

Laurence O'Bryan

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SPEAKERS

Maggie Lynch, Laurence O'Bryan



Maggie Lynch 00:04

Hello, and welcome to Dust Jackets: Conversations With Authors. Today I have a very special guest who is not only an author, but also a computer geek like me. He's always looking to the future of book distribution. But first let me read his formal bio for you. Laurence O'Bryan was born in Dublin. He studied business, and then IT at Oxford University. After going to England, he paid for his own courses and began rising at 4AM so he could study and work at the same time. One early job was as a kitchen porter near the Bank of England cleaning the plates of the well connected. He stayed in squats in London and struggled for years. Laurence was first published by a school newspaper when he was ten, for a short story about aliens getting lost. Thirty-five years later, he attended an autonomy workshop and not long after was offered a publishing contract for three books. The first of which, The Istanbul Puzzle, won the Outstanding Novel award at the Southern California Writer's Conference in 2007. I first met Laurence, seeking help for my Twitter account. He helped me to get started in how to build a following. And I have to say I truly owe at least half my followers to his assistance. So welcome to Dust Jackets, Laurence. Thank you so much for being a part of this.



Laurence O'Bryan 01:31

Thank you very much for having me. It's a great pleasure to meet everybody and great pleasure to be here. Hello.



Maggie Lynch 01:38

For those of you that are detecting an accent, I forgot to tell you that Laurence is from Ireland. So, Laurence, I wanted to start off today talking about a project that we're both involved in, but you really are the leader and mover and shaker on this. And that is book and NFT's. For those of you who don't know, NFT stands for non-fungible token. And what that really means is kind of a way to prove authenticity of something that you're buying in the digital sphere. If you've seen the news on any of the NFT's that artists have put out, we've seen some really amazing sales. For example, multi-million dollar sales for art. Recently, I think Tim Berners-Lee actually put an NFT out of his initial code for the Internet. I think that was a \$5 million sale. But books are on a different level, we think. I don't know, anyone, maybe JK Rowling, who might be able to garner millions of dollars for something that she would put up as an NFT. So we're taking a different approach with that. Can you talk a little bit about that, Laurence? What made you decide that this was the way to go? And how are you approaching it, that other people haven't been able to solve the problem with books in that sphere?



Laurence O'Bryan 03:23

Well, I was particularly taken with NFTs in terms of the new technology opportunities that it provides. We're not looking to be a get rich quick for millions NFT. What we're doing at Books Go Social with our NFTs is providing low cost, reasonably priced ebooks--special editions between \$20 and \$100 with the majority at \$25 and \$30. And that is a reasonable price when you consider that you have a selection of books and items included. Usually inside it, in some cases, it's a box set. In other cases that includes an audio book as well. In other cases it includes extra stories and audio. In one case, there's a song; and in some cases are also video files included. So all of those items are put together into what we call a special edition. So \$20 \$30 \$40 is the majority of pricing of our NFTs. So we're not looking to try and sell something for a million dollars or anything like that. What struck me about NFT is the opportunity. The fact that they are moving into many areas because they are recorded on the blockchain. You've probably heard about cryptocurrencies and how they're becoming an interesting trading option. The value of cryptocurrencies actuating rapidly. So this is based on a cryptocurrency on the WAX system, which is an entirely green cryptocurrency. That means it is carbon neutral. I was overtaken by that particular style of cryptocurrency because of the fact that it's carbon neutral. Let's put that issue aside and you can look that up. It's also been used by William Shatner. And for me, if William Shatner minted his NFT on WAX, it's good enough for me. We also see companies like Atari and Marvel, and lots of others minting their NFTs on WAX. So it's not just the fact that we're doing it at a reasonable price. But it's the inherent qualities of the NFT. And this as a change in the internet and what has been happening on

