

## **EPISODE 138: THE INDIE PUBLISHING HOUSE – WITH JAMES AND JEANETTE HUNTER**

Narrator: 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 Blatch and Mark Dawson, your hosts.

And Mark, we are getting ready. Packing our bags. We are off to NINC in Florida. In fact as we record this I'm off in 48 hours or so and then you're going to follow on.

I think you're going to Boston first, aren't you? You said you're going to see Book Bub.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, I go a week today. I fly on Monday about 5 o'clock Monday in a week, and I go to Boston. Watch Monday night football. And then I'll be at Book Bub's office on Tuesday, and then going to Florida after that.

James Blatch: Are you going to a football game?

Mark Dawson: No, I'm gonna find a bar somewhere.

James Blatch: You go all the way to America to watch NFL in a bar?

Mark Dawson: That's pretty much the size of it, yeah.

James Blatch: Yeah. Okay. Good. We should go to an NFL game. We've been to a ball game, a baseball game. We should go to an NFL game. I'd be up for that.

Mark Dawson: It's my sport.

James Blatch: It's a slightly ludicrous sport in a way that they stop and start, and stop and start-

Mark Dawson: Oh, God, here he goes.

James Blatch: ... and they keep changing the players in the middle of the game. I mean, there's a guy last night retired from his entire career in the middle of the game.

Mark Dawson: Do you know his name?

James Blatch: I don't know his name.

Mark Dawson: Vontae Davis. He used to play for the Dolphins, corner back. Plays for the Indianapolis Colts, or used to.

James Blatch: Do they call them QBs?

Mark Dawson: CBs, corner backs.

James Blatch: CB?

Mark Dawson: He's a corner back.

James Blatch: A corner back. Oh, not quarter back.

Mark Dawson: For our American friends, this is painful.

James Blatch: I liked his style of retiring. I mean, I've heard somebody, occasionally a player walks out in a strop in the middle of a game.

Midway he's gone.

Mark Dawson: "I'm gone."

James Blatch: "I'm done." My career.

Mark Dawson: Getting away from these people.

James Blatch: It was a slightly odd thing because it's quite a big decision that lasts a long time, and you could perhaps think about it before the game, rather than ... But, anyway-

Mark Dawson: It is a bit strange, yes.

James Blatch: It was a bit strange. Now I do know something about American football because I bought-

Mark Dawson: No, you don't.

James Blatch: I brought my son back a t-shirt for the Dallas Cowboys and I learned, don't tell me, the quarterback's name is something ... it's not Payton. That's another guy. It's ... Oh, what was his name? Dek? Deke? Dak?

Mark Dawson: Dak Prescott.

James Blatch: Dak Prescott. That's it. Yes. Dak Prescott. And I forget in New Orleans. But he's a bit of a super hero in NFL times, isn't he?

Mark Dawson: He's pretty good.

James Blatch: Why don't the Cowboys win anything?

Mark Dawson: Okay, we're talking of sports. The greatest sport in the world is, obviously, cricket but I can't talk to that to any American friends because it's bewildering.

James Blatch: It's bewildering to 92% of British people, let alone foreigners.

James Blatch: But, our friend, Ernie Dempsey, who we met in the flesh, our hero of SPF Times, who was a very early taker of your call, saying it turned

his career from being a school teacher in a job he wasn't particularly happy with, to somebody who's bought his father a house through his writing. It's been an absolutely fantastic journey.

James Blatch: We've pulled the journey word and we've loved Ernie's story and we loved meeting him. But he's a big soccer fan, so he supports Atlanta and, of course, I've told him, "If you're supporting soccer, you need to really get into one of the big UK teams, or the big British teams."

So, I have got him a Cambridge United shirt. This is an official away shirt for Cambridge United.

Mark Dawson: So, I should say, for those ... the majority of our audience who are listening to the podcast, as James always forgets, he's sporting what can only be described as the most hideous shirt I think I've ever seen. Yeah, it's kind of a black with yellow outfit.

James Blatch: Black and amber, please. Black and amber army.

Mark Dawson: Black and amber with some cats on it, and his, yes, and his name on the back with "Hill." I'm not quite sure why.

James Blatch: Kenot Hill. Our solicitors, I think, in Cambridge. And Mick George. That's how glamorous it is at Cambridge.

Anyway, they're my beloved team and I've been a supporter since I was in my teens. I'm a season ticket holder now and I go with my boy, who's 12 years old and he proudly wears his Cambridge shirts.

Now, Ernie Dempsey's going to join us. He'll join us again. So I'm going to give him this shirt. It's a surprise, but if he sees the podcast it will be ruined.

Mark Dawson: I think we've got to wash it.

James Blatch: Yeah, I'm gonna wash it. Well?

Mark Dawson: No, you're not.

James Blatch: I'm only briefly wearing it. Now. It's not sweaty.

Mark Dawson: He's not going to wash it.

James Blatch: He might. He might wash it.

Mark Dawson: Sorry, Ernie. I apologize on James' behalf.

James Blatch: But, look, this is what happens if you get to meet us in Florida, which brings me onto, "You should come and meet us in Florida."

We're going to be at the Shark Tooth Tavern on Gulf Boulevard. It's part of the Trade Winds Resort in St. Pete Beach, just down from Clearwater, near Tampa in Florida. In the U.S.A.

And we're going to be there from, I don't know, early evening until late with the SPF credit card being abused behind the bar.

We'd love you to come and say "Hello." We'd love to buy you a drink, and we may even be handing out some pins. Mark may, personally, stick a pin into you to welcome you to the evening.

Mark Dawson: If it's towards the end of the evening, getting a pin from us could be quite dangerous.

James Blatch: Dangerous. I wouldn't recommend it.

