

## PODCAST 7: LIVE FROM LONDON BOOK FAIR 2016, PART I – WITH MARK DAWSON AND JAMES BLATCH

**James:** Hello and welcome to podcast number seven from the Self-Publishing Formula, live from the [London Book Fair](#).

Speaker 2: Two writers. One just starting out. The other, a best-seller. Join

James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James: Okay, well we're not really live because podcasts aren't live are they, Mark?

Mark Dawson: Technically, no.

James: But we are on location.

Mark Dawson: I'm alive. Actually, I'm pretty tired.

James: We are alive. You look tired. You also look tanned. Have you been away?

Mark Dawson: No. I haven't.

James: Well, I should know.

Mark Dawson: Haven't washed.

James: Yeah. That's what it is.

Here we are. We're actually alive and together. We're at the London Book Fair and we're at the cavernous exhibition halls of Olympia in West London. If you know your London geography. I guess somewhere between Hampstead and Kensington. A famous old building. Post-war, I think or maybe even pre-war. 1930s. Should've looked that up. It feels like that. It hasn't always hosted the London Book Fair, which has been around since the 1970s, but it has done for the last couple of years. We are actually in one little area of the book fair which is where they sort of push the electronic new-ish media. It's one corner. It's got a kind of vibrant feel to it. To our left, we can see our friend, Joanna Penn, who is currently giving a session in the author HQ. Standing next to her is one of our friends from KOBO.

Mark Dawson: Mark Lefebvre, yes. Absolutely.

James: Indeed. Mark is certainly coming up on this podcast and we'll certainly get around to talking to Joanna as well.

Mark, we're going to have a chat with a few people while we're here at the London book fair but tell me first of all, why you're here.

Mark Dawson: I've been coming here for just a couple of years now. This is the second time I've come. I was invited last year and this year by Amazon to be one of the talking heads on a panel they do in the morning about self-publishing and what's possible these days. There's that. That's a good excuse to come up to London for, what's turned out to be, a day full of interviews and meetings.

I've spoken with Mark from KOBO, Audible, I've spoken to, obviously, Amazon, and it's been really, really lovely to see loads and loads of students actually of people who've taken our Facebook course. Even readers as well. I've had a couple of readers come up to me. One from the states, Paul, who we've had a good chat to this afternoon as well.

James: We're going to hear from Paul. It's the last interview in our podcast today.

Mark Dawson: We are. It's always fun coming here. It's pretty tiring. I'm kind of operating on about five percent battery now and I'm looking forward to a bit of a lie down because I am old.

James: You're not old.

Mark Dawson: My legs ache. Carry on.

James: It has been a busy time. It's brilliant because we operate in a digital space and we do most of our work sitting in our little offices at home, to press the flesh a bit and meet people and it's a lovely, collaborative environment here. Feels quite different from actually most of the London Book Fair but more of that a little later.

So what we're going to do for this and the next podcast, both of which are going to come from here, the London Book Fair, is we're going to get as much value out of the individuals that we bump into and speak with as possible.

I am with two giants of the self-publishing world. They're both fall back laughing, but you are, and heroines, I would say, to a lot of self-publishers who are trying to get going. [Rachel Abbott](#) and [Mel Sherratt](#).

I have to start with Rachel because Mel's already told me ... She said off-mike she gets a bit nervous when she starts.

Rachel, thriller writer, I think I read you've sold over a million books. Is that ... Have I made that up?

Rachel Abbott: Over two million now.

James: Over two million. I read that about two months ago. You've sold another million since then. Rachel, you are a leading light in the industry.

Rachel Abbott: Gosh. Thank you.

James: As somebody who is trying to get going myself, I know a lot of the stuff that you talk about. You're here LBF.

Let's talk about the London Book Fair first. Why are you here? What do you get out of this?

Rachel Abbott: I'm here to talk to other people who are thinking of becoming self-published authors to see if they need a bit of support, a bit of guidance. A few ideas on what they might be able to do with their books and how they might be able to promote the books because, really, anybody can publish. It's whether you can sell any that's the big thing, isn't it?

James: That's the big bit, isn't it? Afterwards.

Rachel Abbott: Absolutely.

James: It's what you do in the afternoons. It's really becoming the afternoons. Slightly more important than the mornings in some ways. Mel, you actually did have that conversation, didn't you? On the panel? You've just been on the panel with Mark Dawson and you had that point about dividing up your day.

So we should introduce you as well.

You write, I think you call it, grit-lit? Is that right?

Mel Sherratt: I do. Yes. The only reason I call it grit-lit is because when I was trying to get traditional deal it was between women's fiction and crime

thriller and it didn't fit in any genre, so it was gritty. It evolved to grit-lit in the end. Then it got taken on by the industry, I think.

James: Grit-lit. Set in the north normally?

Mel Sherratt: My estate series is set nowhere in particular, purposely. There is an estate like that around the corner in every city. My other series, my detective series, Allie Shenton, she's set in my hometown Estate Contrans. So in the west-midlands.

James: You've also been giving people the benefit of your wisdom on this area. That's one of the reasons you were here. You were invited to be on the panel.

Is there another benefit of an indie author coming to LBF?

Rachel Abbott: I think if I wasn't a guest of Amazon, I would definitely be spending three days in the author lounge because some of the talks are absolutely phenomenal. I could just sit there and learn so much myself. I get really disappointed that I can't go into the talks because we're doing something else. It's just the camaraderie as well. Even if you just come talk to whose on the stand or if you're walking around, there are so many authors. The author lounge has really grown in four years and it's got bigger and bigger. It's great to see it evolving as it is.

James: It's amazing to see how many people are in there when it's a self-publishing topic. They started off this morning with a triad of publishing session and it was a lot quieter. You couldn't get a seat when it became self-publishing. Clearly, that's the growth area.

I tell you, it's my first time to LBF, and what struck me is that 80% of the entire conference is traditional publishing. I was surprised but someone told me it was just because they had more money for stools.

Rachel Abbott: There's certainly some truth in that, yes. People like us, Mel and I, wouldn't think having a stand here because there would be no purpose. The people who come here are not really our readers. These are other publishers and apart from the people who come along to find out about independent publishing or maybe come along to maybe find themselves an agent or a publisher, apart from that, majority of the people here are not really our target audience.

James: I suppose that's one of those things about the self-publishing industry. Commercially, it's a fragmented world, isn't it? Everyone works in isolation by themselves and you know you couldn't create a big self-publishing company that you paid a lot of money to to get your books published because it wouldn't work financially. It has to be like this. I don't know how you represent that in a show. It doesn't really lend itself. It's more of a digital thing, I guess, isn't it?

Rachel Abbott: Yeah. I think for me I tend to come here because:  
A) everybody comes and finds me here, which is really wonderful because you can be in one place, or it's the people around that come to you. And also if you want to find a cover designer or if you want to find a copy-editor and things like that. They're not here at the book fair but you can find them there about that lounge now. People are starting to hear about that and people are going to come here every year.

It's a traditional market here. Very intimidating downstairs with the big book sellers.

James: They are more intimidated by you, believe me. They're the ones looking over their shoulders.

