

## **EPISODE 69: FROM LEGAL EAGLE TO BESTSELLING AUTHOR – WITH STEVE CAVANAGH**

Speaker 1: 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 better time to be a writer.

James: Hello and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast with James and Mark. Very good to see you, hear you, be with you, communicate to you whatever it is you say on this Friday.

If you're listening on launch day, it's a beautiful sunny week in the United Kingdom. We don't get to say that very often. Mark, we travel around the world don't we for various things? I love traveling, I love the world, but when the sun shines in Britain it's one of the best places to be.

Mark: Well, yeah I couldn't dispute it there. I've been obviously in Salisbury and it's beautiful here as well, so I've had a little walk at lunchtime just to clear my head because we've been so busy the last couple of weeks. So much going on, it's quite nice just to get things slowly calming down, getting back to normal again.

James: We've had the 101 course open, which has been an absolute blast. It's been fantastic bringing on board so many people again. One of my jobs has been to put a request out to say, "First thoughts, anyone?" Got 80 or 90 responses and I've been interviewing quite a few of those people. What's really great is people who are brand new to it they're very excited and they see the possibilities.

What's really good, I think, and interesting for us is the people who've been doing it for a couple of years and you can see this weights lifted off their

shoulder, that somebody is going to hold their hand through this process that they hadn't quite got to grips with.

They've heard bits and pieces of almost everything in the course but never been given the instructions. Everything on the internet usually stops short of the detail of how to do things and so that's been really, really pleasing.

Mark: Yeah, it's also it's not just the detail, it's also as you say it's kind of linking things together. So, knowing how to do a task and then what task to do next and then what to do after that.

That's one of the things that I was most keen to get into the course and it's really flattering and pleasing to see that, that's what students feel that they've got. It's been very busy, but we've had a lot of fun onboarding hundreds of new students into the Genius group and just seeing them starting to get to grips with the material and interacting with one another. It's just been, as we expected it would be just really good fun.

James: Yeah it has been. That's it for 101 now that's shuts up shop until 2018. Some point in the spring we imagine we'll open up the doors and onboard some people again. We had quite a few emails because we were open for 101, people asking about the advertising course. That won't be open until the autumn 2017, so later this year we'll give you more gen as we get closer to that.

A few other things to say before our author interview. We've got a great author interview today, which I'm very excited about. One thing is to say that we're very aware that not everyone buys the course and we do want to do as much as we can, particularly for people at the beginning of their careers getting into self-publishing.

I mentioned last week that we're going to put together a course. Mark's going to put together another course, which will be free.

It'll be a mini course maybe three sessions and we're looking for your ideas of what that should be on. This would be geared around authors who've got through the writing process but don't know really where to start in transforming themselves into a properly self-published author with an accent on the publishing side of things.

It might be launch strategy, it might be mailing lists, it might be cover design, whatever you think is important to you that you'd like to have some instructional detail for free about. We're all ears for that.

We've already had a couple of emails in, there's some very good suggestions but if you can drop us an email [support@selfpublishingformula.com](mailto:support@selfpublishingformula.com) and just put podcast idea or something into the subject so that we can differentiate the emails. Yeah, then we will get on with that. One of the many jobs we've got over the summer you and I.

Mark: God yeah! The work doesn't stop. There's some great, exciting new announcements to make as I think Stuart has hinted in the groups, Stuart Bache, our cover designer, we've got something coming up on cover design that's going to be quite exciting.

There's also something else that we can't announce yet that is going to be very, very exciting. Will really fill a hole in the market that we think, that we see, so looking forward to that.

Then also we've got, I'm trying to think how many, at least three free guidebooks coming out. We've got two books on editing. I've read both of them and they're both great. Five maxims, editing maxims that will help you improve your writing.

Then another book on how to work with an editor, so copy editing, proof reading, all of that kind of stuff.

Then on top of that we've also got quite a detailed little book on Facebook advertising, using Facebook lead gen ads to build up your mailing list. We've taken the video course that we do and we've turned that into a free book, so some people will then benefit from the book but maybe from a video. We're in the process of putting that together right now as well. I'd say within the next month or so we'll have four books that people can get. They'll all be free. We won't charge for those books, but we want them to have tons and tons of value inside them, so that's what we're trying to do at the moment.

James: The one book that we started with, which is available and going down very well is The Vault, which is the backlog of all the prior podcast interviews. A lot of value in there as well, indexed and searchable. You can get that by visiting [selfpublishingformula.com/vault](http://selfpublishingformula.com/vault). I think that's it. We should mention that in the summer what are we doing? You're going to RWA, the Romance Writers Association of America.

Mark: Romance Writers of America. Yeah.

James: Romance Writers of America.

Mark: I'll be in Orlando for that. At the same, entire coincidence that you're with your family on holiday in Orlando.

James: I'm going to be on a rollercoaster, going "Woo," like this and you're going to be in the conference.

