



EPISODE 158: DRACULA'S BACK: BEING A HYBRID AUTHOR – WITH J.D. BAKER

Voiceover: On this edition of The Self Publishing Show.

J.D. Barker: The only thing that is actually yours as an author is the physical book, the printed text, that's yours 100%. The second somebody does an audio book, now it's the narrator's take on your work, so it's already different and if you sign a film or a TV contract, forget about it. It's not your project anymore.

Voiceover: Publishing is changing. No more gatekeepers, no more barriers, no one standing between you and your readers. Do you want to make a living from your writing?

Join indie bestseller, Mark Dawson and first time author James Blatch as they shine a light on the secrets of self publishing success. This is The Self Publishing Show. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Welcome along. It's Friday and I'm James Blatch.

Mark Dawson: I'm Mark Dawson. Hello.

James Blatch: We're gradually getting used to that new way of intro-ing ourselves, aren't we?

Mark Dawson: Almost, yes. Almost.

James Blatch: The new intro's being bedded in a few weeks. I absolutely love it. I think that it gets us to where we want to be. We used work hard at this podcast, and show as we now call it, and the video side is important.



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I've worked very hard to make sure that it looks as posh as possible, as good and professional as possible. We think the intro just helps move that along, helps define it at the beginning as to what it is, which is a slight cut above a lot of the podcasts best in the world.

I love listening to podcasts but, and some of them, the quaintness is the they're put together, but we did want to do things as best as we can, which is the philosophy by the way that, Mark, you teach to authors about self publishing, right?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, absolutely. We wanted to be really fun and engaging and professional and all of those kinds of words. It is interesting how the reaction has been.

I posted a week or two ago just asking people what they thought of the new intro, and I suspect most of the people who answered are podcast listeners, which is still where most of our audience consumes our content. That sounds very, very-

James Blatch: Consumes our content.

Mark Dawson: Yeah. It's very cold. But they enjoy us waffling would be the perhaps a better way to put it. The response I'd say was negative, which was interesting.

Then I saw this morning when I got up, someone else had posted to the SPF community how he didn't like the new intro. Fair enough. It's a little bit surprising. We didn't expect that.

The kind of the criticism was that it's too slick and too professional now, and also that they, people, didn't like, and this was universal by any means but people didn't like the new voiceover guy.

They felt he was too salesy and American. It kind of cycles back to something that we said I think on podcast before we launched the new



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branding, was that the guy who does the voiceover, this guy called Huey Morgan, he was a singer and a DJ in the UK. He was the singer with the band called Fun Loving Criminals.

I said to you, James, did I not, that he's quite well-known in the UK but back in his homeland, no one knows who he is. It does appear to be true, doesn't it, that people don't recognize his voice outside of the UK.

James Blatch: It's a very distinctive voice from both his singing and his voiceover work. But yes, a lot of people had ID'ed him in the UK but not in the States which is surprising because he's like a New Jersey kid, isn't he?

Mark Dawson: It's Brooklyn, I guess. Yeah.

James Blatch: Brooklyn, yeah.

Mark Dawson: So it's interesting. I might do a little kind of survey later on just in a week or two, ask the wider community, just to see what people think.

But we do love it and it looks great on YouTube. So I would recommend to people, if they haven't seen the full effect, just hop over to YouTube and take a look.

Last week is when would have been a good excuse to do that because it is all about video trailers for books. So very visual episode of the show. Just go and have a look, and if you've got comments then you can email us.

I'm always interested to hear what people think. I'm not bothered that people don't like it and I do find it interesting and useful and it will be something that we will consider as we move forwards. But I think between the three of us, me, John and you, we love it.

I remember showing it to Joanna Penn. She came into my house not that long ago and I put it on the big screen. She was pretty impressed with it. I



mean, I think it's great, but I always say, horses for courses. Not everyone's going to share my opinion.

James Blatch: Yeah, nothing's forever. We'll rebrand again at some point. But I think that you also have to remember that people, and I include myself in this, don't react always that well to change.

When Facebook changed their platform, I mean actually there was a vitriol online, and Twitter when Twitter made some changes. The vitriol, the world's going to end when this changes. Now everyone got used to it.

Perhaps if it's a good enhancement, Facebook has got better, I think, in its timeline, then you gradually realize it actually wasn't so bad. Gosh, I can think back to companies. I think changes in companies we've worked at together where we all go, "Oh, this is terrible." Like a year later, actually probably was not a bad move.

So there's a kind of natural instinct. I think if it's your podcast, you've been listening to this from the beginning, we've got very loyal listeners, our band of loyal listeners who have an ownership of this show. This is much theirs as ours.

We've suddenly arbitrarily changed aspects of us. That makes, sometimes it makes us bristle a bit and I feel the same way about other things. So there's a little bit of that going on.

But that's not to dismiss that some people genuinely think it's not the right fit for our podcast and other people really like it.

Now, one thing that did come across, Mark, is quite a few said they did enjoy our interplay where we talked about the industry.

Mark Dawson: I don't enjoy our interplay.

James Blatch: No, a little bit. Our social intercourse.



Mark Dawson: Oh goodness, it gets worse.

James Blatch: A little bit British humor. That cropped up quite a few times. That's kind of repeated, Mark, so we are going to do a little bit more expanded area there.

But it was at the same week that somebody on our YouTube channel said, "By the way, 17 minutes and 26 seconds, we want to skip all the irrelevant guff at the beginning. So clearly it's not for everybody, us talking.

Mark Dawson: No. But I'm ready for some intercourse, James. You?

James Blatch: You're ready for social intercourse?

Mark Dawson: I am, yeah.

James Blatch: Well, that's what I'm good at.

Mark Dawson: I know.

James Blatch: So, let's stir things up. Though the first thing I want to do before we have proper social intercourse, a foreplay if you like is to-

Mark Dawson: Horrible images.

James Blatch: Introduce our new Patreon listers who've joined us on Patreon on patreon.com/selfpublishingshow this week.

I want to say a very warm welcome to Michael Maloof from Arden in North Carolina, to Andrew Denaplane who is from Miami Beach in Florida, how very cool. Eliza Peak and Ivy Lane.

Thank you so much indeed for joining us as Patreon supporters. It means the world to me and Mark and it pays for Huey Morgan's Scooby snacks, doesn't it?

Mark Dawson: It does, yes.



James Blatch: His expenses. He was a very good value, I would say. If you want to know anything about how to put a podcast together, we do now know bits and pieces about this. So one of the things that people wanted to hear about was, believe it or not, my book.

Mark Dawson: I'd like to hear about it. How's it going?

James Blatch: I had a bit of a milestone. I didn't even notice until a day or two later but milestone was 100,000 words in what is the third and final draft of where we are. I'm now looking at 103,331.

I'm writing 20,000 a month at the moment and that is getting me to where I need to be to publish this year. So I wanted to do it in spring, April, might be June, now looking at it.

So where I am with this book. Where am I with this book? I have blogged about this on the website, that I started working with an editorial team in, well, I met them in August for the podcast, Jenny Nash, Author Accelerator Program. She hooked be up.

We had a couple of sessions together going through the outline and the structure then she hooked me up with my dedicated editor whose Lizette Clark who's been brilliant.

I now write my scenes every week. They go to Lizette. She gives me feedback. We talk about how the novel is progressing, having done the work on the outline at the beginning.

At the end of this process is effectively a developed mentally edited draft. Now, that's not to say there's no more work to do when I get to the end of this because there's going to be some developmental tweaks, in that there's at least two chunks in the book where, not massive chunks but where Lizette and I are thinking they might even come out or be compressed into a couple of small scenes but that's fairly easily done.



There's obviously going to need all copy and proof editing to get it ready but that's it. So that's quite exciting for me.

This is not one of the drafts I've done before where I'm just thinking, "Oh, it's such a mess. I don't know where to start." This is a flowing readable book now, which is very exciting for me.

What surprised me is that structurally, so at the beginning, on page one, there's an event and things unfold from there and protagonist has to basically work out what's been going on in the background.