Mark Dawson: I wouldn't. Okay. Look, that's it for our plugs for NINC. We'd love to see you, but if you can't make it, there will be some other occasions.

I'll be at Twenty Books, Vegas, later in the year and we always try and make sure we do something in London in April, and who knows? We may do an SPF Live event one day. We've always thrown that idea around, haven't we? Who knows whether that's going to happen or not?

James Blatch: Right. Now, talking of events and things. This is a terrible link. It's not remotely related so it's why I don't work in radio anymore. Let's talk about today's interviewees.

They are a couple who run a small, indie publishing outfit from their home. And they have grown up very similar to Michael Anderlay who wrote and published his own books and then started to publish other people's books.

We've had Jasper Joffe of Joffe Books on this podcast before, who works in London, in Shoreditch, and he publishes other people's books. They effectively are a publisher, but they work in a much more indie type way.

So, very savvy on the sorts of things that you and Jo and Nick talk about a lot, of how to discover your audience. How to get visibility. And how to make money as an indie author.

Mark Dawson: I can't remember, in this interview, whether they share their exact figures, but you have a way of looking at what people are doing in terms of our business and our estimate is that these people, with these small little industries, are going great guns.

James Blatch: Absolutely, yeah. We have a rough idea of what people like Jasper ... how he's doing and it's ... I'd be very surprised if it wasn't six figures a month. I mean, doing tremendous business.

The reason I got really excited talking to Jasper is it really felt like ... We talk about the industry changing a lot, but some areas that's been slower, and the traditional industry. Some people feel very good about indies but a lot of them kind of ignore and still look down on the indie world growing and ignore the facts that it's a good way to make money for writers.

Mark Dawson: Yes, this is irrefutable. These little growth of small businesses that are turning over millions of dollars a year publishing other indie authors' books, is the irrefutable evidence that publishing model of the past is not going to work in the future. It's going to be different and it could

be, who knows? The model might be a thousand small publishers doing most of the business around the planet.

James Blatch: So, that's an introduction to them. Let's hear their story. Let's hear what sort of books they're after, and you might even want to submit your book to them after you've heard this interview. Let's hear from James and Jeanette Hunter.

James and Jeanette. Double heading. Welcome to the self publishing formula podcast.

James: Hi.

James Blatch: There's always a little bit of technical at the beginning of an interview when there's two people, but it's been remarkably quick and here we are. We can hear and see each other and we're talking.

I think we should start really by hearing your story. I've read the notes that you've given me, but let's hear it from whoever, either James or Jeanette, wants to take the lead in telling us how this all started in publishing for you.

Jeanette: He's the story teller.

James Hunter: Yeah, well, it's part of it. She does a fair bit, too. I had written on and off for a lot of my life. I was in the Marine Corps and that's where I got my start writing. Then it kinda fell off for me for a while, and we were living in Thailand in 2014. We were doing international aid work over there and we were really poor.

She's a chemist, but she had left her job at a big pharma company for us to go over there and live in this little concrete shack in this Thai-Chinese area of Bangkok.

There was nothing to do so I started writing because there's no TV. There was nothing else for me to do so I started out, "Oh, I'm gonna go pick up writing again."

I had finished my first book and I thought about going the traditional publishing route and that just seemed like a terrible, just a terrible model for me. It was like, "Man. This is so slow and inefficient and terrible."

So I kind of stumbled upon self-publishing and I didn't have big aspirations but I thought, "This could work." So I talked with her about it and, again, we were ridiculously poor. We spent our first several months in Bangkok just sleeping on floors.

Jeanette: We had a bed.

James Hunter: We didn't have furniture. We didn't have a couch. We didn't even have filtered water for a long time, but I said, "Hey, I think we could do this, but it's gonna take some money." And she was onboard 100% and she said, "Okay. Let's start saving up."

So we saved up for probably six months until we had enough to get a cover and afford editing and do all those types of things. I came up with a marketing plan and we launched my first book in January of 2015.

Fingers crossed hoping that we would make our money back in a year, and we made our money back in a couple of weeks and that was just-

James Blatch: Wow.

James Hunter: - like flabbergasted. Like, "Wow. What is this that's going on here?" At the time we were still there and we didn't really think it was gonna be a business.

I kept writing because I started getting fan letters saying, "When's the next book coming out?" I was like, "There's not a next book." But I was like, "I guess I should." We were using the money to pay off some student debt. And then ... When did we come home?

Jeanette: Late 2015?



James Hunter: Late 2015. I had published like two, maybe three books and her father got sick and we had to come back home and take care of him. Though we effectively lost our jobs and she was about seven months pregnant with our second kid, so we were homeless, moving international with a two-and-a-half-year old and a seven month pregnant wife with no jobs. We were like, "What are we going to do?"

Jeanette: It was a really good choice.

James Hunter: It was a good choice.

James Blatch: Good decisions.

James Hunter: We're like, "Well, we got this writing thing going on. I guess we'll just double down on that and see if we can not be homeless." That worked out surprisingly well.

We just decided we were gonna go full-tilt in on this thing and spent 2016 mostly working on it by myself. I think it was in the beginning of 2017, we were starting to see some pretty good money and Jeanette said ... She's always been really entrepreneurial and she said, "I really want to be more involved." So she started taking over the marketing stuff.

She's a way better marketer than I ever was. My attention was always divided and since she came onboard full time and started doing all the marketing and more of the business side of stuff, that's freed me up to write.

Our business has just exploded since then. We've managed to make something pretty cool, I think. It's been a good experience for us.

James Blatch: I've got a lot of questions as a result of that, and then we'll move forward, I think, into your current guise in publishing other people, as well. All right?

James Hunter: Sure.

James Blatch: Let me just wind back a little bit. You say you were bored and there was nothing else to do, so you wrote. Most authors will say that they always wanted to write or they'd done stories as a student.

