

## **EPISODE 126: THE POWER OF COLLABORATION – DOUBLE THE OUTPUT, DOUBLE THE FUN – WITH RHETT BRUNO AND STEVE BEAULIEAU**

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.

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to the Self Publishing Formula Podcast with James and Mark. And we are going to be talking this week about collaboration.

It does have a bit of a negative connotation doesn't it? "Collaborator," after the war.

Mark Dawson: I suppose so. That is 60 years ago there, James. We can reclaim the word now.

James Blatch: I think it's more than 60. But let's move on.

Mark Dawson: Always best.

James Blatch: Yes, we are talking about collaboration. Something Mark's been in to, but we're talking to two guys who are very well-known collaborators in the science-fiction realm. Who knows which realm that is?

And they've also written a book on it. So if you're struggling maybe to write a book by yourself, or you think it'd be more fun to write with somebody else, this is going to be definitely a good episode for you.

And before then, it's time for us to do one of our occasional welcomes to our Patreon listeners. These are new subscribers who are supporting the Self Publishing Formula Podcast. As little as a dollar and episode, you can do that at [Patreon.com/SPFPodcast](https://Patreon.com/SPFPodcast).

I want to say a very big welcome to Steve Turner from Macau in China. Possibly our first Chinese subscriber. To Guinevere from Pembroke in North Carolina. To Billijo. It's either Billy-Joe, or Billijo. But there's no hyphen.

Mark Dawson: I don't have the emails in front of me. Have you not been professional enough to clarify these before going on air again, James? Offending our Patreon subscribers again.

James Blatch: There you go. So I'll just carry on. Anyway, welcome from Minnesota, Billijo, Billy-Joe. Clive from New South-Wales, Australia. Becky Embers, don't have a location for Becky. And Tracy Beaucanon, This Author Can, is her handle. And also don't have a location for her. So welcome to all of you.

Mark Dawson: Now one of those, James.

James Blatch: Yes?

Mark Dawson: You probably didn't know, she's in the Facebook group. She was very excited of having you pronounce her name. And it was Guinevere, which almost certain we've both got that wrong. But her surname is Ramos.

James Blatch: Oh.

Mark Dawson: She is currently deployed to Afghanistan.

James Blatch: Oh, wow. Okay.

Mark Dawson: So she's just signed up for the ads course. I think she's quite excited to jump into that. And yeah, she's I think with the U.S. Army in Afghanistan.

James Blatch: Well, that's fantastic. Guinevere, we thank you for your service. And particularly thank you for listening. Well, not particularly. We particularly thank you for your service.

And as an aside, thank you for being part of the SPF community. Let's put that in perspective. Well, that's great. I think it must be Guinevere. I think that's correct pronunciation. It's not spelled the traditional Eutherian way.

Mark Dawson: It's the Ramos. I think I asked, and she's Native American heritage.

James Blatch: Okay.

Mark Dawson: And I think she married ... I imagine with a surname like that, she married someone-

James Blatch: South American.

Mark Dawson: ... Latino. I guess.

James Blatch: Yes.

Mark Dawson: But yes, Guinevere. Guinevere Ramos.

James Blatch: It is a good job I did them.

Mark Dawson: It is, yes.

James Blatch: I can't believe you were mocking me 30 seconds ago about that. Anyway, it's exciting to have you all supporting us. So thank you very much indeed. That's superb.

We're very close to our second Book Lab episode. That's in probably three or four weeks. I've just got two interviews left to do. That's one with Stuart Bache about the cover. And with Helena herself, Helena who is our selected person.

And then we're going to move on to the next one which we'll do in the autumn, I guess, will be the right time to do that.

I did mention on one of our webinars, 'cause somebody asked this question, that we have double-bill episode in the summer on children's books. Not writing them, but the all-important subject of how to sell your children's books is a question we get asked a lot.

We put two episodes together with two successful children's authors. And one of whom has written a book called How To Market and Sell Your Children's Book. And they're using social media platforms, particularly AMS ads, but also Facebook ads to do that. And there are some tricks of the trade to learn there. So that's coming up most likely in August.

We got actually quite a few things coming up, because of course Mark and I are traveling soon, so we're going to pick up some great podcast interviews around the world.

And Mark sent me my challenge of the heavyweights of Thriller Fest if I can possibly do that.

Collaboration. Why don't we have a quick chat with you before we hear from Rhett and Steve. Because this is something you go into.

Now, I'm interested in this. Because you're obviously gotten great guns with your writing career. At what point, did you sit there and think, "I think I need to collaborate." Did people approach you and say, "I want to write some Milton books." Or how did this all work?

Mark Dawson: Well, it was inspired by Michael Andale actually. So he's got collaboration down to a fine art. And I think next year, Michael is intending to publish 400 books next year. So more than one a day.

I've no idea how he's going to do that. I'm looking forward to speaking to him and to find that out.

But I get asked a lot by readers who are keen for the next round of series. And obviously I can only write so fast. I'm reasonably fast. Not as fast as I used to be. But I can still do maybe three novels a year. I'm busy with other things now as well. Things like this.

But I'd like to put out more content. But it has to be of a pretty high standard.

I'm really quite particular about how good the stuff with my name on it is. And I wouldn't be able to publish anything that I didn't feel it was of acceptable quality. So I decided in the end, I would look into it.