Lizette and Jenny just said, "Look, explain to me what has happened before the event so we know what the secret is if you like." When I put that in, this single page to describe that, they both said, "That's a huge part of the book. It was compelling the way you described that. You'd got to start the book early. You've got to start the book with all of this leading up to the event. So that's what I've done which has been really exciting.

Now, here's the intriguing thing. I'm at 103,331 words and I haven't got to that event yet.

Mark Dawson: Right, okay.

James Blatch: Which is surprising for me because the entire book was after it. Now, that doesn't mean it's going to be 200,000 words, this novel, it's not.

Mark Dawson: I hope not.

James Blatch: No, but the structure's changed a little bit and there's a lot. I mean, worried. I'm a short form guy. I've been brought up in the realms of the BBC where you compress complex stories into 90 seconds of, scratch it, 45 seconds of script for a 90-second TV piece with a couple of clips in there and you got to tell a lucid, complex story as quickly and easy with it locked in there.



That's what I'm quite good at and I'd been brought up to doing. Now, I worry about being able to write long form, but letting it breathe about having things unfold in front of you, and yes I've really surprised myself when I know what I'm doing, when the editor and I worked out, "Well, this is what's happening." That's how much I've enjoyed and got on with that writing aspect of it.

So that's sort of where I am. I don't know. I think I need to keep it to a maximum of 50,000 more words. I think 150,000 words ...

Mark Dawson: Too high.

James Blatch: Yeah, it's a lot.

Mark Dawson: That's much too high.

James Blatch: Bearing in mind, we're going to cull probably a chunk in the middle. But it's not going to be necessarily that short a book. I mean, this is 383 pages according to script at the moment.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it doesn't have to be short. But I think, in most all of my books, I think if I've gone over 100,000, it would have been once or twice.

James Blatch: Right.

Mark Dawson: So those books behind me. Well, the Milton ones. Yeah, they would be 350 to 400 pages when they're printed and that would be around about 100,000 words.

I shoot for between 80,000 and 100,000 most of the time. That's the perfect length for me. So it's not to say that you can go longer.

Tom Clancy for example, his thrillers as would, I'm guessing, would be around about 150,000 words. Some of those big chunky doorstops.

James Blatch: Yeah.



Mark Dawson: But, I wouldn't go too much further than 120. But your story, that's your story. I haven't read the story and maybe it needs a few more words in there, but that's really what your editor is helping you with.

James Blatch: Yeah. Well, considering the whole thing takes place, it starts on the 7th of June, 1966 and it's currently the 22nd of June. It doesn't happen over a long time period but obviously a lot happens too.

Mark Dawson: That doesn't matter to me. Ulysses takes place over the course of 12 hours in one man's head and it's about, I don't know how many words that is, but I'm thinking it must be 150,000 words, something along those lines, so.

James Blatch: I think a Nelson DeMille book called By the Rivers of Babylon about the hijack of a couple of El Al Concordes and that whole thing was 24 hours. That was a doorstep book. That was a brilliant book.

Mark Dawson: I love the way I bring James Joyce into the conversation and you would talk of Nelson DeMille.

James Blatch: Yes.

Mark Dawson: That's everything that everyone needs to know about our relationship.

James Blatch: I've probably got that wrong, but yeah, when I was 15 they were the books I was reading. I'm not reading Ulysses now, by the way.

Mark Dawson: No. We can have a whole conversation about James Joyce but we'll do that another time.

James Blatch: So that's where I am with the book, which is exciting because we are getting there.

I interviewed Sacha Black for the podcast. She's talking about how to create good body and a good hero, and a really good podcast interview. But



she's the person who I sort of drunkenly shook hands with at London Book Fair last year and said, "This time next year, the book will be in my hands." I have said to her, I'm just going to export this to KDP, print one copy and bring it to London Book Fair.

What's been brilliant is that I've gone from somebody who ... I had written this book before we met. Actually, whilst we knew each other at the BBC, before any of this SPF thing happened, but during the process, I've grown up a little bit as a writer and matured a little bit in that sense.

I now, hopefully the interviews I do with writers, I have more of an insight into the process and the pitfalls and that's why I'm always interested in how people write and how they coalesce their ideas, et cetera. So it's been interesting for me to develop as a writer a little bit, even if I still haven't quite got to that publication.

Mark Dawson: Well, you're getting there. There's lots of people who are itching to buy a copy.

James Blatch: Well that's something. That's obviously the entire plan of the whole SPF project as far as I'm concerned, is bounce my book.

Now, yesterday I interviewed Mark Stay from The Bestseller Experiment, a podcast in the same space that we broadcast in. They had that project a couple of years back to the two of them, two Marks, to write a bestseller and get it into the KDP bestseller list. I think they wanted to get into five or six lists, which they did do.

I had a really interesting chat with him about the whole, the targeting of categories and the narrowing down of genres and so on, and they learned a lot through that process as well.

So I'm starting now as I get past 100,000 words and can sort of see, definitely see light at the end of the tunnel. Starting to stop thinking about how am I going to market this?



Mark Dawson: If only you knew someone who knows how to market digital books.

James Blatch: Yeah. What I need is a course, some description.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: When I do the one on one course for real, talk about it being tailored to me.

Mark Dawson: It was.

James Blatch: This is all going to go wrong for me now because also that book was published during the one on one course.

Mark Dawson: Yes. Yeah. That's right, yeah.

James Blatch: It was briefly published.

Mark Dawson: It was. We can get that taken off, no problem.

James Blatch: We need to speak to Darren.

Mark Dawson: We do.

James Blatch: What's going to happen is I'm going to publish this so I'm going to get one of those emails from Amazon saying, "This is not your work. This has been previously published."

Mark Dawson: Yes.

James Blatch: They'll never accept anything from me to convince them that it's mine. But anyway, that's where we are.

I'm absolutely loving the writing process. I do find it difficult to find the time. This week has been particularly difficult but I try and sit down. Like I say, it was 24,000 words in January and if I can average 1,000 words a day,



or just under, 850 words a day I think in January, 20,000 a month. That gets me to the finished book on the end of March.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: That gives me two months.

Mark Dawson: Well then you have the other editing, copy editing, proofreading, all that kind of stuff.

I would add beta readers, if you want to follow the model I use, which I recommend, especially if you can get some people in your team who have more experience of aviation than you do.

I know you know some or you've met through the podcast some commercial flyers and some military pilots, that will be a good idea to get the book out to those guys so they can, not necessarily correct your errors, although there'll be some that they can change, but to layer in things you don't know that you need to know.

That's the thing with my group is I might not have known that I needed to research something because I didn't know that that was an issue, but they will know that a certain weapon doesn't work that way.

They'll tell me first of all that I was wrong and secondly, they'll give me a little bit of information that I can very definitely, hopefully layer into the narrative to make readers think that I know what I'm talking about when, of course, I have no idea what I'm talking about at all. So that's fine. I enjoyed that process. But it is a skill that you practice.

James Blatch: One question for you is in terms of time, to get this published episodically, would it be acceptable to send out an advanced copy that hasn't been proofed and copy edited to people-

Mark Dawson: Well, you can-



James Blatch: Say, "It hasn't been proofed and copy edited, but can you ignore that aspect of it and give me-"

Mark Dawson: Some people will do that. I don't. So for my process, it's copy edited before it goes to the beta readers because that serves two purposes for me. They'll pick up factual errors, but they also pick up typos that have slipped through the copy edit.

So the last one I did that with, I mean, it was professionally edited but there were probably still 20 errors, probably more than that actually, but 20 ones that I would be unhappy releasing the book with those errors in there.

For example, there was one sentence where he got out of the station and walked five minutes to the station. So I mean, that slipped through. That's one of those things, it does happen. The best editors will miss things. But almost every one of my beta readers reported that. So it's a kind of thing that stuck out to them and so that's gone now.

This process for The Vault, which is the book that I'm talking about, I got a very, very detailed factually based report from one of my readers who used to work for the State Department in the US and has some experience working in Berlin during the Cold War, which is exactly where this book is set. So that kind of stuff.