### **Is there anything in your background there?**

James Hunter: Not really.

Jeanette: Yeah, you always wrote.

James: I kind of wrote a little bit, some short stories on and off in high school. I never thought I was going to be an author.

I started writing a little bit more seriously when I was in the Marine Corps. A whole bunch of times I was with a special operations group, the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, and my first deployment was to Al Anbar, Iraq. I was a convoy machine gunner.

When I was not on the road, I read books, but then I ran out of books. We were living in a condemned Iraqi squad bay. I didn't have anymore things to do, so the boredom got a hold of me once again and I had my computer. I said, "I'm gonna start writing some stories. I read all these books. I think I could do some stories."

That's when the writing bug got me. That was about 2007.

James Blatch: Thank you for putting yourself in harm's way, by the way, while the rest of us were comfortable back home. There's an old saying about we need rough men in the night who go and do that. They keep us safe. There you are. You're a rough man.

### **You started writing and had been a little bit there. What's the genre?**

James Hunter: When I initially started writing, it was just kind of generic, sci-fi fantasy, short stories.

Then my first real effort at writing a book that is the book that we ended up publishing, was urban fantasy. A kind of tough guy, shoot'em up, car chases, action, and metro-urban fantasy. It's sort of a thriller with monsters and guns and car chases. That's it.

### **James Blatch: So drawing a little bit on the military background?**

James Hunter: Actually, that's been a pretty big part of probably all of my books, is bringing in the Marine Corps and some of those experiences.

James Blatch: Why not? Okay. This is what interests me from what you said. It's that you looked at the traditional publishing model and thought, "Nah. This is not gonna work. We need something else." And you found self-publishing. Most people don't do that.

Most people see traditional publishing, get excited about the offer of \$25,000 advance or \$50,000 advance or something, if it's even tantalizingly close to them and they pursue this. At that period have eventually thought, "Well, let me try self-publishing and now we will know actually what the right route is from the beginning."

And that's beginning to have an effect but what was it about you that put you so far ahead of the game at that point and said, "Nah. This is not for me"?

### **What do you think?**

Jeanette: He is really impatient. So he started submitting all of these queries and looking for agents and looking at the process and he wasn't hearing back.

Then, I don't know how many months later, he started getting rejection letters and he's like, "This is ridiculous. It's going to take me a year to even find an agent." So, he started looking into other routes. I think the biggest thing was that he was impatient.

James Hunter: Terribly impatient. I don't do well with waiting.

"This is dumb. Is there a different way that's less dumb?" And there was, as it turned out.

James Blatch: That's a good trade.

James Hunter: Actually, it was David Gaughran's book, "Let's Get Digital." I think that was the first one that I stumbled upon.

I remember reading through some of the testimonials and I was like, "No way is this for real. No way is this the thing that's happening." That was kind of my entrance to the rabbit hole.

I started going a little bit deeper and I think I read, "Write Publish Repeat" was probably the next one that I read. Then I just made my way through the list and I discovered Joanna Penn and Mark Dawson and just everyone. Just started reading and learning and figuring out "Is this a thing that we could do for real if we had some money?"

Jeanette: He studied really extensively.

James Blatch: You got the book written. You didn't go the trad route but you didn't know a whole lot about self-publishing at this stage.

### **What did you do about things like editing and cover design?**

James: The editing, especially, at first was tough. I got pretty lucky in that we found a pretty good cover designer right off the bat and we spent a lot of money on the cover, but I figured, "If I'm going to do it, I need to have a cover that's comparable to what's coming out."

Finding an editor was a lot trickier and I ended up finding an editor through a writing forum group that I was a part of, and I didn't know any better.

We spent a lot of money for a really poorly edited book. But at the time, we didn't know and I actually went through three editors, who were not very

good, and spent quite a bit of money before we finally found an editor who we've had since then, that we just love.

That was more sort of trial-and-error. Spending money. Fingers crossed. Looking at testimonials, hoping it would be good. We got burned a lot before we found someone who actually worked.

James Blatch: That's interesting to me, as well. When you first start writing, and I'm in that position now. I'm not sure I feel confident enough to know what good editing looks like because I haven't written successful books to this point. Although, of course, I read books.

You've come out fully-formed as a self-publishing author with some awareness about you of understanding and rejecting editors who aren't quite up to it. You've got high standards. I'm impressed by what I'm hearing, basically is what I'm saying.

James: Well, thank you. We appreciate that.

Jeanette: You guys have really high standards. A lot of it was, in the beginning we went through three editors. That was probably over a year.

James Hunter: Yeah.

Jeanette: Our fans, our readers would come back and say, "Hey, I found all these errors."

James Blatch: Right.

Jeanette: And we're like, "What do you mean you found errors?" We were like, "Oh, well, apparently, the person that we hired didn't do as good of a job as we thought they did."

James Hunter: That was a big part of it because for me ... Again, I'm a pretty good self-editor but at some point, it's like, "Ugh. I've done everything that I can and anything's that still in there, I'm just gonna miss it." So, send it off to the editor.

It was that feedback from those new fans and those new relationships that we were forming, of people saying, "Oh, man, I found a hundred errors in your book."

Obviously, they did a bad job. We better get somebody else to re-edit it. Just working through that process while also writing new books. Eventually we found someone that was good.

Jeanette: That we trust.

James Hunter: It was sort of a work-in-process from the beginning. Like, "Nope. If it's bad, we're just gonna get it redone. Until it's right."

James Blatch: You stuck your book out, though, at the beginning and you say it turned a profit almost instantly.

### **What marketing had you done to launch?**

James Hunter: Early on, I had a really small mailing list that I had built up by doing a bunch of freebie promotional giveaway stuff for some short stories and book launch stuff through library things.

