

UKAKF Live Chat With Rosen Trevithick

I read on one of your author pages you studied experimental psychology at university. It sounds intriguingly sinister, what is it exactly and what influence has this, if any had on your writing?

Experimental psychology is like normal psychology but without most of the b*llocks. It's all based on empirical research rather than unfalsifiable theories. I'm not sure that it's had a great impact on my writing - not as much as the university experience in general has had.

I was going to ask something similar as well, as I thought it must have had an influence on 'The Ice Marathon' (and probably your other books too...)

Actually, abnormal psychology (psychiatric illnesses etc) made up less than 10% of the Experimental Psychology syllabus. The mental health themes in my books are based on the personal experiences of my friends and I.

And who did you perform the experiments on?

Most experiments at undergraduate level are performed on unsuspecting friends. It's not as exciting as it sounds. I never got to stick electrodes on a friend's head but I did get several to press a few buttons.

200,000 downloads! How did you amass such a great number!

Two words: KDP Select.

KDP Select promotions can net pretty large download figures, as I'm sure you know.

Also, I have many titles because I released five short stories from a collection separately, which boosts the figures considerably.

Rosen, I found 'The Other Daughter' very moving and frightfully realistic - did you do any research into real life cases, or did you just imagine?

No particular research. I've tended to pay more attention to missing children news articles over the years than other news articles (except articles about the Cornish slurry pest - articles about him are my number 1 favourite.)

Rosen, you recently got to Number 1 in the Top 100 free books on Amazon with Pompomberry House 'and' The Casual Vacancy by J.K. Rowling was right alongside you in the Top 100 paid books - I've never cracked the Top 500 myself, so kudos to you as that was a great achievement - is it something that you were particularly proud of?

I was very proud that Pomp got to number 1, being next to JK was the icing on the cake. Believe me, I've got enough screenshots from that day to paper my bog.

How much of your success would you attribute to having a particular author 'brand'? I've noticed that you have a fairly cohesive presentation style across your blog and social media, book covers etc. Is that something you deliberately planned from the outset, or did it develop over time? Do you think it has made a difference?

I've broken a lot of the branding rules - I switch genres faster than I change my pants.

However, whilst my books vary I've always been careful to establish a clear identity as an author. I let people know who I am, what I like to do, what drives me etc, then even when my books seem far away from each other, they don't seem far away from a central core - me.

I can't really say to what extent the branding has or hasn't helped. I don't have a non-branded version of me to use as a control!

In some ways, changing genre has helped my reputation. I often find that reviewers praise versatility.

Rosen, do you plot your stories, or do you write by the seat of your pants without knowing what's going to happen next?

I wrote my first novel, 'Footprints' by the seat of my pants. Then, when I realised how much editing that caused - ironing out plot holes etc - I vowed never to do that again.

Now, I wouldn't dream of approaching a novel without a detailed plan.

There are too many unfinished plays on my hard drive from my 'reckless' days!

1. Who are your biggest influences on your writing?

2. How much re-drafting do you generally do and how long does it take?

3. Are you going to write a book for the teenage market?

1. You!

2. These days, I usually plan in detail, write and then redraft about twice. So I guess, that's about four drafts. I also do a quick final polish when the notes come back from my editor.

3. No plans to write for the teenage market. Although somebody does need to save them from paranormal romances before we grown up with a generation of women who won't touch a man unless he's got fangs.

So do you have a big box of press clipping that you draw from (a la Ian Rankin), or how do you get your inspiration?

Only keep press clippings if I'm in them. It's a very small collection - a snap holding a verse speaking certificate from when I was 7 and a clip from the uni paper commenting on my virginity.

When things happen that inspire me, I usually jot them down on my phone.

Oh no! I've just realised I'm lying! I recently went through six issues of trashy women's magazines for inspiration. However, the stories in them were too ludicrous for a fiction writer to dare use.

According to your website, Lipstick and Knickers led the comedy chart for about three weeks. This is very impressive and something I'd love to do. Apart from writing a good story, what factors led to this achievement? Was it off the back of a promo?

Actually, 'Lipstick and Knickers' is regarded by reviewers as my worst book. Comedy is a matter of personal taste and I didn't get it proofread before publishing, but mostly I think the low ratings are there because it's genuinely not as good as some of my later titles.

So why did it sell so well?

I enrolled it in Select very early on, when free promotions were causing indie books to shoot up the paid charts during subsequent days. I was very lucky.

Also, I think it helped that the book has a hook. Whose are those knickers and what were they doing on Ross Turpin's floor?