Mark: I'm going to be on a rollercoaster as well but it'll be an entirely different ones.

The other thing, I'm going to be speaking at the ... I'm going to get this wrong, but I think it's the International Women's Writers Conference, or something along those lines. I'm sure I've butchered that, but that's in

Matera in Southern Italy in September, so looking forward to that one as well. Yeah, loads going on.

Then in the meantime we're also having a really extensive redesign of our quite frankly, crappy website at the moment. We're really looking forward to getting that out, but another big job for us.

We've got our third amigo, the ever trusty John Dyer is mindfully taking that task on, or is looking forward to get that ready for everyone to look at hopefully in a month or so.

James: Yeah. I think we'll all breathe a sigh of relief when that website gets replaced and updated.

Mark: Especially John.

James: Especially John.

Let's move on to the meat of today's podcast. I promised you an exciting, interesting author interview. If you're watching on YouTube I can show you the book.

This is the debut novel from a man called, Steve Cavanagh who lives in Northern Ireland. He has had an interesting life. He's a lawyer himself. A human rights lawyer in the Province.

This book is gripping. I'm very delighted actually to have a signed copy, which arrived this morning. It's called *The Defense*. I love the tags on the front, "Lawyer, husband, father," above the title. "Con artist, hustler, criminal," below.

To set the story up, it's basically about a roguish former con artist turned lawyer who got a bit complacent in his life and is finding himself in court

with his daughter kidnapped by the Russian mafia, expecting to carry out their will for him as a lawyer in court.

A brilliant start. That's not a spoiler, that's in the sleeve notes. Steve is a really fascinating, interesting guy to talk to, so we're going to have a chat with him and then Mark and I will be back afterwards.

Steve: I'm Steve Cavanagh. I'm a lawyer from Northern Ireland. I also write legal thrillers set in New York. It features a series character called, Eddie Flynn.

Probably, unusually for this show I'm traditionally published because I know you have a lot ... this is the Self Publishing Formula. I think Cal Moriarty was talking to Mark and suggested he might want to talk to me, so this is how I come to be here.

James: We have nothing against traditional publishing. You're very welcome on here. We have quite a few guests who are on both sides. Although we are very much focused on value for self-publishers and some of the hows and ways and means, but we can get onto some of that stuff anyway with you. A lawyer who writes thrillers. I know another lawyer who writes thrillers.

Steve: Yes. Mr. Dawson.

**James: What is it about these lawyers? I guess you're all learned people, so you have to write. There's a lot going on in your brains.**

Steve: Frankly, no I don't think I'm particularly learned at all. I think most lawyers are good storytellers. Most good lawyers are storytellers, because that's what you're doing in court, you're telling a story. I'm telling my client's story.

You need to have those skills to be able to use evidence and testimony to tell a convincing, credible story. Whoever tells the best story, wins. I've certainly taken storytelling skills from the law and used them here. I'm sure Mark's the same.

There seem to be far too many lawyers who are writers. It should be stopped really. There should be some sort of a law against it.

James: It's an interesting take on it because I guess that's exactly what you are doing, particularly with the jury.

### **Didn't you used to have juries in Belfast, do you have them now?**

Steve: Yeah, yeah we still have juries for criminal trials. If it's a terrorist trial though we would have a Diplock court, so a judge would sit alone without a jury so the jury are not intimidated.

But for most cases we have juries on the criminal side of things and occasionally on the civil side for defamation cases a High Court judge would sit with a jury.

James: Because one would like to think that you could coldly present the facts, A, B, C, D, 1, 2, 3 and 4 and the jury would deliberate carefully and make a decision.

### **But you're ignoring the human factor then aren't you about the narrative and the emotion?**

Steve: Exactly. Exactly. This is one of the things that my series explores. My main character is a guy called, Eddie Flynn who used to be a con artist. Then he discovered that a lot of the skills that go with hustling are also skills that a lawyer uses and he became a trial lawyer. They all have those skills. It's distraction, misdirection, manipulation, all of that.

I'm quite a big student of advocacy. I do a lot of my own court work, so I've study this and how the greats do it and there's a huge crossover in that. This is a character who uses those skills in a courtroom. Because legal thrillers, the law is great but it's not good for a thriller. No one gets excited about legal procedurals, it's the action and the emotional and the psychology that's going on in the courtroom, that's what keeps people turning back to these books.

**James: So, it starts off as a reasonably cynical view of advocacy and lawyers?**

Steve: Absolutely, well it's realistic. That's what happens. Eddie is partly inspired by a lawyer called, Clarence Darrow, who's a very, very famous ... any of your American listeners will immediately know that name.

He's a very, very famous civil rights lawyer. Darrow, he did a lot of famous trials. He did the Scopes trial and quite a number of death penalty cases, but started out as a civil lawyer, a labor union lawyer, until he was caught allegedly bribing a jury and then moved him to criminal law.