Library things will allow you to run some free promotions and do early readers, and you can do giveaways. And so I remember setting up a giveaway for the book then, through the library things. And that netted me actually a pretty good result.

Jeanette: But tons and tons of reviewers as well. Book bloggers, reviewers ...

James Hunter: Yeah. So I made a bunch of book flyers, like digital book flyers with just the cover, and book information, and genre, and word count, and all of this stuff. And then basically I scoured the web for about three months finding very book blogger that I could possibly find that have reviewed in my genre.

And I contacted all of them. Professionally said, hey, I'm a new author and I understand if you don't want to work with me, but I have this great book, and here's my cover, and here's my blurb, and I'd be happy to provide you a digital art in whatever format you need.

I would say about 50 percent of the people we approached turned us down. But the other 50 percent said, yeah, absolutely, send us over the book. And that actually got us a good response early on as well.

It was really time intensive, because I just had to just send out so many emails and constantly be following up. But I think that was probably one of the biggest things early on when I had no mailing list, and no real platform, and no readers. That helped.

Jeanette: And then on launch, we actually utilized some promotional sites and whatnot. Our launch now is very different than what it was then.

James Blatch: So you got some pretty good visibility just by basically scratching around and seeing multi faceted channels. Which is fine, will move on to where we are now.

**I'm guessing this has become a slightly small, smoother process for you. And you've worked out what's working.**

James Hunter: Yes.

James Blatch: And that's actually one of the questions, let's save that.

Remind me to ask you at the end, is how much has changed in terms of worked in 20 15 and how you're finding it in all these years later in 20 18. So let's move up to date a little bit.

**How many books have you written now?**

James Hunter: I think eighteen. I think that's where were at. Is eighteen. And then we have plans for about another five to release this year.

Jeanette: Are you talking about whole publishing?

James Hunter: No. No. Just me and my co author books that I've done, is eighteen books.

James Blatch: Wow. You're prolific.

James Hunter: Fourteen individual just me titles, I think. And then we have several, maybe it's ... I always get that number wrong. It's like eight-

Jeanette: It's like twelve and six, or something. Because he has a few co authored project as well.

James Hunter: Eighteen total books is what we've done since January of 2015. And we're hoping to get that number up into the twenties this year, and then maybe the thirties next year.

That part of it has been just a lot of work. Just really butt in chair, putting words on the page, just constantly.

James Blatch: Let's talk a little bit about the writing, because that's something everyone's always interested in, before we move on to the rest of the marketing.

### **All one series? Or multiple series?**

James Hunter: Multiple series. All of them are fantasy based, but multiple series of cross multiple sort of fantasy genre.

I have everything from sort of more high fantasy to whatever PG to urban fantasy. And just kind of spread out across the market. And we've had pretty good success in just about everything that we've done.

We have had books that have flopped relative to how we expected that they would do. But mostly our books across, even performing across different genres, have all done really, really well.



We're kind of all over the board. I haven't done any sci fi. I want to do some sci fi, but that's kind of stick with what you know.

James Blatch: There have gotta be some space marines coming into this at some point.

James Hunter: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Jeanette: We actually have a series that we published through another author that has space marines.

James Hunter: It's true. I have a series on the back burner called, The Galaxy Marks, that I really want to do. It's outlined and about the first five or six chapters are done. But you kind of have to stick with the projects that pay the bills.

James Blatch: Yep.

James Hunter: And then you can give yourself leeway to do fun, good for your soul art writing projects that you're not a hundred percent sure whether they're going to perform well or not, but you just want to write them. So it's kind of a touch and go with that.

James Blatch: And James, your process:

**Do you plot? Do you just sit down and start writing? And how and where do you write?**

James Hunter: Initially when I started writing, I was a pantsner. I didn't do any plotting at all. And that was terribly inefficient for me.

I would write the book really quick, but then I would spend ages editing the book because there would be all these plot holes, and there would be these threads that went nowhere.

At some point, I think it was when we moved back home, I realized this needs to be like a job. I was like, I need to find a better way to do this where I'm spending less time editing.

So, initially, I was like, no way can I outline. But I read a bunch of books on outlining, and I said, I'm really going to give this the good ole college try, as we say here. And it really revolutionized my process, and made the writing a lot quicker.

The outlining is pretty intense. My outlines range from usually about 8,000 to 12,000 words. So it's like beat by beat, scene by scene. The whole story is done before I ever start writing the book.

And usually I'll write it in chunks. I'll write basically a quarter of the book. And then I'll send it to Jeanette who will read it, and do developmental editing on it, and she'll send it back to me. While I'm working on part two.

We'll sort of developmentally edit the book in process as we go. So that by the time that we're done with the book, it's clean. It's ready to go to our content editor. And then from there it will go right out to market.

James Blatch: And in terms of how you learn to write, how you learned your story arcs, and cause and effect, and character development.

### **Is this all self taught?**

James: Yep. I watched a lot movies. And I've read a lot books, especially ones I decided that I wanted to take this more seriously. I just said, hey, if this going to be my job, I need to be better at my job than I am.

My first book was good, but all of my subsequent books are a lot better than that. Because once I decided this could be a thing for me, I went out and read Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Just anything that I could find on story structure, or on plotting, or on character arcs, or ...

I mean most of the books out there on those things, I've read at some point and tried to take away the gems, and see what is going to help with my process, and make better stories, ultimately.

Jeanette: One of his super strong suits, and I think one of the reasons we've been successful, both of us, is that we're not afraid of studying, and reading, and looking at what other people are doing. And really trying to expand our knowledge. And implementing things if we think it will benefit us.

James Hunter: Yeah. And that's one of the things that I really love about what Jeanette has done too.

On the marketing side of things, being willing to say, hey, there are people that are better at this than I am, and I'm going to go learn what those people are doing, or figure out what they're doing, so that I can get up to their level. And that's something I've always done with the writing.

