

PODCAST 71: RIDING THE COLLABORATION EXPRESS – WITH AUTHOR J. THORN

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

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast with James and Mark. We're back in the studio. How does it feel?

Mark Dawson: Good to be back, James.

James Blatch: We get a couple of questions. Quite often I get asked, because of the technical brilliance of the podcast that I produce here, I often get asked how do you technically produce this, James?

People have been intrigued by these screens, which you can, if you're watching on the YouTube channel, you can see Mark hiding behind his. They're very good.

They're dampeners, so they just make the sound not travel too far and they're very nice, so if you're listening on audio, it should sound nice and dead. We sound dead, I think they say in the industry. It actually is a little bit echoey in here.

Mark Dawson: It is a bit. Your chair's a bit squeaky as well.

James Blatch: It is a bit squeaky. Hopefully you're going to build a new recording studio when you move house at some point.

Mark Dawson: Well, that actually is a nice segue into the first thing that we were going to mention today.

James Blatch: Yes, which is the expense of running this podcast. We have an announcement to make.

We absolutely love doing the podcast and absolutely have no intention of doing anything else but doing it, but ...

Mark Dawson: Well, speak for yourself.

James Blatch: Yeah. Obviously it's a huge production effort every week. It has its own value and its own space in our SPF community, but we have decided to open a Patreon account, which gives you the listener an opportunity to be a bit of a closer part of the podcast and contribute to it running week to week. We have set up the account at patreon.com/spfpodcast. Patreon is spelled P-A-T-R-E-O-N.

There are three tiers for you to get involved should you want to, three reward levels, so simply a dollar an episode, which we'd be enormously grateful for, I can tell you, or \$2 an episode, or at the gold level, \$3 an episode, and you get lovely rewards for each of that.

First of all, you'll get a shout-out here on the podcast, get your name mentioned. At the upper levels, at the very searing \$3 level, you will get pretty much everything delivered to you, so you'll be automatically entered into any contests that we run, you'll get all the pdf and cheat sheets sent to you, you don't have to sign up for those or go anywhere to get them, and there are one or two other things. The rewards will obviously get better over time.

We'd love you to support the podcast. We'd feel enormously grateful. Last time I looked, I think it cost us approaching \$20,000 a year to run this podcast, and that doesn't include our time, and your time's expensive, right?

Mark Dawson: It's very expensive. Let's not even talk about John.

James Blatch: No, let's not talk about the hideous expensive John. You're about to get your hair cut, done. The coiffeur ...

Mark Dawson: I am, yeah.

James Blatch: Budget is quite expensive.

Mark Dawson: It's very expensive. I've got a lot of hair to cut.

James Blatch: That's it, so patreon.com, P-A-T-R-E-O-N forward slash spfpodcast. You might be the first person. Actually I'm the test account, so I'm the first person.

Mark Dawson: SPF podcast?

James Blatch: SPF podcast.

Mark Dawson: That's right.

James Blatch: That's correct.

Mark Dawson: I thought it was SPF.

James Blatch: No, it's SPF podcast.

Mark Dawson: I stand corrected.

James Blatch: Let's not confuse the dear listener.

Mark Dawson: Yes, I'm already confused.

James Blatch: For this one. This is not part of the rewards at the moment, is it, but I'll tell you what we could do, we could choose a random couple of our early Patreon members and send them a mug. How about that?

Mark Dawson: Yes. We'll send them a mug. John Dyer will be jumping on a train.

James Blatch: If you're watching on YouTube, you can see that Mark has this splendid SPF mug, which looks excellent. I have a coffee cup.

Mark Dawson: Yes.

James Blatch: At the moment. It does have the union flag on it, which is great.

Mark Dawson: Yes, it's a very nice mug.

My wife Lucy organized these and we posted them in the Facebook group. I was quite surprised by how many people want an SPF mug, so that was quite nice as well. Nice friendly branding.

James Blatch: We've had a little technical thing in the back of us. It's fine, it's fine.

Mark Dawson: Those of you who are listening may have just heard our blackout fall down. That's John Dyer, Esquire.

James Blatch: John to aisle four. Clear up in aisle four, please.

Mark Dawson: Yes. There's some very nice mugs and we'll give, as James says, a couple of those to people who sign up early doors for the Patreon account. Looking forward to getting that started. There is some good stuff. We're going to do some monthly Q&As. One of the benefits everyone will get is that you get to ask me questions and I'll answer those and those will be distributed to Patreon subscribers through Patreon, so something useful and interactive there as well.