And I thought that a good way to start would be to approach authors who have been traditionally published before.

Now before anyone complains, it's not to say that I don't think self-published writers are not as good as traditionally published writers. I absolutely do not think that at all.

What this enabled me to do was to choose authors that have already been through two filters, which means I don't have to filter them quite so much myself.

So these authors are all agented, first of all. And then they have been published. And some of them have been published very well. They've got good sales records with lots of reviews. And all that kind of stuff.

So that all being said, I've worked with three so far. Steve Cavanagh who we've had on the podcast, and we will have on the podcast again to talk this in a bit more detail.

And Steve is currently killing it with his new book, a book called 13, which is doing really, really well. Just been released.

Michael Ridpath, who is an excellent writer of thrillers, with a kind of a financial edge mostly, with a little bit of detail as well. And that's gone down very well.

And then finally with Scott Mariani, who is a Sunday Times best-selling thriller author with his Ben Hope series. So we worked together.

But they produced the first draft, I then typically edited them quite heavily. And then I go through my usual editorial process, copyedit, proof edit. And pleasingly, my copy editor Jen couldn't tell the difference between Steve's book and my book, my writing. So when I got that back, that was encouraging for me.

James Blatch: In a way that's slightly different from the kind of sit side-by-side collaboration, chapter each or even both writing the same chapter. But it's still a form of collaboration.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. It's very different. I'm not so heavily involved in the first draft. I am very heavily involved in the second draft and the edit.

A book that Steve and I are working on right now, which I should have back maybe by the time this episode goes out. I think I will be very heavily

involved in the second draft, because there's quite a cool development that we're going to be looking at with regards to how that's published. I can't say any more than that at the moment, but it's quite an exciting one. So I want to make sure that that is as good as we can both possibly make it.

James Blatch: And we have covered the more side-by-side collaboration before on the podcast. We had the Jo Penn's train experience, which I think is happening again this year. Chicago to New Orleans.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: And they collaborated all the way down on that. And I'm just trying to find the book actually, on Amazon, 'cause I know it's out there.

Mark Dawson: It's called American Demon Hunters, Sacrifice I think.

James Blatch: That was, wasn't it? Let me see if I can find that. Anyway, why don't you remind us about that.

Mark Dawson: You kind of summed it up. There are four writers; Zach Bohannon, Lindsey Buroker, Joanna Penn and J Thorn. They went down to New Orleans and had finished a novel pretty much by the time they left New Orleans.

I think that's kind of taking collaboration to the next level with multiple authors. Another one that we've had on, right back at the start of the podcast with Sean Platt who works Johnny and Dave, I suppose in a model that's more like the one that I use.

As Sean tends to be the editor and the other guys he works with produce the actual words. So that'll be more like my model with my co-writers.

But then we come to Rhett and the model that they use. So certainly lots of different ways to skin the cat.

James Blatch: Indeed. It was American Demon Hunter's Sacrifice by Bohannon, Buroker, Penn and Thorn. And we had J on to talk about that.

So this is similar in that vein, but these are two people who write very closely together in the sci-fi world. They struck up a relationship, and you can tell from the interview straight away that the heart of the success of their partnership is the way they get on.

It's quite a British kind of roasting type relationship. There's a lot of bants as we say in Britain. Which I think is-

Mark Dawson: We don't say it. Young people say it.

James Blatch: Young people say, "Bants." And I was a little surprised having spoken to them up to the interview how far apart they live. And the fact that I think they have met in the real world. But that's really not necessary anymore.

So let's hear from Rhett and Steve. And then Mark and I will have a chat off the back.

We should let people into a secret that we have done this entire interview before. Because we had a rare technical failure. But you know, the banter was so good, and the back and forth, that we just decided we're going to do this all again, didn't we guys?

Rhett Bruno: We did.

Steve Beaulieu: Yeah. It'll be great.

James Blatch: It's a Monday night. And I feel that I've got to have alcohol, which I don't normally on a Monday. I didn't really want this beer, but I have

to have, because that's how we rock, that's how we roll, right? When the three of us get together.

Steve Beaulieu: That's Chick-Fill-A. You guys don't have that.

James Blatch: We don't have Chick-Fill-A. No.

Steve Beaulieu: You're missing out.

James Blatch: Sounds like a really dodgy movie. But anyway. I'm sure it's kosher. Or it may or may not be kosher. I'm getting myself bogged down now. Okay, let's get on with this interview. We're going to talk about collaboration.

Something that emerged in the last interview I think is the relationship between you guys. But we'll move on to that in a little bit and we'll just start with the basics of why you're working together.

**Rhett, why don't you start by telling me who you are, your background, and what sort of things you're writing.**

Rhett Bruno: I'm an architect by day. And I'm a science-fiction and fantasy author. I'm the author of the Circuit trilogy with Diversion Books. And the Titan Born series with Random House. That's being released later this year.

And I co-write with Steve on the Buried Goddess saga. And we have a whole bunch of other stuff coming up.

James Blatch: Okay. So traditionally published.

Rhett Bruno: I'm both right. I'm more hybrid right now.

**James Blatch: Steve, what's your writing background?**

Steve Beaulieu: Can I try to be a little more exciting than Rhett? 'Cause his was kinda just like, "Ah, this is what I do."

Rhett Bruno: I done it so many times.

