



## EPISODE 161: SHATTERING EXPECTATIONS: WRITING REVERSE HAREM – WITH STEFF GREEN

Announcer: On this edition of the Self-Publishing Show.

Steff Green: It was not an easy year, I'll be honest. But then, pretty much to the day that I started the job a year later, I handed in my resignation. That was a year ago, and it's been amazing, and I do not want to go back.

Announcer: 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 Indy 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 back to the Self-Publishing Show. It's Friday. It's James Blatch.

Mark Dawson: And Mark Dawson. Hello.

James Blatch: Hey, Mark. Are you having a good week?

Mark Dawson: I don't know, 'cause we're batch recording this so, yes. You're so false, I'm going to be honest with our listeners.

James Blatch: It's a mini batch.

Mark Dawson: I'm wearing the same jumper, and you're wearing what you always wear, mate. Haven't washed that for years. But, yes. We're recording



this on a Friday, so this goes out ... We're recording this two weeks before it goes out, so yes.

James Blatch: It's a Thursday actually.

Mark Dawson: Is it? It is a Thursday. That's very true. I'm so tired and disoriented, I don't really know where I am at the moment.

James Blatch: You're discombobulated.

Mark Dawson: I am.

James Blatch: This goes out a week on Friday. This is going to go out on the 1st of March.

I'm actually driving to The Alps, splendid mountain range through the central massif of Europe tomorrow to do some skiing for a week. But such is the life for the people who work for themselves, I will also be working. My laptop will be there.

And I'll be writing, 'cause I've got to do at least 950 words a day in February to hit my target. Actually, I think I worked out last night, I forgot I did my figures last night, I think I worked out I need to write more than that a day, so 1,200. And the way I tend to work is every two days, I write 2,500, 3,000, rather than a bit a day.

**What's your word count at the moment? You're going to put me to shame now.**

Mark Dawson: I'm in the editing phase of something, so probably, I don't know, I did about 2,500 words yesterday. And will probably do 1,000 or 1,500 today once all this stuff is out the way.

But when I'm writing normally, I'd say if I'm writing something from scratch, the pure drafting phase, I'd try to hit 3,000. But if I'm dictating, that could be double that without too much bother. That's kind of what I aim for.



James Blatch: Talking of dictating, 'cause I interviewed Kevin J. Anderson, the very well-known sci-fi author this week, and he's a big dictator.

**He goes on walks by himself in the mountains and writes books, just turns them out.**

Mark Dawson: Yeah. I met him in Bali, so that's where we introduced, I got to know him. I saw him a couple times going out with a little Dictaphone and going for a walk on the beach. And he said "just written a short story." Okay, yeah, that's pretty good. That's pretty good.

**James Blatch: Do you use a Dictaphone?**

Mark Dawson: We're not doing that joke, that's for sure.

James Blatch: Okay, yes. He was great, it was a great interview. It was almost very fanboyish about it, because I read all the Tim Zahn and Kevin J. Anderson Star Wars books ten, twenty years ago. Something like that.

So there I was talking to a lovely, lovely guy and prolific and despite being a sort of slightly older, bearded sci-fi writer - I can't remember how old he is, maybe sixties. He wants to keep himself cutting edge. He loves the whole self-publishing thing.

Although he did say in an ideal world he would just sit there and write and someone would take care of business, but he also understands where the commercial successes are, where the best returns are. So yeah, good interview with Kevin J. Anderson coming up.

Mark Dawson: Yes, he's an interesting guy. Definitely.

James Blatch: Right, I was going to give you an update on my book. From Kevin J. Anderson, from the sublime to the ridiculous. I know I gave an update the other week about where I was in terms of the writing so I'm probably, obviously a bit further on than I was. Probably 115, 120 thousand words, can't remember exactly now.



The book is longer than I thought it was going to be, which does have an impact on the particular way I'm writing it. So people will know that I'm struggling a bit with the drafting phase of it, having written it twice, and needed editorial input, which I got.

And then stumbled across Jenny Nash's Author Accelerator program, which, I could tell straight away, was going to be something I would benefit from. So I signed up for them and what this involves is a subscription for six months. You pay 450 dollars a month. I think Jenny herself, if you want to work with her, is 3000 dollars a month. But for one of her team of editors, it's 450 a month.

And what you get for that is you get weekly deadlines. So, every week, you submit your scenes as you go along. Tuesday is my submission day. I submit my scenes, and a couple of days later I get the notes back from the editor. And then every month or so we have a call as well, and we talk through the story and how it's going.

Now the notes are developmental editing notes, although she does a bit of copy and proofing as editors always do as she goes through. But, it's mainly what are they thinking, why have they done that?

And, in the case of Lizette, she's very, very good at motivating me as well and says, ""I absolutely love this." and "James, I can't wait for this to unfold." And so that is a very important part of the process for me, to have her excited about the book and the story, as well.

But it's grown quite a lot, so I think I said this before for somebody who'd worried about not being able to do the long form writing, I found it has been a very natural part of this process anyway. And I'm writing chapters quite detailed about what people are thinking and why they're doing it, my motivation is what Lizette wants me to do. And that's filling out the book a bit.



## PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

We're now at 120 thousand odd words. I've got to the pivotal scene which used to be page 1 of the original drafts I did. We got through that this week, which was a big moment, an emotional moment for me as well for the book.

And we also had a conversation about the subscription, how much I'm paying and how long this is going to go on? Because the six months, although we had a break over Christmas for various reasons, the six months effectively comes to an end at the end of this month we're in now, which is February. So by the date this podcast goes out.