the internet, which really struck me as something different. I was taken with it in the same way as when I heard about the internet 30 or so years ago, and how interesting it was regarding the energy and use the blockchain provides for people. So to give you an idea what that is. It's the NFT's contract. It's a token, which is a contract, which says that you own something. So what do you own when you buy an ebook NFT? Imagine the idea of buying an ebook at 20, 30, \$40 with the extra content, enjoying it, but then being able to resell it. And that struck me as hugely important, because it means that we have a secondary market for the reader. After they've enjoyed reading the book, there's a secondary market. And because all of the transactions are recorded, the author can also get a share of the secondary rights. And in our case, we set that at 10%. So this is a fundamental change for authors. For the whole history of writing, authors have written books and then, if someone decides to resell them, the book that you've written, we don't get anything. So these factors, the benefit for the reader, that you as a reader, and I'm also a reader, that I could buy something for \$25 and then in a few weeks time, I can sell it again. And one of the reasons that is you're able to do that is because these are limited editions. So in our case, we're basing these on one of 100 limited editions. They could be one of 1000, or only one of one. It's up to the author and, in our case, to decide what is the limit on the number of editions. So in this particular special edition that you would buy, say for \$25, this has been one of 100 that means it retains some value, and it can be sold later. So there are arguments to say there's an ebook NFT that might go up in price over the next year or two. There's other arguments to say that it might go down in price like anytime you buy something. But the concept of being able to resell something for me was striking. The idea that you could hold on to an ebook and at some point you could try and resell it. On the WAX currency system, there is a marketplace where you can put things up for resale. And it could also be sold privately as well. It's up to you. And we ask readers to inform us if it's done on the blockchain. Because of the contract, 10% will come back to us automatically. And we are encouraging people to put it through or inform us of any other sales that take place, for the works on the blockchain. So those two key things: that you're able to resell digital content that you buy, and that the author gets a percentage of the resale value, are significant. That means for me that the idea of NFTs are going to continue; that it's not going to die because of a boom and bust in the price of cryptocurrencies on NFTs. Those particular concepts mean for me that this is going to last a long time. And from what we've seen of the interest so far from authors, and from readers, this is likely to continue for a long time. So we've started with our first test with 14 books released near the end of June. They're currently selling and we have one who which has sold for \$100 which is an ebook with added content. A one of one special edition sold for \$100 which we believe is certainly the first time for that to occur. I've never heard of an E book selling for \$100 ever in the English speaking world and I bet that's a record for the price of a new ebook. And that person who bought it, a fan of that author, believes that they've got good value that they own this one special edition. There's some really nice

material inside that special edition, they believe they've got good value. They can also read the book and enjoy it as well. And then in the future, they can sell it. So that's the basic concept. I don't think we have to worry about how the blockchain is put together, just as we don't have to worry about how our jet engines are put together. When we take a flight from A to B, we just need to know that they work. So the blockchain works. And there's a lot of stuff relying on the blockchain now and more and more is going to move in this direction, because it's a permanent record. And they expect a lot of contracts are going to move in the direction of using the blockchain. We already have the NFTs and our various other things moving towards being recorded on the blockchain. We don't have to know exactly how it works. As long as it works correctly, a lot of people are using it, we can go from A to B. We can buy an NFT ebook. Store it in our wallet, which you access easily online, and then enjoy, read the book, watch the video files, listen to the music contained with it, and then resell it when we decide we want to do that. So that just struck me as so new and so different. Because, as you know, you can't resell ebooks in most places. You could buy as many ebooks as you like from any of the big online stores. But you're certainly not allowed to resell them at any price. So that just struck me as so new, so different, that we really had to get involved.



Maggie Lynch 11:46

Well, thank you for that really great introduction, Laurence. I have to agree. You know, the only way I've ever been able to resell a book is a paper book to a used bookstore. And usually it's pennies on the dollar that I paid for it initially. Today I think so many people are doing ebooks. Now, I rarely buy a print book myself, just because I can keep 1000 ebooks in my in my little tablet. So, you know, when I travel, I don't have to have a big heavy suitcase. One of the things I would love for you to talk about and that drew me to your particular project, is that when people purchase their NFTs, they don't have to be worrying about the cryptocurrency because that can be quite confusing, You know, is \$1 inow equal to point 00015 of Ethereum Ether? Or whatever the value is today. And so how have you solved that problem? For people who just, you know, they don't want to do the whole cryptocurrency thing. They just want to give you their money in dollars or pounds or euros.



Laurence O'Bryan 12:53

Sure, that's a really important thing. A lot of younger people, years younger than me, like the whole NFT thing because it's all about cryptocurrencies and wallets and things which the older generation don't know anything about. It's like secret stuff, which they can keep from us, which I'm sure we were like 30 years ago. And you know, we wanted to stuff for our generation. But what we're doing at Books Go Social. So this is booksgosocial.com. You'll see our NFTs for sale there. We have 14 NFT ebooks. What we're doing is allowing