James Blatch: Except, when he started by saying he was an architect by day, and then I thought he was going to be some kind of superhero by night.

Steve Beaulieu: Nothing by night. He's nothing by night. He sleeps at night.

Rhett Bruno: I sleep.

Steve Beaulieu: That's about it.

My writing career is pretty interesting. I'm a pastor in Texas. And most of my writing up until this point has been non-fiction in the vein that I write sermons, I write commentaries on scripture, things of that nature.

About two years ago I got back into my love of fiction, which I used to write when I was a lot younger. But I got back into my love of fiction. And mostly sci-fi fantasy.

Off-air, we talked a little bit about some superhero stuff. Really one of my passions is superhero writing. I run an anthology called Superheroes and Vile Villains. Worked together with about 45 other authors to create four volumes so far. Of that, Rhett was one of them at one point. I can't remember what volume were you. Were you in the first volume?

Rhett Bruno: First tier.

Steve Beaulieu: First volume. He had a great story called, The Roach. The Rise of The Roach ... The Roach Rises?

Rhett Bruno: There you go. I stole it from Batman.

Steve Beaulieu: Yeah. The Roach Rises. So he's a little bit of a superhero I guess.

Went on to write The Brother Dust, The Resurgence, which is The Avengers meets Star Wars kind of in a way.

And currently, as Rhett said, we're working together on The Buried Goddess saga, which is an epic fantasy series. And there's a couple other things in the works that will hopefully be released this year or early next year. We've been sitting on it for a long time.

Rhett Bruno: Forever.

James Blatch: Any decade now. Sounds like my book.

### **Rhett, you're going along with your writing career, were you looking for a writing partner?**

Rhett Bruno: I've always thought about it. I've always liked this idea of alternating writing chapters. Especially after reading The Expanse and seeing how those guys co-wrote that whole universe. It took off. It's a T.V. show and everything.

So it always seemed like this cool romantic idea to me. I didn't know if I could do it. I'm glad that I found someone that I feel like I can write with, 'cause it definitely isn't something you can probably do with anyone.

### **James Blatch: How did you find each other?**

Rhett Bruno: I helped start this science-fiction platform called Sci-Fi Bridge. Sort of like an author co-op and a promotional platform. It's like a book

club for sci-fi, for readers. And otherwise it's a group where a bunch of us authors are together.

We needed a logo. One of the other founders knew Steve. I don't remember how he knew Steve, but he was like, "Steve does graphic designs. He'll do the logo."

So he set me up with Steve, and we just started going back and forth. And making a logo, and it turned into a fun exercise where I complain about something he did, and he'd change it or do something ridiculous in response to it.

We wound up with a cool logo, and then from there he was editing my stuff, I was reading some of his stuff. And I had a book that I really wasn't sure how to write, because it was science-fiction, but it was set in the 60s. And I really have only written space opera type science-fiction. I'm kinda making up my own world, and not writing our own grounded world.

I wanted something with a little more humor. And I have been writing darker science-fiction stories. So after reading some of Steve's stuff, I thought he'd be good at adding that little humor and helping me write in the present day. And it took off from there.

James Blatch: Steve, the relationship led into the collaboration, right? The two of you enjoy each other's company, a little bit of banter going backwards and forwards-

Steve Beaulieu: Oh come on, don't put words in my mouth. Come on.

James Blatch: Well, "Enjoy," is a strong word obviously.

Steve Beaulieu: Yeah, tolerate. Tolerate.

Rhett Bruno: Tolerate. Yeah.

James Blatch: Yeah, but nonetheless, the relationship that led to the collaboration, 'cause some people will think you're a good fit for me because you write good detail stuff, and I'm kind of the story guy. But they won't necessarily work well together.

**And for you it seemed to be, and it still seems to be, that you enjoy each other's sparring company, shall we say.**

Rhett Bruno: Yeah, I don't think it's smart to go into it.

Steve Beaulieu: I think the relationship started it. The relationship was fun. We got along pretty well.

And as Rhett alluded to, we were reading each other's stuff. I always joked that he desperately needed my help. But the reality is, Rhett's a great storyteller. Phenomenal storyteller. Beyond anything that I ever believe I will be.

But at the same time, I tend to be a more technical writer, I think would probably be the best way of wording that.

I help in the technical areas. He helps in the story areas. I can write anything I'm told to write, but he's the one that really just excels in deepening a story beyond what I am generally capable of doing.

James Blatch: As it happens, as well as you getting on and enjoying writing together, there's a good synergy in terms of who leads what area.

**Rhett, are you the leader? This is a loaded question for the two of you sitting here. But do you take the lead on the story?**

Rhett Bruno: I think for our first book together, I definitely did. But that was my story that I had already started, that I brought Steve into it, like let him

read, gave him all my ideas, we talked about it. So I think he personally felt like more of the secondary on that book. And that I had already started that series.

With our fantasy series, *The Buried Goddess*, it was sort of the opposite. Steve had started it and then brought me on. I think we both worked pretty much 50-50 on that book, in that we're really alternating characters and how we write.

So we're both taking a lead on the different characters.

And it's funny, he's the pastor, but I've taken the lead on writing our holy crusader knight. And he is taking lead on writing the thief in the story. It's just kinda ridiculous.

