

## **EPISODE 98: INSIDE STORIES FROM TWO SELF-PUBLISHING PIONEERS – WITH JOHNNY & SEAN**

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

Mark Dawson: Hello, and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula podcast with James Blatch and Mark Dawson. Sorry, Mark Dawson and also starring James Blatch. Welcome along.

As you can see if you're watching on YouTube, I'm in full Santa mode. Santa, I know him. This is my Christmas jumper. It's even got, if you get down here on the video camera, you can see there's a little scarf. It's 3D, this jumper.

James Blatch: Wow.

Mark Dawson: You're very honest.

James Blatch: Spend, spend, spend.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, exactly. And I've got another one coming, actually. I've got an elf jumper this year because we're going to see Elf as a family in London, which we always watch Elf every year.

It's not the greatest Christmas film, but it's very close to it, I think.

**What's your greatest Christmas film before I tell you mine?**

James Blatch: Probably is actually Elf. It's a Wonderful Life is a pretty easy day, isn't it? But yeah, Elf is quite hard to beat.

Mark Dawson: I'm a big fan. I've got top three. National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation is number three. Elf is number two. For me, Muppet Christmas Carol is the greatest Christmas film. It's my number one pick.

James Blatch: Easy choice.

Mark Dawson: Gonzo is not surpassed in that film. So, our Christmas edition, so if you're watching this in June 2019, just try to imagine that it's all snowy. I've just had a light on my fan saying, snow is due this weekend in the UK. I don't know if you get that.

James Blatch: No. I know it's cold here. It is cold and I think the children at school. I dropped my daughter off this morning. They were saying, it's going to snow today. I was like, no, I'm pretty sure it isn't. Anyway, what do I know. It certainly is cold enough, getting there.

Mark Dawson: Could be some snow coming. It would be lovely to have a white Christmas.

Now, this is the last podcast episode before we draw a name to be our first book club person, so you've got a few more days. We're going to draw it after Christmas. After the 25th of December, with the cut off point say, so, if you're not a gold level patron.com subscriber for the podcast, you want to get yourself in there.

We're going to draw a name and that person will have their book cover, their marketing, their blurb, everything properly analyzed by a team of experts and then, we'll have a podcast episode going through all of that.

We're going to do it three or four times next year, maybe even more. So, make sure you keep your subscription going to be in with the chance of that, as well as all the other things you get as a gold level podcast subscriber. Not only, actually, this is the UK mug. Very rare is the US mug, which looks slightly different gets sent out by our team in the states.

Okay, look it's a very exciting matter in the self-publishing world, this podcast today, isn't it, because we are now I think an established self publishing podcast. I think we can say that.

In fact, I did noticed on iTunes, I think I sent your screen grab, didn't I? That, we are, if you put in self-publishing, and press return, we came up first.

James Blatch: Yeah, and your face. Do you have a pen?

Mark Dawson: Let's not be like that. Let's be supportive. I'm more hesitant about saying that because someone else in another part of the world will do a search and the algorithms work differently.

James Blatch: Yes.

Mark Dawson: But, that's how it worked for me on that occasion, unless Apple were just doing that for me.

There before us, and still going and an absolute force of nature in self publishing, and I have to say, completely we love them, are the Self Publishing Podcast guys, Johnny, Sean and Dave.

Today, we've got to try and, it's like crossing the street, isn't it, in Ghostbusters. It's something that you're told never to do. But, we're going to do that today. We bumped into Johnny and Sean in Florida at NINC last year, not last year this year. It's not next year yet, unless you are listening in 2019.

We had an opportunity to sit down and chat with them. And, I say chat with them, what that basically means when Johnny and Sean are chatting together is that Sean is chatting and Johnny and I are trying to get a word in edgewise. He is a force of nature, and everyone kind of orbits around him.

Johnny is also a fantastic influence on that team. It's an interesting team, dynamic actually, isn't it? There's nothing subtle there.

James Blatch: No, not really. There's obviously just three of them, so Dave didn't go to NINC because he doesn't leave his house very much as far as I can make out. Dave is very different from Johnny and Sean, much quieter, more reflective. But no, you're right, Johnny and Sean are both big personalities.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I think in the interview, we talk about the fact that Johnny is quite extroverted and not shy, and Sean is quite shy, which obviously is the polar opposite.

And then, you mentioned Jo Penn. That's a bit like Jo, who stands up in front of, I saw her recently at a conference in London standing up in front of 400 people. At the end of the talk, mentioning the fact that this was really difficult for her and that she's introverted and finds it very difficult to stand up and talk to people.

There was a lot of sympathy in the room because suddenly, in that space, particularly authors, you get a lots of people who are exactly the same as that, but want to know how to build forward.

And, Sean is someone who takes that on, I think. Despite, it is quite difficult to imagine him as a shy individual, but it is something I think he struggles with a little bit.

Anyway, enough of the personality breakdown. Should we get on with the interview?

James Blatch: Let's do it.

Mark Dawson: Let's do that. Let's hear from Johnny and Sean. Mark and I will be back off the back.

Johnny and Sean. That's your mic. Look how professional. I'm now gaga because I'm in front of Self-Publishing Podcast professionals.

Sean: No one's ever used the word professional in our space before.

Mark Dawson: Definitely trying to make it a little like I am, so. Welcome to the SPF podcast.

Sean: Thank you.

Mark Dawson: In fact, Sean, you come back here because you are, I think the two of you are really, really are guest and you are fantastic and full of energy. Your podcast is known for that and your lives actually, complicated and busy, in terms of publishing.

I struggle to keep up. That's one of the reasons why I think we're going to have you on there. Try and see what's going at the moment, and what's working.

Sean: Yeah, you know us. We'll talk about anything. Just ask the questions.

Mark Dawson: Let's start off by talking about NINC because that's where we are at today. Obviously, this podcast is going to go out in a few weeks. You have, just probably my fault, noises of. You've just done a two hour presentation, which is quite a big ask. I know on a recent podcast, I've

listening recently, you talked about not wanting to plan too much for your presentations.

### **How did you approach it today?**

Sean: Yeah, well, that's not our strength. We actually we did the keynote at Author Marketing Live. Four years ago. Was is it that long?

Johnny: I think so.

Sean: So, four years ago. That's a long time. It was one of those things where they give you the PowerPoint and they said, fill it in. So, it's their template and PowerPoints.

If we're going to make a keynote, we kind of want to do it our way and we couldn't. We had the template and that was hard enough. We thought this is a professional thing, like, we're going to actually do this, it's a keynote. I think it was our first time ever doing anything together, at least.

We're going to do this. We're going to take it seriously, so we printed off the entire deck. We went to a coffee shop about two hours before we're supposed to keynote. We're looking at these and we're trying really hard. We're giving it the college try, like, people are here.

They expect us to keynote. We're going be professional. We got through three pages, maybe, maybe, and said, this does not make any sense. This is not who we are. We don't work off of bullet points. It's not stilted.

Even then, I think we did our job that we were supposed to do for that keynote, but this was much more relaxed because we just had 17 images, essentially. We had a lot of notes, but I'd say, we were 90% off script.