He also picked some errors as well. But when you add in that kind of level of detail, the book that comes out at the end of it feels like, because I'm quite good now at taking those little gems that readers give me and then I'm very, very subtly putting them in. The way to do that is if they tell me something to do with a weapon, I will just maybe use one or two percent of the things that they told me.

Like an iceberg, all the rest of the knowledge I leave below the surface, but just the fact that I used something that feels authentic gives the ultimate reader the impression that there's more I could tell them, but I'm not telling



them because it's not necessary. So yeah, that's info dumping and doing it properly but I can help you with that.

James Blatch: Yes. Well, maybe I will send it out.

Mark Dawson: I should probably read it at some point.

James Blatch: Yeah, you could read it at some point. I'll send it out to Dave Gledhills who was an RF fast jet navigator, people like him and there's a few of the Vulcan people who've contacted me.

Mark Dawson: A few of the the Vulcans.

James Blatch: Yes, Vulcans. Send it out to them and I'd tell them to ignore the copy stuff and then send it out to a proper op team, not a proper op team but the kind of readers who would like to read books, I mean, people like Sacha for instance, volunteered to read it for me and I'd love people like that, so.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: Anyway, so that's where I am. That's The Last Flight, 103,000 words so far and not quite got to the beginning yet, which is interesting, isn't it? So good. You know you've got another book called The Vault published under the SPF Books.

Mark Dawson: I do, that's The Knowledge Vault, isn't it? Yes.

James Blatch: Yes, okay. Just double check. You're not going to confuse Amazon in a way.

Mark Dawson: No.

James Blatch: Right. Have we talked about everything we need to talk about? Where are we now? We are at 21 minutes. So that grumpy man on



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YouTube, "If you want to get past all the irrelevant guff, jump to 21 minutes." Or listen to another podcast.

Mark Dawson: Well, there is that. But yes, let's hurry along.

James Blatch: Our interviewee today is a brilliant author who's appeared once before on the podcast. His name is J.D. Barker. We had a quick chat with him at ThrillerFest and J.D. is somebody who has been more a traditional published author in the sense that that's where he's been in.

He's connected, very well connected. He works with, I think, can we say this? I think we can say this. He does say this in an interview. He works with James Patterson and he has worked with the family of Bram Stoker to write a kind of prequel to Dracula, which has been published in the last six months.

But he's one of these people who's just hugely excited about the indie world. He loves self publishing. He's done a bit of it himself in the past.

He's convinced that a good self-published author is indistinguishable from a good trad published author and that distinction is being blurred and disappearing and he's a big advocate for self publishing being as good as it can be.

He wants the traditional industry to be knocked off its platform by the weight, that's probably not right to say, he wants it to be knocked off its platform, but he wants it to be indistinguishable from self publishing. So you and he kind of sat on a panel together and were both saying the same thing and you'd never met each other.

Mark Dawson: High fives and all kinds of things.

James Blatch: We're high fives away. It was natural for us to get together afterwards.

Mark Dawson: I don't do high fives, I'm English.



James Blatch: Yes. Are you going to say anything?

Mark Dawson: No, I'm going to say let's play the interview.

James Blatch: Let's play the interview. Okay, let's hear from J.D. Barker. We'll be back afterwards and Mark will say something then.

James Blatch: J.D. Barker, welcome back and welcome to The Self Publishing Show. We bumped into each other in New York in the summer and it was a real pleasure to meet you and I'm quite pleased by the way that for somebody with gothic horror running through them, you've got a dark environment, there's a picture on the wall behind you that's so black it looks like there might be a moon in it and actually it looks like you're in somebody's basement, which is perfect, right?

J.D. Barker: I'm actually in an upstairs bedroom. I've got a window. I think the picture that you see is actually, it's the cover of my first book, Forsaken. I had it printed on a piece of glass with a dark background, that's sitting in there behind me.

James Blatch: I like it as a creaking door somewhere in the background. Yeah, a slightly creaky line, but we're going to persevere because we want to talk to you about this.

We chatted in New York at ThrillerFest and it was a fascinating but brief chat. I promised that I would get you back on the podcast and wanted to do that. But we may as well just remind people about you and your background.

Give us a quick introduction to J.D. Barker.

J.D. Barker: I've had a crazy history. I actually started off working for newspapers and magazines way back in the '90s, doing a lot of celebrity interviews, and to really date myself, this was people like Tiffany and Debbie Gibson and Bon Jovi and Motley Crue and Guns N' Roses.



James Blatch: Who could forget Tiffany?

J.D. Barker: Absolutely.

James Blatch: Shopping centers will never be the same.

J.D. Barker: Yeah. Well, I worked for RCA Records and for BMG and I used to chaperone these people. I would pick them up at the airport and take into their hotel, get them to the radio station, get them to their concert.

If I was lucky, especially with a band like Guns N' Roses, I get them all back on the airplane and not lose anybody. But I quickly realized that I had these people captive in a car for sometimes days at a time so I would interview and I'd turn around and sell those interviews to newspapers and magazines to offset my student loans.

I was in college at the time. And over time, if you work with anybody in newspaper or magazines you quickly realize everybody's got a novel in some stage of development hidden away in a desk drawer somewhere that they've been toiling away at for the last 10 years, it's at 250,000 words, and they will get it done.

But I became the defacto guy to help with that kind of thing. I started off by just editing the magazine articles for grammar, punctuation, things like that. And then people started handing me these books they were working on and I helped with those types of things with them and that eventually turned into developmental stuff and I fell into a career as a book doctor and ghost writer, which I didn't even realize was a career until it happened. And I did that for almost, I think it was about 23 years.

And it was fun and I literally learned how to write on the backs of other people's problems because by correcting these things I learned to understand what agents were looking for, what publishers were looking for, and I really learned how to tie a novel together and create a tight product.



And that's what it really is, many people need to realize that it may be a work of passion but in the end that book is a product. It's a widget. It's something somebody wants to sell, somebody wants to buy. And you need to understand that going in.

Over those 23 years I had six different books that hit the New York Times' Best Seller list, all with other people's names on them. That starts to eat at you after a little while.

So when the sixth one hit, that was in 2012. My wife pulled me aside and said, "Listen, I think we need to try and make this work again. Try and see if you can make it happen as a writer on your own. That's what you want to do. Let's figure out what we need to do to make it happen."

We were living in Florida at the time. I was still working a day job, I was a chief compliance officer for a brokerage firm, which is as horrible as it sounds. But the salary was good so it was difficult to walk away from.

But we sold everything that we had. We sold our house, we sold the boat, we sold the cars, everything that was costing us money that was basically increasing our monthly nut we got rid of.

We moved into a small two-bedroom apartment in Pittsburgh, which we owned, and just got our monthly costs down as low as we possibly could so we could live off the savings. I could spend a year or two trying to make the writer thing happen.

I wrote my first book, it was called Forsaken. And in the novel, anybody's written a novel it's all about getting to that last page. And in the book I had to explain where the wife buys a journal. And just to get the book done, I wrote that she walked into Needful Things, Stephen King's store, and bought it there. I fully expected to have to change that because you can't just play in Stephen King's universe without a bunch of lawyers sending you letters and calling you.



But my wife again, she's way smarter than me. She read it and she said, "I kind of like this. Let's keep it. Let's just get his permission to use it." Which how do you get Stephen King's permission to do much of anything?

Turns out we had a mutual friend, a guy named Jack Ketchum who recently passed away. I told him what I was up to and he gave me King's email address and told me to send it to him. And he said if Steve likes it he'll get back to you. If the book sucks, you probably won't hear from him. Leave him alone.

I ended up hearing back from him. I got an email from Stephen King. He said I absolutely love this. Go ahead and use it and let me know if you need anything. I stared at that for about four months, you know expecting a retraction, "This was meant for Grisham; it wasn't meant for you. Sorry about that." But it turned out it was for real and he let me go with it.

I fully expected at that point that selling the book would be a nonissue. I've got Stephen King's blessing to use some of his characters in there, I knew it was a solid book, how hard could it possibly be. So I sent a query letter out to 200 agents, a form letter. Never do that.