What we decided to do, and this is entirely Lizette sort of prompting about what we talked it through.

I know what I'm doing effectively now, and we had a call where we talked through the last third of the book everything that needs to happen. So I'm pretty much going to write that now without submitting week by week scenes. I will submit to her every two weeks, so she can catch a problem if there's a problem.

But it's not for the detailed level of feedback that I've been getting so far. Then when we get to the end of it, I'll buy one more month, another 450 dollars, which will take me up to 3100 dollars for the whole thing. And that month will effectively be the revision.

Now the beauty of this process is that you do a lot of revision as you go along, which I know some people don't think is the right thing to do, but you get the notes.

At the beginning, that was rewriting scenes and slightly changing the direction of things. Now, because I understand what Lizette wants and what we're working towards together, there's almost none of that. I get notes a little bit of, "I think this would be a stronger end to the scene if she said 'definitely I'm leaving him' rather than 'I'm thinking about leaving him'." That's the sort of note I'm getting now.



I'm in a position where I can write, and we get to the end of it now, having such a clear thought process between us. That this is a book that's ready to have its fat trimmed. And that is effectively what the revision process is going to be through the month of April into May. It's going to be fat trimming, before it then goes into proofing and copying, which is beyond exciting for me to think that I can get to that stage.

Having said that, it might go a little bit further than that. And I probably am realistically looking at June to have this process finished just because, you know, I might need to write to 160 thousand words before we start the fat trimming.

**But for me, I can't tell you Mark, how this process has worked for me. How much I enjoy it. How much it's brought structure and progress to a project that had effectively stalled.**

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it's great. I was reasonably skeptical about the, I think it's quite expensive. Although, actually I think I can see the value in it. Whatever works.

If that's what you need to get you to do the writing and to finish the book, then it's got to be a good investment. I think you are ambitious on your timings. I think fat trimming is not something you'll get to do quickly, because you trim something then there'll be consequential changes that follow from that.

But that's my favorite part of the editing is the whole process when you get to, or when I get to say 100 thousand words I might take ten thousand out, and that's my favorite bit because you know you've got your structure there, your basis there and your removing extraneous passages that you don't need. You're tightening language. You're shining it up, basically. You're polishing it making it really beautiful and effective.

I love that bit. I'm in that process with a book I'm writing at the moment. We'll see how you get on.



I think if you get up to 150 thousand words, for me that feels long. We mentioned this a couple of weeks ago, I could be wrong on this, there are obviously big, fat doorstep books in that genre. And I haven't read the book either so I'm talking really with no idea what I'm talking about.

But I wouldn't be surprised if you find you take out twenty-five thousand words in the editorial process.

**But just do budget for a little more; it'll take longer than you think it will.**

James Blatch: Yes, I think that's fair enough.

One of the exciting things is, I'm allowing myself to start thinking about things, like leave magnets now, about next book. But in particular, how I'm going to launch this book. You've done your psychological analysis of Milton.

I've certainly got areas I'm turning over in my mind now. There's a military flying accident that's prominent in my book, so to have the crash report which I can style and level publish now in the 1960's crash report.

Mark Dawson: Yeah.

James Blatch: And there's an opportunity from the security services in there as well, so I have similar scope for doing something there. And I think if somebody gets to the end of the book, I'm thinking about if somebody gets to the end of any book, they obviously engaged with it enough to have that, well, here's the inside track on a major event that happened in that book I think would a very tempting reason for somebody, you know, I think it'd be a reasonable conversion rate of somebody then going to your mailing list and getting on it.

I'm starting to allow myself to think about those things, whereas before I thought this was frivolous and wasting time, I should be writing the book.



## **Mark Dawson: And did you say second book?**

James Blatch: I'm thinking about the second book, yes.

Mark Dawson: So, that would be what, 2025, that will be out?

James Blatch: Well that's the other thing I was going to say about the financial investment I'm making here now. The 3000 dollars.

This is my first book and I am learning how to write. Now lots of people say to me "well that's far too expensive, I couldn't afford to do that." But these are people who've got four books behind them and they, in their twenties, taught themselves how to write or had an easier process into it than I have. I am definitely somebody who has benefited from being given these pointers.

I tell you one thing is interesting, I've written this book three times now. So, the first draft, I remember when I had no writing before in my life. I remember the end of it being so different from the way I wrote at the beginning. I mean, just different books, because I was just starting to learn and understand.

The second time I wrote it was during the 101 course, where I decided to throw out the first draft and just write the whole book again. And it changed a lot during that structurally, lots of structural development problems. But my writing was different at the end from the beginning, of course. It developed but not as much.

And now, I look at chapter one of this book, and I have actually every time I read a chapter I make some changes, that's a writers occupational hazard, but it's basically, the change is much less. I can feel my own development now.

You go up quite quickly at the beginning of anything you learn, then it starts to level off a bit. You're still learning, never stop learning, of course.



But that's where that money's gone for me. So that should stand me in good stead so I won't need to do a month by month, week by week process for book two I think.

But I will definitely want to work with an editor right at the beginning on the outline so that she feeds me back or he feeds me back those important points to hit. And then I go off and write it. That's how I feel really about it.

Mark Dawson: That sounds good. Everyone is looking forward to it, no pressure. We've got everyone listening to the podcast is very keen to rush out and buy a copy when it goes live.

James Blatch: I'm not going to say no though, am I?

Mark Dawson: Well, you might-

James Blatch: If everybody could start buying military cold war thrillers now before they buy my book, that's not too much to ask is it?