Johnny: Yeah, we didn't hit a lot of the notes. So much of it was extemporaneous. It's was just like, well, here's a story that occurring to me. Yeah, we were just rolling with it.

James Blatch: We just spoke to Judy, who is president-elect and organized this conference and she said, the room is packed, no one wanted to leave, there was a vibrancy, and everyone was really pleased. So, that was just a bit of feedback for you.

Johnny: Well, thank you.

Sean: That's fantastic. It's really nice. I mean, there was definitely the laughter, which is good. It makes us feel, I think when we feel a little bit of warmth like that from laughter, it gives us permission to just be ourselves more.

We don't have a lot of secrets. We're very interested in just telling it like it is. That's kind of hard when you go into a situation like this because, we're not necessarily talking to our people. I mean, we know that there were a few people in the audience who know who we are.

You try to talk to them, but you want to connect with the whole entire room. It's harder when people don't know who you are because you want to make sure that you are yourself, but you're a version of yourself that's not offending to them in some way.

We do like our four letter words and we like to be colorful, and you don't know if you're going to rub somebody the wrong way, but as much as I don't want to rub anyone the wrong way or hurt their feelings, or say anything that's going to clash with their sensibilities, I need to be myself because that's the way that I deliver information the best.

Johnny: Right, like we could deliver a mediocre version of ourselves in order to not offend anybody, but it's not going to be as good of a

presentation. It's going to be much more stilted and we're not going to get that dynamic audience interaction.

James Blatch: It's not you, is it? You do get the explicit type more than we do. What I like is that, within 30 seconds of this interview you added it to this.

Sean: I know, and I thought damn it, I really shouldn't have done that, but it's already there.

Johnny: You guys should because when you swear with a UK accent it's just so much more exquisite than when we do.

Sean: I know, you guys, it's like poetry. I could listen to like 45 minutes of just swearing from the UK.

James Blatch: Well, there's several TV programs that do just that and they try and exactly like that.

**Is this a conscious decision of you guys to get out more and do conferences? Or, did you just get invited and think, we'll do it?**

Johnny: No, we were invited. We wanted to go to NINC for a while. This is something that's been on our list. We couldn't really make room for it. Honestly, if we hadn't been invited to speak, I don't think we would have come this year.

Sean: We wouldn't have come. In fact, this was really hard because we've been really, really busy, even just a couple weeks ago. Last week was, literally no exaggeration, the busiest week, the most significant week in Sterling & Stone.

Johnny: All hands on deck from everybody in the company.

Sean: Yeah, it was a crazy, nuts week. I worked 300 hours in September. I traveled and so, I wasn't looking forward to NINC, to be honest, at all. I had to make the deck last weekend after this crazy, crazy week. It's was nuts, but it was worth it. It was really great to, once the deck was done, we're all about reframing in the company.

Once of the stories that Johnny told earlier today, that I really like was, back a few years ago when I had all this crap that I had to do that was just admin, just crap, right? Okay, we've got to fix this cover. We got to do that and make all the lists and all the things you have to do when you've been at it for a few years, and you've been throwing shit against the wall. Now, you're, okay, I know what works, but I have to go fix all this stuff that doesn't work. I hated it.

It was admin every day. I'm not making new stuff. I'm fixing old stuff, but we reframed it. Instead of admin, it became inventory management. Inventory management is something you can make money on, right? So then, I'm excited. Okay, inventory management.

James Blatch: You rebranded your admin?

Johnny: Yes, absolutely.

Sean: Yes, exactly. There is value in that. Here, it was the same thing and we rebranded this as, at the end of the year, we do something called The Avalanche. That's just all of our vomit of our information. This is what our next year looks like.

We're in quarter four right now, so our job right now is to sew up this year and really plot out next year. That's something that we don't normally do until around November, but we thought, you know what, we're going to be together for five days.

**James Blatch: You were saying, you don't actually get together in person very much at all, do you?**

Sean: Once a week.

Johnny: We do, we do. We have a regular reoccurring meeting that's usually two hours every week because we live ten minutes from each other in Austin, Texas and we walk a lot.

This is the sort of thing, we've been saying, even though we do live close to each other and we can do that, we wanted to basically sequester ourselves. We're like a co-working space, a hotel room where we can't go home and go home for like, getting snacks.

Sean: Yeah, we were going to do our end of the year planning anyway, separate from, just like, lock ourselves in that space.

Johnny: You've just got to get in there with a whiteboard and what are we going to do with the goals going forward. We're like, we have lots of time now, so why don't we just combine them. That was a really good idea.

Sean: Yeah, so we just became, okay, now the job is to get the NINC job done, but also get the entire outline for 2018 done, so the five days we have together can be really fruitful.

Johnny: Which was really easy, honestly, right? No big deal, just give us food.

Sean: Yeah, just give me food. Yeah, so this outline is about 10,000 words and they're bullet points, but that's what our year looks like this year.

Johnny: And, we had been together for two days and I think we'd gotten through maybe 60% of it.

Sean: Maybe.

Johnny: So, it's ongoing.

Sean: Yeah, and we'll have to have actual discussions from all of those points. These are actually just getting through it once.

But the key is, like last year, we did the same thing and last year was a bigger deal. When we had The Avalanche, we flew everybody in from the company and we sat there and we really focused. We broke it down, but this year, well, let's go back to last year.

Last year, our number one goal, this is what we kind of define not just what our year looks like, but what our actual goals are.

Sean: So, we can be tangible about, this is what we're going to do and this is how we're going to do it, because it's not just what, it's how.

You can make an outline with a bunch of line items, but if you don't actually have the systems to put in place to do the line items, it's just intellectual masturbation. Like, there's nothing to actually gain there. At least, masturbation you have something to show for when you're done. This is nothing.

Johnny: There's that explicit check again.

Sean: Last year, our number one goal was to prepare for 2018.

Johnny: That's the washboard for the entire year, 2017's goal, prepare for 2018.

Sean: We have a lot of smaller goals.

James Blatch: 2018 was always going to be a big-

Johnny: Like, since 2015, yeah.

Sean: We've been preparing for 2018 for several years now. It's been like look, we've got to make baby steps, baby steps, baby steps, baby steps.

We've always had our eye on 2018 as being Sterling & Stone's year. Now, we've done everything in 2017 that we're supposed to do to kind of block that out and make the last quarter as significant as it can be, so that we can do those tweaks, so that 2018 can be the year that we've been dreaming about for a few.

James Blatch: Okay. It is a complicated world that you live in and each project, I'm to keep up with everything, that's one of the reasons we're going to chat with you today.

Is 2018, is this going to be a very, very commercially driven year? I know you've started a few projects in the past, and then decided that, that was horrible and moved on, which is great because we all learned and listened to that process.

### **Are you through that you've done enough learning for now?**

Johnny: Well, it's a few things. A lot of it is internal. Of lot of it is, we had a lot of just, I mean, business stuff. I know that this isn't probably interesting to the Self Publishing Formula audience, right?

Sterling & Stone, in general, it was bloated. We needed to refine our internal systems. We didn't have insurance and payroll. We had people without job descriptions, who were like, well, we just like these people. And so, we were finding a ton of stuff.

