you might have

written the most amazing novel and people won't download it because they think the cover is amateur and therefore the rest of the book will be amateur. It's a fairly low barrier to entry but I think that is one of the two things that you really, really do need to be sorted out.

James: Great. Okay, Mark, brilliant. Thank you. I want to say a big thank you to everybody whose contributed with the one thing. I think it will be a SPF book in the future. I think it will be a great book actually because it's got so many people feeding into it with some great tips. And we'll flush out each one with some links. So that's something for us to work on in the background.

In the meantime, we have this wonderful PDF which is being put together by Lucy, Mark's wife, who's helping out on SPF. It looks really good I can tell you. You can get it by going to selfpublishingformula.com/theonething.

One person who downloads that PDF will get offered a free enrollment into Mark Dawson's self publishing 101 course. This doesn't apply if you already are in 101, I'm afraid. There'll be other contests in the future. Don't worry. But if you're not enrolled at the moment and you fancy getting it for free, we'll let you know by the beginning of the course if you've got that.

The beginning of that course is June 2nd. I said the beginning of the course, the opportunity to enroll in it, you can do it in your own time after that, it's not live, it's the video sessions. That will be open for business on June 2nd at 10 p.m. UK time, a little bit earlier if you go west from here, a little bit later if you go east from the UK. We look forward to that.

Mark, it was a good episode. We've had unbelievable technical problems today. I'm hoping that it wasn't too obvious to people. There were large chunks in that podcast where I couldn't hear what you were saying but we've done it three times now so I kind of knew what you were saying.

Mark: Yes. Earlier James sounded like a Smurf which is one of the funnies things.

James: Mark was killing himself earlier.

Mark: I was. But we got there so hopefully people get something useful from that. I think it is useful to think about some of those things. It's useful for me too to take myself back to how I was seven years ago and just refresh my memory that these are the important things that we need to get right.

James: Yeah, absolutely. Okay, look, I hope you enjoyed it. Thank you very much indeed for listening. We'll speak to you next week. Bye.

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