James Blatch: Great. Thank you for being a friend of the podcast. We have lots of very loyal listeners who are in touch with us very often, and it's a part of the community. It's the best thing we do, I think thing we enjoy the most. Talking of enjoyment, we've got a really good interview, as we always bring you good interviews. We occasionally talk about author collaboration, but this is the ultimate author collaboration. This is an incredible journey, literally a journey. Life's a journey, but this was physically a journey.

Mark Dawson: I hate to use the J word. I hate it. Yes, it was. It was literally a journey.

James Blatch: It was absolutely a journey.

Mark Dawson: It was. Yeah, we can get away with it I think this time. Friend of SPF, Joanna Penn and J. Thorn and Lindsay Buroker and Zach Bohannon, he says from memory.

James Blatch: Quite well done.

Mark Dawson: Traveled from Chicago to New Orleans and wrote a book whilst on the train. I've made that journey myself on the same train about 20 years ago, so I know exactly the trip that they made. They I think it's called American Demon Hunter or something along those lines.

James Blatch: American Demon Hunters: Sacrifice.

Mark Dawson: There we go. They wrote that together. Collaboration is an interesting idea. It's something I'm doing at the moment.

I can't really announce too much about that, but a couple of previous guests on the podcast from the world of traditional publishing are probably

going to be writing in my Milton and Beatrix world, so I'm going to talk about that a little bit later.

I'm not ready to announce any details on that yet, but that's something that I've tried before, found it quite difficult, but I'm going to give it another try with these two writers, and no you can't either, James, before you ask.

You've got to finish your novel first.

James Blatch: You've coaxed Ian Fleming out of death.

Mark Dawson: Ian Fleming will be joining up.

James Blatch: And TS Eliot.

Mark Dawson: TS, yes.

James Blatch: Let's get into this interview and we can talk about your collaborations after. What about me? Yeah, J. Thorn, lovely guy. Absolutely love talking to him, enthusiastic and infectious and a really interesting story about collaboration.

J, okay, so first of all, before we talk about the train journey, which is what we were going to talk about today, let's just get a little bit of who you are. Give us your background, J.

J. Thorn: I started self publishing around 2009, 2010 prior to the Kindle gold rush. I had read Stephen King's On Writing and decided I had never written a novel before. I had written my entire life, but never a novel, and I thought, "Why not? I'll just write a 125,000 epic fantasy first time out of the gate. Why not?"

James Blatch: As you do.

J. Thorn: Yeah, of course, as everyone does. Took me 10 to 12 months or so to write that first draft, and ever since then I've been writing. I try to write every day.

I've published about a million and a half worth of words since then, and just keep plugging along. I think somewhere along the line, and I'm sure we'll get into this, I have a background as a musician and I've done a lot of collaborations, and being in a band was all about collaboration.

I brought that over to the author side and it started in 2012, 2013 with multi-author box sets and it's evolved to where I am today.

James Blatch: That all sounds good. Couple of quick questions then. In terms of genre ...

It's a lot of words you've written. Have you stuck to the same genre throughout?

J. Thorn: I didn't start that way. I was all over the place trying to find my own voice, trying to find the genre that I was really interested in. I started writing a lot.

I was writing different types of fantasy, horror, dark fantasy, and I think it was the past couple years I've turned more towards dystopian post-apocalyptic fiction.

That's really where I think I shine the most. I think that's where my passion is. It's what I'm writing now, so who knows in two or three years, but that's what I'm writing these days.

James Blatch: The musician stuff, so like you say, musicians by and large collaborate. They're the ultimate collaborators in the sense that they need each other, they feed each other, then they argue with each other and they fall out with each other and then they get back. It's almost like a family, isn't it?

And every band goes through this similar thing. I don't know quite whether it's the same in classical music or not, probably, but so you come from that culture of sitting alongside somebody and riffing together and moving on. Writing actually doesn't necessarily lend itself to that. It can be. For most people listening to this podcast, it's a bit of a solo occupation.

Did you set out to make sure that wasn't the case with you?

J. Thorn: It was not part of my grand plan. I wish I could say I was a visionary or I was smart enough to know that ahead of time, but I was just going with my gut and I ended up falling into this role just as a collaborator, but I think you're right. That's a type of art that's most often created individually and in a solitary place.