Sean: We spent a lot of time this year hiring, or last year too, hiring people and not positions. That's a huge difference. Until that light bulb went on for

us, and we realized, oh, we're just hiring really awesome people, but we don't necessarily have a position that they can fill, so that they can feel good about their contribution to the company and we can feel good about their contribution to the company. We had to fix a few things before we could actually scale.

Johnny: But, we're very much where we want to be in terms of that right now. Sterling & Stone is lean and mean. Our structure is sound. We're protective, we're not doing things stupidly anymore.

### **Now, just last week, Story Shop just launched.**

Sean: After 30 months.

Johnny: After 30 months of development, and so it's got the free writer module and seven day trial free for the pro. That's out now and so, in 2018 one of the things we're going to want to do is scale that.

We just launched Stories to Go, which is something that we're going to continue to iterate forward. We have three months to basically, okay, so now we're past kind of a low period, right now, where things were really, really tough and we were trying to realize a lot of it.

Sean: We basically drained the bank account. We went down to nothing.

Johnny: We more than drained the bank account.

James Blatch: That's always a bit scary.

Johnny: Yes.

Sean: When I was 18 years old, my best friend was named Jimmy, we went on this road trip. The whole thing was, we don't know where we're going to go because that's the adventure. We're 18, we're just going to get in the

car and drive. We drove to Vegas because that's what you do when you live in California.

Johnny: You're in Logan?

Sean: No, not yet. No fear or loathing actually. Then, we came back. We were crossing into the boarder and we were kind of low on gas. We thought, should we get gas or just keep going?

We decided to keep going because we were 18, no children, no family, fearless, no loathing, keep going. We ran out of gas in front of the pump. We could not red lined more than that.

Johnny: I've actually done that.

Sean: And, this wasn't like, there's a gas station 10 miles that way and 10 miles that way. We were within 100 miles of nothing and we ran out in front of the pump. Like, the car just stopped. It was dead and we were in front of the pump.

That's what we did in September at Sterling & Stone. It's because you can't develop quality software for 30 months and not charge for it and just keep developing and keep developing without there being a huge emotional and financial tax to the company, right?

Johnny: That's what preparing has been about. It's been about, how do we balance forward momentum, and continue smart investing in a time when we're like, dude, how are we going to pay our bills. We needed to balance those things, and honestly, I feel like we really did.

James Blatch: You really did, yeah.

**Johnny: Last week we launched, you've told this story like three times now, so I'm going to tell it now.**

Sean: Well, it's so good.

Johnny: Last week, we launched, we did boot camp. We did a boot camp last year. I think this is a thing we're going to do now just like a gift to our audience. We did that.

We did an initiative called Stories to Go, which is a collaborative packages that we're selling now. We launched Story Shop after 30 months of development, and we launched Bringing Writers In.

We're going to work with them on production model. We're going to show Ron going forward. That was a huge week. I mean, Sean mentioned he worked 300 hours, but everybody was over capacity. Everybody in the company was over capacity.

Sean: It was also amazing to see all hands on deck. To see that everybody who works at the company loves the company so deeply.

Johnny: They gave fives on a fifteen five.

Sean: Right, right.

Johnny: So, we're over worked and we're really excited.

Sean: We have this thing called fifteen five. It's where everyone in the company kind of has to say, the premise for fifteen five is that it takes fifteen minutes to fill out and five minutes to evaluate. So, like Johnny reports to me. I report to Johnny. We're supposed to spend 15 minutes thinking about our week and detailing this.

This is where I'm at, and then, I'm supposed to spend five minutes checking that. He's supposed to spend five minutes, and everyone in the company does this. Everybody has somebody that is checking in on them. You're

suppose to evaluate how you're feeling, one to five. These fluctuate because life fluctuates.

Johnny: At least somebody on the company was a one, just two weeks before.

Sean: Yeah, just two weeks before. So, we have this huge, crazy week, all hands on deck, nuts, everyone's working, no one is sleeping.

Johnny: Everybody is at 120% of their hours or more.

Sean: And then, they end the week with all fives.

James Blatch: Wow.

Sean: So, we've got a company filled with fives even though they're all over worked and it's because they truly love what they're doing and what we're doing.

James Blatch: That kind of doesn't surprise me actually, particularly, knowing you guys.

### **From my own point of view, it's purpose that drives you, right?**

Sean: Yes.

James Blatch: And the people who are miserable at work, I think just fill their days.

Sean: There's a lot in life.

James Blatch: Yeah, and if they were suddenly really busy and there was something crystal for them to do, their satisfaction would hit the roof.

Johnny: And that's actually something from, I don't want to go too off-track, topic, but that the book, Good to Great, by, who wrote that? Do you know?

Sean: No, actually I'm glad that you went there because that's Jim Collins.

Johnny: Right, so the point is, they looked at people, companies that have gone from good to great, unsurprisingly.

Sean: Wait, they went from good to great?

Johnny: They went from good to great and they sustained it. And it was, they had to start at good. They couldn't have started at great.

The number one thing in terms of like, it was a visionary leader who was selfless, but also people who were driven by belief in the company. It had nothing to do with salaries. I think it might have been negatively correlated.

Sean: Yeah, I think it was.

Johnny: People who were underpaid.

Sean: People want appreciation more than they want money.

Johnny: Under appreciation, they want to feel like they are part of something.

Sean: To answer your question the difference between going into next year and this year, we've tried a lot of things and a lot of things have failed, but right now, this actually comes from the same book, the hedgehog concept.

The companies that went from good to great, it's because they had a hedge hog concept.

**Do you want to talk about hedgehog concept or is that too much?**

Johnny: The biggest thing that we did this year was the hedgehog concept. We have a thing in the company now that we call blinds and Manila. What this means is-

James Blatch: Sean, do a little bit for us.

Johnny: Oh yeah, totally cool for me a little bit for you. So, Sean had an initiative where he didn't literally want to make window blinds in Manila, but it was kind of like that.

Sean: For the record, this idea is awesome.

Johnny: But had nothing-

Sean: It's probably a hundred million dollar idea, but it has nothing to do with our company.

Johnny: Nothing to do with our company. I'm like, dude, what does this possible have to do with what we're doing? He's like, well, it's based on storytelling. I'm like, yeah, it is, like not really.

Sean: Very sideways.

James Blatch: Everything is, yeah.

Johnny: Right, so basically everything has to connect to our core focus. Our company's mission basically is: our six point intro is we make stories and smarter artists.

Everything needs to either be involved in storytelling or basically creative education. If it doesn't relate to that, then we really shouldn't be doing it. We shouldn't be making rolling blinds in Manila.

Sean: Asshole.

Johnny: Story Shop is perfect because it is empowering artists. It's making smarter artists. Stories to Go is making smarter artists. Where did we begin with this?

Sean: Well no, it's because every single thing in the company touches everything else. If you rewind a year ago, the company ran on my fuel.

Johnny: By fuel, meaning like, whoa, crazy ideas.

Sean: That's not necessarily the best way to run a company. It was around a year ago. A year ago, we really realized, whoa, we're really different people and we were treating-

Johnny: By different people, you mean, me and you.

Sean: Yeah. We were treating-

Johnny: Yeah, we're really making that case. Aren't we?

Sean: We were running the company as co-CEOs.

Johnny: Which is stupid.