He was tried for jury tampering and beat the charge. There was another charge levied against him, which he managed to get settled on the basis that he wouldn't practice law in California.

He then went on between 1910 to about 1923 to do over 100 capital murder cases. He lost one case out of all of that. Now, you don't do that by being just simply a great advocate, and he was a great advocate and no one will take that away from him, but he also used other methods.

One of the stories about Darrow is that he won a lot of his cases using a hatpin and a cigar. Do you know this story?

James: Go ahead. No.



Steve: What Darrow would do is, he would wait until it would be the main prosecution witness, the prosecution star witness was going to give evidence. Before a court that morning Darrow used to smoke these foot long, big Cuban cigars and he would get a lady's hatpin and would thread it through the center of the cigar.

He would then be in court in the days when you could smoke without a SWAT team descending on you in a public building. He would light up the cigar and smoke away while the prosecution witness gave her evidence. But, the thing is he didn't tip the ash from the cigar into the ashtray.

On that day he also wore a beautiful pressed white linen suit. As the testimony got more damning, the ash, the column of ash on Darrow's cigar got longer and longer, and longer until the jury was ... people and witnesses in court say, you could see the jury nudging each other going, "Look at that."

Darrow would sit with the cigar perched over his chest with this huge, impossible column, Damoclean column of ash sitting there. No one's paying attention to what the witness is saying, everyone is hypnotized by this.

Other lawyers did similar things. There's a British lawyer called Sir Edward Marshall Hall who famously turned down representation with Dr. Crippen, but did a few other very high profile cases.

Marshall Hall would come into court with three clerks behind him. One clerk carried these packages of brand new silk handkerchiefs. The other clerk had two jugs of water. Another clerk had a mysterious Paisley patterned bag.

If the case against Marshall Hall's client got bad, he started to blow his nose on the handkerchiefs. If it got worse he would spill the water all over the

table. If it got really bad, he would open the bag really slowly and he produced this rubber cushion.

It was well-known around the bar that Marshall Hall suffered terribly with hemorrhoids, so he would sit and ... just blow up this cushion very slowly. Of course, the jury is mesmerized by the sort of pantomime, they're not paying attention to what's in court at all. Those kind of lawyers, and if you get someone who's doing that for the right reasons, that sort of thing, that's partially the inspiration for Eddie.

Eddie's not really ... it's not a comic matter. These are very hard hitting, exciting, entertaining thrillers.

James: You talk about the advocacy in the courtroom and then the procedural.

### **In the Eddie Flynn novels how much is the case a factor or how much is it about the law?**

Steve: Very little. There's lots of courtroom scenes in it, but I mostly focused on what happens within that scene and within that witness. How you can have a witness who's telling the truth, but Eddie might totally destroy them. For example, in the first book, *The Defense*, what happens is, Eddie has quit the law. His daughter is kidnapped by the head of the Russian mob in New York.

They have been watching Eddie for some time and they know he knows all the security guards and all the security staff in court. They want Eddie to smuggle a bomb into the courthouse because the head of the Russian mafia is on trial for murder.

They want Eddie to plant this bomb in the courtroom and kill the prosecution's star witness or they're going to kill his daughter. That is the premise for *The Defense*. It's a high concept, rollercoaster thriller.

Most legal thrillers, it starts off as a crime, there's an investigation and then there's a trial at the end. All the Eddie Flynn novels take place over 48, 72 hours. It's a real action packed thing.

Eddie then decides, "Look, you don't need me to plant this bomb, I'm going to win this case." You know his client's guilty, but you're really rooting for Eddie. You're behind him, you want him to succeed and get this guy off because he's doing it, again for the right reasons.

James: That's brilliant.

Steve: ... to help his own daughter.

James: That's gripping. That's great Steve.

### **Have you come up with a succinct tagline for this?**

Steve: For The Defense? No. See, this is part of the reason why I'm not self-published, I can't do any of this.

James: I'm just thinking it's not a million miles away from Adam Cross, but he's had tremendous success with and partly down to his tagline, "Would you kill your wife to save your daughter?"

Steve: Yes. Yes. I know that book.

James: It's a totally different scenario, but that sort of tagline that sells that high concept is so important in that. I can see on the film poster.

Steve: Yeah. Those are all really important, but I'm terrible at all of that. I can't write a synopsis. I can't write a blurb. I can write the book and that's about all I can do.

I'm one of those guys who needs a team of people behind me because I wouldn't be able to do any of that myself. I just couldn't do it. But, I do listen to the show every week and I'm in awe of the authors that you have on and particularly Mr. Dawson and what you're able to do because it's fascinating and it's brilliant, very exciting.

**James: Your traditional deal, how and when did that come about?**

Steve: I started writing quite late. I started writing when I was about 18 or 19 I wrote screenplays. I wrote three or four screenplays, didn't get any of them sold. Managed to get an agent, but didn't get any of them sold so I gave up.