I got a handful of responses back, hardly anybody had even asked to read the book. I got really discouraged and I decided this just wasn't for me. I had one offer to publish it from a small press. They were going to give me like a \$5,000 advance and the payouts were horrible.

So I decided to go ahead and indie publish it, but I figured if I was going to do that, I needed to make sure that it was on par with the titles coming out at the top five.

It had to look like a Random House book. I didn't want to just go to Amazon and hit that publish button. So I hired professionals across the board.

I hired professional cover designers, professional editors, professional copy editors, proofreaders, everything I possibly could. And released the book



in November 2014 as hardback, soft cover, audiobook, the full gamut. Did it through an LLC so if anybody dug around a little bit it would look like it was published by a real company and not some guy in his basement.

And got really lucky. The book ended up selling a lot of copies and while that was going on it got nominated for a Bram Stoker award, which was awesome, for best debut novel.

I was writing my second book, a serial killer called Doug, The Fourth Monkey. And when I finished that I looked at my sales numbers for Forsaken and my payouts and I thought about it a little bit, I'm like I might be better off to self-publishing this.

My wife told me to go ahead and just query a couple of agents, just see what happens. If you don't get what you're looking for, self-publish it. You know how to do it. You know you can make money doing it. So I queried 53 agents and this was February 2015. And apparently they saw my track record because within two weeks I had 13 offers of representation.

I kind of had a pick of agents and I ended up going with one, a woman named Kristen Nelson, who is phenomenal.

There's two websites that I love to plug when I talk about agents because a lot of people don't research their agents. If an agent says they want your book, they tend to just kind of sign on the dotted line. But there's ways to check on agents to make sure they're legit and make sure they're what you're really looking for.

Query Tracker is a great one. Querytracker.com for just following up on what agents need, what their types of responses, things along those lines.

And another one, which I found tremendous, was Publishers Marketplace, because you can plug in an agent's name and you can see what kind of deals they're getting.



And one of the things I noticed about Kristen is she had a very small group of authors that she was working with but they were all New York Times' Best Sellers and they all got there with her. She started with their debuts and she got them to that level and her deals that she was getting for them, they were all six and seven-figure deals.

Many agents out there, it's very easy to throw a website together and make it look like you're a professional and I see people fall into that trap all the time. So I think it's really important to research them.

But she took Fourth Monkey out there. It ended up selling for film and television before the print rights sold. Then I got what was called a preemptive offer out of the UK from Harper Collins, that came in and then the US rights sold at auction. By the time everything was said and done that book brought in a little over \$1 million.

James Blatch: Wow.

J.D. Barker: Which is tremendous. So it allowed me to continue working as a full time writer.

While that was going on, I felt like I was getting stuck in a bottle with Stephen King, I kind of figured that was kind of the end of it. But while Forsaken was nominated for that Bram Stoker award I was at the award ceremony, the Horror Writers Association, and Daker Stoker, who is Bram's great grandnephew, kept approaching me and said we need to talk, we need to talk.

We eventually had breakfast on the final day I was there. And he sprung this on me. He said, "My family and I have read your book. We absolutely love the writing style and we've been trying to find somebody to write a prequel to Dracula for a while now using Bram's original notes. Is that something you'd be interested in?"

Of course, I said yes.



That book is done as well. It came out October 2nd. And again, the film rights actually sold before the publishing rights. That was a crazy whirlwind of a trip because we ended up going to New York. We had eight different publishers that wanted the book.

So we flew to New York and we started meeting with them one at a time, all on a Monday. And while we were in the car, the Uber's going from one to the next, we were on the phone with the film studios talking to them about this novel.

I ended up selling the book to Putnam. The film rights went to Paramount with Andy Machete attached to direct, who's currently redoing It for Stephen King. So a phenomenal team.

I'm having a ball and, again, I figured now lightning's struck twice. It's not going to happen again. I'm working on my next book and I get a phone call and it's James Patterson and he read Fourth Monkey, gave me an incredible blurb for it. He called it ingenious.

We ended up meeting down in Florida. We had lunch. We talked about a couple different ideas and agreed to write a book together. The last chapter got written today on that one. So it's been nuts.

James Blatch: That is nuts.

J.D. Barker: I've been thrown into the middle of all the different publishing methods out there. 'Cause now I've got books with three of the top five and I've self-published. So I've kind of walked the line in between both of those worlds.

James Blatch: There's lots to talk about there. Did you know Jim Patterson?

J.D. Barker: No. One of the most important things or at least you're told they're important are blurbs on the back of books. So I reached out to a lot



of different people to try and get blurbs for Fourth Monkey when it was coming out and he was one of them.

I mailed a copy to his house and didn't expect anything to come of it because he probably gets 50 books a week. I know Stephen King gets somewhere like to 100 books a week. I mean it's ridiculous. So your book kind of disappears. But it felt like something I needed to do.

And then the phone call came and it just kind of went from there. He liked the book and I talked about projects that he had worked on in the past. How Along Came a Spider, some of those books really inspired me. We just kind of hit it off.

I've got a house in Florida, my parents live fairly close to him. So we went down for the holidays and I was in the area so it just kind of all fell together.

James Blatch: That's amazing. The first thing we should note of course J.D. is the tribute to your writing because this is not quite lightning, this is people reading your books and being very impressed with the way you write and wanting to have a piece of you. And if their name's Patterson or King, that's helpful. So the Jim Patterson project is about to come to an end.

Will there be something that follows that up do you think?

J.D. Barker: It's hard to say. I've got a bad habit of leaving a couple of dangling strings at the end of every book that kind of leave those doors open. I have trouble saying goodbye to certain characters, especially once I start having fun with them it's tough to do. Killed off a lot of people, but some of the best ones are still there. So we'll see.

Ultimately it's up to him and up to his publisher. I'm definitely game. One of the reasons why I did this project was just to be able to work with somebody like James Patterson. It's like going to school. He weighs in on every single thing that I send him and vice versa and just having that



dialogue with somebody like that, I mean that's a priceless education. I wasn't going to turn it down.

James Blatch: Yeah, absolutely. And he is somebody who gives back to community by teaching a bit as well. He's got his own master class, hasn't he?

It was a very cool moment actually in New York and your phone went and you said, "I've got to take this. It's James Patterson."

J.D. Barker: It's funny; he's got a habit of doing that. He doesn't use email. He loves to phone. And for whatever reason, I don't know if it's 'cause I'm always busy or whatever, but it's like his phone calls always seem to come in at moments just like that. Not while I'm sitting at my desk doing nothing, it's in the middle of an interview with you guys.

James Blatch: He's got a sixth sense. Okay, well I want to talk to you about some of the areas that you've mentioned there.

You've got these amazing things have happening to you, but you're very dedicated. We got a hint of that when you said at the end of your first book when you were coming to publish it, your decision to self-publish it you wanted it to look indistinguishable from trade-published titles.

So just talk to me a little bit about that mindset you think authors need to have.

And the reason I ask you, it's not obvious to everyone and certainly there are people in the industry who think that self-publish means much lower quality. But it doesn't have to be, does it?

J.D. Barker: No. And that's one of the things that actually frustrates me about the entire process. I mean every year there's about a million books that are published. Your book is one of them. So you need to figure out you're going to make that book stand out.



I don't see other indie-published authors really as my competition. I don't necessarily see any authors as competition but I do see the publishing houses as competition.

If I'm going to put out a product it needs to be on par with the best. I mean that's why I seek out people like Stephen King and I talk to Dean Koontz fairly regularly, too, via email.

I'm not going to go to Joe Blow, the indie guy, who's got 12 books out there and six reviews and ask him for advice. I'm going to go to the people that have been there and have gotten it right.

But I think that's where I do see a lot of indie authors really drop the ball. They get the book done, a lot of times it's just a first draft, and then they run over to Amazon, they upload, they hit that publish button with a cover that they made on their computer 10 minutes earlier and then they expect to become famous, expect the money to start rolling in. And it's never what happens.

What does happen is you'll see four or five copies get picked up by their friends and family. Those four or five reviews will come and they'll all be five stars because they are your friends and family.