So we've got you here, we need to get some value from you for our podcast.

Rachel, how do you sell two million books?

Rachel Abbott: It's a very difficult question to answer, that, because I think I was lucky about when I started out which was at the end of 2011. There were fewer books out there now. I think there's about double the number of books now on Amazon than there was then.

Also, a lot of traditionally published books are being sold at very low prices as well. I make no bones about it when I started I was selling at £1.99. I'm not now but at that time there weren't that many books that were in that price range that people seemed to enjoy reading and people were prepared to talk about. Whereas now, if you look in the top twenty, my book has been £3.48 since it was launched but the vast majority of books in that top twenty are .99 p or £1.99 at the most.

It was much easier then.

James: Tougher climate now.

Rachel Abbott: Yes.

James: Nonetheless, you both continue to have success.

Mel, you've come on quite strongly, I think, in the last twenty-four months, probably, for your sales.

Mel Sherratt: Possibly but I started at the exact same time as Rachel. Rachel took over me. I'll never forgive her.

Rachel Abbott: That's not true!

Mel Sherratt: I'll never forgive her for it. Actually, I learned so much from Rachel as well. Mine started to take off more now. I think it's a case of I've got so many books out now. I've just published my eleventh book. People are coming to find, if they like one series, they're going to find the other one. Whereas before they weren't doing that. They weren't crossing

over. Something along either the marketing I've been doing or the Facebook I've been talking to people, talking to readers, has started to work for me, and I'm getting a bigger audience.

James: There was a bit of a discussion about genre. One question at the end there. Yours is quite niche I suppose.

I thought you made a really good point that there's so many readers out there that there will be readers for your book.

Mel Sherratt: You need to find your readers and find your market. Two million books on kindle but you don't want that market. You want your category market. That's what many people think, that they're just going to put out a general book out and think somebody is going to find it. You have to narrow down into exactly what you want and you also have to realize what your dream is of success.

Do you want to sell a thousand books? Do you want to sell a million books? Do you want to start off with a thousand and then sell a million? Or just carry on? That's where you find you market then and build yourself up from there.

Rachel Abbott: And also, of course, some people it's more about the reviews. They'd rather sell fewer books but get amazing reviews. Some people aren't even interested in selling them. They're giving them away free. All they want is to be able to say, "I've got a book published." I think everybody needs to decided what they want to consider success.

Once you know what you consider to be your success criteria that gives you a direction on which you need to travel, really. That's important.

Just sticking it up there and thinking, "Oh I don't know what to do now."

Mel Sherratt: Which is what we first did. When we first put our books up.

James: Everyone does that. Yeah.

Mel Sherratt: Then you start thinking, I need a strategy now. It's learning to evolve into a business person over those years as well.

James: You've both done that. You are saying, "Well, I had an easier start because the climate was easier." But there were plenty of other people that didn't make it.

How much of it is the fact that you have evolved and you have decided to spend the afternoons marketing?



Mel Sherratt: Definitely in the early days. I spent 14 hours a day, seven days a week, for three months doing nothing but marketing and eating biscuits, which is why I put on so much weight. That's all I did. Sat at my desk, munching biscuits, and marketing my socks off. Literally, 14 hours a day, seven days a week.

James: You do have to think about lifestyle. We have a sedentary lifestyle. We've had a conversation this morning about standing up desks that we're going to get soon because it's really important thing.

Rachel Abbott: You wouldn't want us on a treadmill. You can get them on treadmills as well.

James: Yeah, we interviewed Russel Blake.

Mel Sherratt: Yeah. I need to listen to that one. That was the one I wanted to listen to.

James: He uses a treadmill. Does two miles a day or something. Anyway. Parts of it. It's an important area for authors to think about that but back to topic.

Transitioning into marketing. Advice I suppose, one key bit we get is that you have to think about marketing. It's not just going to happen naturally. We've had that one.

Something else, Mel? The way that you're selling books now, it would help people?

Mel Sherratt: Mine was exactly like I said on the panel this morning, experiment. Don't just put a book out there and, if it doesn't sell, leave it. Just look at the product description. Change the cover. Go back inside and maybe get it edited again. Try a different key word. Try a different category. Find an audience on Facebook. There are Facebook groups out there for everybody so you can always join in there. Talk about your book. Don't sell it. Talk about the book and talk about yourself and you'll find your audience.

Rachel Abbott: What Mel says is absolutely right and the other thing really is the best, the most important readers out there are the ones that you've already got. They're the ones that are going to be your greatest advocates. You have to make sure that you keep them on board.

It's really quite important that you start to build a mailing list of your readers. So you put something in the back of your kindle, on the back page on kindle with a link to your website where they can leave their name, their email address so you can email them every time you've got any news or you've got any special offers. I don't send many. I only send out maybe four a year and one of those is happy Christmas.

Mel Sherratt: Yeah. I send one every two months to my list.

Rachel Abbott: Do you? Yeah. They really appreciate it and you can get a conversation with them. You can put little competitions in there and stuff like that. You build that mailing list and it gives you a really good start. If they feel in some way connected to you, they're far, far more likely to talk about you to their friends. They're your biggest advocates.

James: That's great and that follows on from the Marie Force interview we had on the podcast. She's really taken that engagement onto the next level in terms of physically meeting her readers quite often.

Mel Sherratt: I'm going to do that this year.

James: You are? Excellent. In Stoke? At your estate?

Mel Sherratt: In Stoke. Yeah. I'm going to have an afternoon tea party for my grit-lit group.

Rachel Abbott: Fantastic.

Mel Sherratt: I'm going to get thirty bloggers who look after me. I'm going to look after them. I'm going to treat them to an afternoon tea and a copy of the new book.

James: That's a great idea.

Mel Sherratt: Yeah. I'll have fun as well.

James: Rachel and Mel, thank you so much indeed for joining us. You can get back to your coffee.

Mel Sherratt: Thank you.

Rachel Abbott: Not at all. Thank you.

James: Rachel and Mel, what fantastic inspirational authors to speak to and to see them and meet them both together here because we see a lot, we read a lot of blogs, you listen to podcasts, and so on. These are familiar names. That's one of the advantages of a fair like today is to meet them.

Mark Dawson: I met Mel for the first time last year and Rachel too. Very interesting writers. Really switched on. Doing amazingly well in their genres. It's one thing to email people, it's another to be able to sit down and have lunch with them. A lot of learning going on. A lot of swapping of ideas and tactics.

James: We've moved away from the new media, if you want to call it that, side of the fair. We're now looking at one of the large exhibition halls. This is the main central hall for Olympia. Above us are these iron girder style archways. It looks a bit like a railway shed. It's very light. It's beautiful actually. Lovely, as I say, pre or post-war, I haven't quite worked out what building it is.

In front of us, there are all these stalls. We can see some familiar names, some less familiar names here but I would say, Mark, having wondered around eighty percent traditional media? Traditional publishing?

Mark Dawson: More. 95, I'd say. Something like that. Looking at this vast space now, I can see Bloomsbury, Hachet's over there, Ingram.

James: I know Harper-Collins and Penguin Random House are in the far corner. We can't quite see them from here. They're miles over there in the distance.