I said, "Look, this is just far too hard." I was in university then. I trundled on, forgot about writing. Didn't go back to writing at all.

Then about 2011 my mum passed away quite suddenly. She was the only person who ever encouraged me to write. It was her that gave me the love of reading and particularly thrillers. I sort of thought to myself, "Life's too short, I should go back and have a go."

I was quite determined to do this for once because I always thought, "Oh I could go back to writing," but I never had. After a 15, 16 year break I went to it and I wrote *The Defense* in six months.

Started editing it and working at it and reworking it. Then I thought, "Oh am I going to try and get an agent?" I had looked at self-publishing. It's was so intimidating, it's a wonder that we're able to do this because I'm technically stupid when it comes to all of this stuff, I'm really, I just can't do it at all. I thought, "I'm going to have try and do that." I sent off the manuscript to lots of agencies and then I got all the rejections. I got maybe 40 or 50 rejections from literary agents.

I had got a couple of nibbles. A couple of agents in New York said, "Oh, I like this. Send me the whole manuscript." Then they came back and said, "I really vacillated about whether to take you on or not, but I've decided not to."

There was a small firm, a small literacy agency in London. I tried some of the bigger agencies in New York and not gotten anywhere. I tried some of the agencies then in the UK, but only small agencies.

There was one small agency came back and said, "Oh I love the opening in this book. I want to see the whole manuscript." I thought, "Okay. That's good. That's very encouraging."

The agent said, "It's actually my partner who deals with the thrillers so I'll have to wait and see what he says, but I love it." I thought, "I've been in this boat before and got close and got rejected. Why don't I try some of the bigger agencies?"

I sent off the opening three chapters to a few of the bigger agencies.

I remember it well, it was a Monday night I got an email back from the small agency, who were initially very keen. The email from the agent was brutal. It was absolutely brutal.

He said, "This book will never be published. Scrap the whole thing and write something else." I was devastated. Then on the Wednesday I got emails, offers of representation from two of the big agencies in the UK. I went with A.M. Heath in London.

I worked on the manuscript with my agent, Euan Thorneycroft for about three months, this was around April time, April 2013, I think. He sent it off then to publishers.

It was around the time of the Frankfurt Book Fair in October, and we were in September time, I think. He said, "Look, I've sent off the manuscript. It'll probably be a month or so before we hear anything so don't be worrying and just forget about." I thought, "Okay," because I am a worrier. I do worry about things and I get anxious and impatient.

A week later he emailed me and says, "Okay so there are five publishers bidding on your book in the UK. There are seven in Germany. There this many in this country and this many ... " It was just magical.

All I wanted was the book to be published. I wanted to see the book in my hand. If it was on a shelf in a bookshop, that was a bonus. That was all I wanted. I had no aspirations for anything else really.

That was just incredible and the book sold in lots of different countries, lots translated, lots of different languages, which is great because you see all the different covers coming in.

It's brilliant to see what the covers are like in different countries and what sells books in different countries and not the UK or the US. Yeah. It's been amazing. It's been a total dream come true.

James: What a great story.

**Tell me, did the book change very much in those three months you worked on it with the agent?**

Steve: Mostly it was changing the ending and tightening it up a little bit, and covering up plot holes and things. Most of it is exactly as it was really.

**James: There was absolutely no justification for that brutal treatment from the other agent?**

Steve: No, and particularly the first chapter as it's published in however many languages it is published in now, is exactly the chapter that went off to those agents.

James: It's an interesting story because on the one hand it's an affirmation that good work will find a way and it's also a damning indictment on an aspect of the old gate keeping system, which does rely on this rather subjective and who's to judge?

**That's the beauty of self-publishing is that, it's the reader ultimately who will judge whether they buy the book or not. It does not matter what someone sitting in an office in London, Dublin or New York thinks.**

Steve: Exactly. That's the fantastic thing about it. Getting a, "No" from a literary agent it's a personal thing. It's that person on that day saying, "You know what? That's not for me."

It's not a damning indictment of the work, although there were a few damning indictments of the work, but that's fine. Again, you get that from readers, but again, that is the brilliant thing about self-publishing is you can let the readers decide.

On the other hand, what I have the benefit of and what I think I need is a big team behind me both to publish the books, but mainly for the editorial work. There's a huge amount of editorial work goes into it.

From what the self-published authors that I know they do do a lot, a huge amount of work editorially. They will go through a couple of rounds of edits. They will go through copy edits and proofs and all of that. So, I don't think there's much difference these days.

The successful published authors that I know, they're doing the same work that I'm doing. They care about the work. They want a book that they can be proud of because they have realized the big thing.

As I know your podcast is a lot about marketing and selling and how to sell your book, and you're trying to figure it out and traditional publishing is still trying to figure it out, nobody really knows-

James: Absolutely.