Mark Dawson: Exactly.

James Blatch: That people not only buy my book they also buy-

Mark Dawson: Yeah, they need to spend 20, 30 dollars on Tom Clancy, and-

James Blatch: Nelson DeMille.

Mark Dawson: Nelson DeMille, yeah we mentioned him last week. James Joyce.

James Blatch: He's so snobbish, James Joyce.

Mark Dawson: And then they'll be ready to go. Ready to buy *The Last Flight* when it comes out in the summer next year.

**James Blatch: Got a great video trailer didn't we a few weeks ago.**



Mark Dawson: It is very good, yeah.

James Blatch: All ready to go. I'm so excited and I feel that there are so many people holding my hand through this process from the SPF community.

I feel very lucky to be surrounded by people who have nothing but enthusiasm, occasionally ticking off for me for what they consider dilly-dallying, but generally very supportive in the same way that we try to be as supportive as possible to people who are navigating their challenges in writing. So that's a great thing about this.

Now one thing we have been working on in the background of SPF recently, has been our YouTube channel. So many of you, we often try and say to you listening to the Self-Publishing Show we know that most people do listen to it.

But go and take a look at it because we put a lot of time and effort into how it looks and feels, video side. But we have been putting effort into the YouTube channel being an important resource, in its own right, for independent writers or for writers whatever way they publish. So we just started to roll out these videos. And you've done a mini-series on surveying your readers.

We've taken on Tom Ashford who is a writer based in London and Tom has been turning out videos on, we've mentioned word count just now, so Tom has done a little mini essay on how many words should be in your book. And he describes when it's important to consider word count, when it's not important to consider word count, and so on. I've seen some of his other titles coming up, in fact, in front of me today. He's been busy the last few days.

So we think the YouTube channel is, well we want to make it a useful and go to resource for people. It's going to take a while to build up that level of instructional video, but we would urge people to go and check it out.



Mark Dawson: I've actually just at this moment told Tom to make the first five videos live on YouTube. So they will be up as this podcast goes out. And I may do another recording whilst I'm in the office today.

I think I might do something on backing up your work, because I've been looking at, I've been a bit lax on that. I've touched wood so far, have avoided losing lots of work with a technical problem. So that's eventually something that will happen to one of the laptops I'm using.

I'm using multiple redundancies, so physical hard drives like one I've got on the desk here, Dropbox, CrashPlan, iCloud, all this kind of stuff. Got loads of different ways this stuff is getting saved now.

Because, as a writer one of the things you worry about the most is that your twenty thousand word work in progress disappears. And to be able to go back and pluck a previous version so you don't lose that work is something that we all should do. I may do something on that.

There's going to be lots of content on YouTube going up with different bits and blogs, several videos a week is the plan at the moment.

### **We may even get John Dyer out of the dungeon. What could John do? Procrastination for writers?**

James Blatch: Yeah. I could do that one. LeadPages I guess. John is our landing page guy and web stuff.

Mark Dawson: He could do some web stuff, yeah.

James Blatch: Literally as we talked Tom Asford has just posted into our little Slack communications channel, "and they're live". So that's it.

Our YouTube channel has its first instructional help videos available to you. And you get to it, it's YouTube.com obviously, forward slash, I think self pub form, but let me just check that. Yes, YouTube.com/selfpublishingformula.



We haven't introduced the interview yet. We've been rambling on.

Mark Dawson: A lot of guff, annoying at least one of our audience.

James Blatch: Yes.

Mark Dawson: But others are delighted by it.

James Blatch: But it's our own to annoy. Yes so this week's guest is all the way from New Zealand, and she really got herself drilled in to, she enjoys the whole urban fantasy, et. cetera genres. And she's got herself drilled in to these little emerging trends, these little sub-genres within sub-genres. And I think we talk about, what is it, reverse harem?

Mark Dawson: That's not a little genre. That's a big genre now

James Blatch: We say it's a big genre, but literally-

Mark Dawson: You haven't heard of it, because you don't read that stuff.

James Blatch: I haven't heard of it, well I don't read fandom. Have you heard of it?

Mark Dawson: Yeah, well I'm quite plugged into the community. It's a big one. It's a really hot, trendy subject at the moment.

James Blatch: Steff Green is somebody who does plug herself into these and finds a way of making them commercially work for her. So let's hear from Steff.

Steff, welcome to the Self-Publishing Show. People don't need to know this, but this is the third time we've started the interview just because of technical issues. But we did work out at the beginning that if you hold a globe, you couldn't put two people further apart from each other than the United Kingdom and New Zealand. So it's a bit of a miracle that it's working, but it is.



I can see and hear you and I think we're going to give it a go this time. So welcome to the Self-Publishing Show all the way from down under.

Steff Green: Thank you so much for having me. Having me from the future.

James Blatch: Yes, from the future, cause you're tomorrow already. It's Tuesday, you've got your hover cars and your space suits and everything going there.

Steff Green: Exactly.

James Blatch: Look, Steff, we're going to talk about some of these things. Now we're going to talk about the huge genre area that you work in. I'm excited to talk to you about something, though I had to look up earlier, called reverse harem, which I know is a big growing area at the moment. And we're also going to talk about juggling different pen names at the same time. So a few areas to cover in this.