And then either the book will disappear into oblivion or somebody else will find it and review it for what it really is, full of typos, not professional, not a complete story, all the problems that everybody has with a first draft. Nobody writes the perfect first draft, including people like Patterson and King. You've got to comb through those books.

You've got to perfect them. You've got to get them to the absolute best level that they can possibly be before they come out. And that's what I was getting at with that.



If you're going to do this and you want to do it right, you do need to compete on that level and you have to be prepared for that. And there's a lot of similarities between the two.

The one thing that really gets me is cover design. A lot of people skimp on cover design. And that's people do buy their books based on the cover. Again, that's sad. It's always been that way.

It used to be you walked into the grocery store and at the checkout line there was paperbacks right there. You picked up the ones with the most interesting covers. Amazon is no different. You're still doing that; it's just a different format.

So when I did the cover for Forsaken as an example, I used a company called 99designs, which is phenomenal. For I think it's \$399 you put your ideas out there basically what you want the cover to be like, if you've got examples of images you can put those out there. And designers will create covers for you.

Over the course of a week you'll get anywhere from 30 to 50 to 60 different cover ideas. And those designers will work with you to perfect them and tweak 'em.

So when I did that with Forsaken I took my top 10 favorites, and I put them up on the Internet. And I've got a pretty decent-sized following and I had one questions on there. I said, "If you were to buy a book based solely on its cover, which one would you select?"

And that's the cover that I went with. The one that's on the book got 86% of the votes. It wasn't my favorite, but everybody else seemed to like it. And personally, I feel crowdsourcing stuff like that is key.

Now, when you go with the trade publishers, the big guys, they don't do that. Your editor will send an email to the cover design department, your book will get assigned to somebody that most likely won't read the book.



They'll create a cover based on whatever the editor's suggestions might be and that's what you kind of get stuck with. And a couple people in that department might weigh in on it.

The marketing people have more of a say than anybody else. It's a very weird environment. And all my contracts allow me to push back and nix a cover if I don't like it, but at the same time they'll hang that over your head. If you change the cover and the book doesn't sell, they're going to say, "Well, you know if you went with that original cover it might have been-

James Blatch: It's your fault.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, it was your fault.

James Blatch: But what's brilliant about that this is you trying to make sure that your book is indistinguishable from traditional published books. But this is you getting an edge on the trad publishers because we can act in a much more flexible and digital way than a big publishing house that, as you say, has an art department that they basically have to go to to get their covers done.

We can go to the best independent cover designer on the planet, if we want, we'll go to another one.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, absolutely. And you've got total control over that. And when you deal with the traditional guys, that's the hardest thing to do is to give up that control, whether it's cover design or interior text, or whatever it might be. And sometimes it's little things.

Right now Dracul is a finalist for the Goodreads Choice Awards. It's top 10 or so of the horror books for this year, which is phenomenal.

So I started my brand just going through all these things that's an indie I would do to start pushing that to get some of those votes to come in. Email



going out to my group, this going on, advertising going on, all these little things.

If you go to somebody like, in this case it's Putnam and Random House, and you tell 'em you would like to do all of those things, it's got to get approved by a lot of different people. Budget's got to get approved. This department has to agree to do it. It has to fit within their timing.

It's almost like you're running along and you get stuck in molasses and you have to go slow and you have to push. And it will still get done if you push hard enough, but a lot of times the decisions that can be made as an indie, you can flip the switch, you can make it happen, and it doesn't work that way.

James Blatch: I actually love that take on it. The idea of somebody throwing hands up in the air and saying what chance have we got up against Penguin Random House?

Well you've got the one thing that they desperately know that they want but don't have, this agility, this ability to make quick decisions and get ahead of the market. So you were at a strong position being indie. And that's, from your point of view, you've done a great traditional deal.

You did an amazing deal, although I suspect the fact that you had proven the worth of the book as an indie was a factor in being able to negotiate that type of deal.

J.D. Barker: Oh, absolutely. The indie authors that are out there that Amazon is really a proving ground. There's a lot of people watching to see who's ... A million books published every year, which ones are rising to the top? Which ones are standing out?

Everybody's got eyeballs on that. With each of those publishers that I talked to on Fourth Monkey, one of the first questions they asked me was about my social media presence and what type of marketing activities do I



do on my own. They already liked the book, but they wanted to know what I was going to bring to the table from that standpoint. And if you go back even three, four, or five years, those questions weren't on the radar of these guys.

They're slowly coming around to realizing as an indie you have to do what I call guerrilla marketing. There's a lot of things you can do and a lot of things you can't do.

It's very difficult to get into traditional press for one thing, so you have to offset that by going to bloggers or getting in through some other means. They're coming around to actually doing some of that. I mean book club, if you go back a few years ago was all indie titles.

Now it's not, it's a mix of both. They're realizing what's working and they're starting to do some of it. And it's taken them a little while to get there, but they are.

But at the same time, I stay in touch with a lot of indie authors. I try to stay on top of what's working and there are a lot of new things out there that aren't on indie authors' radars yet, it's just a couple people are trying it, realizing it's working, and slowly that will trickle. And by the time it gets into the masses those people have moved on to something new and sooner or later it'll make it to the traditional side.

James Blatch: Well, luckily we work close with Mark Dawson who tends to have a hands on all the goodies first. In fact, I've seen a couple things he's trying now with Amazon, which are top secret but look amazing.

So your own position on this now is that you are traditionally published.

Do you think that's always going to be the way for you in the future now?



J.D. Barker: No. And I've got a couple things I'm trying to resolve. I don't want to get pigeon-holed into writing this same book over and over again. I love writing in the horror world. I love writing thrillers. I like to bounce back and forth.

The common thread between all my books is really suspense and that's how I sell it to my agent. But immediately, as soon as you go to an agent, they do want to pigeon-hole you. They want to say this is a thriller author. This is a romance author. This is a sci-fi author.

They want to put you in that box because that's what the industry itself understands. Editors are looking for somebody in that box. The marketing [departments] are, the bookstores are. So if you want to bounce around a little bit, it's tricky.

My agent and publishers are now on board now at this point with me doing that, but it's been an uphill battle for sure, because it's not the norm to be able to bounce around that way.

But I've made it very clear that I'm going to write the kind of books that I want to write, and whether they go out through somebody like Random House or I publish it on my own, the book will get out there. And there's a lot of things you've got to weigh when it comes to that type of thing.

The advance is one thing, but you really have to look at the economics of that. It's wonderful to get a big check; nobody's going to argue with that. But you've got to look at the payouts on the back end.

Amazon you're getting 70%; you're getting 70 cents on the dollar. A traditional deal you're lucky if you're getting 25%, if you're getting 25 cents on the dollar.

So once you eat through that advance amount, then keep in mind you're paying for it at a smaller level because of the sizes that you're collecting.



Once you get through that on the backend you're still getting that smaller payout.

So you have to look at the advance number they're offering you and decide whether that's really worth giving up what you're giving up. 'Cause you can make a lot of money as an indie author, but it takes time. It doesn't come in all in one shot. It may take a year or two years or whatever, but it can happen. And it's difficult for a lot of people to grasp that.

James Blatch: The math is simple isn't it. I read an article a couple of years ago, it might be out of date, that suggested that the average percentage for a first-time author deal in the UK was 8%.

J.D. Barker: That might be in the UK. I made roughly 25% on each of my deals.

James Blatch: Oh, no. Yeah. The point being that you have to sell far fewer books to earn the same money and of course you sell the same number of books you did on the traditional deal, it's the difference between being able to quit your 9 to 5 and live as a writer sometimes.

And we hear this. Traditional writers all the time who complain they don't really make money.

J.D. Barker: Oh, absolutely. I know a number of New York Times' Best Selling authors that have day jobs just because of that. And it's not because of the money, it's because of the way the process is structured.

The traditional publishers, they try to get that big hit right out of the gate on publication date. They want to get the bulk of their sales 'cause they want to hit that list.

But there's not really a longterm plan; it's almost like a movie coming out in the theaters. It's in the theaters for a couple weeks and then it disappears.

The indie authors, if you do it right, you're getting that residual income.



In my case it's actually increased. Forsaken is selling better month over month, even though it's been out for four and a half years than it was at the beginning. It's a very different structure.