Mark Dawson: It is absolutely the case that this is dominated by traditional media. Of course, one of the reasons for that is it's money. These stands are expensive so they've invested a lot to be here.

It is interesting. Last year I came for the first time, the author HQ, which is where the self-published authors hang out, was in a slightly more prominent space. I actually couldn't find where we were this morning. I was running a bit late. So I was dashing through this vast space, trying to find where I needed to be to get onto the Amazon stand. It does seem we've been pushed a little bit towards the back, which is really odd given that it's not that difficult these days to find the splits between traditional publishing and indie publishing is narrowing all the time. Yet here we are, pushed toward the back of the shed.

James: One interesting thing that I thought this morning is the very first session in author HQ was actually a traditional publishing discussion and I think it was titled something like, "The role of a literary agent and the role of

a publisher." They were about 25, maybe 35 tops, of people sitting there. A lot of spaces on the seats.

The next session, actually you were on the panel for that, was all about self-publishing and the place was crammed. It was three deep outside the theater, people looking in.

Mark Dawson: I'm not going to comment on that, James. I think it was obvious why it was busy.

James: The other two on the panel were great.

Mark Dawson: Careful, James. This is a really steep balcony.

James: One of them was Mel. The went to talk to Mel.

It does feel a little bit like the old industry doesn't quite know what to do. Funny, Rachel said in the interview, "I'm a bit nervous looking at these big giants."

I said, "Believe me, they're the ones nervous."

They are looking very nervously at what's happening with self-publishing and we've seen this in the music industry and the video industry and so on. The ones who don't know how to adapt or don't adapt because they can't, will die. It doesn't matter how big their name is.

Mark Dawson: Exactly. You mentioned music and video. Those two industries have demonstrated what happens when old style distribution runs up against the internet. It isn't as if the books industry has no example to draw upon, no frame of reference to look at what might happen. This is probably something for another podcast but you can look at what they are doing and what they're not doing and I kind of scratch my head at times. They've got plenty of examples of what will happen to them unless they change course.

Someone else mentioned this to me the other day. What we're looking at now is like a great, big ocean liner. There's an iceberg with "independent author" written on it and they're just sailing towards it. It doesn't seem that they're prepared to change course. There is only going to be one winner in that death match between liner and iceberg.

The book at the moment is the delivery mechanism and there are other delivery mechanisms and there are other delivery mechanisms. We're not even talking about audio books. There's another one. What will come along

in the next two or three years. Readers want stories. It doesn't really matter how they're delivered.

There will always be a place for books. I love books. You love books. We all love books.

James: Yeah. Of course.

Mark Dawson: We love stories more, I think. It's how we get our stories that is the interesting question.

James: We're going to focus obviously on self-publishing and the opportunities for self-publishing authors and make the most of our time here. Let's hear from Mark Lefebvre from Kobo.

Here we are on the Kobo stand which is in a sort of what feels like an annex hall to the main hall.

Mark and I were remarking on the fact that this whole industry has been turned up on its head. That self-publishing and electronic media is dominating and everyone is talking about it. Yet the show feels a little bit like most of it's still trad industry? Is that fair, Mark?

Mark Lefebvre: That's a fair game. Actually, I think the one thing that I really love about London Book Fair is the author HQ actually gives writers a place to go and feel welcome. So while you still have that exclusive industry, you're not wearing the tweed jacket and you're not from traditional publishing, you have a place to go and you have a place amongst your people. Where you can hang out with not only with folks from Kobo and from different aggregators and obviously the world's longest river, but you get a chance to network with authors like Mark Dawson and learn from them and see them on stage.

While I still have that angst about, why aren't you treating us with more respect? Why are you sticking us in a corner up in the back corner? I still look at the vibrant life right behind us. It's standing room only. There's such demand. There is such interest. There is such passion. We know that there is enough money in this business for people who are doing it properly. That this is something that should be taken more seriously. It's just a matter of time.

James: It's got an indie vibe, this area of town, this area of the LBF. Indeed, a grungy vibe.

Mark Dawson: Mark's right. This is where the authors come. This is where the action is. It's where the interesting ideas are being discussed and debated. Downstairs to me is a little bit stale. That's just the way I look at it. I know where I'd rather be.

James: Let's talk about Kobo for a bit.

The two things I was instructed about Kobo last time was you're a Canadian company and the name is an anagram of 'book'.

Mark Lefebvre: That's right. You can win a bar bet with that now.

James: I can. You're next to the world's longest river here.

Talk us through the platform and where you are now in terms of share and your future.

Mark Lefebvre: Within Kobo itself, Kobo Writing Life books published from Kobo Writing Life, are the leader in terms of weekly unit sales. Bigger than the world's largest publishing conglomerate. That's indie authors showing how powerful they are to Kobo readers. Kobo readers, we don't spotlight and say, "Oh here's an indie author." We just put the books out and let the readers decide what they want to read.

Kobo Writing Life was born in 2012. I was hired by Kobo in 2011 to come up with a solution to make it easier for indie authors and small publishers to get into Kobo and I now have a team of amazing people.

I have ten folks. I have Diego here in the UK and Camie in France and Chrissy in the US. I have an amazing team, most of which is in Toronto. Keeping all the bells and whistles running. The development team that is dedicated to continually, every six to eight weeks, putting out yet another release with some other fixes.

It's not about just building something good and hoping it can stand on its own. It's about listening to authors. Mark and I were just talking and looking at, "What can we do to make it even better for your experience as an author?" In my mind, it's been about connecting with the authors and figuring out what is it that an author will find valuable to help make them more successful in their plan.

As an author myself, I start with, "Well, is this something I would like?" Then I go talk to real authors and find out, "Would that work for you? It sounds good to me but in my little corner in Canada it sounds like a good idea.

How would that work in the UK? How would that work in the Netherlands?  
How would that work in Spain?"

James: Mark, as you grow, it's a problem that all companies have. I mean, you talked about starting all the way back in 2012 and I can just about remember how it was back in 2012 and here you are growing.

How do you keep yourself feeling vibrant and indie and fresh when you're growing and growing into, frankly, what is a ... I don't want to use the word monster ... It's a big beast now.

Mark Lefebvre: The biggest challenge that we have, the thing that we love the most is the connectivity that we have with authors. That is something that we're never going to get let go of. No. I can't hang out with all 50,000 authors all at the same time but I can come to a fair like this and schedule meetings with folks like Mark and Joanna and other people. We want to make sure that we have time to sit and talk. Then also to meet new others and constantly listen.

Authors are innovative. They're the fast-moving ships and there is a lot of ideas and things that they're doing now that will probably influence our industry. The thing that keeps it fresh and exciting is you're always aware of where you are today. You're always aware of what successful today but you're always looking for what is that next thing. We don't know.

The industry ... I heard a stat recently that the industry has changed more in the ... Maybe I heard it on your podcast ... Was it Marie Force that said that?

James: Marie, yeah. Two years.

Mark Lefebvre: Yeah. That amazing interview. Go back and listen to that episode.

The publishing industry has changed more in the last two years than it has in the last sixty years. That is so true. You can see it from fair to fair, from LBF last year to LBF this year. Just the stuff you've done with Facebook alone and the authors you've helped. Dramatic changes from last year to this time.