**But first of all, let me ask you a general question about some of the areas you write in which is fantasy, you've written paranormal gothic. These are areas that feel to me like they've been enabled by the whole Indie Revolution.**

Steff Green: I would completely agree, yes. Back when I started writing, paranormal romance in particular, publishers weren't really taking it. They felt that vampires had had their heyday. No one was really reading werewolves and no one wanted any kind of other paranormal creatures that weren't vampires or werewolves.

So it was just really the big names were getting published, but it wasn't a lot. No one was really taking new authors.

And then the indies came along, and those readers who were reading those books, never stopped wanting them. They never stopped reading



them. And the indies came along and said, "Hey, I'd really like to write some vampire books and some werewolf books."

So people started doing that and the readers just gobbled them up. Just more, more, more, more, more, please give us more vampires. We need more sexy werewolves.

Now, when you look on Amazon, the paranormal charts are just absolutely dominated by indies. Indies and the big traditional names, but it's such a huge market for indies, it's incredible. And it's really amazing to be a part of that, actually.

James Blatch: It is really exciting. And it makes sense when you think about it, that before the indie revolution you had a limited number of publishers. It was quite expensive and a long-term project to get a single book out, sign a new author.

There was a limited amount they could do to test the market to know what people wanted. They were guessing, their instincts, they could do some surveys.

But now you've got a million writers and they're all writing what they want, what they love, and uploading it. And the market is deciding what's going to fly. And loads of areas that traditional publishers were perhaps a bit sniffy about in the past, are flourishing now, and how brilliant is that?

Steff Green: Exactly. It's amazing. It's a really exciting time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Yeah, it really is. Okay, well now let's talk about some of the particular areas though. You've mentioned some of the genres I'm familiar with, but reverse harem, I have to say, I wasn't familiar with before you put it into your notes to me.

**So just explain what reverse harem means.**



Steff Green: Reverse harem is becoming quite a big, it's almost not really a genre. I like to refer to it as a relationship type. And it's becoming a big trend, particularly with indies, on Amazon.

What it is, is you have a harem novel which were very popular and sort of old school fantasy, they're quite popular in RPG, and they're quite popular in some sort of old-fashioned romance books where there's one guy and he's got lots of women who are interested in him, who he's got a relationship with.

And the women don't necessarily have a relationship with each other, but they're all connected to this guy. And, obviously, the word comes from harems, the kind that you might see in sort of ancient Egyptian princes and things like that would have. So that's kind of the history of the word.

There's quite a popular sub-genre of anime, called reverse harem, where there will be one main female character and she will have this kind of group of males around her. And they're often kind of high school drama shows. Ouran High School Host Club is quite a popular one.

There's this girl and she has all these guys around her, and some of the guys might be friends and some of them might not be, but they're all in the relationship of some description with the main female character.

In anime, usually at the end she will choose one of them. And so this has been popular in anime for quite a while. And then a few years ago, these books started to appear on Amazon.

C.L. Stone's quite an early author, C.M. Stunich, Tate James. A few of these guys started publishing these books and the idea was that there would be this main female character and she would have all these men around her, in a relationship with her, and at the at she would not have to choose one. So she could have all of the guys, all of the cake, eat it too, how much fun is that?



In the last two to three years, this genre, this relationship type has kind of exploded. And it's particularly popular in paranormal romance, I think, largely for the reason that in the paranormal world it's much easier to create the world building, a polyamorous relationship which is effectively what this is.

It's kind of accepted, so there's a lot of books where it's in an alternative world where women having a harem of men is an accepted part of society, or it's part of how she gains her magic, or something like this. Often there might be a wolf pack and she's mated to the whole pack, that kind of thing.

So they're quite popular in paranormal, but there's also contemporary reverse harems. There's reverse harem everything. There's reverse harem urban fantasy. L.C. Hibbett did a cozy mystery series. The new series I've just launched this week is a paranormal mystery series.

There's science fiction reverse harem, anything that you can imagine, you can reverse harem it. So it's quite a lot of fun to write, as a writer. That's what I've been doing for the last year or so.

James Blatch: Excellent, well I hope there's a reverse harem washed up MI6 officer genre comes up, cuz then Dawson can get his teeth into it.

**How do you keep track of these sub-genres, these trends in writing? This is quite a modern development of authors who are casting their eyes around the world seeing what's trending and then just getting on that wave.**

Steff Green: I think there's two things with being an indie. And the first one is to read quite widely. I'm not as voracious as some of my readers. They're all on Facebook at the moment posting that they've read 500 books last year or 800 books last year, and I'm like whoa. I read about a hundred.



I'm not quite that voracious but I'm a relatively voracious reader. I'm always looking at the charts and going "oh I'd like to read that, oh I'd love to read that."

That's how I got into reverse harem originally, was that I read a few of the books and I loved them as a reader. I wasn't going to write one, but then the idea for a series kind of bit me, as they seem to do.

And the other thing is that because as an indie you can write a book in a month, or in a few months, and then publish it immediately, you're not waiting that year or two years for it to go through the publishing process. You're able to experiment a bit more, and you can jump on trends, or what you think might be a trend. And even if you're wrong, and you publish something and it's a bit meh, kinda falls flat, then two months later you can release another book in a different genre. You can try something new and you can experiment.

We've got that flexibility that the traditional world lacks. Which is part of what makes being an indie so exciting and also a little bit scary.

James Blatch: Japan often seems to be the place where these genres take off and become embedded before they break out into the rest of the world. I'm not really sure why that is. It's a quite distinct culture in Japan, isn't it?