Steve: ... at the end of the day what's going to happen with a book, no one knows.

**James: Whatever is working now will be different in five years time anyway.**

Steve: Exactly. Yes. It's probably the same with self-publishing. It's getting that name out there. It's all about discoverability and getting your book in front of someone so they'll read it.

But, the best thing you can do to sell your book is, to write a great book because word of mouth, either digital word of mouth or real word of mouth, going into the office and saying, "Oh I read this book last night, it's fantastic. You have to read this book."

That's what you want. That's what happened with *Girl on the Train*. That's what happened with *Gone Girl*.

When *Gone Girl* was published it was published first in trade paperback in the UK and it completely tanked. I know several retailers that didn't want to take the paperback because they couldn't sell the trade paperback of that book. Then the sort of cultural Zeitgeist, it captured something and people were talking about it.



People were going into these stores and saying, "I want this book." Whatever little copies they had were selling out and they were buying more. That book built up its own head of steam, there was no publishing push behind that book, no marketing thrown at it.

It came out and it took off after a while. That just can happen sometimes with books, but again, it's because it's a great book.

James: Yeah. Absolutely.

**In terms of the marketing push behind your book now, how involved are you or aware are you of the campaigns and what goes on?**

Steve: I'd be very aware of it. I have regular meetings with the publisher. I get emails. I get sent what the campaign is. There's a really good eBook campaign going on at the moment. There will be different campaigns depending on what book is out.

I'm publishing the third one on the 18th of May. Just a couple of days time it comes out, so there's different campaigns for each book depending on where they are and how they want to push it.

Most of the campaigns going into paperbacks because that's where the publisher makes their money and they can sell that volume.

With eBooks there's Facebook advertising, there was a BookBub, which was very, very successful. There's little things like adjusting metadata. I did not know how important that was. I couldn't even tell you really what it is, to be honest now.

What the book is kind of thing on a very basic level. I could be totally wrong about that. But again, this is why I need people to do this for me because I haven't a clue.

All of that, even making slight tweaks to that can send the book skyrocketing. It's little tweaks like that have made *The Defense* a bestseller, so I'm totally indebted to them, but I do see all the campaigns.

I'll see, there will be a marketing campaign. There will also be a publicity campaign, which is separate. I'll be doing radio interviews. My publicity manager will be sending me out to literary festivals and we're pitching me for literary festivals, which I can talk about, which is a great thing to do.

Radio, paper, newspaper, that sort of stuff like that. Sending it out to the right people who will review it online. All the big crime fiction websites, the *Crime Fiction Lover*, even other publishers would be recommending my books because they get to see it and they like it.

It's a great joined up approach and they're complimenting one another and they're working on different books. I am quite involved in it.

I know some authors who really don't know what's happening, but I think more and more these days publishers and certainly my publisher, Orion, are very keen to get me involved with what's happening. Even listen to my crazy ideas about doing things from time to time, so it's all good,

James: In terms of the books Steve, obviously you're writing about something you love, something you're interested in, which is a good starting point for anyone.

**Then how much work do you do or how much regard do you pay to keeping in genre and thinking about something that's going to be identifiable to its potential readers as a genre book?**

Steve: None whatsoever.

James: That's why I wondered.

Steve: None, because once you do that you're in trouble. I heard, there was a guy on your show who was talking about, "If you're going to write a book you need to do your market research. Who is your audience?," and all of that.

I think once you start that, my view is and with due respect to this gentleman, and he created a product and all for that, I think that's great. But for me, I would never touch it in a million years.

Why I write a book is, I get a crazy idea in my head. Normally a, "what if" idea, so my books are, for the Eddie Flynn, the first Eddie Flynn story was, what if there was lawyer who was doing a murder trial and he had a bomb strapped to his back and his client had his finger on the detonator? That was the idea for The Defense.

I thought, "Okay. That's pretty bad. How can I make that worse?" That was the idea for that book.

With The Plea, it was different. With The Liar, it was different.

For the one I've just finished it's what if Eddie's involved in a celebrity murder trial and there's a serial killer, but the serial killer isn't on trial, the serial killer is sitting on the jury?

Those sort of things. I'll get an idea about that and I'll go, "Okay. That's a book," and I go and write it.

I'm trying to tell a great story. What I think is a great story. A story that I want to read. I have no regard for what anyone else wants to read. If anyone else does want to read it I count myself as blessed, "Well that's great that you like that," but I am writing it because I think it's a good story. If the audience is there, fantastic, that's a bonus, that's luck.

James: Your happy coincidence of being interested and passionate about an area that people are interested in. I'm thinking back to the beginning of the interview when you said that, nobody's that interested in the dry procedurals.

I don't know if that's true as such because I can think of quite a lot of books that are.

**Do you remember the old Crown Court series, which used to be on the BBC or ITV?**

Steve: I do.