Sean: Like, you don't do that. So now, I'm the CEO. He's the COO. That means that, I have the ideas.

Johnny: You're the visionary and I'm the articulator.

Sean: Right.

Johnny: It's not an exact comparison.

Sean: If you read the book, Rocket Fuel. They really go into this, where great companies can run with a visionary and an articulator, but they're different people with different functions.

The analogy that I really, really love is, yeah, I'll get up in the air, but Johnny has to help me land the plane, right?

Johnny: And, you also need somebody to tell you, no.

Sean: And, I need somebody to tell me, no. So, our CFO, his wife, will then like, no, no, no, because I do answer problems with money. I just so don't care about money as much as I care about momentum.

I'll spend my way out of things, right? Throw more money at Story Shop. Throw money at this idea. We need to have lean business that makes sense, quarter to quarter. It can't just go on my raw enthusiasm.

From November on of last year, we've really taken great pains to make sure we're that we're making the right decisions for the right reasons and we're putting the right initiatives on our plate.

Johnny: And the other thing, is to serve more than two masters. That's the other thing.

Story Shop can't just be like we're building a school software product. It has to be something that ties into, I mean, it ties into Stories to Go, right?

Sean: The Stories to Go products go into Story Shop. Story Shop is what we built everything in. It's part of our future publishing model and the way that we're going to keep adding modules to that. We want everybody using that.

Story Shop is the bridge. It's smarter artists using it. We're using it. Stories to Go is, I know we haven't talked very much about that.

**James Blatch: I want to talk about both of them from a sort of consumer point of view.**

Sean: It works for us because we're creating inventory that has no spoilage. I come from the flower business, right?

James Blatch: I remember.

Johnny: No spoilage in the flower business.

Sean: If you're in the flower business, it's the worst thing ever. On Valentine's Day, you have this inventory, which is really expensive. We'll spend \$20,000 dollars on inventory before Valentine's Day with fresh flowers. Guess how much that inventory is worth on February 15th? Right? It's all gamble and you're not creating any assets.

That was very much in my mind as we were building Stories to Go. What can we do or rebuild forever assets?

We built something that is 100%. We can take it right off the shelf and now we're going to build this for ourselves, or someone can buy it, but there's no spoilage.

Either way, it's IP. Whether selling the IP or we're using the IP in a queue because now we're doing the production model, so we'll have other writers who could pull this off the shelf.

**James Blatch: So, it's not a million miles away from a cover designer using their rejected covers as an off the shelf pre-design tool?**

Sean: Okay, yes. Here's the difference. Sorry. So, here's the difference with a cover designer, there're rejected covers. Here we're actually putting on

our marketer's hats and reverse engineering what a best seller looks like. So, what does a best seller look like, feel like, smell like?

Johnny: You're basically starting with primary conversion elements. That's what I love about Stories to Go.

James Blatch: Shall we focus on Stories to Go and then, do Story Shop.

Sean: You're the boss, man.

James Blatch: Yeah, yeah. I think people are intrigued by this and it's a very interesting concept.

### **Stories to Go, just explain the concept, first of all.**

Sean: Do you want to talk about how you hated the idea for a while?

Johnny: Well, I didn't understand the idea. So, Stories to Go, it's [storiestogo.io](http://storiestogo.io). Basically, the idea is, it's a collaboration package.

But, I didn't understand it, to Sean's point because I'm like, why would somebody want to buy basically an outline and a cover and some meetings and some stuff?

I just didn't get it until it dawned on me that this is basically, exactly how I write. Sean creates the characters, and the world, and creates an outline.

I don't make the cover. I don't come up with the marketing plan. I don't have to worry about a collaborative partner because I have one.

That's what Stories to Go is based on. We're basically like, if you're the person who's, you don't have to worry about getting hung up on with like, what's going to happen next. You just write the draft. And, that's the sort of thing that we're like, okay, that makes sense.

Sean: Yeah, the tag line is, we collaborate, you keep the copyright.

James Blatch: So, I was going to ask about it.

**What's the long term for the company, for Sterling & Stone? Is it an off the shelf package that's sold? There's obviously collaboration. Do you hold on to some rights?**

Sean: No, no rights. No, we hold no rights, but so like, Dave. Dave had a hard time with this. You know Dave, right?

James Blatch: Yeah.

Sean: Dave was like, wait a minute. You're asking me to outline stuff that we're not even going to write? He's bothered by this, right? But, we've taught him that ideas aren't precious.

Dave's superpowers are telling stories. He doesn't have to write a 100,000 word version of that story. He can tell the three act structure of that story.

We got very good at that three act structure because a competent writer, who understands structure, or can at least adhere to structure, is going to be much more successful than a competent writer who is just, or a great writer even, who doesn't adhere to structure.

Readers need structure. Repeat: readers need structure. They crave structure. When we're trying to navigate beyond that, that's when we don't sell books.

If you look at our catalog, the books that we're kind of winging it, are the books that don't do as well as the books that are structured. There's a reason for that.

So, yes, it's kind of like rejected covers, but we didn't approach it that way. What we approached is, these aren't rejected covers, they're covers we designed.

Johnny: Yeah, I don't think it's rejected covers because honestly we, on a lark a few years ago, we said, we're going to write a book based on a cover.

We had a cover that we really liked. It's a whole long story. Jason Gurely, cover designer, was retiring. The only way we could get cover from him was a pre-made. We were like, so okay, if we can do this, we're going to turn lemons into lemonade. We're going to write a story based on a cover.

James Blatch: Based on the cover.

Johnny: Rather than the other way around. We were like, wow, that was awesome.

Sean: Yeah, at the time it was our favorite book we'd ever written.

Johnny: So the idea of saying, what most people do is they write the book, and then, they're like, okay let me try to make a commercial cover, hopefully, out of this. Let me try to write a commercial blurb.

We're flipping that around and saying, cover is the number one conversion element basically deciding whether people buy your book. The product description is the number two conversion element, so let's start with the cover.

Sean: And, with the cover, it's not just the cover it's the concept and the tag line. So, we're copywriters. We get that.

If we can take care of all the base conversion elements, look, we know what popular genre is. We know what a popular cover is going, we know what

BookBub is going to accept, right? I mean, we don't know what BookBub is going to accept, but we understand that they're a conversion company.

That their main allegiance is not to authors, it's to readers. So, they have to protect that relationship by giving the readers the best thing. So, they're conversion experts.

If they see a cover that is, wow, that's a very commercial cover, with a commercial tag line that we know readers are going to click on, and, wow, is that a good product description, that's the stuff that even really competent writers, that can take it 90% of the way, can't get the rest of the way. This sets them up for success ahead of time because all that stuff is just taken care of.

James Blatch: It's a very focused commercial approach.

**It's very, very reminiscent of Adam Croft who started with his tag line, Would you kill your wife to save your daughter?**

Sean: See, that's fantastic.

James Blatch: He started with that. He started with a Facebook cover, and then, he went and wrote the book. And, it was the book that changed his life.

Sean: Yes, that's really smart. A lot of artists reject that. They think, well, now I'm selling out.

How are you selling out? As long as you tell the story that you want to tell and connect with readers, aren't you doing much better for yourself then, what would you rather do, sell out or suffer obscurity?