people to buy in dollars with PayPal or Stripe, things that they know about. We are also allowing people to get a refund within seven days, if they don't like it. And it's reasonable if you buy something for 20 or 30, or 40, or even \$100 that you should be allowed, if you open it up and you see it's not what you expected. This was one of the principles of the internet at the beginning. It was always the idea that you'd get a refund if you didn't like what you bought online. So we're keeping to that. And we're doing those two important things allowing you to pay with PayPal or Stripe with your credit card. Both of which offer a refund service. So even if you think: Oh, are they going to actually refund me? You can go to your Stripe or PayPal account and ask for your refund and you will get it. So that's really important, I think to allow people to purchase this ebook NFT which they can resell later and do just with PayPal and get back dollars. So there's no confusion about pricing and what do with cryptocurrency for refunds. There's no confusion with any of that. After purchase we have a one click wallet where you can accept your NFT contract so that you can resell that book in the future. So that's on the WAX blockchain and again, it's used by William Shatner. He sold a lot of NFTs on this system. And it really is, it's the easiest wallet I've seen. But that is, afterwards when you want to take your contract, which shows ownership of the NFT. There is no extra...there are no extra fees involved at the later stage. It's simple. If it's \$25 to purchase. That's it. That's what you paid. And we guarantee that you can get a refund on that money within seven days, if you change your mind. So that solves that problem. You do not have to get involved in cryptocurrencies unless you want.



Maggie Lynch 15:40

That's really great. So I think what I'd like to do is to move over to talking about you as an author, Laurence, because that is a big part of the interviews that we do here. And a great segue for that is to ask...Well, I saw that you've written looks like 14 or 15 books at this point. So which one did you choose to put on as an NFT? And why did you choose that? And what other content did you include with your special edition book?



Laurence O'Bryan 16:14

Thank you. That's really good. So I have I think it's about 12 books. Now, one just came out. I did have a nonfiction as well, but I have 12 novels. And what I put up is the box set of A Dangerous Emperor, which is about the life of Constantine the Great. And it's a fictionalized account. And the reason I put it up is because it's received the most reviews, five star reviews, in a series of my own self-published. So HarperCollins did publish three books for me at the beginning of my career. But these are self-published, which also means I have the rights to do it because I own the copyright and have not licensed it to

another company. I have the right to do it. And so I put the three book box set, plus an extra story. There's a short story at the end, which is about Constantine's death, which isn't included on the books you can buy on Amazon. So it's got an extra short story, plus a video. It's only a two or three minute video, explaining my research sources for a dangerous Emperor. And why I decided to write that book. It started about 20 years ago. And I was particularly interested in that series for an NFT because I was told by a couple of people that it would never do well. That it was impossible to sell that. And I didn't manage to sell it to a publisher. But it has gone on to get hundreds of and shockingly good reviews. If I ever feel down, I can go to Amazon and look up some good reviews, which tell me how wonderful it is and how much people enjoyed the book. So it's got lots of reviews, and you get this extra content, a video, an extra story, get the whole box set, which you'd have to buy separately on Amazon. In any case, there isn't a box set of the members that you get in this unique collection. And I really enjoyed writing that series about Constantine, I found it like fascinating. He was the first Christian Roman Emperor. He introduced Christianity..well not introduce it, he made it the official religion of the Empire. Up until that point, you probably know that there were persecutions of Christians. They were being persecuted and thrown to the lions. And there was a persecution just before he, he decided to make it the official religion. And there's a very famous battle. And so that's depicted, the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, as depicted in some amazing paintings in Italy; and in the rally songs about his battle. So there's a lot of stories about how Constantine came to become Christian. And what I decided to do was to turn those stories into fiction. How he went from being a captive, with another Emperor on the far side of the Empire, with his father almost disdaining him and not wanting any contact with him. And then his father mysteriously dying in York in northern England while he was there. And him being elevated by the troops, by the legions being elevated in York, to become emperor of the West. And then him having to fight his way across The Empire and defeat his the other emperors who were against him and defeat them outside of Rome at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. And so many other stories about his life just fascinated me. So I used artistic license to fill in the gaps. So I did a lot of research over many years, attended lectures and classics and various other things and bought all the books about his life. And just really enjoyed the adventure. I've always liked adventure books really enjoyed that adventure with Constantine. It was a completely different time. And if you weren't careful, you had a sword put through you in those days if you said the wrong thing. So very different time to the very civilized, generally civilized society we have today. But it's a big escape thing as well. It's a great adventure. So I hope people like it. It's called A Dangerous Emperor that's on the NFT site.