James: Every single episode of that long running series was set entirely in the middle of a court case and was partly about procedure.

I used to be a journalist, I used sit in magistrates' courts and Crown courts and unless you've done that, you have no idea of the raw theater in a Crown Court case.

Steve: Yes.

James: That moment a jury comes back and to use the cliché, someone's life is about to change. A person's going to go to prison for 17, 18 years or possibly life. A family are going to get exonerated or a killer is going to walk free.

I've been there in all three of those circumstances, it's the most dramatic, gripping thing. It doesn't surprise me at all that it is a successful content for books and drama.

Steve: Yes. When I talk about procedure I don't mean that. I would classify that as action. That's courtroom action. You're absolutely right, there's nothing like that drama when you capture it.

I'm talking about procedurals you would get people say, "Oh I will need to make an application. I would need to make a motion for this. No objection," and all of this business. There's legal argument, if you like, because that stuff's boring. Even lawyers find that stuff boring. But, you can't write a realistic courtroom procedural.

The same as where you can't write a realistic police procedural, because most policemen, be it in America or in the UK, spend a lot of their time sitting at their desks working. That's where a murder case is solved, at the desk. They're not out interviewing witnesses or hitting people or involved in car chases. That's not police work. There is a swilling suspension of disbelief in all of it.

The thing is, I'm more interested in the reader turning the page. I do give them a lot of information, but it has to be something interesting.

James: I must say I can't watch *Silent Witness* because I've covered the real life thing and the idea of a forensic pathologist getting that involved in a case and interfering in what's going on, rather than examining the body and presenting evidence is ridiculous. But, that's how-

Steve: Exactly.

James: ... *Silent Witness* works. That's a BBC-

Steve: The same with *Judge John Deed*. Do you remember *Judge John Deed*?

James: Yes. I do. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Steve: He used to sleep with everybody. He was sleeping with the prosecutor, sleeping with her, sleeping with the witnesses, but I quite liked it. It was fun, you know?

James: Yeah. We're referencing quite a lot of British crime series. I don't know how many of these have traveled elsewhere, but there you go. The Defense sounds like an absolutely bang, slam, Hollywood film to me. That sounds like a Denzel Washington.

### **You must have had interest; where are we with that?**

Steve: We have. We have had a lot of interest. The thing is finding the right person.

There was a couple of Hollywood directors have looked at it very seriously and talked to my film agent. A couple of TV channels as well and different producers. I'm a bit worried about it.

The only thing that I do regarding the business is I look at other authors that I really love. I find out what happened in their careers. Where they went right and where they went wrong.

One of my favorite authors is Michael Connelly and I looked at his career. At one stage early on in Michael's career he sold the movie rights to Bosch, right, and to Paramount?

It was great, it gave him the money to give up his journalism job so he could write full-time and he bought a house, but Bosch didn't happen. They didn't make that movie. They wrote a few scripts and then they shelved it. He couldn't sell that property anywhere else. Bosch we're like on the 20th, 21st Harry Bosch book now, so 20 odd years later we're now seeing Bosch on the screen.

That's because Michael bought the rights back from Paramount at great personal expense and then took it to Amazon to do it, so you have to be extremely careful.

I have the same Hollywood agent as Michael Connelly, so he knows all about it. You have to be very, very careful about who you sell it to.

The thing is, not selling it for money, it's getting it made. As I'm sure Mark will tell you because he's going through all this now. You want to put it in someone's hands who will make it.

There's very few directors that you can rely on to do that, less and less so these days. Only one of them I can think of is Clint Eastwood. When he buys a book that's his project and he'll make it.

James: Yeah. It takes us back to the Cal Moriarty interview we did and all of these pitfalls. That's certainly one of them going into, what do they call it? Turnover or something? There's an expression for when a film just begins and then gets held on hiatus, which last decades. It's turnaround, I think they call it.

Steve: Yeah, turnaround.

James: Which is a horrible thing for the writer. As you say, you're just sat there and they're not going to let the rights go because there's some feeling in the back of their brain at some point it might get made. In reality, it's not going to be. You're right to be cautious.

Steve: You have to be cautious, so we haven't found the right people yet. You never know, we might do. I'll be more inclined to look towards TV these days, I think.

I think Mark's doing the same, but because it's all superhero stuff in the movies. They want that tent pole superhero movie. Good thrillers aren't getting the sort of audience that they used to.

James: We have had the rise of the Scandi long form, any of the those Killing, Bridge, Tunnel, which the UK remake.

Any of those could have been a Hollywood film, but actually worked much better as a series and potentially *The Defense* could.

Steve: Yeah. There's a lot of stories in the Eddie Flynn. There's three novels published now. There's another one coming next year. There's a novella. There's lots of material there.

Ian Rankin's actually just got Rebus. He's going to get Rebus back on the screen and they are going to do it properly now, because when they were last doing it, I think with Ken Stott as Rebus, it was one episode was one book.