But she's really done that, even the editing side, which was the thing that she hadn't been into before, but on the editing and the marketing side. And it's really shown. I mean, she's grown a lot.

James Blatch: That's a really important trait. We see a lot of this, of course. And it sets people apart. The ones who say, I don't need any help and you can't teach me anything. And the ones who are all over anything that you've got to say.

I think that's a very important mental state to have, mindset.

Jeanette, let's talk about you a little bit. So, first of all, I'm intrigued by the fact that five years ago you were a military wife, husband presumably away quite a lot. And we know that's a very tough thing. So we thank you as well for your part in that.

**Did you have any inkling, at that point, that you'd be sitting here in this publishing partnership with your husband a few years later?**

Jeanette: No. But he remembers the story a little bit different than me. Because when he got out of the marine corp in 2010, I remember he wrote another novel prior to the one that was published.

James Hunter: And it was garbage.

Jeanette: I was reading it. And I went into his office and I said, hey, you're going to be published one day. This is really good. And of course that book is never going to be published, but I do remember saying that to him.

I never thought that I would be along for the ride. But I always saw his skills and abilities, and thought he could totally do this. And now here we are.

James Blatch: But that was a sort of a fanciful thing, I guess, and here you are as this partnership and it is genuinely a partnership. I can tell from a few things that James has said, that you are a key part to this business. So you've picked this up.

### **Do you have a background in marketing or business?**

Jeanette: I've got some background in marketing. I'm a chemist so that's like my actual profession. But I've studied a little bit of business, a little bit of marketing on the side as well.

My father ran his own business. So I kind of had that entrepreneurial gene, or drive, or whatever to do things on my own.

James Blatch: Well it's come into its own now.

So in terms of marketing, what has developed, in terms of James' book first of all before we talk about widening your enterprise.

### **What had developed in the way that you market now? What's working for you now?**

Jeanette: People always ask us about Facebook and Amazon and all those things. And, honestly, we didn't start running ads until a year ago maybe?

James Hunter: Yeah.

Jeanette: Just under a year ago when I took over. I mean we'd done a few things here or there, but hadn't really done a lot.

Our whole business before that had all been organically grown through the way that we discussed earlier with promotions, and reaching out to bloggers, and all of those things.

James Hunter: And also just because whenever anybody asked me what's the best thing they can do in terms of marketing, it's write more books faster.

Jeanette: Well, and a mailing list.

From the very beginning we've always known that a mailing list was very important.

James: We had started our mailing list even with just from the first book.

Jeanette: Yep.

James Hunter: But our biggest growth, initially, was just by writing books. And by releasing good content, consistently.

Jeanette: Yes. Because at that point, I was doing some editing and running our finances. Taxes and all of that. But he was running the business completely.

**James Blatch: And at some point, you decided to start taking on other authors.**

Jeanette: That was probably a year and a half ago?

James Hunter: A year and a half ago. Yeah.

**James Blatch: What prompted that?**

James Hunter: One of my co authors now, Eden Hudson, who we just adore and love.

Jeanette: She was a beta reader.

James Hunter: She was a writer, but her and I had sort of a writer relationship where she would beta read some of my books and I would beta read her books. And she's just a phenomenally good writer.

She hadn't had a lot of financial success self publishing. And then she had a new series that was coming out. And I read it and I was like, man, this is so good, this is really good. And we were doing really well at that point.

We had a surplus at that point in terms of business money. And it was like, we can afford to get nice covers for these, and we can afford a marketing budget, and we can afford to do a lot of this stuff that I know that she doesn't really want to do.

Because she's just more on the writer side of things and the publishing side of things. And so we made her an offer on the books. Even knowing they were off genre, they were a little bit wonky. Amazing books. But, in terms of just marketing, a little off genre. Not really fitting cleanly into the box. But we-

Jeanette: At that point though we were doing it because we had the money and we wanted to help out.

Because we really liked her. I don't think at that point we had this vision.

James Hunter: No. But that's how we got into it. Publishing other people. Is just wanting to help this one friend of ours who had this great series. It was a little bit outside the genre box. That we thought, we should take a crack at this and see what we could do. And it just kind of evolved from there.

Jeanette: Yeah.

James Blatch: And you said that you made her an offer. And I know that obviously deals between you and authors is gonna remain, you probably want them to remain confidential.

**Can you give us an idea of the model that you used? Compared to what the traditional industry would do?**

James Hunter: I'll just tell you what we do. It is a little bit different with every author.

Jeanette: And it's different now than it was then.

James Hunter: But, generally, we do like a in advance-

Jeanette: Very small.

James Hunter: A small advance, but just kind of a good faith offering. Like, hey, we believe in you. And we only make money if we sell books. So we usually do a small advance.

And then we do, usually it's 60/40 on the first 3500 copies to help us recoup our investment, and then we split it 50/50 with the author. And that's across all titles. So if it's e books, or audio books, or whatever.

And we pay for everything. We do all of the marketing. We do all of the covers. We pay for the multiple editors that we have on our team now.

We never do the royalty split on the audio books. We always do just straight up per finished hour. So far it's turned out to be a pretty good model for the authors that are working with us.

Right now we have a couple of authors that are working with us, but we only have two that we really publish, aside from me. But they've both gone to be Amazon number one best sellers in their respective categories. Not like small niche categories like dark fantasy or ... I mean these are like big categories like dark fantasy, or cyber punk, or sword and sorcery, or

whatever it is that we're publishing. So it's turned out to be a pretty good thing, so far, for the authors that have worked with us.

Jeanette: Yeah.

James Blatch: That's fantastic. And it's a story that's increasingly common. We're hearing these small agencies.