**James Blatch: Obviously you've got complicated alter-egos, the two of you.**

Rhett Bruno: I think from an overall storytelling aspect, I might be taking the lead in that I'm more experienced outlining and stuff, in finishing four novels. But as far as where we are right now, we're pretty much doing 50-50 on everything.

Steve Beaulieu: We did the whole last interview without even mentioning the book that we were promoting.

James Blatch: We're definitely going to mention it this time.

Steve Beaulieu: We have a non-fiction book out called ... What is it called? *Two Authors, One Book*.

Rhett Bruno: *Two Authors, One Book*.

Steve Beaulieu: Co-writing, murder free.

James Blatch: That's a really dodgy reference to call it that. But let's just park that reference for moment and keep it clean, people. So yeah, so you've got this non-fiction book.

We are going to move on to the book. It's a very important part of the interview that you are harnessing what's working in your collaboration, and using that to teach other people.

I think it's a really great thing. I definitely want to talk about that.

I am interested, at this stage and understanding how it works, Steve.

**So you feel that you've developed a little bit from perhaps somebody who wouldn't necessarily have led on the story, because of the relationship you've got with Rhett now?**

Steve Beaulieu: I think that I was alluding to the difference between kind of a primary and secondary writer, which is something that we talk about in the book.

Rhett has taken primary on Lunar Missile Crisis for the sake of the fact that he was the guy who came up with the idea. That's the 60s sci-fi thing.

I came into it really fulfilling his vision of the book, taking a character he'd already developed, and then just I took it over.

In The Buried Goddess saga, we really brainstormed. Of course I came up with both of those characters too, but they evolved so much over the course of time with Rhett developmental editing things for me at the begging stages.

That the relationship I think is what you asked. And the relationship led to the comfortability.

We got really comfortable as you can tell, making fun of each other. It's super easy for me. We were talking today, I was editing one of his older books. I'm like, "Man, you've gotten better since then."

We have a great relationship in the sense that neither of us seems to care if the other one tells them how awful something they wrote was.

Rhett Bruno: Yeah.

Steve Beaulieu: Which I think is so beneficial in our writing relationship.

James Blatch: Really important. So that's interesting that you edit each other's books.

### **You've both got a bit of a background of editors, right?**

Rhett Bruno: Steve is definitely the copy and line editor. I have done more developmental editing.

When he first started that fantasy series, I think like the first five chapters or whatever. And he wanted me to take a look at it. I was finishing another book while he was doing it, so I wasn't writing. He was like, "Rhett, write this series with me." I was like, "No, I need to finish this book."

And then somehow I finished that book way faster than I expected. So after developmentally editing those first five chapters a ton of times, and accidentally changing his whole story pretty much, we decided to take it from there.

It went from what was really a big sprawling epic fantasy type story, to a more personal character focused story.

'Cause just through developmental editing, that was what I saw that that was the strength right here. He had this two really opposite characters who were going to have to work together. And that was, I thought the brilliance of the idea.

So I jumped in and loaned my strength.

James Blatch: That's a big shift for a developmental editor to make to a book.

### **I guess you can only do that when it's partly your book, right?**

Rhett Bruno: That was the stretch. And then I was like, "All right, let's do this together and brainstorm where we could take what you have right now, and push it into a series." So that's how we've done it.

I'll tell people they should outline. We've kind of taken a more pantsing approach to this book sort of on purpose, because on the outside it is like your classic Dungeons and Dragons type fantasy.

But we've really let the story go to crazy unexpected places. And in a book that at most times is really light-hearted, to some really dark places. I think it's evolved. It's taken both of our strengths and put it into one fantasy series.

James Blatch: I think I asked you the first time we did this interview.

### **I said to you, obviously you have to plot everything in advance, otherwise you can't work separately on the same book. And you both burst out laughing at that.**

Steve Beaulieu: We did that anyway.

Rhett Bruno: We do it, and then it changes anyways.

Neither of us are big outliner-type writers. We do it as much as we can. And I forced you to do it, 'cause I know he doesn't want to.

James Blatch: But how does that work? Steve, let me ask you then.

**How does that work if you're not really on top of the structure, very clearly defined of who's doing what, how does that even work when two of you are writing?**

**We should say, you're thousands of miles apart, right?**

Steve Beaulieu: 1500 miles or so.

We're not taking a book that's a single character and writing back and forth on it. We each have our own characters that we write. And generally they will meet up within the story. In the whole first book, they more or less spend the entire book together.

In books two and three, they're apart for portions of it. So during those times, we really have a lot of freedom to write our own thing, as long as it lines up with the narrative of the overall book.

Rhett's writing a holy Templar type character in the capital city. While I'm writing a thief that's out adventuring somewhere doing his thing.

We're able to handle those things until they come together. Then when they come together, Rhett and I are talking. I think I've mentioned this the last interview. We talk all day, every day. He's an hour ahead of me. I usually wake up, there's a text from him. And generally the last person I talk to at night is Rhett. It's not even my wife. My wife gets on my case.

Rhett Bruno: Well, they go to sleep so early. So it's their fault.

Steve Beaulieu: I've got two young kids, man. My wife's in bed, and his wife's in bed. And we're still sitting around trying to talk about these books.

And for us, our friendship has been instrumental in the sense that we're talking all day anyway, so if one of us has an idea for the book, it doesn't go longer than 10 minutes without the other person knowing about it.