I think where I started with the collaborations was around the marketing side, so reaching out to people and saying, "Hey, we're all writing in this same genre. Why don't we box up our books and put them out there and we'll all promote them together."

I think that's where it started and I think for people who are considering collaborating, that's a great place to start because the creative process is messy to begin with, and when you involve other people, it's even messier.

It's great, but it's messy and I think if you don't have any sort of practice at that give and take of collaboration, the marketing is the easiest way to get going on that.

James Blatch: Let's move on to the meat of this interview. This started because I bumped into Joanna Penn at London Book Fair and I said, "Hi Jo, what have you been up to?" And she told me about this train journey she had literally just been on, and I said, "You did what?" But you were part of this, so just take us back.

Where did this all start? And then tell us what happened.

J. Thorn: I don't remember if this is what really happened or not, but it's the story we're going with now.

For one of my clients, I had been traveling to California in June for the previous three or four years. I live in Cleveland, Ohio, which is in the Midwest United States, and we were going out to San Francisco, and I had always had dreams of riding a train.

I always thought that would just be the coolest way to travel. Most Americans don't ride trains, they get in cars or planes, and being a writer, I thought, "Wow, that'd be really cool. I could write on the train. That would be a different experience."

Fast forward, I did that three years in a row. It's about a two and a half to three-day train trip from Cleveland to San Francisco through Chicago, and I wrote. Every year I wrote and I loved it.

And on the last one, I think on Twitter I was tweeting Lindsay Buroker and I was making a joke or she made the joke like, "Oh, we should write a collaborative novel on a train," and that's where it started. I thought to myself, "Why not? Why not ask a few people and see if they want to hop on a train and see what happens?" That's where the idea started.

James Blatch: Were you the organizer? You instigated this?

J. Thorn: Yeah, instigate's a good word. Yes.

James Blatch: How did you find your co-collaborators?

J. Thorn: That's a tricky question. I would put a little asterisk on this. This was not my first collaboration, so again, if you are considering collaboration as an author on the creative side, you probably don't want to start with an overnight train ride with people you don't know.

I knew I wanted some balance, I knew I wanted about three or four people to be part of this. I wanted different voices, some diversity in the creative process. I had collaborated with Joanna on Risen Gods and we got along quite well. I love her and she's been a great inspiration to me, and so I asked her.

I think I posed the idea to her first and I said, "Here's what I'm thinking about doing. Would you ask another woman writer? I'll ask another guy writer and we'll see if we can get four of us to do this."

I immediately thought Zach Bohannon because Zach's my guy and we're starting the whole publishing business together and Zach was totally in. Joanna said, "Well, who are you thinking of? Who's the other woman I should I ask?" And we both thought Lindsay Buroker at the same time. She was the first thing that came to both of us, and we were able to trick her into going too.

James Blatch: You got your collaborators together, you had your train journey, and that train journey.

Was it from the Midwest to the West Coast?

J. Thorn: No. We put some obstacles in our way that we probably didn't need to. The first one was we decided we were not going to talk story before we were together, so we were not going to do any sort of preparation or outlining or plotting or anything until the four of us were physically together.

We all agreed we'd probably want to do that differently next time, but that was what we decided to do.

Our other plan was we were going to plan or plot the major story arcs and themes during the train ride, and then when we arrived in New Orleans, we were going to then write the first draft.

We all met in Chicago. There's an Amtrak train that runs from Chicago to New Orleans, takes about 19 hours and it goes overnight.

We met in Chicago on a Sunday afternoon, we got on the train there. We each had sleeper cars. Zach and I shared one, Lindsay and Joanna shared one. On the train ride, we started kicking around some ideas, started talking about the story, and then the next day when we arrived in New Orleans, we got together and started the drafting process.

James Blatch: Did you work overnight? You went to bed at some point? You had the cabins.

J. Thorn: Oh, yeah. Lindsay was coming from Seattle, I believe, Zach was coming from Nashville, and Joanna was coming from Bath. Joanna was all jet lagged and she was really tired, but we were all tired, so we were basically hanging out on the train.

There's a lounge car with booths where you can sit four people, so we were sitting at a table talking, and it was the first time all four of us had ever met face-to-face.

We were just hanging out mostly on the train ride, and then we slept and then the next day we got up and we worked a little bit on the story, and got into New Orleans about 2:00 or 3:00 that afternoon.

James Blatch: How did the initial discussions go, then? You sat down there really with a blank page having forced yourself not to do any pre-work. Where did you begin? Somebody must have brought an idea to the table, right?