The traditional guys they want to get to the 6,000, 7,000, 10,000 sales or whatever it is from a debut in that first week. And if it doesn't hit that list they see those numbers drop.

James Blatch: I was just going to say that one of the mantras at 20 Books Vegas conference last week is the best way to sell your last book is your next book.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, absolutely. The other thing that I tend to run, I did a talk last night so a lot of this stuff is kind of fresh in my mind. But a lot of authors will sign a traditional deal just because they want to be able to walk into a bookstore and pick up their book from the shelf. And I get that.

I was at Penn State, so I was in a town that I'm not normally in. I ran to the Barnes and Noble, I ran to the two or three other bookstores that were in town. I grabbed all my copies, I signed them all, and it's a cool feeling to be able to do that. Or walk into a library and find your book.

But when I look at Forsaken, I probably sell maybe 500 e-books for every physical copy that goes out the door. And I'm making a decent amount of money. So is that money worth giving up just to have that presence in a physical store?

Most of the time that presence it doesn't last very long. Now, in places like Barnes and Noble those tables are bought and paid for. Your publisher's putting you there for a certain amount of money for a certain amount of time. So you're not going to be there forever.

James Blatch: But it depends what your definition of success is and it's absolutely fine to measure your success in that way if that's what you want to do.



Most people listen to this podcast probably want to live and get paid as a writer, so they're going to be very commercially minded and that's also okay.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, absolutely. And it's something that I'm really looking at closely now and I think that's one of the reasons why I'm open to doing books, basically being a hybrid author, self-publishing some titles and going through traditional and others, because there are things that the traditional side can offer that you can't necessarily do on your own.

It's much easier to get into foreign languages. I'm in I think 31 different languages at this point, which is over 100 different countries. You can do that as an indie, there's site like Babble Cube is a phenomenal one for getting your books into other languages. But it's a difficult uphill battle to do.

Some of the marketing that they can do you just can't do. I'm in a lot of magazines, a lot of newspapers that would never touch an indie author. I just had a full-page spread I think in AARP this month on Dracul, which is not something that would even get on my radar as an indie.

So I look at these things as marketing opportunities. What can the traditional guys do that are different from what I can do and how can I take advantage of both of those to take my entire platform or my brand and bring it to a higher level.

James Blatch: You talked about print books a little bit. So let's just focus on that for a moment 'cause you said when you did self-publish to start off with, you released on all formats at the same time. Is that right?

J.D. Barker: Yeah, I did. I did a hardcover, a softcover, audiobook, and then eventually six months later put out the mass market paperback.



James Blatch: Okay, so you did it in the traditional timescale almost, perhaps slightly faster than they do 'cause it seems like a long time between various formats. But hardback, I mean I'm surprised about that.

And was that profitable to you, the physical book? Because that's an area that indies do struggle to make money on I think.

J.D. Barker: It is profitable, but I think on the hardcover, I only make like \$2 and change, versus the ebook, even at \$2.99 I think I make a little bit more than ... I end up with \$2.03 or something after Amazon takes their cut.

It's more about just having it available to everybody. I think when Kindle first came out, it was a bit of a novelty. People liked the idea of it, so a lot of people bought Kindles, a lot of people bought books on Kindle, but eventually it's kind of faded away and people are falling into what is my best method for reading a book? What is going to work for me at this particular moment?

In my case, I run five miles a day. I listen to an audio book while I'm running from Audible. When I read, I like to read on my phone because it's back lit. I read my Kindle on there.

We've got a lake house that's got a deck overlooking the water. If I'm out there, I like to have a physical book. To me, that's the most relaxing. My wife won't touch anything other than a physical book. She was reading it the other day in bed and holding this thing up with one hand in her arm was shaking because the book is so big, but she refuses to touch a Kindle book.

I think people are starting to realize what format they like and they going with that. It's nice knowing that books are now available in more formats than ever, and I think there's going to be new ones. We just haven't figured out what they are yet.



James Blatch: Yeah, and it's getting easier and easier to do all these things. You mentioned Audible and there's Findaway Voices and all sorts of other ways of getting your audiobook out there.

KDP print-on-demand, which is now integral to the KDP dashboard. Makes it a few clicks of the button to have the paperback available. Although it is more difficult to make money, one of the things that we say to people is, if you don't do it, it's money on the table, because some people only read print. They'll look at your book, they'll be attracted by all the bits you've got right, all the blurb, or the cover. Those first few seconds, and then they can't find the book for sale because it's only on Kindle.

Even if you're only making a dollar at the time, it's a bit more exposure. That's one of the great things.

Technology is a great enabler for writers to do that bit easily and focus their time on writing the next book.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, the audiobook is huge. I see a lot of people not doing audiobook, and I never got that. I pay for it out of pocket.

ACX makes it unbelievably easy to create an audiobook. If you can't afford to go out of pocket for the cost, you can split it with the narrator, so there's ways to get it done. I ended up paying out of pocket for ... I think I did about \$250 per finished hour for Forsaken. It was a little over 10 hours, so a little shy of three grand or so to get that audiobook done, but it actually paid for itself within the first month, and it's one of my biggest moneymakers still today.

Personally, when I go into Amazon and look at a title, I look to see what formats it's available in. I think it's important that it's available in multiple formats, and if I see a book that's only available as an e-book and only as a softcover, I immediately think, oh, this is CreateSpace, this is KDP.



So then I'll read that first three chapters to look for that very first typo, which is inevitable always there, and I walk away from it.

If I see a book that's available in hardcover, audiobook, all the different formats, to me that's a green light. That means the author took the time to get it out there for everybody. They're not going to go through those expenses unless they've taken the time to edit it properly. It's a sign of quality to me, and I think other people see that, too.

James Blatch: How did you do your hardcover copy?

J.D. Barker: I did that through a company called IngramSpark, which is Lightning Source, and they're the distributor for a lot of the major publishers, as well. They've got a new product company now that they actually bought recently that a lot of people aren't familiar with. Have you even heard of the Espresso book printing machine?

James Blatch: No, not yet.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, so this is a machine. It's roughly about the size of a tabletop or so, or a desk. So you can put it pretty much anywhere. It will print off a paperback copy of a book in five minutes. Full color cover and everything. It looks totally indistinguishable from another paperback. Right now they've got their full catalog in these machines, about 7 million titles.

Personally, I think it's a game changer. When I walk into a Barnes & Noble or one of the big bookstores here in the US, it's a very difficult model to sustain. People go in there at this point, they get their cup of coffee, they take a book off the shelf, they read it for an hour, then they put it back on the shelf and they leave.

But meanwhile somebody's got to pay for all this core footage. So I don't know where that's going to end up a couple of years from now, but something's going to have to change there.



The biggest problem I see when I walk into an indie store, a small little independent bookstore, is their selection. They've got such a limited shelf space, so if they're lucky they've got some of the latest bestsellers, but if you take this machine and put it in the middle of their store, not only do they have a physical hardcovers there for the latest and greatest, but they can rattle off any other paperback that you might want while you stand there and wait. That's a game changer, because now all of a sudden people aren't waiting for shipping from Amazon anymore. It's instant satisfaction.

James Blatch: That is amazing. So, what, the cover and all? Everything?

J.D. Barker: Yeah, it's the coolest thing ever to watch. If you just look up Espresso book printing machine, you can get to a list of places that actually have them.

You see the pages running while it's printing the cover, and then it mashed it all together and binds it, and it looks no different. It's basically the same type of technology that KDP uses for its softcovers.

James Blatch: So, what we need now, and Barnes & Noble need this as much as the indie bookstore, is the beautifully-created virtual bookshelves. So, they're made out of wood, they look lovely, you just swipe with your hand Minority Report style, going through the covers, touch one, so it's almost the same as having the physical book there, which they could have around there as well.

But if it's one of these books you go to the ... you press it, and by the time you've had your coffee and wandered to the counter, it's been printed. I can see that ... that potentially is a way that Barnes & Noble, and Waterstones here in the UK can find a way into the future.