Whereas, now it will be three or four hours or a week of programming for one book, because as a novel it's more suited for adaptation through TV. This serial stuff, like you see on Netflix, something will be downloaded, eight episodes and you can go through it. It feels like a proper book. It's got real depth to it, which you don't get from a movie.

James: I don't think the subject matter will ever go out. You've got a really interesting and exciting action take on it, but the crime genre, and I reminded of this, we're recording this interview today when a guy called, Ian Brady has died in the UK. He was a notorious child killer, absolutely notorious, horrible 1960s case.

There was a big feature on the radio this morning about a bit of a moral panic that happened at the point of his arrest and trial because the trial was so disturbing, they tortured children to death and recorded it, that the newspapers went into a bit of a panic about what they should report.

They played some of the contemporaneous interviews about it and it just made me think how far we've come, but how they were talking in a rather pretentious way about nobody wants to hear the sordid details of this, and the reality is the opposite really.



Actually, there's a grim fascination that's drawn to this other side of life, that hopefully, touch wood, will never impinged personally on our lives, but we can't turn our heads away from it.

Steve: That's right. I think that's what drives the genre to some extent. But, whilst you have that, and there are people who are fascinated by the grim details of it all, but most I think, people like it, it's like going to the zoo and looking at a lion or looking at a tiger. You think, "If this cage wasn't here I would be mincemeat." That's what you're doing when you're reading that sort of a crime novel. You get to vicariously experience that fear.

Also, you're trying to work out why would someone do that. I think in some ways this is perhaps some fascination for people with aspects of wars as well. Why do men do these things, these horrible things? How can we understand that?

I accept there is some grim fascination with it. However, the big switch now in modern crime fiction is to make sure, and all the crime writers I know and I certainly try to do it is, the victim is not a plot point, it's a real person.

You try to make your victims a book as real as possible so that you're not exploiting them. That's one of the themes perhaps some crime writers who are coming along with this think, "Oh yeah. I'll have all of these victims in it," but they don't create that empathy with the reader. It's simply a plot beat. You see that sometimes in TV as well.

Whereas, modern crime fiction is very much about the reader gaining really empathy with the victims because the victim is sometimes forgotten in all of these things.

How many serial killers can we name between us now? Probably, at least a dozen. How many of those serial killers victims could we name? Probably not as many or very few.

I think that's very important and there is a real ethical movement, shall we say, in the genre to make that sure nothing is gratuitous. No one is typing with one hand, shall we say. I'll let everyone work that out for themselves. James: This interview has just rattled past Steve. It's been absolutely compelling.

Let's just talk about the writing process, because as a writer and I know as our listeners would all like to know how each other does it.

**How do you approach your writing? Are you routine, disciplined or just seat of your pants when you get going?**

Steve: It's a desperate struggle really. I have a very, very basic idea and a very basic idea for an opening scene and that's as much as I know when I start. I don't know the end, I don't know the middle. I have no idea. I write line by line.

I try and put in two or three hours a day. I start writing around 10 o'clock at night and I work until my head hits the keyboard, which might be 1:00 a.m., 2:00 a.m. or 15 minutes past 10. Just, I try to get what I can done.

I don't have a word count. I just try to make progress. Sometimes that's a paragraph, sometimes it's a couple of chapters, it depends. Because I don't outline there are various points in the book where I have to stop because I don't know what's going to happen next.

For example, I was writing, in the last book I had to stop because there was a knock at the door and this scene and I didn't know who was on the other side of the door. I went back and wrote another bit of the book and came back to this and then I did know who was on the other side of the door.

Then, this character who was on the other side of door had a box in their hand and I had to stop again because I didn't know what was going to be in the box.

When I say, "Stop" I'll stop for a day and think about and then go back. Then around 20,000 words I stop and read over what I've got and redraft it a bit. I will do that at around 60,000 words as well, 80,000 words and then up to 100,000 words or whatever the book is.

A couple of my books are about a 120,000. I will stop at various points and go back and read over actually because I've forgot character's names or what the color of their eyes are or something like that. I'll say, "Oh God, I forgot about him, we'll have to put him in here somewhere else."

Yeah, I do and that seems to work for me. I wouldn't recommend it as a way of writing a book. It's a terrible way to do it, but it just seems to work.

James: Whatever works, right? How long do you write for at a time?

Steve: Sometimes it is an hour, sometimes it's a couple of hours, so I don't sleep much. I get to bed normally around midnight, one o'clock in the morning and I'm up at six because I've young kids.

But, I do it because I love it. I really enjoy doing it. I know there are writers who hate writing, I don't understand that. I do really enjoy making things up and having fun.

If I want to know what I'm going to find out, what's going to happen next in the story I'm thinking, "A reader's going to want to know that."

It's the story driving me along. If I knew what happened in the whole story before I started I'd probably wouldn't want to write it, it's not that fun for me, you know?