James Blatch: You're preaching to the choir about that, but yeah, I know you do hear some people say, oh, tacky. Tacky and poor.

Sean: Yeah, right. But the thing is, we have never seen it as sacrifice at all. We love the stories that we tell. Even if we start out from a commercial place, there's still a story that is very much me. It's very much Johnny. It's very much Dave.

That's the whole thing, Dave was writing these stories, and for us, there's no spoilage, so yes, someone can take it off the shelf and write that, but if they don't, we still can.

Johnny: Oh, there's covers that I hope never sell. Dave is too. We're like, oh man, I hope that doesn't sell because I want to write that one. I don't want somebody else to buy that.

Sean: Or, show run it.

James Blatch: So, how many have you done?

Johnny: 40.

Sean: Yeah, we've done one-

James Blatch: Wow, no wonder you have no time in your lives.

Sean: Well, that was a crazy month.

Johnny: It was crazy. Yeah. But the whole idea is, we want it to be like a gallery. It's not like you can just go to storyshop.io.

Sean: Storiestogo.io.

Johnny: Sorry, storiestogo.io.

James Blatch: We'll move on to something.

Johnny: It's not like you can go to [storiestogo.io](http://storiestogo.io) and shop because we need to control the inventory. And, because they're collaboration packages, we can't just have people coming in any time and then our calendars up in the air.

We need to have people come in and then, basically it's a gallery opening. We're building a list for this. We're opening the gallery. It's open from this window of time, and then, we're closing it, and we'll go build more to fill the next gallery, and open it again.

**James Blatch: Tell me about the process. Somebody comes in off the list, browses the gallery. They read a description or do they see the whole thing?**

Johnny: Let me take this because I'm the articulator, right?

Sean: Okay.

Johnny: Basically, there's a deposit. We're wondering how we're going to do this. Currently, it's, people put down a deposit and then they're able to see, they see a short synopsis, and the cover obviously, and the tag line. Then, they put down a deposit.

They can see the full version of the entire outline. If they want to proceed, they go ahead and they pay in full. It is a premium product. I'll just say it right here, it's \$5,000 dollars because it's a high touch product.

Then, we get in touch with them and they will have a one hour story meeting. For the first batch, it's with us. By the time this airs, it won't be with us. We're grooming story coaches.

They'll have a one-hour story meeting about the outline where they can ask their questions. They can say, I want to personalize it in this way. There are the changes that I want to make.

Sean: Right, because they truly are story starters. So even if you don't like the title, let's say, you can change the title. Now, the titles are copy written. We did think about what is a commercial title for this cover. Now, having said that, you can change the cover. You can change the title. You can make tweaks to it, but we suggest-

James Blatch: You put some thought into this already.

Sean: We gave you, it's not just a cover and a story. It is a marketing package. It is a package where, I think there's two authors that this really, really helps. Either the person who needs a really big head start, right?

I can write a competent story, but I don't know story structure, and there's so much to figure out with indie publishing, but if I work with, I mean, because ... I'll let you finish because there's so much more to it.

Johnny: Oh, I'm going to let you finish.

Sean: Or, a copywriter who is really, really fast at writing copy, but doesn't necessarily know what genre to choose, or isn't really familiar with story structure. Like somebody who can write well but has so many question marks, it's just an amazing head start.

Johnny: Right, so they would have the one hour story meeting with their story coach, or on this first round, us. They would also have a one hour meeting with a character consultant, basically, because our character starters are just brief. They're just very skeletal.

Oh, I want this person to be the hero with a heart of gold, or something like that, or hooker with a heart of gold. Then, they flesh them out. They'll have

that interview and then, our person will flesh them out, basically, help them to create fuller characters.

Sean: Right, because hooker with a heart of gold is great as a one liner, but that's not enough to write a book.

Johnny: Right. Then, it's their job to then take what we've given them, what we've discussed, go back and rewrite, like, flesh out the outline, create something that is more to them.

Sean: If you have a 6,000 word outline, make it 10,000 words. Add your own ideas for the story. You get a recording of the story, meaning you get transcripts.

James Blatch: This is the caricature, then, fleshes it out.

Sean: The storyteller.

James Blatch: The storyteller, okay, yeah.

**And, they start to add in their own voice at this point?**

Sean: Correct. And, then there are three-

Johnny: So, wait, wait, wait. Part of the story maybe-

James Blatch: You will get to finish.

Johnny: I know.

Sean: I'm going to let you finish.

Johnny: Part of the story meeting isn't just about the story, it's about the author, which is important.

James Blatch: Okay, yeah.

Johnny: What kind of author-

**James Blatch: It's partly your story guys listening to the author not the other way around always.**

Johnny: Yes, because it has to be. It has to be their story.

Sean: It has to be their story and a lot of it, we're building a series because that's where the money is, right? We have to know who you are as an author so that we can articulate the story that you can actually take to the finish line and further, right?

Johnny: So, then they will basically go back and once they have a completed outline they'll give it to us for a story jacket, which is our term for self-service.

It's a developmental edit on an outline, basically. If you get a developmental edit on a book, that can be really costly.

Sean: It can cost more than a story to go.

Johnny: And, you have to spend a bunch of time fixing something, which is once the draft is already done, right?

Sean: Which you order for one price.

Johnny: Exactly. This would be something at the outline stage. It would be a comment or a critique, and then, they would go back and revise that. Then, they would write the draft and they have three collaborative meetings during the process where they can save them up, or they can do back to back.

Sean: They can do act one, act two, or act three, or just all at once if you need that.

Johnny: Once they're done, then it is currently, in the current model, it's then in their court to get it edited.

Future iterations will include editing, but not this first one, or maybe even the second one. We haven't decided yet.

Then, once they're totally done and ready to launch, they'll get in touch. We'll have another meeting with one of our marketing and launch experts, who will create a custom marketing plan for them and deliver it.

Sean: That's again, based on who they are as an author.

Johnny: Correct.

Sean: So, what are your assets on a list, what genre, because it really does depend, and we found that after working with the apprentice authors for nine months that all of our advice had to be tailored to each person.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Sean: You just really can't, and actually, this is good circle around too because I remember the first time that I was on the show, I talked a little bit about building a course, right? We struggled with this for years, like years because our audience really wants us to build a course. They've always wanted us to build a course.

There's a part of us that's wanted to build a course. I mean, it's certainly like, the money is good, and we could do it once, build the asset, sell it over and over.

But after working with the apprentices, we really felt like there's no way to teach what we do without the experience of it. We just kept beating our heads against the wall.

### **How do we create a course that teaches this and actually gives people an asset?**

James Blatch: Finding that creative space that you were talking about. It would become a mediocre product because you're trying to make it fit.

Sean: Yes, and so instead of making a mediocre product that goes to everybody, we made the product that we think would actually work for fewer people.

James Blatch: Yeah, which is everybody doing that. Obviously you've got a few loose ends.

### **When is this launch?**

Johnny: Gallery one is live right now. Yeah, so by the time this goes, I'm sure it will be closed. So, there will be like a waiting list situation. We'll let people know.

James Blatch: How many are you going to let on board? All 40?

Johnny: 40.

James Blatch: You already said 40.