I can see in a writing relationship where the authors don't talk very often, I can see one person writing something that just totally contradicts the other person's writing. And then you have issues. But we just never shut up. So we're constantly in contact with each other.

Rhett Bruno: Essentially our outline is through hundreds of texts and Facebook messages.

If you're not going to talk a lot, I would suggest then developing a pretty robust outline beforehand. We do the broad strokes of the narrative and work our characters through that towards our end goal.

James Blatch: I can see how you can get around the plotting side of things like that. And it's certainly a great friendship really, 'cause it's a friendship with a purpose. Right?

If you were just friends, how often would you speak? But because you've got this stuff you do together, you enjoy each other's company. It's a good thing.

I hope I haven't jinxed it by saying this, and you have some terrible row tomorrow, and everything falls apart. But I'm jealous of the man love that you guys have got going on. You're bros, as I believe you say in the United States of America.

Let's talk about the book then. Where did the idea come from? You can be honest. That it's a commercial venture that, "We've got something here. We can tell the story be entrepreneurial about it."

**Or was this something kind of a burning desire that you've got to get into the non-fiction realm?**

Steve Beaulieu: I mentioned earlier that I do a lot of non-fiction writing. And hopefully this doesn't blow our whole cover here. But I could write a non-fiction book very very quickly.

I told Rhett one day, "Man, why don't we write a non-fiction book about the process that we take, the hurdles that we've crossed." Potentially, there's a lot of people out there that want to co-author a book. That don't really know how to co-author a book.

For me it's been so beneficial to co-author, because I have a very limited attention span. I get an idea for a book, I start writing it. 25 000, 30 000 words into it, I'm on to my next story, my next. And that manuscript just ends up on a computer somewhere.

Being in a co-authoring relationship, Rhett's gonna be there going, "What do you mean you're starting a new book? You can't start a new book. We have to finish this book."

There's been a lot of hurdles that we've crossed. And we've seen a lot of benefits from co-authoring that we just thought, "Let's write this book."

We decided this is a good way to make money, let's not lie about it. This is an opportunity to make some money writing about something that we've experienced. And I think that's what any non-fiction book is in the end. We want to help other authors. We want to be able to make a little bit of money doing it.

But really, Rhett and I love the other authors that we get to work with on a day to day basis, with Sci-Fi Bridge, Fantasy Bridge and all that. And we're already answering questions like this all the time.

So we figured, why not make an inexpensive route for them to just buy a short book that explains to them the process. And then if they have other questions, just go ahead and ask. But here's a whole book.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Steve Beaulieu: "Here's all the answers, see what comes out of it."

**James Blatch: You allude there, Steve, to keeping each other honest.**

Steve Beaulieu: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

James Blatch: Keeping each other on the track. And goodness me, that's a single outstanding advantage of working with somebody else. Some writers I'm jealous of, they just sit down and work seven hours the day, and then stop. I'm probably one of many people who find it a struggle to get the word count down, to motivate myself, to start.

If I haven't got several hours in front of me, I don't want to even go there. But when there's somebody else, and I know what it's like in my business that you're working together with somebody, you go on with it.

**That single thing is a really valuable thing I think to a writer.**

Steve Beaulieu: It sort of makes it a race, even though you're both going towards the same finish line. I know Steve's way faster at writing than I am.

James Blatch: Right.

Rhett Bruno: So I'll suddenly be 5000 words behind him. And have to buckle down and catch up to him, otherwise especially if we're reaching a point where characters are going to come together. We both need to be in that exact same moment on the same page.

Keeping each other honest is great. Especially if you're ADD-type writer like I am, where I could get distracted extremely easily.

James Blatch: Any kind of small distraction. Yeah, I know that.

Steve Beaulieu: Facebook's enough of a distraction as it is.

James Blatch: That's ruined everybody's lives, hasn't it? But it also allows us to sell books. We're going to come on to a little bit of marketing and stuff in a moment.

**But let me just keep on the non-fiction book. Just remind us what it's called.**

Steve Beaulieu: Two Authors, One Book.

James Blatch: That's right. Yes, I forget that.

Steve Beaulieu: Co-Writing Murder Free.

James Blatch: So far. Okay, so you've got the book out there.

**Do you have sort of web resources as well that go along with it?**

Steve Beaulieu: That would've been so much smarter.

James Blatch: Okay.

Steve Beaulieu: No. We don't have any.

James Blatch: Okay.

Steve Beaulieu: Book's the web resource.

Rhett Bruno: Yeah. Honestly right now, we've been so busy trying to hit a deadline for Audible. I'm amazed we even go this out.

James Blatch: Well, no. That's good. That's good. I was just checking if there's somewhere people go. So people can go and find the book. I just want to make sure they can find the book, and they'd have to go.

Rhett Bruno: Just go to Amazon, search either of our names. And it'll come up.

James Blatch: And you wrote this book, in itself is a collaboration.

**As a non-fiction book did it require a little bit more structure and plotting than perhaps your fantasy books do?**

Rhett Bruno: We got real passionate about doing it one weekend, and both wrote at the same time. It usually doesn't happen. But we were going back and forth the same time.

I wrote 9000 words on this Monday, which is my record by a lot. And the way we wrote it was, we would each write a bulk section, a meet section and then a steam section for each category that kinda gave all the perspectives on each step we're saying that you should look into while you're co-writing.