J.D. Barker: Or any little indie store. I mean, the machines are anywhere from \$25,000 to \$100,000 to buy. They can be leased for less than that.



If I were to open a bookstore today, I wouldn't even consider it unless I had one of those in there. So again, I personally think it's a game changer. I think it's like Netflix or Redbox that we have here in the States for videos.

James Blatch: Wow, that is exciting.

Do you feel optimistic about writing at the moment, for writers?

J.D. Barker: It's a weird thing, and that's one of the reasons why I like to get out in front of writers' group and talk. Because I like them to understand what happened to me, could happen to them. These things still happen.

There are still big advances out there, if you want to go that route. You can still make money as an indie author if you want to go that route. The key to all of it is just doing it right. Again, putting out that better quality product. Make sure you go through all the hoops.

Nothing in life is easy. Nobody's going to hand you a big check, but you can get there. You can get it if you try, if you put a lot of effort in and do it.

James Blatch: Yeah. One of the things that struck me when I watched you on the panel at ThrillerFest was you're talking very forthrightly to the audience about that focus on quality, about how important it was, and it was almost evangelic for me.

It wasn't just about well, you'll make more money if you do this. It was just that you should be doing it right.

J.D. Barker: I saw it when I was working as a book doctor. I got about 100 manuscripts every month that I had to go through, and if I was lucky there was maybe one good one in there.

You're reading along and reading along, and all of a sudden somebody's writing just jumps out at you and you know that this is the product.



That's not different than an editor, I mean, they're in the same boat. Things have changed so much. Budgets have gotten extremely tight. Years ago, an editor was willing to take on a project. They only had a couple of books they might have been working on, but if you talk to an editor nowadays, their desk is just stacked to the ceiling with the books that they're managing.

The last thing they want to do is take on a project. They don't have time for that.

So if you can hand them a book that's going to need the least amount of work and it's a solid story and the writing is good, they're going to grab that, which is evident by what I've seen, versus somebody handing in a manuscript that's just a complete mess. Nobody's got time for that anymore.

I really identified with Mark, because when he was talking not only about quality, but also the marketing side of it and things like that. Those are the things that you as an indie author, need to understand.

You are a business when you do this. You're a business from start to finish. You have to do all these different things, and if you don't understand that at the get-go, you're going to drop the ball, and you may end up losing that particular book and have to start all over and try again.

James Blatch: Yes, I find it a frustrating thing to hear sometimes with authors telling me that they don't want to do something. Like, "Oh, I don't want to be on Facebook," or, "I don't want to write the blurbs myself."

I'm thinking, well, you don't have to write the blurb yourself, but you have to do all this stuff. It's like running a company, saying, "Well, I don't want to do the accounts."

J.D. Barker: You know, the thing is, even ... okay, Dracul is with Putnam, which is Random House. I wrote the back book cover with my editor. We



ended up tweaking that. The tag line that's on the book, on all my different books.

I create all that stuff in advance because I prefer people not to change it. So the more you hand them, the easier it is to get things done and the more likely they are to stick to your actual words instead of somebody else weighing in their opinion on what they feel should be there.

It's worth taking the time, I think.

James Blatch: That's one of the reasons I asked you about the traditional deal, because even though you've got a great deal, I would think just the mass wise, would you not be making more money as an indie?

J.D. Barker: It's a tough thing to figure out. I think the two together work very well, because again the traditional guys are doing things with my books that I would never be able to do.

There's still, at least in the States, a certain validity to your book being in Barnes & Noble to people walking through that door and seeing them there, that name and brand recognition is big, and that's not something as an indie that you can really do.

But at the same time, I think if I would have self-published Fourth Monkey, I think I probably would have. I would have probably made more than that advance was.

I don't know whether it would be published in all the different countries that is now. I don't know if there'd be a movie and DVD out for it. It's tough to say, but I'm very open to the idea of bouncing back and forth and continuing to indie publish while I traditionally publish.

For me, a lot of this has to do with the actual release dates. I write fast enough where I can put two to three books out a year, and traditional



publishers don't want to do that. They really want one title out of you a year.

So, if I have to offset, I'll indie publish. It just allows me to control this publication date, so I can make sure I've got one in the spring and I've got one in the fall. With three different publishers out there, they don't work together. They just kind of put it out when they want to, and somebody's got to steer the ship a little bit, and this gives you a little bit control over your career.

James Blatch: I do have a friend who signed a traditional deal knocking on two years ago, and the book has just come out in French. That's the first edition, and it's still not out in the UK, it's still not out in the US.

I've been amazed at how long the process has taken with a traditional publishing house. They do take their time, don't they?

J.D. Barker: They do, I mean, Fourth Monkey is still coming. The softcover for Indonesia, I think, it came in on my Instagram feed. I didn't even know that it had just released over there. I actually just saw people talking about it. But that book was released here in the States about a year and a half ago already.

James Blatch: Let's talk a little bit about your process, if that okay, JD. So you alluded to the fact that you try to do three books a year.

How do you approach the book from the beginning? That's quite interesting that you write the tag line and the blurb quite early on in the process.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, I usually start with the title, and I've got the tag line. I tend to see a lot of my books as movies. So I try to imagine the movie poster. The movie poster is my cover. That one sentence tag line is what the book is really about, and I just kind of go from there.



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

I'm what they call a pantsner here in the US. An organic writer. There are so many different terms for it, but I don't outline. Not for the most part. I'll create my beginning, my middle and my end, and kind of go from there.

I've learned to trust my subconscious quite a bit. When I get up at the end of any writing session, I tend to either quit in the middle of the sentence or I know what the sentence is going to be, rather than sitting down and writing like 5,000 words, and literally running out of stuff to say.

I've learned over time that if you do that, the next day when you sit down, you end up staring at a blank screen for a while trying to get your brain to start working again.

But if you get up and you know what's next, for the next 24 hours your subconscious is working on that story. You're washing dishes, but your next dialogue tag just jumps into your head. That kind of thing, and it allows you to ... you just hit the ground running every single day.

I start writing first thing in the morning. I get up at the crack of the o'clock because I can do that now. Grab my cup of coffee downstairs and I make my commute up to my office, so about 15, 20 feet or so altogether. I don't turn the internet on until I'm done with my words for the day.

I start writing at 8:00, usually I'm done about 11:30 or so, and I knock out about two to 3,000 words. That's when I turn on the internet and look at social media or check my email, all those types of things, because even if you get a good email from or agent saying that this is happening, that's happening, it can be distracting. So it's best to just get the words done.

You have to focus on your bread and butter, and that's writing that next book. It's always writing that next book, regardless of what else is going on.

I spend the second half of the day usually working on marketing activity, doing interviews like this, working with bloggers, that type of thing, and try to find a balance between all of it. That's one of the tricky things that



actually comes out of your book coming out in all these different countries over such an expanded period of time. I just did an interview yesterday for Romania for Fourth Monkey.

James Blatch: Of course your book would be big in Romania.

J.D. Barker: Well, we were actually talking about Fourth Monkey because that just came out over there.

James Blatch: Oh, okay.

J.D. Barker: They haven't even gotten to Dracul yet. I'm two and a half, three books past that one already and trying to do an interview as if you just wrote it a week ago. That gets a little tricky.

James Blatch: That's the same as George Clooney, by the way. When he sits down to do his publicity interview for the film, he's already made two films since then. So you must live a similar lifestyle.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, it tends to be like that. That's my typical day. I go for a run every day after to hash out a lot of what I'm going to write the next day during that run, just kind of rinse and repeat and start all over again.

James Blatch: I love that practical tip on process, and I think I've been doing it by accident quite a lot, because I'm really enjoying my writing at the moment, so I'm having to quit because it's time to quit, but I know what I'm going to be writing next.

And you're quite right. Next time you sit down there, you're away writing. It has happened also occasionally, it happens to all of us, where you get to that scene, you know there needs to be a scene in between scenes you know about, and you're not really sure what it is, and then, as you say, you start the next day looking at a blank page for a bit, which is not productive time. But yeah, so really great. I think I was doing it by accident, but it's a great tip to hear vocalized.