Johnny: But again, this is from the flower merchandising thing. We never expect we're going to sell all 40. Like that's just not the way it goes.

Sean: What's awesome is that we, literally, don't care. So like, Dave is, Dave kind of-

James Blatch: But, you could sell 40?

Johnny: We have enough already.

Sean: Yeah, we could.

James Blatch: A lot of work.

Sean: We've done well so far. But like, Dave is actually hoping that his don't sell.

**James Blatch: You've got them individually, last year have you?**

Johnny: Well, they shouldn't be. That is kind of the way that it happened, but the in theory, like, story to story. Dave shouldn't consult on a romance because he doesn't understand what happily ever after is.

Sean: Yeah, people had bought romances.

James Blatch: When does he murder her?

Sean: Right, right. No, a couple people because for the first batch that was the promise. You could ask for me, or Dave, or Johnny. There was somebody who bought a romance and they requested Dave.

We both had to say, no, no. Like, yes, you can ask for anybody, but you really shouldn't ask for Dave for a romance. That's not going to serve you. That's part of our job too, is to create these packages, it's to take it all the way. Like, who are you as an author and what does success mean to you?

James Blatch: And just to finish the journey then.

**They launch when they're ready, use of maps, and plan for them, and so on, and then, you get nothing more?**

Sean: Right.

Johnny: Oh, us? No, we get nothing more.

James Blatch: Okay. You must have discussed this as being a possibility for, Dave you said, was bold to this as being a possibility that you hold on to 10%.

Sean: It's a premium product.

Johnny: We make what we make on the front end.

Sean: Honestly, what you need to make on the back end to make up the cost of this, is really not that much.

Johnny: Yeah, and we could over produce, but the key is, we're still producing things that our writers can write. We're going to find, there are going to be some writers who end up publishing with us just because.

James Blatch: Of course.

Johnny: So, it's a way for us to filter a little bit too.

**James Blatch: Do you expect people to come back to you for the second and third in a series?**

Sean: I think we'll have some definite repeat customers. I think that there will be some people who will find this so efficient that it's just like, I mean honestly, I could see myself, not me because I have the team and we write this way, but if I was a solo person, and I knew I could just drop five grand

to save me all that time and I could just write, I could write a book every few weeks.

Johnny: Especially, subsequent books in a series with some sort of a discount or package deal or something like that, for sure.

Sean: Yeah, and again, it has to be for the right writer. For a lot of writers this is a terrible thing for them.

But, for the right writer who understands conversion, and really you have to be able to write fast, so you can be able to do it again, and again, and again, and again.

We spend more than \$5,000 dollars in pre-production every single time. I think a lot of authors don't think about the amount that they spend on pre-production. I think a lot of authors spend way more than five grand if they're actually counting their time, but they don't. They think my time is free, and so therefore, the time I'm in pre-production is free. So, my pre-production was zero, but I spend a 100 hours on it. Well, that doesn't add up at all.

James Blatch: Right, okay. The team made products that you've talked about, Story to Go and Story Shop, I can barely talk. Story Shop, let's move onto that one.

Sean: We have that effect on people.

James Blatch: Yeah, I can barely talk now. There are quite difficult to say there.

Sean: We call that st, st, st, story stuff, Stories to Go.

James Blatch: Yeah, do you do speech recognition.

**Story Shop, who wants to launch on Story Shop?**

Johnny: I'll go on Story Shop.

James Blatch: Will you be allowed to finish?

Johnny: I guess. I don't know.

Sean: I won't say anything for five minutes.

Johnny: Yeah, we'll see if that happens. Where do I begin?

Story Shop we did a Kickstarter. The idea was, we've done pre-production on kind of just on pencil and notepad, not literally, we did it in Scrivener. What I'm talking about here is basically, cast and characters, deciding who these characters are.

If we're going to do a movie, we tend to cast them. What actor would play this character, so, that's shorthand. We understand the kind of what the mannerisms are, like how they are, or what their mood is.

Locations, where does this story take place? What is the office of what this person looks like? So, there's a lot of other character.

What are the major elements that are in the story? Then, obviously, the beats, which is our outline.

We used to just do that in Scrivener and it was kind of clumsy because nothing was connected. We would have a bunch of individual files. Okay, well so, Mica Ryan is related to Issac Ryan. Okay, let me figure out who Issac Ryan is because I'm in Mica's thing. Oh, there he is. There's his file in Scrivener.

Story Shop, it's a web app where everything is connected. Contextually, you would establish Mica is Issac's brother, in this example and it's mutual, so if you look on Mica's page, it's almost like a social media profile.

So, if you look at Mica's profile, it would basically give here's who he is, here's who he casts, his brother is Issac, and you are able to click over to Issac, and say, okay here's who Issac is, here's what he's like.

One of the early mantras was, connect all the things. Everything needs to be able to be reference-able by everything else. So, you're writing the outline and you say, I'll stick with the Ryans.

Mica and Issac Ryan are together, but they're a contextual hotlink. So, it would be like, you'd be typing and you'd say, at Mica, and okay, Mica Ryan from the list. Then, as you're reading through the all answers you as you go, you can click on Mica.

Who was Mica, and a shadow box appears, and says, here's who he is. Originally this was planned as just a planning tool. It was pre-production. Just so you know what your story is.

**James Blatch: It's a help with consistency.**

Johnny: Well, cannon control is huge. So, the examples I've given, it hasn't been five minutes. So, Mica and Issac Ryan are characters from our world of being. The being is an incredible complex world.

Keeping track of who knows what secrets, who's with what political party, what happened in what year, is really, really hard, to the point where-

Sean: It has an eighty year timeline before our story begins.

Johnny: ... before this story begins. So, we won't write Beam season three, Beam season 4 until we have all of this stuff put in Story Shop because I

don't want to read all three books to try and figure out who is related to whom.

Sean: It's half a million words.

Johnny: It's ridiculous. That was the idea. It's based on the world. What does the world look like? Who is the president of the world? What are the key elements of the world, the political parties?

Andy Weir said that for his next book he was reinventing physics because you know he's not ambitious or anything.

If you have rules of swords, if you have magic in your world, what are the rules of the magic? That sort of thing. You need to keep track of what all that is. Everything is contextually linked within the beats, which is our outline.

That's where we were going to stop, until we said, you know what? It doesn't make sense to create a planning environment and then have to export or be jumping back and forth. And, I've done this.

I would go into Scrivener and be writing, and have a web browser open with Story Shop, and go, okay let me click back and forth. So, we said, let's create a writing environment within Story Shop. Now, at launch, you can click back and forth. Like okay, I'm going to write this chapter. You click over. You can still reference all the beats, reference all the people in the beats. It has distraction free mode and all this stuff. It's now a complete suite. We're going to just continue to develop and develop it.

**James Blatch: You can reverse engineer it a bit so if you decide to make changes to relationships, if there's a need to know if this guy is related?**

Johnny: Oh yeah, sure.

Sean: And, it's smart enough so if you say that, Rachel is Issac's mother. Well, it automatically populates that on Mica because they're brothers, so they clearly have the same mother. And, if you change that, it will change it on the other one too.

James Blatch: So, a very different product, sort of the craft side of things.