James: On that advertising question, we talk about Facebook and other social media platforms.

How much of a role do you think there is for platforms like Kobo in perhaps having a hand in that side of things? Is that an area you think you might move into?

Mark Lefebvre: I think one of the things that we've been looking at to try to do more collaborative promotional opportunities with authors. Because they have ideas, they have things they want to do. Maybe they need some help from us and we need some help from them.

In particular markets, what is it that we know that works? What is it that they know that works? Instead of doing it separately, instead of me trying to promote a Mark Dawson product to certain customers, if Mark has a product that he's looking to promote and I know of a certain market that would be good for that, why don't we do something like that together? Kobo has always been about collaboration and I think when you consider collaboration in your business strategy, you will be constantly ahead of the game because you're not trying to push anyone else out. You're trying to bring people in. In my mind, that has been a key in Kobo Writing Life's success in that last few years.

James: I think that's a, for me, I work across a few industries, that's a key differentiator between a modern industry that feels 2.0 doing things differently, wanting to collaborate. Frankly, I deal with enough old business that doesn't want to collaborate that is frightened of everyone else and who wants other people to fail.

We don't want other people to fail, even in competition. It's a thriving environment.

Mark Dawson: Rising tide. Place all boats, you know?

Mark Lefebvre: Exactly.

Mark Dawson: That's how I look at it.

James: That would be a win-win for you, wouldn't it? If you collaborate over an advertising product, ultimately shift more books.

Mark Lefebvre: At the end of the day, our job is to make readers and writers happy and bring them together. That's all we do, right? We do books and that's it. If we have great success having a reader discover a new author we've given that reader a lifetime of value. What better thing can you imagine doing?



I'm not a brain surgeon. I'm not curing diseases. But, I'm helping bring a reader and writer together. Wow. I'm a lucky, lucky guy that I get to do this. James: Mark, not every gets the chance to chat to you here, so tell us a bit about Kobo and what it's like there. I know you said you're based in Toronto. I learned how to pronounce that from the movie Argo. You don't say the second "t."

How many people work there? What sort of environment is it there?

Mark Lefebvre: The Kobo office in Toronto, that's our head office. About 500 people there. We do have another 100 folks around the world. There's actually folks in the Rakuten office in Japan.

Rakuten is our mother company. Rakuten owns LinkShare and Viber and Overdrive and Pinterest, etc. Kobo is one of their digital companies.

We have folks in New York and in Paris and in London, sixteen or seventeen different territories around the world but it very much still has the startup feel.

Michael Tamblyn is our new CEO and President and is very approachable. Just before he went on a huge world tour, because he's constantly having to visit with business partners and executives around the world, he will come out in our very open office environment and he'll come out and take his laptop and say, "Okay. I'll be on the second floor in this area. I'm just going to find an empty desk where someone is on vacation. I'm just going to sit there and work there."

He still feels that he needs to be connected to the developers, to the people who are doing the day-to-day tasks in order to give him a good understanding of what is going on.

Every Tuesday we have a town hall where we hear from Miki, the CEO of Rakuten. We hear his asakai, which is something that he does. He talks to everyone in the company. Says what's going on. What we did last week. Just a brief update. Then either Michael or the president or one of our executives will come up and do a presentation.

Once every quarter I do a Kobo Writing Life update for the entire company and I spotlight, "Hey, here are some authors we think everyone should know about. This is a rising star. Yes, you know the giant New York Times

bestselling authors but here's an author you're going to be paying attention to in 6 months."

I love that. I've been a book seller for 25 years and one of the most exciting things you can do is introduce the reader to the new writers. Doing that internally at Kobo, I work on the book-seller team, so that is the content team. Basically, the merchandisers, the publisher operations working directly with publishers, and the Kobo Writing Life team. We all work ... And we just call ourselves the book-sellers.

We're the ones who are the book nerds and really passionate. We love sharing and talking about books. We even have a Kobo Writing Life book club that Christine started in the office. Where once a month we pick a Kobo Writing Life author we've never read and we discuss their book because we want to understand the products. This is not just a thing we sell. This is something we truly believe in.

That passion, you feel it throughout the company.

James: I'd say, you can tell that Kobo is run by book nerds. It feels like that, doesn't it?

Mark Dawson: It does. It's lovely.

James: It's important. Okay, Mark, we need some value out of everybody who comes on the podcast.

From your bird's eye view, particularly working with authors obviously, top tips for somebody who is starting out? You know I'm in my first draft of my first novel writing experience. What should I be doing in terms of looking to the marketing stage?

Mark Lefebvre: I don't want to repeat the oft given advice but the reason it's given often is important. I know that you don't want to hear that but when you get that book done, start writing your next book.

In traditional publishing, that was still the case. When you pitch to an agent, they weren't just interested in that book. They were interested in your career. "Okay. That sounds good. What's your next book?" "Oh, I haven't thought about that yet."

That used to be the advice when you were set up with an agent. The same thing now is, "Great. Your book is out and it's in the market. What's your next book going to be?" Because that's huge.

The other thing is, don't just think about the territory you're in. Don't just think narrow-minded. Think globally. Think that this is an opportunity for you to reach readers around the globe.

I'm obviously going to talk about going wide because that includes us. There are different customers on different platforms and you may never know where your next rabid fan is going to be coming from. Your next greatest fan could be on a platform that you're not even familiar with because it's on some company that nobody has ever heard of but is a reader that you've got for life.

I think paying attention to international pricing and the changes is really, really important because you can be earning more per unit in certain territories than others. I'll give you an example, the Canadian dollar is not on par with the US anymore. In Canada, Australia, and New Zealand you better be pricing just a little bit higher. Just like in the UK you're going to want to go lower and in India you're going to want to go bargain basement. 49 rupees.

As much as possible, paying attention to the market and thinking of your book from the customer's point of view. Not just the writer's point of view. Looking at, what does the customer see?

That's why sending you the screenshot of, "Hey, you're number 1 in Canada. You can't see that because you're in the UK. You're number 1 in Canada." I also send screen shots to authors and say, "Here's what your price looks like in Canada. Here's what it looks like in Australian dollars." That's not a very pretty price.

Those are some of the things that I think can be very valuable for an author.

James: By a pretty price, you mean not ending in 99?

Mark Lefebvre: A native price. We know that in Euros and in pounds, 49 and 99 work. In North America, 99 is the king and queen bee. Pretty much.

James: That's great advice, Mark.

Finally, I just want to pick up on India because it's such a populist country and I can't help feeling that there is some work that we as marketers need to do to try and understand that market a bit better. It's got to be lucrative in the long run.

Mark Lefebvre: I have an author who runs a podcast, who's writing an article specifically about strategically pricing to sell digital books in India. We actually delayed the release of our pricing tool because the UX team, the User experience team, came up with a far better way for us to show authors.

Going from managing 8 prices, to going to managing 17 prices, some people don't want to do it. How do you make the experience good for people who want to just not look at it? But the ones who want to exploit that, how do we make it as easy as possible to see, not just their price but if they have a promo. You know how complicated that can be.