**I'm just wondering whether in your, geographically, New Zealand feels that a little bit sooner than perhaps than we do over in the West, in the UK and the US? You're kind of in the zone.**

Steff Green: No. I would say usually we're about 12 months behind everything else. I'd say the exact opposite. We're just a little bit too far away from everything. Not really the center of anything.

James Blatch: Well we have the internet now. Look, here we are chatting to each other so -



Steff Green: Exactly.

James Blatch: So you don't need to get on a plane or a boat anymore.

Good, well you've identified these areas, and I think what comes over to me is what you found is that you really got excited about it and wanted to dive in there and that's a great driver.

**Rather than necessarily, coldly sitting there thinking "well here's a commercial area for me to exploit", it's just seeing something you wanted to do and doing that.**

Steff Green: Exactly. And there's certainly a place in indie and there's a lot of authors that do this who take quite an analytical view of this is what's trending, this is what's selling, this is what I should do, breaking down books into kind of these are the beats, that kind of thing. And there's 100 percent a place for that.

This job is quite hard to do. If you wanted to make money there's a hundred easier ways that you could do it. Every other way to make money is probably easier than being a writer.

And so if you're not enjoying it, then why don't we just go and get a real job? So, yeah, I kinda feel as though I've got to be having fun writing the books because otherwise there's other things I could be doing. And I don't want to be doing other things, I want to be doing this.

I've looked at things before sometimes and thought, oh here's a thing I could do and maybe that would make money. But nothing I've ever gone into where I've looked at it and thought like that has ever turned out as well as the projects where I've been really, super passionate about them.

And I'm also lucky in that the things I'm super passionate about are relatively commercially successful. I'm super passionate about paranormal



romance and not like postmodern poetry or anything like that, so that's a bit of a relief.

James Blatch: Yes, it is. Postmodern poetry is still that tough nut to crack, in commercial terms. But you did crack it, Steff, because not only a year ago you went full time.

**Tell us about the moment you realized that was going to be a possibility for you.**

Steff Green: Yes. It was awesome. I had been working in the tech industry as a content writer for about three or four years in different companies. And I was relatively well paid and stuff like that.

It's quite hard to think, oh gosh, I got this great job that actually a lot of people would kill for and I'm thinking of giving it all up for this pipe dream of being a writer.

I'd been aiming to go full time ever since I started writing paranormal romance, which was 2015, and working towards that.

As as I was doing that, my husband and I were building a house, so like, our dream house. We designed it ourselves, we did all the work ourselves. So we were up on our plot of land every weekend working on this house.

We live off the grid, we kind of a little bit of self-sufficiency, we got all this land for growing vegetables and you know got little bit of chickens and sheep and stuff. So it's kind of a crazy thing that we did.

And the house itself is about an hour outside of the main city where my job was. And I am, you might be able to notice from the video, I'm actually legally blind so I can't drive. And that's why I blink all the time and stuff like that. So I can't drive and getting to work was starting to become, we know it was a hassle for me.



The jobs I had, I was lucky in that people would allow me to work from home a few days a week. Two years ago, in February, I accepted a job that was too good to be true. And it was going to be about an hour and 45 minute commute each way to where the office was. So about, what's that, three and a half hours each day commute. And they wanted me to come in four days a week.

And then the day before I was meant to go to the office, they emailed me and they said, "oh by the way, we've actually moved the office to a place that's about 45 minutes extra away from you. Hope that's not a problem." And I went, "oh, gosh."

My commute turned into a 5 hour daily commute. One hour long car ride with my husband, and then two buses to get to the office and then the same thing on the way home.

When I did that I would set down with my husband and kind of crunched the numbers and we said okay I can do this job for a year and I'm not going to do it any longer that that because this is just going to kill me. I spent the year putting everything into place so that I could quit as soon as I possibly could. I took on some extra freelance work and I kind of really planned out my releases and what was the next thing I could do that would earn us more money. And of course we had to finish the house first before I could quit, and all those kind of things.

I spend this year, and it was quite a horrible year actually, because I would do my five hour commute, go to the office, come home and then I would work all night on my books, or on freelance work. And then every weekend I would work.

That was not an easy year, I'll be honest. But then, pretty much to the day that I started the job, a year later I handed my resignation and I left. And that was a year ago and it's been amazing. And I do not want to go back.



I'm pretty determined that this is going to be me for the rest of my life. It is absolutely amazing. It's everything you've ever dreamed of.

James Blatch: Fantastic. Well congratulations on planning it and getting there and putting in that work.

One question on the visual impairment you mentioned.

**I was thinking about you could use the commute, the bit on the bus at least, to write. But did that make it impossible to do because you needed audio equipment or something to write?**

Steff Green: No, I actually, when I got on the bus I would get my laptop out and balance it really carefully on my lap on top of the bag. And I would type, I could usually type 1000 words there and 1000 words back before I had to put it down so that I could make sure I got off at the right stop. It was twice, actually, where I kept riding and got too far on the bus and had to go back.

I would try and do 2000 words on the bus on the way there.

James Blatch: Not ideal that's for sure. But anyway, well done. And there'll be people taking heart and inspiration from that tale.

**I guess fate played its hand as well in that the job offers and the house move made this date appear on your horizon that you then put everything into.**

Steff Green: Yeah. I may not have, if I hadn't have taken that last job. I've got my husband as well and it's not just my dream and it's not just my income, it's about both of us and our family. So if I hadn't had that impetus to quit, so I didn't have to do that sodding commute, I might still be working.



It might have taken me another five years. I might never have felt safe enough to quit. And there's still a few months where we go, {groan}, but never enough that I think about going back.