### **This is developed by coders?**

Sean: No, no, we partnered originally with a guy named Seth, Seth Atwood. He's a wizard.

Johnny: He knows the rules of magic.

James Blatch: He needs them.

Sean: Yeah, he has this beautiful, beautiful balance of left and right brain. He really likes typography and aesthetics and all that, but he's also a brilliant coder. I mean, it's been a slow road, 30 months.

It started out with Seth had a really great app idea. He said, hey, can I talk to you about an app I want to do? We talked for an hour and I gave him some feedback.

Then, I said, I have an idea for an app. I told him, at the time it was called, Master Beats. Then, I don't know, maybe a week later he called and he said, we need to build this other thing.

So, that was a long time ago, and we very slowly, but consistently tried to get our systems and our routine, and what helps up create better stories faster in a system, in a tool that everybody could use.

### **James Blatch: What does it run on?**

Johnny: It's on the web. It's cloud based. Honestly, I didn't understand this at all because this is something we were developing. I had trust and faith that I would get used to it. But, I was like, I don't know like, cloud writing. That doesn't make any sense, although, Ulysses is that way.

I've been using it, and I'll go upstairs, and I'll write, and I'll stop for the day, and I'll leave the window open. I don't close browser tabs. In the morning I'll be downstairs and I'll be on my wife's laptop, and I'll be, okay, it's still right there. I just go to the same page and continue writing.

Sean: It constantly saves. It's really elegant and it's only going to get more so. It took a long time to get there. Actually, the first version that we'd spent almost \$100,000 dollars on, we threw in the trash and started over, which was devastating.

Johnny: That was great.

James Blatch: A good moment for everyone, yeah.

Sean: We just knew we couldn't go forward with what we had because it wasn't good enough.

Johnny: It was built on the wrong technology stack.

Sean: We were basically trying to change the way people write, and you can't do that with anything less than just fantastic.

### **James Blatch: Where is this available and how much is it?**

Johnny: It's at [storyshop.io](http://storyshop.io). It's \$9.99, nine dollars and ninety-nine cents a month or \$99 dollars a year, although, we do now have, basically the writer component.

The part where you just write has rudimentary outlining capability. Nothing like the robust stuff that I talked about. It's actually free for up to three stories. If you just want to write and do rudimentary planning, it's free forever.

It does have a free seven day trial of what we're calling, Story Shop Pro, which includes everything. But, basically, \$9.99 a month or \$99 a year. We did choose the software as a service model, which people pushed back a little bit on, but Ulysses has established that.

And the beauty of that, I don't want to go too far in depth on this but, a pay once model doesn't have any incentive for the developer to continue to make it better because you have to continually market to new customers.

Our idea is, anything we make in, 90% of it or more is going right back into development because we have timelines that we want to establish. We want to build more templates. There's a tone of other things.

Sean: For us, it is our tool. Like, the whole thing is, we built it.

Johnny: Built in what we want.

Sean: Yeah, we build what we want and we want a lot more than what it does right now. We're really happy with where it is, but it needs to go a lot, lot further. If we say, what is five years from now look like? We're really, really far from there.

We need millions of dollars to build the thing that we actually want to use that's going to change story telling for everybody.

James Blatch: It's going well?

Sean: Oh yeah, yeah.

Johnny: Yeah. Especially, after launch. Like, getting up to launch was just, everybody was all hands on deck. When we threw it away, that was a fun day, but yeah, I just love it. It's my tool now.

Sean: Yeah, the version that we have right now is really pleasant to use. It's a delightful experience. I haven't actually written in it yet. Johnny's been able to write in it. All of my work has been planning and not actual writing.

I cannot imagine going back to what it's like to work without it. I actually had to do that for Stories to Go because it was a lot of writing and not planning. Once we expand on those stories, then you write characters and stuff like that, but this was basically just 40 paragraphs.

When we started it, writer wasn't quite finished yet. I just ended up having to do everything in just plain old Word, and I hated it. It was like, oh my, I feel like I went back in time.

James Blatch: Well, this could be huge. I mean, Scrivener has turned into a huge monster. I mean, you talk about the subscription, but personally, I prefer it with my software now where you use Adobe Creative Client for this stuff. I much prefer the subscription because it gets updated with the latest software.

Johnny: I do too.

Sean: I prefer it too just because I just think of it as a business expense.

James Blatch: Well, exactly.

Sean: And, where in business do you get to pay for it once and then continually use it to improve your business and never pay for it?

Johnny: And, it gets better all the time.

James Blatch: Scrivener kind of stands out as being unusual because it's kind of a favorite.

Johnny: Yes, but look how slow development is.

Sean: I bet, Keith, the Scrivener guy, wishes that he had a subscription model ten years ago.

James Blatch: He'd be a billionaire for starts.

Sean: You know if he had done that ten years ago, there would have been no room for Story Shop because Scrivener would be amazing, but they've stunted development because they made money.

Johnny: But, we're a collaborative company. We do love Scrivener. I mean, I am so not going to cross that off.

Sean: We wouldn't have a career without Scrivener.

Johnny: Yeah, I love Scrivener but that said, we had a lot of problems with collaboration on it because we're collaborative writers.

Sean: It's not a collaborative tool.

Johnny: Yeah, Sean could never work on a project while I was in it because only one person can have it open at once. We had drop box sync issues because the files are so big. Now, it's a real time collaborative.

Sean: And, the way they're organized too.

Johnny: Yeah, you can see it's almost like Google Doc. It's where you can see somebody, oh, somebody's typing, right? You can watch the words form on the page.

Sean: Yeah, we had a word builder summit a couple of months ago. Story Shop wasn't out yet, publicly the way it is now. We were using it in-house and we had it tested because there were going to be nine people in the world at the same time. We were handling it like a writers room.

We wanted to make sure there was no lag or slow down and we could all be on it at the same time. We field tested it, nine people in the world at the same time. There was no lag. There was no slow down. That's a beautiful thing because we are a collaborative company. Without a collaborative tool, we're handicapped.

Johnny: And down the road, we can't do this right now, but the intention is to have a full suite of editors' tools. Right now, you still have to export to Word just like you would with Scrivener because track changes. This is what we're talking about future development.

Being able to do track changes in Scrivener would be amazing. You just give your editor access to the world. It never has to leave your writing tool. They can work in it when you're writing.

Sean: And, that's exactly it. We're trying to build more things like planning tools, anything that you can do to stay in your workspace. Story Shop is a really intentional name. We wanted a workshop feel. You go there to create. You should not be changing tools from your planning, to your editing.

**James Blatch: It is such a pain to having to export to it. I hate it.**

Sean: If you have one environment, where everything from the first seed of an idea to your eventual compile is all in one place and you include your planning, like okay, we're going to have this, I mean, this is years away, but, your planning stuff should be, everything should be in there. It should be one tool. Right now, authors, creatives need way too many tools to get their stuff done.

**James Blatch: That's going to be really cool in a few years when there's editors that have been Story Shop certified.**

Johnny: Yes, absolutely.

Sean: Yeah, absolutely.

James Blatch: Well, as always, you're not too ambitious. You just want to change everything, the way that we do things.

Johnny: Just a little.

Sean: We haven't even scratched the surface how we want to change the world.