In rupees, as a good example. The cost of print books in India is minimal so you have to get any attention in that market you have to be as low as possible. Otherwise, you're just going to price yourself into piracy.

Basically, because it's cheaper for me to get the print book than it is the ebook. You're going to lose that customer. That's something that we're learning. India has a huge population of English readers that it's a market you can't ignore.

I pay attention to the Creative Penn and usually pay attention to what Joanna's thinking about. That's usually where we're heading as an industry. That's why we're really excited to roll out the extra tools so you can price in rupees and rand and rial and all the other currencies that start with R, apparently.

James: That's great, Mark. Super. Thank you so much indeed for having a chat with us. Great that you've come over. We're all book nerds aren't we?

Mark Dawson: We are. Absolutely.

James: Book nerds together.

Mark Lefebvre: Thanks.

James: Okay. That's Mark Lefebvre from Kobo. You know, I was shocked to know that they had Japanese corporate owners because Kobo feels like a lean, agile startup mentality company. It does have a startup mentality but I genuinely thought it was a young internet startup without corporate owners. I guess that's maybe the Japanese corporate mentality is being quicker to adapt than the Western one.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Kobo, they've been around for a while and they are lean. They are agile. They punch above their weights. It's pretty obvious from speaking to Mark that they're very author-focused. Mark and the team at Kobo Writing Life are very author-focused and they do amazing things like reaching out and telling you how promotions are going in markets you might not have visibility of. That really impressed me when he emailed me with details of how my book was doing in Canada.

James: Lovely guy and an avid listener of our podcast.

Mark Dawson: Hello, Mark.

James: Okay, we're going to get a couple more interviews in in this episode whilst we're here at LBF in Olympia in London. The last one, I'm going to trail ahead, it's a really entertaining chat with a guy called Paul Pender. We almost interviewed him by accident because Paul actually won a competition to get a signed book from Mark.

He was coincidentally coming over from California to here, whether he came here specifically to get your book, however, what an absolutely fascinating and interesting guy who is just on the cusp of a self-publishing career. Boy, he has a stellar Hollywood career behind him which was really interesting. Great interview with him. It's a real treat. So do keep listening for that a little later on.

But before then, let's keep our focus on self-publishing and the opportunities for you. We had a chat with a woman called [Anna Jean Hughes from the Pigeon Hole](#). Some of you would've heard of it. Anna explains what it does very clearly so, I'll hand over to her.

Anna Jean Hughes: We launched in 2014, largely to create a flip on the traditional publishing model. We wanted to use a digital serialization to really drive exposure and offer authors a slightly more supportive role in the publishing industry. Use a digital serialization to flow into a ebook publication and then use that ebook publication to flow into a paperback and hardback publication. We've flipped it slightly because in doing so we realized that the really interesting space is mobile reading. Mobile reading is changing very much not only the way we read books but the way that we write books.

Since then, we've been concentrating on mobile book format. We are now one of the leading mobile reading sites. We offer books that are either published by us, classic that we've re-serialized, re-formatted, re-publishing with lots of fun extra content. One of the main driving factors of what we do is to create as much of a extra social reading platform as possible.

Not only are all our books published with live serializations, we like to have an author on board to answer any questions that readers might ask. We have full multi-media extras that come with it. Videos of the authors talking and reading. We have Q&As. We have soundtracks. We have a full 360 enhanced digital reading experience.

More and more now we're working with publishers to, again, offer a mobile offer for their books. What I could say now is that not all books should work on a mobile book format but we are offering publishers the opportunity to launch their books on our app as well.

James: I've got a ton of questions from that elevator pitch on this. We'll leave your first model aside because you've obviously moved on and fine-tuned it. I had some questions about that but let's just work on the mobile platform.

Treat me as though I don't know what I'm talking about, which is a good way to treat me.

Mobile platform, this is your own app that serializes books?

Anna Jean Hughes: Yes. We have a Pigeon Hole reading app. You can buy and navigate within the app. Finding the books you want through our library or premier section which is the section of the live serializations.

James: When you say, "live serialization?"

Anna Jean Hughes: It's our first ever serialization of a book. We like to re-serialize a lot of our books to make sure they get as much exposure as humanly possible. We have 10,000 plus subscribers now. So we relaunched those books to those subscribers but the premier launch is the first serialization that we do of any given book.

It might be a book that we've created ourselves. It might be a book that we've signed up from a publisher. It might be an old book from a publisher. Might be a new book from a publisher. We like to do things such as, offer publishers a chance to do a pre-publication serialization of their book to do

a big marketing publicity drive. Sometimes we offer free books to people, just as kind of net galley type platform to really drive exposure. To get as much as possible. Get as many readers as possible.

James: Like a lead-magnet, effectively, giving away the book.

Anna Jean Hughes: Exactly. Yeah.

James: It's a bit of an event then.

You try to create an event around a book being serialized, which actually is almost a Dickensian approach, isn't it? Because Dickens and his fellow authors famously serialized their books in newspapers.

Anna Jean Hughes: Yeah. Dickens does digital. We call ourselves the global book club in your pocket.

Another thing that we're trying to do is break down the territorial boundaries and offer a really, truly global launch so people around the world can talk about a book.

The point of serialization is always, at least, to tag on to the cutesy Dickens link but also the idea of creating a kind of digital wood-killer moment. You'll really get people talking about the book everyday, every week. It might be that we serialize it daily, or every two days, or weekly. You're getting people excited about it because you're holding back. It's the delayed gratification idea.

James: I can see a lot of the attractions to that. You're swimming against the tide, I suppose, in the sense that we are moving away from scheduled lives. We used to always have to wait for Sunday night to watch a show. We watched recently the BBC thriller series with Tom Hiddleston. I don't remember its name.

Anna Jean Hughes: The Night manager.

James: The Night manager. What struck me about watching it ... So sorry if you're in the States. This is a high big profile thriller series on the BBC in the UK.

What struck me about watching it was it felt like ten years ago where we were waiting for it every week to come up on a Sunday night. Whereas our lives now are geared around we can watch three episodes of Games of Thrones tonight.

Anna Jean Hughes: But you were waiting for it.

James: We were waiting for it. So, it was quite nice in that sense and we did talk about it during the week in a way that we probably don't talk about the box sets because we're watching them at different times. You are swimming against one tide but trying to tap into the romantic and enjoyable aspect of all sharing in an experience.

Anna Jean Hughes: It's also the idea that chopping it up into manageable sections, manageable installments, you're allowing people to really monitor their reading, manage their reading better.

If you say to someone, "Look. I know it's Moby Dick and I know there are seven pages of whale bone descriptions and it's really dry but we're going to give you twenty minutes a day. It's going to come for 31 days. It's going to come with animations and live readings and so much extra content to help you get through it and there is going to be support from everyone else around you, reading at the same time, at the same sections. We can help you get through this quite boring, needs an edit book."

James: How's it going?

Anna Jean Hughes: It's going really well! The thing that we find is that there are so many applications for what we're doing at the moment that I think one of the exciting things is to see how much people have enjoyed it and actually how much the authors have got onboard.