We had Jasper Joffe on this podcast. We're speaking to other people at the moment. Mark and I are really keen on this as well, because we have a big communities of authors.

And we know that there's a tragedy of lots of people that are very, very good writers but just don't either want to or just can't quite get their heads around the marketing side. And I completely understand that.

James Blatch: It's hard.

Jeanette: It's a lot of work.

James Blatch: And what a far more equitable split. I don't think the general public, my friends, have any idea how little the percentages are in traditional publishing.

I point out to them, I've mentioned this before in the podcast, the stories about authors who go back to their job as a solicitor because they've made no money from their writing. And it's a tragedy for writers that it's gone on for centuries like that.

So I'm so excited every time I hear that another little agency started up where there's an equitable split for the author. It still relies on key things, the books being good and the marketing being on point. But competition will sort that out.

And the agencies that don't work, don't work. And the authors that can't write or haven't adapted their writing to be better. But that's all okay. Right? But it's an exciting field to be in.



Jeanette: Yeah.

James Hunter: Absolutely. And I am seeing this a lot more. Because once you've already developed those skills, once you know how to market and sell books, it's easier to build those audiences. Even for authors that are not you.

Jeanette: You have to have the skills.

James Hunter: That's one of the things I think that has just been so huge for us now with the skills that we have. And part of it's with our platform, and the reach, and the mailing list, and all these things.

But in some ways, it's harder for us to fail than it is for us to succeed. That doesn't mean we can't fail. We still have projects that didn't do as well as we wanted them to do.

Jeanette: Yeah.

James: But now there's sort of a reader bias in our favor. Instead of a bias against us.

James Blatch: Yeah.

James Hunter: Where we already have this in-built audience of people who trust the kind of books that we put out.

If we put out a book, even if it's not by me, they say, well, James Hunter writes books like these, and he likes books like these, and I like the kinds of things that he likes, so I'm probably going to like this. And they're going to pick it up and buy it.

James Blatch: And in terms of your mailing list, you had your author mailing list. You've now got your publishing house, if we call it that, mailing list.

**Is that the same list? Or have you compartmentalized?**

Jeanette: No. I always laugh when I was watching Mark's course. Because he shows just this giant list of all of his different lists. And that's totally what ours is like.

We have different genre lists. We have different mailing lists for things that are specific for him. For people that signed up for his mailing list. We have our Shadow Alley Press mailing list. We have lots of segmented things so that we can make sure we send people what they want.

James Blatch: Okay. But it sounds like a lot to manage in terms of that.

And then I'm quite interested in how who the author who comes to you, who may or may not have the assemblance of a mailing list. You're effectively building up a mailing list for that author, but that's something that you own rather than they own. I guess.

Jeanette: Correct.

James Hunter: That's true. That's one of the benefits of working with us. But it's sort of a double edged sword in the sense. If an author already has a mailing list and wants to put links to their mailing list in the back of their book, we're totally fine with that.

But in terms of like promoting a mailing list, like when we're promoting a mailing list, we're almost always promoting the Shadow Alley Press mailing list. Because that's something that we can control and is a big tool that we help, not just that author, but all the authors that we work with. And that is one of the benefits that they get as they get access to our list of readers, which is pretty substantial.

Jeanette: Yep.

James Hunter: And, generally is an engaged audience, because we don't do a lot of like mailing list blasts for other authors or things like that. It's mostly given them specifically the content that they have told us that they want.

If they're audio book listeners, great. We will message you only about audio books. If that's the thing that you're into, that's the thing that you're gonna get.

Jeanette: Yep.

**James Blatch: What platform do you use for the mailing lists? So Mail Chimp by the sounds of it? You got separate lists.**

Jeanette: No. We use Mailerlite.

James Blatch: We're adding that to our 101 course, it's such a popular platform that's risen in the last 12, 18 months or so.

I suppose the one thing I was thinking about this the other day that's missing at the moment and I know there are companies around trying to bridge this gap is organizations like yours Michael Anderlay's and in Jasper Joffre's and so on, getting books into bookshops.

Because really you're looking after well read authors, you're a well read author and it's slightly ridiculous that somebody who hears about you, who's completely ... Because they're a reader, agnostic to everything, walks into Barnes and Noble or Waterstones in the UK and says "Can I have a James Hunter book?" And they shrug their shoulders and say "Who's he published with?"

There's a stupid behind the scenes demarkation between the two. And I wonder, I know we've had a couple of people approach us say that their job is to get books into bookshops and we're just doing our due diligence at the moment because there's also a few companies in there who perhaps just take some money of you for what looks like that.

**But this seems to me like an area that needs developing, right?**

Jeanette: Absolutely.

James Hunter: It is really frustrating because there's a whole segment of readers that are not exposed to my books that I think would like my books. But because they predominantly shop in physical book stores, they're paperback book readers and obviously we have our books in paperback that you can order on Amazon but it's not quite the same thing.

So that's one of the very frustrating things for me, I'm working with an agent, Paul Stevens out of the Donald Mossletter agency, we're tentatively going to be working together. We have an agreement drafted but it hasn't signed to try to pitch a new fantasy series that would be probably be a loss leader for us in terms of actual revenue that we make but that would get us access to a new reader pool that we don't currently have.

Because it's, yeah, we've looked at it, we've looked at the book sellers association and like, how could we do this because it's not just ... We have enough money to do a five or six thousand book print run on some of our more top popular titles.

But how do we distribute them, how do we get them into book stores? We don't have reps, I mean that's the one thing that the traditional publishers have is they have this giant network of representatives that can go into every book store and they go into libraries and they can go into indie book stores.

And that's the one thing that they do really well that I have not seen in indie ... I mean you can go to your local Barnes and Noble and say "Hey, I'm the local, put my book on your shelves." And they might but getting national or international distribution-

Jeanette: It comes to the point where you think, from a marketing or advertising standpoint that the hours that you're going to have to pour in to get anything, your return is gonna be so minuscule.