Maggie Lynch 20:58

Thank you so much. And um I will, as usual, be sharing shots of Laurence's books as well as

all of the site information that we've been talking about. So history, a lot of my readers love historical novels. And so I'm hoping those of you listening who do like those might want to try this out. And I did mention it to my husband, who was a history major and writer. And he said, Oh, that sounds interesting. So I suspect that he will be very interested in in reading that as well. You also have written some science fiction, I noticed when I was looking you up, which makes sense. So many people I know, who are part of the IT industry, like science fiction. You you mentioned William Shatner, of Star Trek already, of course. So I think I saw three science fiction series. Is that right?



Laurence O'Bryan 21:59

I have a near future one. The HarperCollins series was the Istanbul Puzzle, the Manhattan Puzzle, the Jerusalem Puzzle and various other puzzles. But those are near future. Semi science fiction novels. Most recently, I have a novel which is about the discovery of the Ark of the Covenant in Ireland, which is I know, it's a long shot, okay. But there is some reason to believe that the prophet Jeremiah came to Ireland. The current Queen Elizabeth of England claims her royal blue bloodline from King David, through this connection to the prophet Jeremiah, who escaped Jerusalem, with two princesses from the Jewish royal family, and brought them to Ireland. And so this is a story which has been passed down in Ireland. I was also featured on the Discovery Channel, Discovery Science Channel. You can find it on there, The Secrets of the Lost Ark is currently showing. It came out last month talking about this. But there are various theories. If you liked the Raiders of the Lost Ark movie, you might believe that the Arc ended up in Ethiopia, because other people believed it ended up in a cave in Israel somewhere. And then there is this theory that it might have come to Ireland, because of the Jewish princesses who came by boat and traveling from the Mediterranean to Ireland was quite common. We have examples of pottery and things from Phoenician pottery in Ireland from that area. So it's quite common. Traveling by boat would have been an arduous journey, you know, taken months. But people did it. And they were trading in tin and various other things like gold chain. Anyway, so that was turned into a novel, which is also about quantum physics. So I bring together quantum physics and the Ark of the Covenant. So that's available on Amazon at the moment as well. So that was just an aside. I was like writing that, because of the pandemic. And also because I was invited to participate in this Discovery Channel series to speak about Ireland and the possibility that the prophet Jeremiah had come here.



Maggie Lynch 24:33

Oh, well, that does really sound fascinating. Here in the US, of course, the Indiana Jones

series has been very, very popular and is on almost continuously available on some cable channel, or Netflix or somewhere else so people can watch it again and again. And this gives them another opportunity to see another take on some of those things. That's Really great! So what are you planning to do next in terms of your author life?

 Laurence O'Bryan 25:10

Yeah, well, I have a book I wrote about 10 years ago, which I'm going to go back to. Now I know they say, never go back to your first books. But I have to tell you that the Dangerous Emperor was my first book. And I left it aside for 10 years, and came back to it and completely tore it apart, rewrote it, got multiple edits on it. So I'm planning to go back to a book I wrote 10 years ago, called sisters, which is about some terrible things happening around the world about the use of fetuses for various experiments. I don't want to go into too much detail about it, but some horrible stuff that's been hidden from us. And it's just about facts, those things, you know, I'm not going to be moralistic in any way about anything. I'm just talking about facts and how we might need control, particularly for young women who are in difficulty in this era of search called Sisters. And it's about someone who finds himself in difficulty in San Francisco. And so it's partly based in San Francisco. And I spent a little bit of time there visiting various places, locations and things there, It is based in London as well. So it's, it's near future, what horrible things they get up to if you get caught up. So it says it's a psychological thriller. And so that's what I'm working on. And I've got a lot of notes to take that one forward. And I really like uncovering and helping people, and speak about and have stories about things that we don't usually talk about, and that are difficult things. So I know I'm jumping around a little bit in my books, and they advise you not to, but unfortunately, that's where I'm being hit by whatever it is that's leading me this way.



Maggie Lynch 27:13

Oh, well, I actually love that about you, because I'm the same. I write in like four different genres. And I know that that's not what you're supposed to do. But that's what's so great about being independent, right? You get to choose what you want to do. And I think there's readers for lots of different things. So it's just a matter of finding them and, and letting them know that you are the kind of writer...that you have the kind of voice and creative mind that they really want. So I think it's great. It's not always the best way to make the most money, but we have to do what's in our heart, for sure.

 Laurence O'Bryan 27:50

Absolutely. Yeah, I agree with that. And it's great to be independent, to be able to keep to that and not to have some corporation telling you, you have to do this, and you don't have the freedom to do what you want. So yes, it's the indie flag, we can wait on that one.