**James Blatch: Talk to us about the books, Steff. What series have you produced so far? And what are you working on at the moment?**

Steff Green: Last year I put out my first reverse harem series which was a five book series called, The Briarwood Witches series. And that was basically about the main character is, she's a total science nerd. And she's off to MIT and she's going to be an astronaut, she's going to be in the space program.

And then her parents are tragically killed. So she's in Arizona in the US, and she inherits an old English castle. And so she goes to her castle and it turns out it's got five tenants in it, and the five tenants are quite, they're all different, and they're all quite hot young men.

Through a course of events, she discovers that's she's actually a witch and these five guys are also witches and there's some not very nice Faye who are coming through a wormhole at the back portal at the back of the castle. And these witches have got to fight them off.

It was really a cool series to write, because I love this idea that she was a complete science, rational thinking, and she discovers she's a witch. And so she spends a lot of the series kind of trying to rationalize her power and all these random supernatural things that are happening to her scientific knowledge. And so it was heaps and heaps of fun to write.

So that series is five books. They're quite lengthy books and it's all completely finished. And the box set's out now and it's doing really, really well. It's the biggest, best, most successful series I've ever written, so that was really exciting.



I've also got 10 other books which are all shifter books. So werewolves and foxes and raven shifter stories that are all set in a small town in England. They're a little bit Midsomer Murders, but with shape shifters.

I've got that and then I've just released book one in a new series which is another reverse harem series which I'm super, super excited about.

It's a paranormal mysteries series. It's a bit like Cozy Mysteries series, except that it's got a lot of sexy times in it. And it's set in a cursed bookshop in England, which is run by fictional men. Heathcliff is the owner of the bookshop, and he's a little bit like Bernard Black from Black Books.

**James Blatch: Now I don't know how many people are going to get that reference, but I loved Black Books.**

Steff Green: It's the best and yeah, anyone who reads it who loves Black Books will totally see Bernard Black in Heathcliff. Heathcliff's the bookshop owner, and then there's James Moriarty, he's hanging out there as well. And Poe's Raven, so quoth the Raven, is also there.

That is the heroine's harem in the first book. Her best friend's murdered in the bookshop and she's the chief suspect. So they've gotta solve the murder before she ends up going to jail for it. It's so much fun to write, it's called *A Dead and Stormy Night*, the first one.

And then I'm writing the next one at the moment which is called, *Of Mice and Murder*. And I've got about five books in the series all planned, all with kind of punny book titles. And yeah, it's great fun.

James Blatch: That was a good title.

**Would you say that paranormal is the one thing that runs across all your books?**



Steff Green: Absolutely, 100 percent. The tagline for my pen name, which is Seffanie Holmes, is "paranormal with a touch of the gothic" which is kind of my wheelhouse.

Most of my books are set in England, a lot of them feature crumbling houses and creepy book shops, and that traditional sort of gothic, or gothic romance elements.

And then I have another pen name, E.C. Green, which is kind of for, it's got my dark science fiction on it, it's got an urban fantasy sort of dystopian series on it. And it's the book I'm going to be releasing my children's book from in March.

So it's kind of my catch all name for everything that doesn't really fit really well with paranormal romance. But all of it has this kind of fantastical, paranormal, dark theme running through it as well.

James Blatch: Let me ask you about the twin pen names. We do get this question quite a lot in the beginning where people are setting themselves up with their Facebook accounts, their social media accounts, their KDP accounts, et cetera, knowing that they're going to two pen names.

**It sounds to me like a complication that could get out of hand for some people. How do you manage that?**

Steff Green: The reason I have two pen names is kind of a funny story. And it kind of comes back to why you'd want to do it. Whhat's the point in it, is it actually worth it?

I started out publishing this quite serious really dark science fiction stuff. It's a bit China Mieville, that kind of vibe. And I published, I think it was two books in that series.

I was making about 10 dollars a month, that kind of thing. And I went along to this party with some friends, and a friend there was talking about how



she'd read *Fifty Shades of Grey* and she absolutely loved it. I was being a typical author and I was like oh you know I read the first chapter and it was so terrible and I couldn't read any more. She's getting a bit annoyed with me being a bit of a snob.

And so she says, "Well it's not like you could write a book like that." And I said, "You're probably right." But in my head I went, okay, challenge accepted.

So, without telling anyone, completely on the sly, I wrote this 30 thousand word novella about this fox shape shifter who was an artist, and he was a recluse until he met this gallery assistant. And, then there was a bunch of werewolves after them and stuff like that.

I wrote this sexy paranormal fox shape shifter story, and I put it up under a completely secret pen name, which was Steffanie Holmes. And I thought well, we're just going to see if this is going to work. So I did that, and the first book sold about, it was like 1000 copies in the first couple of weeks. And I was just, whoosh! No!

I wrote another one and the second book in the series and that kept selling and it just kept selling. And I kept expecting Amazon to call me and say, "Look we're really sorry but we've actually given you someone else's royalties and we're just going to take those back."

But they never called, and I published a third book and they keep selling. And they were so much fun to write. And so I had to sheepishly one day tell my husband, look I've actually made all this money, but not from my super serious dark science fiction, but from these paranormal romance sexy books.

He just laughed. He's like, "Well you going to write some more, right?" And I said, "Yeah, okay. We'll do that."



I never really thought too much about what the future of the name was, it was just kind of this experiment that's I'd done because this friend said to me you can't do that. And so when I started Steffanie Holmes, it was actually sort of by accident, very tightly branded. Everything under that pen name is paranormal romance. It has this gothic touch. Everything feels like it is a perfect way for a reader to start one series, and then when they're finished that they can go on to the next series, because it's all super tightly branded.