Rosen! You've written serious drama, comedy and now children's fiction. Are there any genres or types of stories that you have always wanted to have a crack at, and may attempt in the future?

I always harboured a desire to write a children's book but I've just done that. I quite fancy writing a film script. I've had a bash at some short scripts for film but I'd like to come back to that area some day.

You're a great advocate of indie publishing/books, but what do you think the future holds for the indie writer?

The high street is being massacred by the internet. In order for book stores to survive, they're going to have to start following the tastes of online buyers. We're lucky in that we've already made our mark there and hopefully, in future months, we'll find that buyers for the bigger stores start taking us more seriously.

However, we're going to have to fight hard to maintain a good reputation as self-publishing gets easier and easier, and more and more attractive to people who aren't ready to publish.

Interesting comment about reputation ... What with the recent disruption in the reviewing system (can we call it reviewgate??) and your recent experiments with metrics for rating books, how do you think reputations will be made or broken in future? Are you trying to anticipate future developments and ready yourself for them as much as possible?

It's very sad that our reputations are so heavily based on customer reviews. It is so easy for one or two spiteful individuals to stand in the way of a blossoming indie's career.

Personally, I try and appeal to communities like this one, where members review books. That way it's harder for individuals to have an impact on my ratings. Sometimes reviewers aren't even being spiteful, they genuinely don't realise that giving one star to a book because they picked up the wrong title is wrong. Sadly, that can make or break a young book if you're not vigilant.

I certainly keep an eye out for fraud on Indie Book Bargains but whether I will be able to continue to do that as it grows, I don't know.

As for future developments, as the indie book scene grows, we will hopefully become less reliant on consumer reviews and find it easier to get into magazines etc.

Roz: what is your favourite thing about writing a book?

Choosing the names of the characters! And the rest of that initial excitement when an idea is growing.

I have to admit, I use the computer game 'The Sims 3' to design characters' physical appearances and I enjoy that a lot. But don't tell anybody!

Rosen, I'm amazed that no mainstream publisher has tied you up in a multi-book contract. Apart from the fact that your writing deserves its reward, by making you one of them they would take away all the support you are providing for the indies.

I'm not entirely sure that I would like a mainstream publishing contract. Of course, it would depend on the terms and I would welcome the ease of getting into bookshops. I wouldn't defiantly close my eyes to the prospect if it arose. However, I really enjoy the indie process - working out how it's all done, managing a website, hiring my own editors and illustrators, creating covers... Yes, I would welcome having a little less promotion to do, but apart from that, I enjoy the whole self-publishing experience.

What proportion of your books have been free downloads and what proportion priced?

Ah! Now that would be telling.

Let's just say that an enormous majority have been free downloads.

How much different is your final draft from the first one? Ok, I know this is a learning process, but I'm finding so many inconsistencies (and just plain boll*x) in what I wrote first time that the second draft is almost a different book...

I'm totally guessing right now, but I'd say that the first redraft tends to add about 25% to the total length. I tend to tweak sentences, embellish bits that seem rushed and layer on extra humour in my redrafts.

If you could have only one of your books/stories made into a TV drama or cinematic film which would it be? Also who would play the main characters?

It's hard to decide between 'Pompoberry House' (with Steven Fry as Monty and Pam Ferris and Dawn) and 'The Troll Trap'.

If the troll trap were made into a film then there's be kids with models of my characters in their homes. How cool would that be? That would probably please Katie too, because she's the illustrator.

BIG SHOUT OUT TO KATIE STEWART - she has done an awesome job illustrating 'The Troll Trap'. Very talented lady. Lovely to work with. I highly recommend her for anybody looking for an illustrator for cover or interior.

What books did you used to read a lot before you started writing?

Psychology text books!

And did those books change after?

I hardly have any time to read at all now. I can't read a book when I'm planning or writing a first draft because I'm too easily influenced. When I do get a chance to read, between projects, I tend to favour indie books because I want to see what the lovely people I interact with daily have been working on.

Writing or chocolate? Which one couldn't you live without?

That's like asking me which one of my kids I want to shoot in the head.

Is there a particular book (by someone else) you wish YOU had written?

I love some of Ben Elton's stuff. He satirises things in ways I like to think I could - but got to things I'd like to satirise first (i.e. Big Brother, X-Factor).

Do you listen to music as you write? I tend to prefer peace and quiet. What are your musical tastes?

I can't work with music on. I find it too distracting. However, for some reason I can work with the buzz of a cafe going on.

My musical tastes are very eclectic.