It's a really nice thing to offer authors, not least the data we can strip down back from all of our launches. We can tell authors where readers got involved, where they weren't interested, where they were reading from, how they were reading, the time they were reading. It's a really interesting data harvest that we can get from each launch.

Also, the really nice thing is the ability to talk to their readers directly. The marginalia that runs throughout the book is either the extra content you can see or the comments that you can get. At any point, someone might put a comment in your book and all that happens is you get an email saying, "So-and-so has said, 'This is such a great line.'" Then you just press a button and you respond. Then you suddenly have access to your reader.

James: Wow. Truly interactive. That's going beyond just responding to reviews on Amazon or whatever people are talking about.



Anna Jean Hughes: I was just thinking about that.

James: Instantly. Yeah. That's a really great aspect of it.

I suppose you're a traditional publisher in the sense that you're selected people would come to you and say, "Can you take my book?" And you send a rejection letter or you move ahead with it.

Anna Jean Hughes: Now that we're working more and more with publishers, I think our list for new writers is stripped back, but it just means that we're very much more selective which is not a problem.

I also think you have to be very aware of certain aspects about a book on whether or not it actually can be serialized, if it actually can work on a digital platform. I don't think just all books should be stuck into a mobile book format. I think people need to be much more curated about their lists. We certainly are.

James: The way the narrative works? Some narratives lend themselves to a episodic-

Anna Jean Hughes: If you're dividing it, week by week, and you have split narratives or multiple voices and you can't divide it by voice, it can be very difficult. If it's seven hundred pages long and it doesn't have that amazing drive and it's maybe a huge literary classic, it can lead to problems when it comes to getting through it. Again, that's why serialization is there and can help on the flip side is that we can get you through certain books.

I think, what it comes down to more than anything else for us, is making sure the list is as enhanced and as interesting and as sort of live for the extra content, the comments, and the book club feel. We really want books that really can be driven and do drive a conversation.

James: What platforms do they work on?

Anna Jean Hughes: We only iOS at the moment. We're building Android soon. We have a web reader for people who are reading on Android.

Android is coming this year. We sell all the books we have full rights to on Amazon as well for anyone who wants to read on their kindle. We did use to serialize it on Kindle but it got a bit tricky and I think it's better for the books to just be bought separately.

James: Do you see a future where there is a self-publishing arm?

Anna Jean Hughes: We're actually setting that up.

James: Hey, I've seen into your future. I've been sitting in the board meeting.

Anna Jean Hughes: We're very much doing that at the moment. We're just playing with the name. We wanted to call it The Pigeon Hole Nest or I don't know, The Olive Branch, we've been playing with it. We're playing with the title.

But yes, absolutely. The idea would be you offer the platform for self-published authors can pick and choose either to launch it onto the community that's there or they can have a closed private launch that they can launch to directly. Then we'll just sell them the data that we'll harvest. But it's free to upload. Free to see the comments. So it's a really nice way of gearing how well a book is doing to your readers.

James: What I'm thinking is some writers who are slogging through their first novel, that very difficult process, actually this might be a very attractive way of approaching writing. An episodic, really structured the way you approach writing a book.

Anna Jean Hughes: Absolutely. We're also kind of crowd sourcing editing, which is something a lot of editors are quite upset about.

James: Well, yeah. That's probably the way that's going to go, isn't it?

Anna Jean Hughes: We're also moving onto a very exciting aspect which is the gamification of books. Our next book that is coming up in the 8th of April, is a serialization of Head of Zeus's book, Victim Without a Face by Stefan Ahnhem. We have disappearing chapters. You have to read within 24 hours otherwise we just take away your story.

James: Okay. I've hogged you for enough but my final question.

You've kind of got a foot in both camps because there is a lot of trad aspects of the way that you operate but also electronic as well on these platforms. So where are we going to be in five years?

Anna Jean Hughes: I think the traditional publishers have more money to spend on the stores. I'm not convinced. I think there will always be room for physical books, thank god. I love reading physical books. I think they'll always be kindle. They'll always be audio. They'll always be digital. I think mobile reading is about to see a huge uptick because I think the idea of having the idea of having a book in your pocket and also see the kindle

app but not needing it and actually having an app and actually being able to communicate through the app is a very exciting thing.

When it comes to traditional, whether it's on its way out, I mean physical sales are up, digital I think is plateauing in some respects, but I think that because kindle, again, isn't as interactive as it could be.

When it comes to how people are going to be publishing in the future, I suspect that there is going to be a specific divide of roles in the publishing industry. I think that the way the publishers seem to try and hog practically all aspects, including publicity, marketing, digital, sales, I think those are going to split off. Things are going to be more and more outsourced consistently to a point where there are actually differing hubs within the industry that work in symbiosis rather than someone just sitting on every right and not giving it to anyone which is difficult.

James: Anna, thank you so much.

Anna Jean Hughes: It's a pleasure.

James: We're continuing on with the podcast here at LBF. We'll watch Pigeon Hole and particularly Pigeon Hole Nest or whatever you come up with for the self-publishing arm. You'll have to come back and talk to us about that when that launches.

Anna Jean Hughes: I will. I will. Thank you very much for having me.

James: You're listening to the Self-Publishing Formula podcast with James Blatch and Mark Dawson at the London Book Fair 2016 in Olympia in west London.

We've moved again, Mark, to what feels a little bit like a library.

Mark Dawson: It does look a little bit like a library as well. I can see rows and rows and rows of books. I'm not entirely sure what the deal is.

James: I think at an early stage of the London Book Fair back in the 1970s when they realized they had all these publishers here and all these meetings going on and talking business, there wasn't actually anywhere to go and read a book or buy a book, maybe that's where this idea has come from.

It's a whole area of the book fair where you can sit down, take a book off the shelf, read it, and buy it if you want.

Mark Dawson: I'm looking behind us into the central kitchen and I can see people with glasses of wine, which I have to say, looks particularly tempting coming up to five o'clock on the first day.

James: Yeah. We're going to have something alcoholic shortly. I've got a lot of editing to do tonight.

Mark Dawson: I haven't.

James: Yeah. Lucky you.

That was interesting, talking to Anna. I love the idea of it. She was explaining it to me in the interview and I wasn't really listening properly to it until I was editing afterwards. I think what they've created there is reading books for people who don't read books.

Sounds like a slightly odd thing to say but I'm a bit like that. My attention span is not what it is for the person who voraciously reads a novel a week. I can't do that. I was quite drawn to this idea, this episodic approach with lots of other bits and pieces thrown in at the same time. You having to keep up with it.

Mark Dawson: They're pretty stretched on, actually. They've been around for a year, two years, and they've got a lot of very interesting ideas in terms of serializing fiction, breaking things out into smaller chunks.

I cannot say too much about it but I was having a chat with her afterward, and there might be something that we do together towards the end of this year that I think sounds quite exciting as well.

James: She did mention in the interview the self-publishing side of things, which they're working on now.

Mark Dawson: Something different. Something top secret.

James: Even more top secret? I thought that was an exclusive for our podcast anyway.

Let's move on. We've got two more interviews to go. Like I said, I keep trailing ahead to Paul Pender. He's a good one to finish on.