James Blatch: I think something must be coming this way because I can understand the systemic problems, if that's the right word. Bookshops can't

deal with 100,000 individual authors or small companies, but there has to be some way of streamlining this process and yeah, those solutions are probably coming.

James Hunter: I hope so. I was gonna say, I think a big part of the problem at this point is still the return policies for most book stores. For traditional published books they can return them if they don't sell and for most indies that just-

Jeanette: Isn't gonna work.

James Hunter: It just isn't going to work, especially if you're doing print on them and that kind of thing, so.

James Blatch: It would be the remaindered pile so, yes, indeed, we'll have to get over that.

Let's talk about where you are now, and there will be of course authors listening to this saying "Publish me, publish me."

### **Are you looking for new authors, how do people go about contacting you?**

Jeanette: We're pretty selective on the people that we work with, we have a must meet and like you policy if that makes sense.

We don't just take open submissions. But we did have an open submission for an anthology that we're putting together, that's closed now but we'll probably do that again in the future so if there are submissions open you'll be able to find information on our Facebook page, on our website, things like that.

James Hunter: One of the things that we decided on early on, that we wanted to do differently than a lot of the small presses that have been out there for a while is we are not interested in publishing 100 authors.

We are interested in publishing like, ten authors because when you have that many authors, unless you have a giant, giant staff it's really hard to give the authors the attention that you need for their books to be successful because marketing books, it's really time intensive.

Our goal early on was to find authors that we want to work with and then, not just publish a book or a series but partner with them as authors and help them develop a sustainable brand that's going to be lucrative for them and lucrative for us.

So our goal is not just, "Hey, send us a book and maybe we'll publish it." It's "Hey we want to develop a relationship with you as a person, and if we like you and you're easy to work with and you can hit your deadlines and you're flexible and coachable, then we will help work with you to build a sustainable living, hopefully as an author."

And that's really more of our goal. It's a little bit different than the really widespread, as many authors as you can get putting out as many books as you can, that's not really our model.

James Blatch: Yeah, managing growth is a really important thing to do for new businesses and we know that over extending yourself can be the death of a business.

But, hey look, you guys have done well, I think you've shared some figures with me in the notes, looking at potentially half a million dollars of revenue this year?

Jeanette: Yeah.

James Hunter: I'll let her speak to that, she's more the numbers person than I am.

Jeanette: I just calculated our second quarter, actually third quarter, we don't have all the final figures in for third quarter yet because audio is only a month behind but we'll have another six figure quarter for third quarter

so I think that the fourth quarter will have to have a really good quarter but we've had quite a few really hot, best selling releases that just came out.

James Hunter: Yep, and we have a lot of follow up books in the shoot that are ready to go, ready to drop.

Jeanette: And we've got a ton of audio that's getting ready to come to market. So a lot.

James Blatch: Either way mid six figures this year, one way or another.

Jeanette: Yeah.

James Hunter: Absolutely.

**James Blatch: And you're growing so you're looking at seven figures next year?**

James: Fingers crossed.

Jeanette: That would be amazing.

James Hunter: And really I think the thing that I'm most excited about because we're pretty simple people, actually like we are a one car household, it's a 2015 micro van, it's not even a mini van, it's a teeny little thing.

Jeanette: Would you stop?

James Blatch: I think you want a new car Jeanette.

James Hunter: We're not antsy people.

Jeanette: No he's the one that wants to keep it.

James Hunter: I'm the one that she's been fighting for the new car.

Jeanette: I'm like, we're making how much?

James Hunter: This is a fine vehicle to get us from point A to point B, so we don't have like really high tastes so I think that's been exciting for me is that money allows us to finance new projects.

And that a big chunk of that money is getting paid out now, it's royalties to authors that we're working with. Because I think we're helpers by nature and so the thing that's really exciting for me is that we can help.

Being a writer full time is the coolest job on the planet, so knowing that we are getting to make that dream a reality for other people, that's the thing that's just blown my mind and it's so exciting and so cool.

I'm really hoping that next year we'll be able to make that a reality for even more people.

Jeanette: We have one of our writers, Aaron Crash, he's been writing for like 11 years and has never really had financial success with it, has always done it because he loved to do it. And he's just doing really, really well with us and just is ... We're just thrilled that we get to help him on that journey.

James Blatch: That's great and it sort of brings us full circle because you started the story helping out others in Thailand as a couple with very little, not even a micro van between you I'm guessing.

Jeanette: We didn't have a car.

James Hunter: We had little bicycles.

Jeanette: We had feet.

James Hunter: They're called grandmother bicycles and so here I am, this 6'2, former marine American.

Jeanette: With a basket.



James Hunter: Little basket on the front riding my bike down the streets of Bangkok so we've come a long way, all the way up to micro van level of success.

James Blatch: I really hope when we speak again you may have a new car but who knows, I don't want to push you into any kind of rash decision.

Jeanette: Oh no, we will.

James Blatch: Now we should say, because we haven't just to conclude this, we haven't given away the name of your company but it's the Shadow Valley Press?

Jeanette: Shadow Alley Press.

James Blatch: Shadow Alley, oh yes, I saw the W but it's a W not a V, Shadow Alley Press and so people go to shallowalleypress.com to find your books and so on. And potentially who knows, somebody who you might meet and like one day and end up publishing.

Jeanette: That's true.

James Hunter: We do a lot of conventions, I'll be at dragon con, I'm gonna be at the quills con in Utah in just a week from now I think.

But the number one thing if you're listening and you want to work with us, come and meet me and don't be terrible because our number one rule is you have to be easy to work with and we have to like you. Because if you're hard to work with it's just going to be too much of a hassle, so come and introduce yourself and be awesome.