Whereas, E.C. Green, my other pen name, was this dark science fiction name. But it also at the moment what it currently does is serve as a catch all for any other projects that I'm potentially interested in that doesn't fit really well under Steffanie Holmes.

E.C. Green is about five percent of my income, it's not very much at all. But, it means if I have another project I want to do; for instance I'm publishing this children's book in March and that is not going to go down very well with my paranormal romance readers. It's two completely different audiences. And so that's going to go under E.C. Green.

I'm a little bit different from other people with two pen names in that I focus 90 percent of my attention on Steffanie Holmes and E.C. Green is my name for projects that don't fit under my other pen name.

On Facebook I have Steffanie Holmes and E.C. Green pages. I have one reader group for all my stuff. I have one website for all of my stuff which is a blog that I've been running for years, and years, and years.

I'm not secret with either pen name so all readers know that I do lots of different things. And yeah that's the way I've chosen to run it, but it's obviously not going to, if you have a super secret pen name that's not going to work for everyone.

James Blatch: Yeah. It's interesting, though it's quite fun that Steffanie Holmes was this side project that's become the monster.



Steff Green: Yeah.

James Blatch: And is now the dominant character. Now, there are some people who might write cozy romance and erotic romance and for them they would want to keep it a separation because it could damage the brand on either side.

Steff Green: Exactly.

James Blatch: So then it becomes more difficult for them, and a little bit easier for you.

**But nonetheless, you still have different brands to manage and I guess there's a challenge in that.**

Steff Green: Yeah. Steffanie Holmes is very specific. And it's very important to me that that brand stays pure, as it will, that maybe the right word, yeah. That brand stays a certain way.

But on my main website, which is [steffmetal.com](http://steffmetal.com), that's less about the books almost and more about me as an author. And me as an author is kind of like I'm the same person, it's the same person that writes all the books. So it's kind of more about the things I'm interested in.

I was an archeologist as a career originally so I'm quite interested in historical details and things like that so I post a lot of that kind of stuff on my blog, and I post a lot about music and traveling and hiking and all that kind of stuff. So it's sort of more a personal brand, it's kind of my overarching thing and the other pen name, E.C. Green kinda fits into that personal brand as well.

**James Blatch: And you do a bit of writing for writers as well. In fact, did I read you got a book, a nonfiction book for writing?**



Steff Green: Yes. So I just last year, sort of as a side project, I have started publishing a lot of posts on my blog about kinda trying to help beginner writers and also people who were at the stage where I was.

Where you're making a bit of money, and you're thinking maybe I can quit my job maybe sometime in the nebulous future; to kind of put that plan in place to get there. And so once a week, I've been putting up an article on my blog and talking on podcasts and doing really cool stuff like that.

I've just released in December an ebook for writers, which is available completely free. If you go to my website and you sign up to my Creative Rebel newsletter, and it's called *Unleash the Beast: Releasing Your Inner Writing Monster*.

It's about the creative process, and it's about putting that plan in place where you can go from, hey, you know, I've done the thing to how do I do this as a career? What are the next steps, that kind of thing. So that's a lot of fun to write and it's had a lot of really good responses. So if anyone wants to grab that, you're more than welcome.

### **James Blatch: Where can they find that?**

Steff Green: It's on my website, which is Steffmetal, [www.steffmetal.com](http://www.steffmetal.com), and there's just a tab for writers and when you sign up for the newsletter you get a free copy. And it's a pretty meaty ebook, too. It's not just like a couple of pages.

James Blatch: I expect nothing less from the application to everything, Steff.

So let's conclude, I want to talk a little bit more about paranormal because, I mean, it's such a big area and I love so many of the paranormal authors we have in our community. It's a fun and quite a broad area.

### **Have you any explanation as to why it has grown so big?**



Steff Green: I think there's a little bit, there's things going on in the world and there's kinda two things that go with it. The world's a bit crazy at the moment, and I think one thing is that people quite like to escape from that, and sometimes reading books that are contemporary and set in a contemporary world feel a little bit too close to home.

It's not quite enough like an escape. But more than that I think often paranormal and supernatural creatures and things like that, they often serve as symbols for things in real life and vampires often represent greed. Werewolves kind of often represent almost the battle of the human being versus natural instincts, like civilization versus chaos versus natural instincts, which is a really fascinating kind of thing to look at.

Witches have become insanely popular and I think there's a real desire for women in particular, because these books are predominantly read by women. To look back at societies where women were revered as being wise. Which is effectively what the witch was, she was a healer, and she was the leader of a tribe or anything like that. So, it's kind of a desire to go back to that idea of women being wise, women having the power, because a witch literally has the power.

I think that's quite powerful and as a writer it's quite good to always remember that those things, it's more than just writing about sexy vampires. There really is a real world sense to it as well.

James Blatch: That's really interesting hearing you talk about that, and the witch thing makes perfect sense, as well, because of course they were also as an excuse to persecute women.

And now, I think there seems to be a resurgence of powerful, capable witch characters in control, sort of righting a little bit of the wrong and showing them instead of just saying we weren't witches, embracing it and saying but there's a power to it and a beauty to it.



Steff Green: Exactly. And seeing witches in books using their powers for good, that's really powerful. That's really symbolic as well I think.

James Blatch: Great. And of course, alongside this huge explosion in paranormal indie books has been Netflix, and Amazon Prime, and equally they're falling over themselves at the moment to reboot witch series.