We're going to talk to a woman from Armenia whose recently relocated to London called Ani Alexander.

Ani runs her own podcast. She's really interesting on self-publishing. Full of good advice and we caught up with her just a few moments ago.

Annie Alexander: My name is Annie Alexander. I'm a best-selling author, a podcaster, and I also help writers become authors. My podcast is called **Write to be Read** and it's main mission is to encourage and inspire writers to become authors.

James: Turning writers into authors. Let's get some value from you whilst you're here on the podcast.

What are your key bits of advice then for a writer who's sat there, trying to produce their first book?

Ani Alexander: First of all, you have to get the right mindset. Get rid of the self-doubt. Going back and forth, editing and re-editing the text that you are writing. You just have to make sure you sit down and produce the text first. It doesn't really matter if it's good or bad. You don't really have to evaluate it too critically. You don't really have to think about what happens next. Just start with the first step and make sure that you write something beforehand.

James: I'm writing my first book and I'm doing everything wrong then. I'm going back and I'm looking over it. I'm lying awake at night, fretting about what's coming next, and here you are, your advice, which sounds liberating. Is just write.

Ani Alexander: Yes. Exactly. The first drafts always suck. You will never be happy with what comes out. That shouldn't really stop you because even the most famous writers didn't really produce the things the way you are reading them right now. They have been edited and polished and gone through it many, many times. The first drafts always kind of suck and that's the way they're supposed to be. That's why they are first drafts.

First of all, you can't be objective about what you've written because you've written that. Second, even if it's not something that you like, don't really follow your first impulse to delete it. It's something you can work out later on. Just make sure you produce something. Make sure you put out your message out there, your story out there, and then it can always be reworked and made much better.

James: In terms of editing, you would advocate an independent editor.

Ani Alexander: Absolutely. I know people who even though who are professional editors and writers themselves and they always hire another

editor to go through their text. You've been in the story for too long yourself. It's very difficult to kind of turn away and evaluate it from a reader's perspective.

It's always nice to have a professional editor to walk through that and working with a good editor will teach you to go back and look at the common mistakes you're making and the style you're following. It will open your eyes on the process and you will discover more about your writing and grow as a writer as a result.

James: Here's the question that we're asking writers today. As one question we're going to ask everybody. You've got a friend. They've written a book. First book, unpublished. You've read it. It's absolutely amazing. You give it to their literary agent friend and they think it's amazing. You give it to a publisher friend who is absolutely amazing. You know they've got a stellar book.

What's your advice to them? They can get a traditional publisher deal, no problem at all or do you advice them to self-publish?

Ani Alexander: It depends on the goals. Let's say, for example if my friend is a writer who wants a writing career and who is going to write second, third, fourth, etc books. It's not like his one and only book of a lifetime. Then most probably he can sacrifice this first book with a traditional publisher and start growing his own platform meanwhile and self-publish later when he already has an audience in place.

If it's the life book of his and the only one and he really isn't a prolific writer who plans to write on and on all the time and let's say it's a very emotional thing for himself. A memoir or something like that. Then I would most probably self-publish, create my audience, and engage with my audience because, most probably, if it's that type of book, then the message for me is very important that I'm sharing. With this message, I would most likely want to change something in other people's lives. In that case, the audience and my relationship with the audience will be very important. That can't be reached through traditional publishing.

James: That's Ani who spent a bit of time with us this afternoon. Interesting to chat to her.

We are in the smaller of the two grand halls, they call them, at Olympia. It's the same sort of arched roof made of iron and a new set of exhibition stands. We're actually standing in the vacant Ugandan book stand. They haven't turned up. We might occupy their space.

I've looked up the dates by the way of Olympia. It wasn't pre or post-war it was pre-Crimean war.

Mark Dawson: Pre-A war, yeah.

James: 1886, this place was built for agriculture halls for exhibitions. A little bit earlier than I first suspected. The architecture is marvelous here. It's quite something to see.

We're going to do two episodes. The next episode will also come from the London Book Fair. We're going to include a chat with SPF community members who have come up and tapped us on the shoulders. Just like we said people should do. It's been wonderful talking to them, hasn't it?

Mark Dawson: It's always lovely people who recognize me and have either taken our fill or the pay course have shared their results. It's been really lovely to meet those guys. Not saying set up, just kind of natural and really a real pleasure to meet them.

James: They've recognized me when I start talking.

Mark Dawson: You do have a very distinctive voice. Let's be honest.

James: I'll take that as a compliment. Dearest I've ever got from you.

One of the people who we've come across who is a follower of the podcast, listens to the podcast, and is a member of SPF community is a guy called Paul Pender. Like I said earlier, we didn't know much about Paul. He came across to collect a prize. He lives in California. He's actually from Scotland originally. You'll probably Google his name after you listen to the interview because he has credits in major Hollywood films behind him. A really interesting guy. He's going to be our last chat today from the London Book Fair.

Paul Pender: My name's Paul Pender. I'm writer of a book called, "The Butler Did It." Available in all good book shops. I'm also the screen writer of the film Evelyn with Pierce Brosnan. I wrote Brother Cadfael, adapted it for the screen, for Derek Jacobi, and I develop projects for a Hollywood company. So I'm a poacher turned gatekeeper or vice versa.

James: One of the projects that you've developed for the Hollywood company is the Truman Capote film.

Paul Pender: Aye. Yes. I developed that. We did rather well. I believe it won the Oscar.

James: Yes. It did indeed. That's a great claim to fame and, of course, immediately ears perk up when Truman Capote is mentioned in writing circles.

Paul Pender: Yes, well, he's a hero of mine. That was a joy to work on. Winning a Oscar for that, which I didn't win the Oscar of course, but we did win the Epiphany for Evelyn. The top spiritual award of the year which came with a large cash prize which Pierce Bosnan decided we should give to charity.

James: Good on that. You were delighted. I can see.

Paul Pender: Oh yeah. Very good. I was so happy that I lost 50 grand.

James: As a true Scot, you are thrilled.

Paul Pender: I don't want to confirm the stereotype of the Scot as a tight-fisted person, so I went along with it.

James: You obviously do have a Scottish accent. When you just said that. Just off mike, you're from Glasgow.

Paul Pender: I'm from the west coast, a small fishing village on the banks of the clay called Glasgow, yes. Yes.

James: However, California is your life.

Paul Pender: I've lived there by the ocean in California for twenty-years, yes. I went over there ... God, whenever twenty years ago was. I get American citizenship next month. I've had a green card for a long time.

James: Have you passed some sort of general knowledge test on American history?

Paul Pender: Yes. They give you a hundred questions and answers which you have to learn of and repeat like a well-trained parrot.

James: Right. We're getting a little bit off-topic but it's interesting.

Paul Pender: We are a bit off-topic but I'm fascinated by the self-publishing revolution. I've been listening to your podcast religiously. I've been following Mark's career with admiration. Thinking that's the way to go.



James: The heart of it, you've got the fundamentals are there for you because you are a writer and you've got quality writing behind you. In fact, you wielding in your book. You've got two books in your hand. One of them is from our esteemed boss Mr. Dawson.