So it was a fun experience to do it like this, 'cause we don't usually get to point out who's writing what in our fiction books. And that we tried to make it so you don't know who's writing what, so that everything seemed like one

author. This was doing all three. It was us making something smooth like it's both of us. And then each of us writing our own portion.

James Blatch: It'll be interesting to see whether people can read the non-fiction book and then start to work out who writes what in the fantasy bits.

Rhett Bruno: Yeah.

James Blatch: However closer you write together, there is a subtlety in people's voices.

**If you ever look back at some of your books, and you work so closely together can you always work out who wrote what?**

Steve Beaulieu: No.

Rhett Bruno: I remember who wrote what, but I probably couldn't tell.

James Blatch: Okay.

Steve Beaulieu: The process that we have with fiction books is, we write it together. And then Rhett does a read-through and an edit. And then I do a final read-through and an edit.

And I do it for copy, I do it for line, it do it for flow, sentences, things of that nature. And so in the end of course, it is a collaboration. And it looks different than if I would've written it alone.

But it carries one voice, because I am dissecting that book every single paragraph, I'm making it look like we wrote it with one voice. And our wives have read our books, and I speak for at least Elise too I think. My wife has no idea who wrote what.

Rhett Bruno: Yeah, yeah. No, she would have absolutely no idea. I mean, she hasn't read that many of my books.

But I think that's an important thing in picking someone to write with is having opposite strengths.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Rhett Bruno: And that neither me or Steve could edit, then that wouldn't happen. We would need an editor to come in and smooth it together, so it sounds like one voice. But we both come at it from different approaches, and we're able to work that out together without having to rely on someone else.

James Blatch: Although that is an option for people who want to write together and do have different voices, that an editor could come in and just make it smooth. I mean, there's different ways of doing it

Steve Beaulieu: We would suggest it, for sure.

If I didn't have an extensive background in editing, then there's no chance we would be releasing anything without having an editor go through it.

James Blatch: Now let me talk to you a little bit about marketing. So you say you're traditionally, I think you said Harper Collins maybe. Rhett at the beginning trad published a book.

And you're also indie publishing. And I know you're into audiobooks quite a lot.

**Do you do much of the marketing yourselves, the two of you?**

Rhett Bruno: Right now we've been doing pretty much everything ourselves. I would beg anyone with a publisher also do it themselves and not rely on them. I did that for probably too long.

But as of right now and the last year, I mean we've been pretty much running all of our own marketing. And especially in sci-fi, I do a ton of marketing for other people, and for myself pretty much every day in Sci-Fi Bridge, 'cause we run promotions every other day for authors, and giving away some stuff.

I'm doing it a lot right now. Steve would prefer to just write.

But now I'm kind of beholden to a lot of authors to help them out with these platforms, which is great. And that goes back to collaborating, not writing in your own little hole is a really good idea.

And other authors are marketing resources. If another author's going to share your book, that's free publicity. And if you're going to share theirs back, that's free for them. So that's beneficial to everybody to get out and meet authors that are writing the same sort of stuff.

James Blatch: You've built a great platform there. We should just dwell on Sci-Fi Bridge for a second, because there'll be writers in that genre now who maybe aren't part of it.

### **Tell us how it operates and what people get out of it.**

Rhett Bruno: Sci-Fi Bridge, it's pretty much just a growing co-op of authors. We have some loose guidelines, which we don't really talk about publicly, because we don't want to get millions of emails.

But authors reach out, or we reach out to them and I invite them to this group. And once you're in it, we run promotions for you, everything, totally free.

We run group giveaways, and we built our own list that we promote to. And it's a pretty strong list. I don't know many lists as strong that don't cost a lot of money like BookBub, and such. But it does everything.

We've put out anthologies, *Bridge Across The Stars*, which has foreword from Kevin J. Anderson. We meet a lot of authors and helped promote them. Even authors you might not think need it, they get their promotion from somewhere, so help those guys and we help emerging authors. So it's really grown in the last year to a big platform.

**James Blatch: How big is it? How big is your reader list, how big is your author list? If you're happy to say that?**

Rhett Bruno: We don't usually share our reader list, because we go for a more active type of list. So that overall number won't be that impressive. But the amount of sales we get is pretty impressive.

We've gotten three to 400 on someone's book when it's on sale, which for free and not above is ... There's not many things like that.

Steve Beaulieu: I can speak for myself, when we released *Brother Dust* we sold more on opening weekend, with just Sci-Fi Bridge pushing it than I think I probably expected to sell in the lifetime of the book.

If it wasn't for Sci-Fi Bridge pushing that book at the start, I don't know that it would've gone anywhere. And so I know for me personally, I saw the power. And that was almost when Sci-Fi Bridge first started.

We've now had a year of snowball. And we have just seen people skyrocket to the top of the ranks because of a Sci-Fi Bridge promotion.

Rhett Bruno: It's going pretty great. And I mean, we have Fantasy Bridge as well, which is growing a little slower. The fantasy readers seem tougher to reach on that subscriber list level.

Steve Beaulieu: For sure.

Rhett Bruno: ... than the sci-fi readers, who I think maybe are just more technically savvy, or something. I'm not sure why there's a difference, but it's a pretty stark difference between the readerships.