We just has Sabrina, haven't we, rebooted, and there'll be plenty more where that came from. So it's a good time to be there.

**Have you had any nibbles from Hollywood, Steff, for any of your series or characters?**

Steff Green: No, but I am, if anyone's listening, I'm here and I'm waiting. And I have a really great paranormal mystery book shop series if anyone ever wants to do the next Black Books. You know, just get in touch.

James Blatch: That would be so awesome. And, well, you need to get hold of Peter Jackson, he's the obvious candidate to get that done.

Steff Green: Yep.

James Blatch: Steff, look, it's been brilliant talking to you. The line has held out really well, we struggled a lot early on to get this thing settled, but it's done us proud. Thank you so much indeed for joining us today.

This is an area and a genre that I'm really interested in and love talking about, so there's no doubt we're going to revisit on the show at some point in the future.

Steff Green: Awesome. And I'd be more than happy to come back, it's been heaps of fun. Thank you so much for having me.

James Blatch: There you go, Steff Green. And we should say, I can't remember if she mentions it in the interview or not, but I will just say that she is very, well, partially sighted is putting it mildly. I think she struggles to



see clearly at all, so she's been through her life doing everything that the rest of us do, but with that particular challenge of not being able to see. And so all credit and admiration to Steff, it was fantastic talking to her.

**Now how important is this, Mark, maybe more important for some genre than others, to keep an eye on these emerging trends?**

Mark Dawson: It's important. It's a good chance to find opportunities. The first people who wrote reverse harem stuff, this would be, I don't know, a couple years there probably, it's been big since then. They would have done pretty well.

There are tools for finding those emerging little spots that you can take advantage of now. KDP Rocket is a good one. K-lytics, so we've got Alex on the podcast in the next week or two talking about that kind of report looking into finding, the trick is finding genres and niches that have hungry readers but are underserved. That's the trick.

So if you can find that, I don't know make something up top of my head, you know, cowboys and dinosaurs, there's a free tip- cowboys and dinosaurs.

**James Blatch: You're absolutely certain that humans existed at the same time as dinosaurs, yeah?**

Mark Dawson: Well, everyone knows that. My son told me that the other day. So finding an advantage and there's a market there for the stuff that you're writing but there's not much competition, that's cool.

And with reverse harem, that was you know so that's basically one woman, multiple men, so it kind of turning an old trope 360 degrees. And then writing into that niche, they would have done quite well in the early days.

It's still a popular genre, but it's not quite as simple to do well there as it might have been for those pioneers. So the trick is not to, that zeitgeist has



probably moved on now, you need to find the next one and there are ways to do that.

James Blatch: Next week's interview is all about this. It is with Alex Newton and Alex is the guy behind K-lytics and he talks in very good detail about identifying those hot areas as he calls them. And there's a heat map he does, these categories that have a lot of readers and not been particularly served by.

Mark Dawson: He told me actually, previously, that a really hard area is Military fiction and dinosaurs. You need to get to the dinosaurs

James Blatch: Well, you got a dinosaur writer here.

Mark Dawson: That's true. My son and then loves this dinosaurs and heavy machinery.

James Blatch: JCB's

Mark Dawson: Yeah, dinosaurs driving JCB's. He absolutely loves it. So there you go. When you edit, basically change all your characters make them all dinosaurs.

**James Blatch: At the moment there are almost no dinosaurs in my book.**

Mark Dawson: That's probably going to be why it doesn't sell, because you don't have any dinosaurs.

James Blatch: Not enough T-Rex's.

Mark Dawson: I recommend some Velociraptors and kind of add an old grizzly T-Rex. He can be the base commander.

James Blatch: I'll mention it to my editor.



Mark Dawson: She'll love it.

James Blatch: Yes I'm sure she'll go for that.

Mark Dawson: I want a commission on that. This is golden stuff.

James Blatch: We should also say that in the next couple of weeks, we are opening up the 101 course. So the 101 course is one of the periodic openings to take a new batch of students on, so if you're listening to the podcast, chomping at the bit to get the good stuff from Mark.

A premium course, it sets out everything from beginning to end about how to set yourself up as an Indie publisher. We take it from the moment you've written 'The End' on your book, hopefully me soon.

It's not about craft, it's not about how to write your book, it is about how to become a commercially successful author on the back of your writing. So that's going to open up on, Wednesday, 6th of March.

Mark Dawson: Yeah for a couple of weeks there so we'll have more about that next week. But the 101 course is coming around soon. It is. So I'm going to let you go and drive off to the Alps.

James Blatch: Yes, I'm going to drive to the mountains and have a week in the mountains skiing. So hopefully I'll come back with my bones, you know.

Mark Dawson: Intact.

### **James Blatch: What are you doing this week?**

Mark Dawson: I am writing and working. It is half term next week but I've got lots on, so I'll be doing what I usually do.

James Blatch: Looking after the shop. Good. Thank you very much indeed, Mark. Thank you so much indeed for watching this week. We will be back next week, as I said, with that interview with Alex Newton. Thank you so



## PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

much for watching this week, it's been a great pleasure having you on so thank you to our guest, Steff Green.

As well next week is Alex, I think he calls himself Alex Newton because we all struggle to say German names like that. And it's a very, very good podcast and we got loads more to come in the next few weeks. So stay tuned. I'm going to say it's good night from him.

Mark Dawson: And it's good night from me.

James Blatch: Good night

Mark Dawson: Good night.

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