James Blatch: I'm aware of that. We've been going for 45, 50 minutes. It's been brilliant, I mean.

Johnny: We have a history of that.

James Blatch: The energy in the room is always strong particularly Sean, it's kind of like, I feel like I'm recharged slightly whenever I talk to Sean.

Sean: That's great.

Johnny: That makes me feel empty. I usually feel exhausted. I have to filter all this.

Sean: You should talk to my wife because she could probably use some of that.

James Blatch: It's been great. Well done for the soft opening. It went really well at NINC. I know, you've said it in the past, that you're a little bit shy.

Johnny: I'm not though. He seems like an extrovert, but he's not.

Sean: I actually love being in front of people. I'm like an ambivert, right? I need to recharge a bit. I dig being in front of people. I thought that was great.

Johnny: I feel really exposed.

Sean: But, I'm good at it. Like, once I'm up there and I'm feeling, especially, like it was easy today because I had Johnny with me, so I wasn't alone. The last time I had to keynote, I actually bitched out.

Johnny: We're a little codependent.

**James Blatch: You get nervous.**

Sean: Yeah, I get really nervous and I hate it.

Johnny: He had to carry a security blanket up on stage.

Sean: I did. That was for Johnathan Fields Camp Good Life. I was supposed to do the Saturday morning keynote. I just lost my shit. I went up to him and I'm like, Johnathan, I'm sorry but can we just sit up on the stage like together on bar stools and just interview me. Then, he asked me like three questions and then I was fine.

James Blatch: And, no one would think that about you, but there you go. Look, it's been brilliant. We've got to bring it to an end. I hope you'll come back on the show at sometime.

Sean: Any time.

James Blatch: And, I think you're going to have a few visitors to the two products.

Sean: You all do great work and we're happy to support you however we can.

Johnny: Yeah, absolutely.

James Blatch: There we go. Really enjoyed chatting to them. They are a force to be reckoned with in this sphere. We carried on chatting off to obviously over a few beers in the evening and made the point that we are still in the early adopter phase of self-publishing.

There are lots of ideas flying around and they're obviously full of ideas and coming up with new things all the time, new products, etc. No one really knows what this is going to look like in ten years.

I mean, that's the truth of it and how this is quite going to work. I do think that you're not going to see, in ten year's time, will it be the case of somebody working in isolation, trying to find a cover designer, find themselves there, find a community to help them guide them through, will there be, it won't be the big publishers because I think they're never going to quite get together, get themselves together without, but there will be organizations that will be your holding hand through it.

They're more hands on than we are. Where we encourage people to do everything themselves, well I think some organizations will spring up. They'll help you with the story development, etc. I guess that's where SPP, well I should say, Sterling & Stone are positioning themselves at the moment.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, they're moving into lots of different areas. It is very hard to say how things will pan out over the next few years. There will be all

kinds of different options available for five, six or one different kinds of things, I suppose.

For me, personally, I'm always going to be, the stories will always be my stories. There will be things that I've worked on and I'm passionate about. Other writers may have different views about that. It's interesting. There's going to be lots of changes as things continue to evolve.

James Blatch: Yeah, and somethings are controversial and somethings aren't. We'll see won't we? Somethings will fly, somethings will sink. We know that from our own experience.

We just have to be, I think, wary particularly with the bigger companies. We get quite a few people that come to us very often and say, I published my first book last year. It cost me \$25,000 dollars and it didn't sell.

And I think, why did it cost you \$25,000 dollars? Because you went to a company that asked you for \$25,000 dollars to do some of the basic work that you can do yourself and you've got to be very wary of that.

They're the people that need to be aware of the big traditional publishers, frankly. Who are we talking to the other week? I was listening to, I think it was John Burman, wasn't it, his interview? Couple of weeks ago who said, in all honesty, the traditional publishers would probably like to kill off the Ebook because they see it and that when it first came along, they thought, this is going to be great for them.

Now, they're terrified by what's happening to it. So, you have to be wary of them as well unless they can find it in themselves to adapt. This other cadre of companies, of which I think we've positioned ourselves there, these are the ones that are, they're names you've never heard of until two or three years ago, are the ones that are going to be part of this exciting new world, this multi-billion, turnover industry.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, absolutely. It is worth remembering. I've said this a lot though, we are at the start of things and it's easy to forget that's true.

I speak at enough conferences all around the world really, when people have no idea what's possible. No idea whatsoever. Last time I did that, people just came up to me and said, I didn't know that I could publish to Amazon myself. That's very basic.

If you don't know that, then you won't know anything else about half the stuff that we talked about on this show. People that are listening are, the things to take away from this, here's my Christmas thought, Mark's Christmas thought for the year, for the years that you are in the 1% of people, at the absolute maximum, probably less than that, of everyone who is interested in writing or who is writing, the fact that you are listening to a podcast about self publishing with James in his shed, and me in my office, is that, you are ahead of the crowd.

You have a great advantage. You are bound to do much better because you are forward thinking and prepared to look at different ways of doing things. Well done to you for being in that position and for putting up with us for nearly 100 episodes.

James Blatch: Yeah, this is quite exciting for us, we're about to tick over, so episode 98 and this episode. It's the pajama set really. There should be a podcast called the pajama set that encompasses the army of individuals across the globe now who don't leave their home and run significant businesses.

Whether it's a business that gives them enough money to pay their mortgage and live their life, or it's a business that's making them rich. We are the pajama set.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, I'll come back to you on that. You need to copy to me. You make us look and sound good.

James Blatch: I was going to go onto our lawyers and copyright that one, just in case for the future. Good, okay, look, it's an opportunity for us to say, a very happy Christmas, happy holidays, as I believe you say in the United States, happy Christmas, and probably in other parts of the world, something else. But, we're going to say, happy Christmas because in the UK it's been absolute privilege as ever to have you with us this year.

Thank you so much indeed for listening. It's a growing community. It's a community that we are thrilled to be a part of. We love it when you Tweet us, when you drop a note on Facebook, or you email us at, [support@selfpublisherformula.com](mailto:support@selfpublisherformula.com).

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If you're in the gold level there's lots of goodies coming your way, not just the mug but the chance to win courses, the chance to win and analysis of your marketing setup. Good, I think that's it, so happy Christmas Mark.

Mark Dawson: Happy Christmas James.

James Blatch: I've got my jumper on, but you actually look like Father Christmas.

Mark Dawson: I do. Yeah, one of the things on my Christmas list is actually a beard maintenance kit. It's ridiculous the things you can buy these days. 150 quid for a wooden box with some, a comb, some scissors, and some kind of hair stuff for beards. It's a complete ripoff, but I want one.

James Blatch: You're a marketing man's dream.

Mark Dawson: I am yeah, terrible.

James Blatch: You should definitely tell your kids. You should start hinting the reason you've been growing this great beard, start disappearing off.

Mark Dawson: Dad is going to be busy.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Mark Dawson: 24 hours.

James Blatch: Good. Thank you very much. It's Christmas week, so you don't have to write this week. You don't have to, do you Mark? You can relax and spend time with your family, so I'm not going to say more on the pay off thing. Just have a really lovely week and we'll speak to you one more time in 2017. Bye-bye.

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