J. Thorn: Yeah. Joanna had this idea. I had, I still have a world called American Demon Hunters. This is a world much like the X-Files in that the protagonist moves from one challenge to another. It's a series, but it's not a linear series.

In this world, these demon hunters go to a different city to battle whatever the paranormal obstacle happens to be. Joanna had the idea, she's like, "Why don't we write this in the American Demon Hunters world because you already have characters established, the rules were established. It would be a little easier than starting from scratch."

We didn't talk story beforehand, but we had this setting ready to go. I think that made it a little bit easier because everyone was familiar at least a little bit with the premise.

James Blatch: Then you get ideas, and how ... I mean the creative collaborations can be tense sometimes because everyone feels a little bit ... You have ownership of your idea and then somebody says, "Yeah, I don't really like that," and it's difficult not to take that personally. It's a maturity thing when you're in the creative industry.

How did this discussion unfold and how polite were you to each other about ideas you didn't like?

J. Thorn: We had some tension. We weren't just holding hands and singing the whole time. We had some disagreements around stuff to be totally honest.

But I also think part of the reason why we were able to accomplish our goal of getting this drafted and eventually published three weeks later is because we sort of officially nominated Joanna as the creative leader.

In Chicago, she went to a museum and she found the inciting incident of our story and she brought that to us. We acknowledged that she was taking the lead on that, and so I think that helped a lot.

Then we also had a moment where because we did not have an outline and Joanna's more of a pantser, Lindsay, Zach, and I had a moment on Tuesday where we were struggling because we didn't know where the story was going to go.

Joanna said, "Hey, why don't you guys just come up with a short little outline, a draft of an outline, and we'll look at it tomorrow?" And we did. The three of us did that when Joanna went to bed. Then it kind of set the stage for the rest of the story and it worked out pretty well.

There's disagreements all along, and I think one of the things that came out of it that Joanna talked about quite a bit was if you don't have any collaboration experience or if you don't have any publishing or writing experience, it's a really hard process because you haven't developed that skill set and you can take things personally.

Zach and I just kept saying the whole time, "The story is the king. It's not about our idea, it's not about our voice or our character, it's about the story. The story has to trump all." We were able to get through it, but yeah, there's always going to be moments of tension and disagreement.

James Blatch: I can already see how great this is going to be as an experience for people because actually learning to let go of your babies and so on, learning that the story is king is a really difficult ...

Actually it's probably more difficult to do that when you're sat by yourself because you haven't got somebody saying to you, "Do you know what? That doesn't work," until you get to the editor stage.

J. Thorn: That's a really good point. All of our words are precious to us, and every time we write them, we hold onto them.

In every collaboration and especially in this one, there were thousands of words that all of us wrote that got cut. That's just how it is.

The book's only been out for less than a month now, and all the early reviews talk about how fast-paced and how interesting and exciting the book is, and I think that's because we were really hard on ourselves and we cut stuff that didn't have to be there.

But you're right. You have to learn that. I believe the best way of learning it is by doing it.

James Blatch: You almost had an editorial process going on at the time of writing, so you got that pace down, whittled it down, the sort of thing that an editor will do with you afterwards and say, "This is where it drags." That was happening dynamically.

I've talked a little bit about the writing and then I want to talk about what happened afterwards. You did the train journey, you did the plotting and stuff, Joanna went to bed, you all went to bed I hope, and you got to New Orleans.

Did you say you had two or three days in New Orleans together? How long was this?

J. Thorn: We arrived on Monday and we left each other on Friday. We spent most of the week there and again, we didn't have a hard schedule. We were saying we probably should have looking back at it, but what we had decided to do was have a story meeting first thing in the morning and then in the evening so that everyone knew what they were writing and where and when.

We didn't necessarily all four of us sit down at a table with knees touching, writing every day. We each did our own thing and we came back with our words, but we held each other accountable.

We only had five days there and we knew we wanted to hit anywhere from 40 to 60 thousand words for the book, for this first draft, and we couldn't do that by taking time off and not writing, so we had to be pretty disciplined with each other.

James Blatch: You realize you chose the wrong place for this, right? You should've chosen somewhere in the middle of Arkansas or in the Corn Belt, a tiny little town. You went to New Orleans.

J. Thorn: Have you ever been?

James Blatch: No, I haven't, but if I go I'm not going to sit in my hotel room writing. I'm going to go out and get drunk.