James Blatch: That sounds like a terrifying prospect, to have to come and not be terrible in front of a man who used to snap people in half in the middle east. Or whatever it is you did then.

Thank you so much indeed for joining us it's a really lovely ethos the two of you have as a couple that drives your company as well, so I'm full of

admiration for that, I think it's really nice. And yeah, I don't know if you're going to 50 books or NINClater this year, either of those?

James: We're not going to 50 books this year, we went last year.

Jeanette: We went last year.

James Hunter: But we're gonna try, I think we're gonna try to go to Bali is our next destination.

Jeanette: But that's not for where readers can meet us.

James: No.

Jeanette: We're in the process of moving states right now, because we like to throw everything on at once.

James Blatch: I've noticed that.

James: So NINC we'd love to go, but haven't committed to it yet.

James Blatch: Okay, but people can see you round at the various conventions, so great.

Thank you so much indeed for joining us from Colorado, all I can do is just wish you growth and success in the future and we'd love to keep in touch and catch up with you in a little while.

James Hunter: Awesome and we just want to say thank you so much for inviting us on, I mean what you guys do is just amazing, you know, Mark Dawson's courses have been instrumental.

Jeanette: Really good for us.

James: And transformational for us and our business model, so giving the opportunity to come on and talk with you and just-

Jeanette: It's been awesome.

James Hunter: It's amazing, it's really cool so thank you so much for having us on, it really is a pleasure and an honor so I really appreciate it.

James Blatch: It's been our pleasure and honor so thank you so much.

James Hunter: Take care.

James Blatch: Okay there are James and Jeanette. Now you and I got very enthused about this as you and I, John Dyer got very enthused about the whole idea of an indie publishing space and I feel, I still to this day feel very strongly that you are in a really strong position to do this. I know the big problem we've got is a time sap, is a big time sap.

But we did a trawl out for books, we got a lot of submissions from the SPF community, we've done some work in narrowing those down and we've got more work to do in trying to create a kind of model around that. But that could be a really exciting thing for SPF to get into.

What we're looking for, this could be another opportunity to say that, is we're looking for somebody who's a good writer, writes books that sell in a genre that's well read but who doesn't like, can't do, hasn't tried the marketing.

There's no point in us taking somebody on who's been really good at the marketing because they probably done as best as they can and it would be wrong of them to sign over to us.

And the deals that Jasper and I think James and Jeanette do is much closer to 50/50 percent than it is the traditional industries deal, so it's always gonna be a good deal for an author.

**How are you feeling about it, I'm still feeling energized that this is something that should be in our future?**

Mark Dawson: We'll see, the problem is just time so I've got two businesses, both of which do quite well and both of which take out an enormous amount of my time, plus two little people I have to look after.

There's only so much time really. If time was no issue I'd definitely look into doing something like that because I think, a lot of these people, Jasper Joffe took my course so I've taught him through the course how to do what he's doing so I can certainly do that, it would be something that I think I could do quite comfortably.

When I do things I don't do things unless I can dedicate myself to them 100 percent and at the moment I don't think I could say that for yet another business on top of the two that I'm already involved with. So, one day we'll see.

I think it is something that could be quite fun and it probably could be quite lucrative.

James Blatch: And we should say to the people that have submitted their books, it's not a waste of your time, it is still an active project within SPF, it's that it's not moving quite as fast as perhaps all of us would like but it is still moving, so thank you very much for that.

And now, the other thing just to mention is that conference season is upon us, NINC and Vegas and all the rest of it and what's the question I get asked by everybody we meet? What do they say to me? What's the second thing? The first thing is how are you, how was your flight, what's the second thing they asked?

Mark Dawson: What is it like to work with someone like Mark, that's got to be the question.

James Blatch: That's down on the list. The second question they ask me is where's your book dude?

Mark Dawson: Yes, that's right. They say dude?

James Blatch: They say dude, because they're American, that's how they dude in America, all the time.

Mark Dawson: Fewer people should use that word.

James Blatch: Okay, dude. Alright grandad. So I get asked, where's your book?

Mark Dawson: Where's your book dude?

James Blatch: I have to explain, now things are feeling a lot more positive for me about the book, incredibly so actually this time around so I do have a better answer than I did and I have blogged this, I promised I would blog this.

People will remember we had Jenny Nash, book coach, on the podcast. I'd recorded that interview at the beginning of July and in the background I'd been connecting with Jenny and bought into the service she's offered.

I'm blogging that process so that people can understand what it is you get for your money, why it might work for me, might not work for you, might work for you, who knows. And that blog I think is going live on the same day that this podcast is going out, is that correct mark?

Mark Dawson: That's the plan.

James Blatch: That is the plan, and the blog is called "Where is James Blatch's book?" Should've called it "Dude, where's your book?" Should we change it to "Dude where's your book?"

Mark Dawson: Let's not do that. I hate that word almost as much as I hate the word journey.

James Blatch: Okay, so that blog is there and I can refer anybody who asks me, dude where's your book? To that blog over the next, so I might put the URL onto a bit of paper and hand it out. Anyway, that's not to stop you asking me where my book is and I'm happy to talk about it.

Good, okay that's it, thank you very much indeed for listening, thank you to our guest today, James and Jeanette working and publishing from their front room at home and going great guns.

It's an exciting time to be a writer, there's never been a better time to be a writer in fact. And we are gonna say hello to you next week so tune in then, bye bye.

Narrator: You are listening to the self publishing formula podcast. Visit us at [selfpublishingformula.com](http://selfpublishingformula.com) for more information, show notes and links on today's topics. You can also sign up for our free video series on using Facebook ads to grow your mailing list. If you've enjoyed the show, please consider leaving us a review on iTunes. We'll see you next time.