But they're both there. And I mean, fantasy's growing.

James Blatch: The fantasy readers live in a world of leather bound books with quills. And the sci-fi readers live with computers and space ships.

That's obviously a massive generalization about readers.

### **You have criteria for authors joining?**

Rhett Bruno: Yeah, I mean we [crosstalk 00:39:04].

James Blatch: Which is all very mysterious. A little bit secret. But you find them, they find you? I mean, people listening to this who write science-fiction books...

Steve Beaulieu: There's a dark alley.

James Blatch: ... can they join?

### **Is it a secret handshake or gang sign, or something?**

Rhett Bruno: They're free to join. We kind of have a rubric for how much exposure or how big of an author we want you to be at this point.

James Blatch: Okay.

Rhett Bruno: Because we do have so many people in it. And the strength of how we promote is, we don't do 10 books in one email. It's one or two we really try to put the focus on them. So we are pretty picky about who we'll bring in.

I'll look through authors I know I've heard of. And I'll reach out to them often. We had a Star Wars author reach out to us, which was pretty cool.

Maya Bhathaus is in the group. So we get people both ways. And we're open to anyone. We have to just be picky, because it's the nature of it is no one makes money on this. Without our anthologies, we would be losing money. And it's kind of how it works. We're just here to help other authors at this point.

James Blatch: Okay.

Steve Beaulieu: Rhett knows every author by name. I mean, this dude is talking to me about people like they're the biggest thing in the world. I've never heard of them, and then I look them up and they're like rank seven on Amazon. I'm like, "How do you know?"

So he's constantly reaching out to people. And so I would almost say people don't even need to reach out to Sci-Fi Bridge, because if they fit the criteria, Sci-Fi Bridge is probably talking to them.

James Blatch: They would've had this hand on the shoulder.

Steve Beaulieu: Yeah. Exactly.

James Blatch: From the mysterious Rhett.

Steve Beaulieu: Yeah. With the weird hand signs. Just crazy stuff in dark alleys.

**James Blatch: Is it mainly indie authors, or trad authors? Or a mixture?**

Rhett Bruno: We go for both. I almost say the indie authors are more likely to join a group like this and do cross promotion.

Most of the traditional authors could even help our list grow, or help anyone in it, with a social media presence or something, probably don't need our help at all and wouldn't even answer. We could probably get a lot of mid-list traditional authors.

But again, a lot of them aren't keeping lists, or those kind of things right now. So it definitely is more indie. And if we have traditional people. And I mean, we have some big ones that are hybrid, so they're more involved in the marketing end of things, like how I have been recently.

James Blatch: Okay. It's a really interesting area. We gotten a little bit side-tracked from our main subject. But Sci-Fi Bridge that's obviously this beast that you're growing. And it's fascinating to sort of keep in touch with that, as that grows. It sounds to me like a sort of thing that's going to take over your life at some point.

Rhett Bruno: It does.

James Blatch: I'm sure. You're a bit of a polymath, Rhett. And you guys, I mean considering you're an architect during the day. I don't know what it is you design. But you have to pay attention when you're designing stuff.

You're a pastor, Steve, as well. You've a flock to look after. And yet the two of you are doing a lot of work here.

**Where do you find the hours?**

Steve Beaulieu: Is that a question?

James Blatch: It's just a statement. I'd like complete silence after it, please sir.

Steve Beaulieu: It's kind of the same answer as any. I mean, there's people doing all kinds of jobs that are finding time to write. I think that's the thing, man. If you want to write, you're going to find the time to write.

We have some good friends that are police officers. I believe it's in Kansas if I'm not mistaken. And they're posting pictures of themselves with coffee at 03:00 A.M. 'cause they've gotten up to write. I commented on there, I said, "Man, I hope my law enforcement officers sleep more than you do."

Rhett Bruno: Yeah. That's true.

Steve Beaulieu: I mean people, if you want to write, you're going to find time to write. And we do.

We stay up late, we get up early. We forego lunch breaks. Whatever it takes to write a couple of chapters, to write a 100 words even. Whatever it takes.

James Blatch: It sounds like the relationship as we started this interview, is something that keeps you going in all areas. Keeps you working, keeps you motivated. And ultimately produces good pieces of work.

The book is going to be a great guide for people who are starting out, who want to collaborate.

But the X-factor there is to find the person who you fit with. Which is not necessarily somebody like you. But somebody who you complement.

Rhett Bruno: And we talk about that. It's hard to quantify, the X-factor type thing. But we mentioned it a lot, this really becomes a friendship. I know Steve will say it's sort of like a marriage of sorts.

Steve Beaulieu: Yeah.

Rhett Bruno: You really have to learn to work together, learn to take criticism, which is big. Learn to give back criticism.

And if you're not working with someone you really enjoy working with it's going to be tough. Especially working this far apart where we have to talk a ton just to keep each other updated on what's going on with the story.

Without a friendship, I don't even really know how you would do it. It sounds like it would get pretty rough.

Steve Beaulieu: Hard. Rough.

James Blatch: And then there would be almost no point in doing it, because what is the point if it becomes a slog?

This type of collaboration is becoming more common now. Obviously writing, and people knowing each other writing is exploding a bit at the moment because of the whole digital revolution. Even in filmmaking I think you see pairs of directors.