Anyway, you made this hard on yourselves, right?

J. Thorn: Yeah, maybe. One thing we didn't do is stay in the hotel room.

Lindsay and Joanna went and they took a swamp tour one day and we went to the Museum of Death one day.

We got a tour by the wonderful Martones. They took us around, they lived in New Orleans for a long time, and they took us on a tour of the French Quarter.

Zach and I hopped around about three or four different coffee shops, a different quarter each day. Yes, it would be very easy to get distracted. You certainly can.

The food and the beverage in New Orleans is phenomenal. I think it's some of the best in the continental United States.

At the same time, we like to think we're professionals and we would stay disciplined and we did for the most part.

James Blatch: Actually, that sounds wonderful. It sounds a really ideal way to get to know the city.

J. Thorn: Yes.

James Blatch: You did your writing, you held yourselves accountable, you got to Friday in this process where there was this editorial dynamic to it. So the book was coming out more formed than a book would be perhaps if you just sat and wrote it by yourself first draft.

What did you end up with on the Friday?

J. Thorn: On the Friday, we had what we affectionately called Frankenstein. Because we did not properly outline or sequence.

We had scenes that overlapped, we had some characters who were one physical location in one scene and then magically got to somewhere else the next, and again, Joanna took the unofficial role of creative leadership

and she volunteered to take a crack at that first revision. If she hadn't done that, it would've delayed us weeks.

She worked on that for hours and hours and hours and did a fantastic job on it, but that's what we had on Friday. We sort of set up a revision schedule.

Joanna did this first pass revision and then it went to me and then it went to Zach and it went to Lindsay and so on and so on, and we had this mapped out for about seven to 10 days so that by the time we were ready to send it to the proofreader, we felt pretty good about having it polished, but it was Jo who took Frankenstein and turned it into something better.

James Blatch: How long did that bit take then, Jo's revisioning?

J. Thorn: Well, I never asked her exactly how many hours it took, but I know that she worked on that solely for a couple days straight, and put a lot of work into it.

James Blatch: Every collaboration needs a Jo, doesn't it?

J. Thorn: Yeah, but she'll be the person to say don't ask her to do it. She doesn't want to do any more right now.

James Blatch: We're going to get her back on. She was our very first podcast guest back in the day. I can almost say back in the day now, we've been going long enough, but we decided recently that we're going to revisit some of the early guests.

I haven't told her yet, but she's going to come back on soon, so we'll get her side of this. She'll say, "They were slave drivers. It was unbelievable," but no, it sounds wonderful.

You're smiling all the way through telling me this and I don't think anyone's going to be listening to this thinking, "Nah, that's not the sort of thing I want to do." I think most writers would love this. Kudos to you for having the initiative and getting it going.

J. Thorn: Thanks.

James Blatch: I guess I've got to ask you where the book is now.

J. Thorn: We were really pleased. We might get into the weeds here on some of the publishing details, but I'm sure the listeners won't mind that.

James Blatch: Sure.

J. Thorn: Even though it was, I think it came out to like 42,000 words was the final thing, and we decided we weren't going to call it anything. We weren't going to call it a novel or a novella, we were just going to give it a title.

We had Kealan Patrick Burke do our cover, who is a phenomenal cover artist and a great Bram Stoker writer himself, and we launched at \$3.99. We decided we're not going to do a \$0.99 launch, that because of all the investment we had in it and we really believed in the story, it was sort of a premium e-book. We published at \$3.99, we went into Kindle Unlimited to hopefully stoke the Amazon algorithms, and we're going to be looking to go live with it probably later in the summer of 2017, but for now it's in Kindle Unlimited.

It did really well. I think the first week we got the top one thousand. I think right now it's around 20,000. We've got some 52 reviews on it, and most of them are five stars. I think we're really pleased.

We knew going in that it was kind of a crapshoot because Lindsay is the first to admit she doesn't write any kind of story like this. She jokingly said that none of her stories take place on Earth, so putting that in front of her readers is a challenge.

Jo writes more of the dark fantasy thrillers, Zach and I are more post-apoc/horror. Kind of a hodgepodge, and if you look at the books we write, it's a bit of a hodgepodge, but none of us went into it measuring success by the number of units we sold or a rank or our reviews.

I think our success was being able to say we did this whole thing in a matter of weeks and we're pretty proud of it.

James Blatch: I was going to say, the motivation for doing this wasn't purely commercial or commercial at all really by the sounds of it. It was an exercise in itself that you wanted to complete and take part in.