J.D. Barker: Well, there's a couple of other little tricks that I've learned over the years, because back when I was working the daily job I was working probably 70, 80 hours a week, but I still forced myself to come home and write every night. Because if you can do 250, 300 words every night, that's a novel within a year. And it's not just difficult.

That's a couple of paragraphs. It's not much. But I learned that if you write in the same place every night, that's extremely helpful. So if you've got one place in your house and that's where you go to write, whenever you sit down in that spot you write, and that's all you do, that helps.

I listen to a thunderstorm soundtrack doing a white noise as I write. It's a Pavlov's dog thing to me. I put my headphones on, and as soon as I hear that thunderstorm kick in, my brain goes, "Oh, we're writing now."

Those types of things will allow you, if you are working a day job and you're coming home and trying to make this kind of thing happen, those things will help push it forward a little bit.

It is important to write every day. It's like a muscle. I have to exercise it. If you don't, it goes away quickly.

My normal pace is two to 3,000 words, but when I go to a conference I have a difficult time writing, and I'll get back home and just cranking out 1,000 words is difficult, and it takes a couple of days to get back into that rhythm.

James Blatch: Yeah. There's no magic formula here to replace doing it.

J.D. Barker: No, it only works in the movies where they sit down at the typewriter and they crank out a novel in a couple of hours.

James Blatch: Talking of movies, let's conclude, if you like, with a little chat about your transition to the screen then. First of all, there's a process thing. You think about the story in movie form at the beginning, which helps you



with the marketing and the story, but you've actually made the transition a couple of times.

I think Dracul's been picked it up, as you say.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, Dracul was picked it up by Paramount. That one, it looks like it's moving pretty quickly. As far as I know, Andy is doing the next installment that's coming out very soon. I think that we might actually be the next project on his to-do list, which I'm hoping.

Fourth Monkey actually sold to CBS. We had an auction. Both projects had auctions, but with that one, with Fourth Monkey, CBS came to the table and they said, "Well listen, we can do not only a future film, but we can also do a follow-up TV show," because they've got a film division and they've got the television division.

That's what sold it for me. You know, as an author, the one you all ... everybody wants a movie. It's like, you write the book and it's like, I want to see a movie. So you think that's your next big thing.

But when I started talking to the producers and the directors about Fourth Monkey, first thing they would weigh in with is, "Well, this is a long book. In order to get it down to a two-hour film, we're going to have to cut this out, we're going to have to combine these characters, this is going to have to happen, that's going to have to happen."

It kind of becomes a different story. Then I had the same conversations with the people that make movies for Netflix and HBO and things like that. It's a very different conversation because not only do they tell you that they can make your story as you wrote it, but they look for additional material.

They want to know what you cut out of the book, so they can expand it. So I kind of leaned in that direction. Initially I wanted a movie, but then the idea of being able to tell the story that way was really enticing.



I read years ago, this might be in *On Writing* from Stephen King, someplace. But he mentioned that the only thing that is actually yours as an author is the physical book, the printed text. That's yours 100%.

The second somebody does it as an audio book, now it's the narrator's take on your work, so it's already different. And if you sign a film or a TV contract, forget about it. It's not your project anymore. It's their project.

And I've seen that. I'm the executive producer on all my different projects, but they have to pay me if they pick up the phone.

Hollywood's got pretty rigid machines in place. Every director has producers that they work with. They've got writers that they like to work with. These close-knit groups, and the last thing they want is the writer raising their hand every five minutes, going, "No, this should happen. I don't like that idea. I think we should do it this way." Because it gets expensive. So they tend to cut the writer out of it a little bit.

James Blatch: I'm also not sure it results in the best product. There's a couple of big examples where the writer has forced themselves to have a say in the film and the TV adaptation, and they're writers, and the people who make films and TV know what they're doing, and it's a different art form.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, I would no more expect them to weigh in on my next book than I would ever weigh in on their project. That's their skill set. It's what they know how to do. I'll let the experts do it.

James Blatch: And I guess these deals were done through your agent?

I was going to ask you a bit about some tips for writers listening to this who may have been approached in the past.

Your agent would have handled probably the negotiations or were you integral to that?



J.D. Barker: I've got three different agents. I've got one who handles domestic, so basically US, Canada.

And then I've also got a foreign agent who does all the other countries, so Russia, Poland, Germany, France. All these other countries that I'm in, she handles that.

And then I also have a film and television agent who does nothing but market my books to that particular world.

James Blatch: Okay. JD, we've been rattling on for some time, and I've heavy with cold and we had technical issues which meant we changed horses midstream, so I'm very grateful for you to bear with this.

Every time I speak to you I feel we've barely touched the surface, so we will no doubt talk to you again.

Are you going to be in New York again in the summer for ThrillerFest?

J.D. Barker: Yeah, I will definitely be at ThrillerFest. I've got a couple of other conferences coming up, but yeah, New York for sure.

James Blatch: Okay, superb, and just to remind people, if they want to read your work, which I think is very worthwhile, Fourth Monkey is out now in English language?

J.D. Barker: Yeah, Fourth Monkey's been out for a whole now. The sequel in the UK is ... it's actually available in e-book but they haven't released the print yet. The print version's coming out in December, which is something I've never seen anybody do, so I'm curious to see how that plays out.

Dracul has been released worldwide, so that's available there. I was actually just in London and Ireland a couple of weeks ago promoting that title.

James Blatch: Fantastic. I think I mentioned to you that Gary Oldman was two seats away from me on the plane last Friday night, and of course he



played Dracula in what I thought was the great film, Bram Stoker's ... true to Bram Stoker's story, I think, that film.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, that's still my favorite, for sure. We could go on an hour just about Dracul and Dracula and Bram Stoker. The amount of effort in that book and the things that got cut, it's a conversation all by itself.

James Blatch: I would love you to be a regular on the podcast, and I think we should narrow it down. We've talked very motivational. I think you're brilliant in terms of ... you sound very much like Mark, which is why we latched onto you quite in terms of getting it right, being the best you can, keeping writing. All that stuff is great, but let's spend an hour next time talking about suspense.

J.D. Barker: Yeah, absolutely.

James Blatch: How suspense works, because I think your a fascinating one there, as well.

J.D. Barker: Oh, I appreciate it. I'd love to be back.

James Blatch: Brilliant, thank you, JD.

J.D. Barker: All right, thank you.

James Blatch: So, there we go. JD Barker. It was such fun to meet him in New York, and brilliantly, he has become a big fan of this particular show. So he tells me he listens to every episode.

He was really pleased to come back on. He actually said to me, he's so earnest. He said afterwards, "Let's do it again because we can talk about other stuff," but I think JD is the sort of person we should talk to once a year, because he's so well plugged in to the industry. And I can listen to him and also feed of his inspirational energy.



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Mark Dawson: Yeah, I agree, he's a good guy, and lots of interesting ideas, and I shared lots of them, so it's good to get him on, and yeah, I'm up for him coming back next year, as well.

James Blatch: Yeah. Let's see if we can get him along to the SPF drinks in New York. Are you coming through? I can't remember which one you're not coming to.

Mark Dawson: No.

James Blatch: You're not coming to ThrillerFest, are you?

Mark Dawson: No.

James Blatch: Well, you'll miss out, but we'll get JD Barker along to the bar in New York, if we come, if he's at ThrillerFest this year, and then you can have a chat with him and meet him, as well. He's a really great guy.

Good. Well, I think that's it. Enough of our irrelevant guff or whatever it is that man said. We mustn't latch on. So one person comes up with one criticism amongst 60 compliments, and all you think about is that.

Mark Dawson: I know, it's natural to do that, but no, concentrate on the good stuff.

James Blatch: We should have done, I think, an episode on dealing with criticism in the past, and we should do one again, because there are ways to do that.

It's been brilliant talking to you this week, and brilliant having you on the show as well, Mark. Thank you for joining us.

Mark Dawson: It's been average talking to you.

James Blatch: I've enjoyed our social intercourse.



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Mark Dawson: I feel a bit dirty. I need a shower now.

James Blatch: Okay, good, thank you so much. We'll be back next Friday. Bye-bye.

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