Rhett Bruno: Yeah. Stranger Things.

James Blatch: Stranger Things, and the Cohen brothers. There seems to be quite a few people who work together to produce things. Where in the past it's always been a single name. Or is it my making that up?

Steve Beaulieu: Even if we go back in time, you'll see Steven Spielberg and George Lucas working together on Indiana Jones. You'll see Lennon and McCartney writing some of the greatest Beatles songs of all time.

Rhett Bruno: Although they wrote quite a lot separately as well, didn't they? I don't know how much.

Steve Beaulieu: They did. And I think that that's actually key as well is, Rhett's doing his own writing at times. I'm doing my own writing at times.

And then you come together and arguably do some of your best work. And so I think that in the writing industry, it's becoming less taboo.

For years you had the Steven Kings of the world that were all being judged by one group of people to see if they were worthy of being published. Now anybody can write a book and create a fanbase. And I think we even mentioned this at one point, they don't have to be phenomenal writers to create a fanbase.

And so imagine if you have two non phenomenal writers, well you have them right here. We're able to create twice the fanbase by combining ourselves together. In the end, my readers will then read Rhett's stuff. And Rhett's readers will then read my stuff. And our individual work will kind of explode as well.

Rhett Bruno: It's great for two people with full-time jobs, where we can produce a book a lot faster.

Steve Beaulieu: Yeah.

Rhett Bruno: And again, that seems to be bigger now is releasing books faster.

James Blatch: Yeah.

Rhett Bruno: If I'm in a full-time job and I'm trying to write my own book, it's going to take me like half a year right now, 'cause I'm not that fast.

But together in the last year we've written almost four books. So it's exponentially grown, because we're able to push each other and fill in the blanks when you don't always feel like writing.

James Blatch: Bringing it back to that sort of keeping each other going. And that's an important commercial consideration. That's another edge that the collaboration gives you.

**Although, we should temper that with the fact that you split the profits, right?**

Rhett Bruno: Yeah. But if you're used to being with a publisher like me, 50% is a lot better than 20.

James Blatch: 50% of 70% is a lot better than anything you get for a trad deal. Okay. Look guys, thank you so much indeed for coming on to the SPF Podcast.

Rhett Bruno: Thank you.

James Blatch: I think I hope I speak for the listeners as well, it's in infectious relationship that you guys have.

And I think it's almost the human condition, isn't it? Finding that kind of soulmate that you want to spend some time with. And it's a good thing you found. You're channeling that into your books. And that's a great thing.

We wish you all the very best. We should again, give a plug to the non-fiction book that was the entire of the interview, that none of us mentioned the first time we did this whole interview. Which I still can quite believe.

**Rhett, tell us where you can find the book.**

Rhett Bruno: It's Two Authors, One Book. How to Co-Write Murder Free. You could find it on Amazon right now. It's only Amazon. It's Kindle as well. Just search our names, Rhett Bruno or Steve Beaulieu.

I think it's a good book. You'll learn the steps that we used. Good idea. We tell you how to co-write, who to co-write with based on what we've seen others do and what we've done ourselves.

I think all in all, writing could be a really lonely thing. So if you're feeling that way, writing with someone else is kind of a great way to keep things going.

James Blatch: And for some writers who can't get themselves off the starting block, this could just be the key to allow them to write, but to be in a relationship, a writing relationship with somebody else. So great, guys. Steve, Rhett, thank you so much indeed for joining us.

Steve Beaulieu: Thank you.

James Blatch: Have a good rest of the day. And I'm going to go to bed. Because we live in the future in the United Kingdom. That's how we roll. Okay, thanks guys.

As you heard at the beginning, we did that entire interview once, and there was a very rare ... In fact I think this may be the only time it's happened, technical failure at my end. And so we had to do the whole interview again. But so very grateful for them for doing that.

Clearly what comes across in that interview is their relationship that allows them to work together all the time. I mean, both wives joke that they talk to each other more than they talk to their partners. They get up in the

morning, they're just on speaker phone to each other, and the ideas flow between them.

And it was interesting to me that they don't have a particularly orthodox structure to the way they're going to write together. They just always know what each other's doing, just by that constant communication. That's one way of doing it. And it's fun. It seems like fun.

The other thing which strikes me as somebody who's getting a first book written is it keeps the book moving. When you got two of you, it keeps the book moving.

Mark Dawson: Definitely. It is something to think about. You can obviously write faster if there's two people handling it. And motivation is a good one too. Writing can be a bit of a solitary thing. And if you don't have someone that is waiting for your words.

Say you got a chapter to send over to them, and you know they're waiting for it. That can be pretty great in terms of just keeping your ass in the seat, fingers on the keyboard. It's something that is certainly worth thinking about if you're struggling to find that motivation to get something done.

James Blatch: When are we going to collaborate on my first book, Mark? Bookmark. That should've been your provision company name.

Mark Dawson: Jesus. People I have to work with. Yeah, let's take a rain cheque on that. We'll have a discussion perhaps.

James Blatch: John Milton travels back in time to 1963. REF station where he becomes a Vulcan pilot. I've got it all worked out. If I do the first draft-

Mark Dawson: Yeah, don't call us. Don't call me ever again.

James Blatch: I think we have a similar relationship to Rhett and Steve. Okay look, thank you very much indeed.

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