Do you feel that you've grown a little bit more as a writer as a result of this?

J. Thorn: Oh, tremendously. Every collaboration I do, I learn so much about the process because you can't help but not when you're working with someone else.

Being able to spend the week with Zach and Lindsay and Joanna and being able to be part of all of their creative process, but also just their mindset

and learning habits and learning ways of doing things is just ... It's just fundamentally incredible experience.

It's something that Zach and I, we kind of had this epiphany on Thursday. I think we were sitting at a pub and having dinner and we were like, "So many people would love this."

We're still early on, but we think we're going to try and offer this kind of opportunity for other writers. If we have time, we can talk a little bit more about it, but we believed in the process so much that we think other people would find it really incredibly powerful.

James Blatch: Well, let's definitely talk about that because I think there's definite scope for some sort of structured way of other people doing this, whether you're the organizer, the instigator, or whatever.

I'm already thinking in my mind that maybe an additional step would be for the journey to somehow more closely link to the story you're writing, so maybe some where it starts in Chicago and ends in New Orleans, and then you go off and ... With a bit of plotting in advance. That would be an amazing.

If you knew that you are writing a chapter where a guy is arriving in New Orleans the next morning and that's what you're going to be doing, how more vividly are you going to write about it?

J. Thorn: That's what we ended up doing for *Sacrifice*, and that's a credit to Jo. We had some discussion about what the story was going to be about and I was already thinking like, "Oh, we'll set the story in New Orleans," and Joanna was like, "No. Let's set it on the train."

So the whole story we told takes place on the train from Chicago to New Orleans, and one of the greatest things that came out of that was all of the little details when you travel. You forget all of those wonderful little details. Things like the Peruvian chocolate brownie that we were served at dinner is in the book. Patrick, our train car attendant, is in the book. The grumpy lady at the Amtrak desk is in the book.

You're right, selfishly it's like a memory book for me, but it's also a really authentic story because so much of what we experienced made its way into the story.

James Blatch: What are you thinking now in terms of taking this idea on and maybe including and inviting more people?

J. Thorn: Like I said, we're in early stages, but we're taking in applications now. Zach and I have decided we're going to try and meet a few of these, and to be perfectly honest, we're not looking to scale this up or we're not making to look an empire out of this.

We figure if we can take two things of four people, so eight people on a trip and we do that a couple times a year, that would be phenomenal.

We're going to test it out. We're going to offer to start two trips, we're going to replicate the one we did, so we're going to offer a train ride from Chicago to New Orleans.

And then we're also going to offer, for people who don't want the train or don't think that's an appealing part of it, a destination-only in Nashville, Tennessee, so people will show up in Nashville for four, five days and do the process and then leave from there.

We're going to try those. If we get enough people who are interested, we're going to do it, and if we don't, that's fine too.

Our primary job as fiction writers. We started Molten Universe Media Publishing Company, and that's really what our focus is, but we believe so much in this experience that if we can offer it to 8, 16, or 24 people a year, we want to be able to do it.

James Blatch: Before we move on from that subject, how do people get in touch with you and apply?

J. Thorn: I can send you the link, but if you're listening, it's theauthorcopilot.com/retreat. There's a really short form there. Just fill it out and I'll send out applications and all the details about everything that's in there.

Although it's a little bit of a chicken and the egg scenario right now because we can't really book stuff until we know we have interest, and it's hard to get interest without having some of the details. Like a collaboration, it's kind of a little messy right now and if people can put up with that ambiguity for at least the next few weeks, I think we're going to have something to put in front of people. I think we're going to have a few trips, at least I hope. I think it'd be a blast to do it.

James Blatch: I think it would. The different writing styles that people have, and you talked about Lindsay being in terms of genre differently, but it's more than genre, isn't it?

If a reader's going to read a book, they can't have it suddenly change into a completely different voice at a point. How do you deal with that?

J. Thorn: We conquered that one and the way we did it is we each wrote a character POV in the story, and because we each wrote that character's POV, we were able to maintain that character's tone in our own writing style, but you raise a really good point.

Something that Zach and I have been talking about, we think is sort of a non-negotiable is if we do this with other people, we are going to group people by genre.

You'll get four romance writers or you'll get four sci-fi writers. That will help with a lot of the genre conventions, a lot of the tropes that those readers expect because everyone will already know them. That will head that off. The writing voice is an interesting conversation. With *Risen Gods*, Joanna took and revised that so that even though her and I wrote that, it's sort of a singular author voice.