Paul Pender: Is he your boss? I thought he was your colleague?

James: My colleague, yeah. He likes to be called the boss.

Paul Pender: Then the one with the more attractive cover and the bigger title is mine. The Butler Did It. Yes.

James: Good title.

Paul Pender: Yes. But he's made much more money than this.

James: Now that's the trick to it, isn't it? That's why you're here and that's why you listen to the podcast.

Paul Pender: That's why I'm here, yes. That's why I listen to the podcast because I do think there are ways now to reach the market which have never been available to writers before and which any writer who wishes to get the fruits of their labor should address.

James: What is interesting about you is you've got a great respect for writing and Capote is one of your heroes.

You've got a lot of track-record behind you and yet you're willing, able to say, "You know what? I know nothing about this." And dive into a new life.

Paul Pender: I think life's about reinvention. Self-invention and reinvention. One of the things I've always believed is you should write the story of your own life. Don't let anyone else write the script for you.

When I went to California twenty years ago, I was a guy who had met a drunken woman in a bar in Ireland who had told me her story and I said, "That would be a great role for Pierce Brosnan." I just wrote the script in spec. I don't drive. I still don't drive.

James: Really? You live in America.

Paul Pender: I live in the car capital of the world. I live in California and I don't drive. In the early, pure days, I used to get buses to the studios.

James: I still love that moment in LA Story when Steve Martin gets in the car and drives next door.

Paul Pender: Yes. It's incredible. I used to have to ... I ended up meeting a guy who drove a really nice vintage Jag. He delivered scripts to the studios. He used to drive me to meetings and people thought it was my car.

James: Lovely.

Paul Pender: That created the right response.

I used to work at BBC. I had a good living there but I always wanted to go to Hollywood. I had a good time there. I'm keeping an apartment there. I'm going to go back and forward but Edinburgh is on the horizon. Beautiful capital city. I'm writing a cop saga based in Edinburgh. The debate is, do I conventionally publish or do I self-publish?

I'm increasingly persuaded that I should self-publish.

James: If you self-publish, is there something you're going to get down and dirty with yourself? Are you going to get into Facebook? Social Media advertising?

Paul Pender: Oh yeah. I'll have to. Absolutely, yes. I've been very remiss about it. I haven't had to up 'til now. Absolutely. I think the idea of being involved with your readers is extraordinary. I still love if I get one email a year from a reader but the directness of your relationship with the audience and the readership is got to be intoxicating for any writer in my view. You guys are the cutting edge globally. I know you've got that English modesty but I was listening to your show in California. From where I won this prize was I identified John Milton's lighter to get this prize and I was sitting in Starbucks looking at the ocean when I sent the answer in and found out in real-time, one minute later, that I'd won it.

That's kind of fascinating.

James: It's an engagement thing.

Paul Pender: Yeah. An engagement thing. Imagine if Truman Capote had done a thing like that. Just think of the fun he could've had.

James: How brilliant is it you're actually here in London? You've come over, not just to pick up the book ...

Paul Pender: I've got a London agent that's quite surprisingly well disposed toward publishing, self-publishing, independent publishing, as he would call it. I've been watching vids about this stuff for two years now and I'm seeing faces. There's Mel Sherratt. There's Rachel Abbott. There's Mark.

They feel like my close personal friends and I've never met them before until I met Mark a short while ago.

It's a whole new map of the world, I think. The more innovative and imaginative and ambitious writers should take a long and serious look at it. Everything that the traditional, legacy publishing ... Whatever you want to call it ... Everything that they talk about reduces the role of the writer. An editor will fix your messy work. The agent will also edit it and then you just sit back and let us do the rest. That's a very dangerous way to go.

If I do go ahead and independent publish, I'll then be a hybrid author. At the moment I'm a conventionally published author. I know what it's like to have the world promised to you and then there is no marketing muscle and you end up doing it all yourself. Hopefully, there will be a TV adaptation of my book and then a mass market paperback.

James: Ideally.

Paul Pender: And suddenly the whole thing will be kick-started again. I'm very, very excited by all of this stuff.

James: What are you going to bring from the film world into your new venture into self-publishing?

Paul Pender: I think it's got a lot of parallels to the independent film world. The guy I worked with, what I think Mark is becoming, which is a very successful indie producer. He started off with his own little film and he ended up ... He's now got 35 or so feature credits and we won the Oscar for Capote that was the ultimate triumph.

All of that entrepreneurial spirit and not taking no for an answer and not wanting to be bossed about by a big studio, the big studio and the publisher. The analogies are all over the place. You know, you can be the little writer that can.

Yeah. I'm up for it. I just hope I can succeed. Using Mark's techniques. Listening to your podcasts. It's inevitable isn't it? It's almost guaranteed.

James: The attitude is the other thing and I think you've got that. So let's give you book a plugging. It's Paul Pender. The Butler Did it.

Paul Pender: Well said.

James: It's a counter-intuitive title because it sort of feels like you've given away the last page.

Paul Pender: It's a true story of a Scottish serial killer butler whom I interviewed at the BBC. He wanted me to write his biography and I started doing so. Then he threatened to kill me because he didn't like it.

James: That's what serial killers do.

Paul Pender: It's what serial killers do. It's like the scorpion and the frog. I was the frog. He's dead now. So I could write the book when he died. Allen Cummings is very excited about playing the butler in any forthcoming television adaptation.

James: Should that happen.

Paul Pender: Should that happen.

James: That's fantastic. Good luck with that, Paul.

Paul Pender: Thank you very much.

James: You're going to keep in touch with us, I know. We're going to see how your career unfolds.

Paul Pender: I'm excited for the podcast I'm on and I'll be listening to the podcast and it's great to be part of it.

James: Paul Pender. What a wonderful guy and what a wonderful surprise as well.

Mark Dawson: He was a pleasure to talk to and it's slightly embarrassing is he emailed me last night to tell me he was coming and to remind me to bring the book and I probably would've forgotten if he hadn't reminded me. He said he'd like to talk to me about film and I misread his email and I thought he said he was from a production company called Capote production.

So I said, "Do you have a link for that?"

And he very politely and patiently wrote back and said, "No. I produced the film Capote with Philip Seymour Hoffman, you might have heard of it." That was me putting my foot in it but what a lovely guy. A very interesting story.

James: He wrote Evelyn with Pierce Brosnan.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Fantastic story and just getting started with his fiction career. Best of luck to him.

James: Okay. Mark, I think a glass of wine is probably calling for both of us. This is day one for the SPF, at least, and it is day one for the London Book

Fair. Do join us next time. We'll have some more interviews from here. We're going to always try to bring you some of that value, ask those key questions, particularly that mix of trad and indie. Trad's not dead as far as a lot of indie publishers are concerned. It's still the big aim for them to perhaps to land that big trad deal and absolutely do it with a good track record behind you, with a clear idea of the figures you could make from the indie side of it, and negotiate from that point.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. Exactly. Make sure you've got all the information so you can make educated decisions that are best for your career.

James: So that's it for the Self-Publishing Formula podcast from the London Book Fair. We'll be back here at Olympia 1886 next time.

Mark Dawson: Let's go to the bar.

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