James: Congratulations on your success so far Steve. I'm going to pick up The Defense. It's on my list to read.

Don't be too cautious with the film company because I think it would be a fantastic film or mini-series. If you can get that deal done at some point.

For me, it's really of all the pitches that I hear you know that some characters are going to lend themselves to a film, but that is a concept that I think will draw people in. Anyway, it's just my view. Thank you very much indeed for joining us tonight from across the water there in Belfast.

Steve: Not at all. Thank you very much. It's been fantastic. I love the show. I listen every week. It's great.

James: Well, there you are, you're a part of it this time.

Steve: Brilliant. Thanks James.

James: I loved that interview with Steve. Some authors can be very eloquent about what they do and why they do it, and other authors find it more difficult to talk about things. That's probably why they're authors.

Steve was definitely in the first camp. One of life's great enthusiasts, really fun and interesting guy. Yeah traditionally published but I think fascinated by what's going on in the world of indie publishing as well. Keeping half an eye out on that.

Mark: What camp am I in?

James: Yeah. You're reticent, quiet, shy, someone who doesn't like talking about themselves.

Mark: I hate it.

James: Actually you're very good. You are reasonably, despite the publicity and coverage you get you are reasonably modest when you speak.

Mark: Yeah.

James: You present yourself as that anyway.

Mark: I try to be. I know it's a fair point. I don't like to blow my own trumpet too much.

James: And you're not vain because I shaved before this interview. Actually, I interviewed Chloé Esposito this morning.

Mark: That's why you shaved.

James: Yeah, that's why I shaved. I mentioned Chloé's book last week. That was a great interview and a name to watch. She's really going places Chloé.

First novel is published in the UK tomorrow where we are now. We're recording this on Tuesday of the week, but you get it on a Friday. It's complicated. Her novel will be two days old by the time this podcast gets released on Friday, called, Mad.

She's coming up shortly. We also got Felicia Yap who came through the same stable actually, the Faber Academy.

We're going to do, I think the summer is a good time to have author interviews. We will have some technical podcasts as well, but I think these author interviews are great. We all enjoy them.

We all like hearing how other people got their start. How they got their deals. How they run their marketing if they're self-published. How they write. All those things, which all filters in, we'll soak all that stuff up don't we?

Mark: We do yeah. It's good fun. I love those kinds of interviews. Always interesting to see how other people do the same thing that I do.

You can always learn different routines, different ways to increase your productivity and all that kind of stuff.

Also, you mentioned Chloé, without spoiling anything, but she's got a great film deal coming up. It's quite aspirational to look at that given that I'm probably slightly behind her when it comes to that, but pushing forward in that direction too, so definitely looking forward to hearing that one.

James: One of the things she talks about in the interview is how she wrote with a film in mind. Not because she was thinking commercially about selling the rights, but because that's how she thinks. She thinks in terms of the two hour film, which is quite a good way to write a book anyway.

Mark: Yeah.

James: Great. Okay. Mark that's it. I'm not sure what we're doing next week. We've got a couple of interviews still in the bag, but we will be down in Salisbury, your way shortly to cause havoc and upset you with untidiness.

Mark: Yes.

James: We were talking about people taking pictures of their workspaces. Something you asked people to do, of new 101 students. We had quite an interesting one didn't we? A photograph popped up.

Mark: Oh God. Yes. This was at 35,000 feet, yeah. We had, I can't remember the name and I probably wouldn't name them anyway in a very public forum like this.

Pilot of a 737 is it James or an Airbus?

James: It was actually an A320.

Mark: A320, nerd alert everyone; James loves airplanes. Yeah, he was a pilot and he was writing whilst he was flying, at least whilst he was on the flight deck, but James tells me that it's perfectly safe everyone and there's nothing to worry about.

James: Yeah. You only really need to concentrate for the first minute and a half and the last minute and a half, and in the middle you need to keep yourself reasonably active and alert. That's what they say. It's absolutely true.

Anyway, we're delighted we have quite a few pilots, which is quite exciting for me. We have an F-16 pilot.

Mark: We do.

James: Two F-16 pilots from the United States.

We're going to wrap up at any moment. We have that United Airline, Susan Grant who flies 747 for United.

Mark: Yes.

James: Which is very exciting for me. They're very welcome to join my list at [jameseblatch.com](http://jameseblatch.com) because I'm always on the lookout for-

Mark: I see what you did there, very smooth. I've taught you well.

James: You have. People I can-

Mark: Annoy.

James: ... quiz. Yeah, annoy, quiz. Okay. Good. That's it. You and I have to go and find a dark room and lie down and not together, obviously.

We look forward to speaking to you again next week. Have a great week writing. A great week publishing and we'll speak to you in seven days.

Speaker 1: You've been listening to the Self Publishing Formula podcast. Visit us at [selfpublishingformula.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.