But for *Sacrifice*, for this collaborative project, we intentionally did not do that because we had the separate POVs. We feel like based on who we get or who we take with us, we can make those decisions. We kind of know now ahead of time the best way to do that.

James Blatch: It's great, J, and I'm quite excited about this prospect. I don't know if we'll ever be able to coincide one of our trips to the States. To come and see it happening for real would be amazing.

J. Thorn: I'd love to have you, James.

James Blatch: We'll keep in touch. Well, I think I have to publish at least one book before I put myself forward as a collaborative writer. I haven't got the self-confidence yet, but I could at the very least turn up with my microphone and talk to people and find out how they're getting on.

J. Thorn: Absolutely.

James Blatch: It sounds great. We will also put a link out, which Mark and I will do before and after this interview to remind people they can come and remind themselves of where to go to to take part in this.

One thing I don't think we've made explicitly clear is the title of the book and where to find it. I guess it's on Amazon, right?

J. Thorn: It is. It's called American Demon Hunters: Sacrifice. It is exclusively on Amazon right now and it will most likely be going live to other retailers and distributors later this year. It's available as a paperback as well through Amazon.

James Blatch: Okay. J, before we go, a little bit about your publishing empire. Can I use the word empire?

J. Thorn: Well, you can, although listening to Michael Anderle last episode, I wouldn't call it an empire.

James Blatch: He's moving fast, isn't he, old Michael?

J. Thorn: Yeah, he is.

James Blatch: But yours comes from a very similar place to Michael's in that it's really collaboration between writers that's driving the business. It's not somebody sitting there investing in writers.

He is a writer, you are a writer, and you want to get together with other people, and self publishing is making this as a natural next step, isn't it, to start to find an economy of scale in terms of the marketing and so on, so I guess that's similar to what you and Michael are both doing.

Tell us a little bit about your setup.

J. Thorn: Sure. It's unofficially Zach Bohannon and I. I say unofficially because we haven't really developed much yet other than our first book, which just released this week.

We co-wrote a book called Dawn, which is the first book of the Final Awakening Trilogy. It's a post-apocalyptic story. We wrote that and we published it under Molten Universe Media, which is going to be the name of our company.

We're starting out, it's just Zach and I, and we're going to co-write a bunch of stuff. We want to build a back catalog. We'd like to get this first trilogy done this calendar year if possible, and then phase two of that is going to be expanding into those other mediums, so maybe graphic novels or music.

We're both musicians, and also including other people. Once we get a nice back catalog of Bohannon and Thorn stuff, we're going to then reach out to

other people similarly to the way I've done with American Demon Hunters and have other people be part of this.

Again, I don't have the same skills as what Anderle's doing, but we're definitely looking at co-writing a lot of stuff and also bringing in collaborators.

James Blatch: I think there's a place for this not just because it makes sense in people who can write together and have a similar genre and appeal. Combine their audiences, but there are people, and I think Michael Anderle's found them, who are good writers but not confident about the whole marketing side.

You do take a hit personally because you're going to start sharing profits, but for them it's a good route and I guess you'll find people like that as well for whom if you're happy with the marketing side of things.

I don't know how happy you are spending the other half of the day doing all that stuff, but it's not for everyone, right?

J. Thorn: No. It's a big job. Luckily, Zach and I have complementary skills as well as skills that overlap. I'm a story nerd and I'm a big fan of the Story Grid, so much so that I'm going to be becoming a certified story grid editor later this year.

James Blatch: Oh, you are?

J. Thorn: But I love story. Yeah, yeah. I'm really excited about that. I think that's going to add a lot to not only my own writing, but a lot of these collaborations. I'm a big story nerd and so is Zach, but I feel like that's where I really shine.

Zach is so good at a lot of the marketing stuff around strategies and tactics. He knows keywords, he knows ad copy. We have a lot of overlapping skills, but when we put those two together, as we've seen from this launch this week, we feel really good about where we're headed.

James Blatch: That's great, J. Look, we've come to the end of our allocated time slot. It's been really wonderful talking to you.

It's been a really refreshing and interesting idea that you just got up and did, which I'm full of admiration for you. It sounds like you had a great time doing it as well, and Auntie Jo kept you all in order, which is what's needed.

J. Thorn: Yes. Everyone needs an Auntie Jo.

James Blatch: Absolutely. I think hopefully you'll get a few sales of the book as well. I think people will be intrigued to see how it turned out from this. Like I said, we'll broadcast that link again, but also do keep us in touch with when you're doing this again and if we can possibly make something work, we'll come and find you.

J. Thorn: We'd love to. You and Mark both have a seat if you want one, absolutely. I've been listening to the podcast from day one and I've been following Mark for years.

I love what you guys are doing and I'm a little honored, more than a little honored to be here. I'm kind of pinching myself that I'm on this podcast, but thanks for having me and letting me tell my story.

James Blatch: Hey, J, you've been a brilliant guest. It's been our pleasure, absolutely. I'm now going to ask Mark about whether he's going to take up that spare seat offer. I wouldn't hold your breath, but we'll see what he says.

J. Thorn: All right.

James Blatch: J, thank you so much indeed. Should remind you of the book. I'm sure you'll all want to rush out and buy it now.

American Demon Hunters: Sacrifice, and you can do the list of authors, Thorn, Bohannon, Buroker, and JF Penn of course.

That sounded like fun, and I think one of the things that struck me is also that I struggle to get in the hours and get the word count up, as you know, in my busy life.

But there you've got this not only keeping each other honest because you're talking, but you've got nowhere to go but to sit there and write. What a great exercise that is, particularly if you find it more difficult to get your word count up.

Mark Dawson: Also, if you think about a novel, let's say it's 100,000 words, then four writers write 25,000 words each. That's not a huge amount.

James Blatch: It's a chapter, isn't it? Yeah.

Mark Dawson: Well, one of your chapters. I do a little shorter than that, but yeah, it makes it a lot more doable. Lots of challenges of course to make sure the voice is consistent.

I know that I spoke with Joanna about the experience that she had because I think she was the main editorial eye who worked on the book and made

sure that the voice was consistent, everything was as it should be, continuity was correct, so there are some challenges involved there, but it is fast. Also, instead of having one author, you've got four authors who are able to promote the book, so if they've each got 10,000 people on your mailing list, you've suddenly got a reach of 40,000 for the book rather than just 10,000.

Loads of reasons why it's something that newbie authors should certainly give some thought to. And going on a train going down to New Orleans, that's pretty cool.

James Blatch: Well, J. Thorn is definitely going to do it again. He's been in touch with me a couple of times since we did the interview to say that if people are genuinely interested in this, to get in touch, so you can email us at support@selfpublishingformula.com.

We'll pass your email address and your interest along to J. Potentially, this could be a regular thing, could be a once a year thing and could be a really, really good fun. I'd love for you to go, Mark.

Mark Dawson: They might well do. No, I'd love going although also I'm going to America roundabout not too long from now. I'm going to fly to America to speak there, so that'll be good fun. You guys are going to NINC in Florida.

James Blatch: We should say we're going to be in Florida at NINC again this year, so if you listen to the podcast, you are part of the SPF community, don't have to be a member of NINC or going to NINC, but if you've got an opportunity to drop down into St. Pete's Beach near Tampa in October, so I guess probably something like October the 6th is the Wednesday night, isn't it?

October the 4th is the Wednesday night, so October the 4th, provisionally we'll say we're having a little meetup and we'll buy you a beer if you come up. Particularly if you're a Patreon member.

Which brings me back to just mentioning before we go, we have launched a Patreon opportunity for people to be a part of the podcast. You can sign up at three different levels, a dollar an episode, \$2 or \$3, various rewards, but you get an exclusive Q&A every month from Mark, which could help you in your writing. You also get everything that we talk about, all the

freebies and giveaways, you'll get those delivered to you at the upper levels of that reward system.

Mark Dawson: And rumor is that James will remove an item of clothing every ...

James Blatch: Not true. I should also say actually, the one reward that I didn't mention which comes in the gold and silver, the \$2 and \$3, is an opportunity to win the course for free.

You can win the 101 course. Once a year we'll do a draw for the 101 course and once a year we'll do a course for ads and 101 for the gold members.

Check us out at patreon.com/spfpodcast.

Mark Dawson: And the other exclusive bonus, the gold level, is one dinner with John Dyer, and the silver level two dinners with John Dyer.

James Blatch: He's on a roll tonight. He's on fire. John, stick that back up. We need to get a shot of that for the YouTubers before we go. Okay, that's it. Thank you very much for joining us. Look forward to speaking to you next Friday.

Speaker 1: You've been listening to the Self Publishing Formula