Maggie Lynch 28:06

Absolutely. And that actually kind of brings us full circle around the whole NFT movement as well. In that, you know, authors have control of that in being able to set their prices and being able to resell books, to choose to allow their books to be resold. And all of that I think has drawn a lot of independent authors into that environment. So another thing I would just like to talk about briefly, because you did mention your company, Books Go Social, which is spearheading this whole NFT book marketplace effort. But your company also does a lot of other things. And I know that I do have many authors that listen to this podcast. And so can you just tell us a little bit about some of the other things that Books Go Social offers, and that authors may be interested in, in knowing about?



Laurence O'Bryan 29:05

Well, I spent a long time studying and working in marketing and working specifically in IT marketing. And after being published, I found I had a lot of followers. HarperCollins did some great work with various digital initiatives, which ended up with me having a good following on Twitter and Facebook and an email following. So I started helping other authors to market their books. And so that was back in 2013. And then in 2015 we started doing Amazon ads for people and then doing Facebook ads. So we do Amazon ads, Facebook ads, and we also help people to self publish. That is not vanity publishing. As a self-publisher, if you decide that you want help...you want somebody to proofread your book, you're going to put it up on Amazon KDP yourself, but you need a proofreader or cover designer, then you can select a service that you want. Or maybe you did a proofread already, and you want someone to just upload it for you. So we have a selection of services to help people self publish and we are really keen on people's self publishing. They get paid monthly direct to their bank account by Amazon. So there is no publisher standing between you telling you, you have to wait six months for payment. You just get paid every month. So we're really encouraging people to put their own books up. But often people say, Okay, I can do all the proofreading and editing, but I need some help with a cover or something else. So we help with that. And then we help with the marketing, that's Amazon ads, Facebook ads, and we have some big email lists as well as social media followers. We do those as well. And we combine packages with all of those services in it. And we offer a refund service, cash refund service, if people are unhappy. And we generally pay out one or two refunds every month. There are some books that slip

through and don't do well. We start doing the work on them, using our expertise, but nobody buys them and people want their money back. I think it's really important along the lines of the internet, the promise of the internet, which was that if you bought something on the internet that you could have your money back, if it didn't work out. We do take off if we've paid Amazon ads for you, we do take off those speeds. But usually they can be stopped pretty quickly. People are unhappy with the service and we spend only \$20 or something. And we also want to protect our good name as well of course because we're interested in the long term being an advertising agency for books and the long term support for authors. It's difficult now. Authors have almost have to pay to play. They have to do some ads to get seen. You might be William Shakespeare or the best writer ever. But unless you're doing some sort of advertising you get lost on Amazon; and so that's why we do a relatively modest couple of \$100 programs where we can test ads. Ads do work most of the time. Facebook ads work because the whole principle of marketing is based around the idea of testing things first. Those are the principles you know when you study marketing. You're supposed to test if you do Amazon ads. Does it work? Do you need to change your cover? Do you need to change your description? Do you need more reviews? All of those steps we do our best to provide a personal service as well. There are real people available for a phone call. All of that to help people. So that's that's what Books Go Social does.



Maggie Lynch 32:50

And I can actually say I have used the service myself and that's why I can recommend it wholeheartedly. I have also recommended people who are very happy. There was one person who did request refund and did get it. I think you tried your best, but it didn't generate sales. I think it's really important for me to speak out, because people know that I don't ever recommend something that I have not used before myself or that I know the people involved. So, for those authors who are listening, if this is something you're interested in, you know I do definitely recommend this company. To be clear, he's not paying me anything. I'm not getting affiliate money or anything else for saying that. It's just because I honestly believe that they do the very best job they can.



Laurence O'Bryan 33:39

Thanks



Maggie Lynch 33:40

Absolutely. So Laurence I think that we're about to the end of our time here. But I do want

to just give you an opportunity. We know you said booksgosocial.com is your company site. Do you also have a site for just you as an author?



Laurence O'Bryan 34:00

You can see some of the books at <https://lpobryan.com/lpobryan/> You can also find me on Amazon at Laurence O'Bryan. That's <https://www.amazon.com/Laurence-OBryan/e/B005XIJDXY/>. You could see that Roman series. If you like a good historical novel, then yes, hopefully, you'll enjoy that historical adventure,. And it has very prominent female characters in it as well, who help Constantine to achieve his goal. And they're not mentioned in the history books, of course very rarely. Just as he had a he had a wife isn't mentioned much. But I can assure you a young and powerful man in his 30s leading the legions would have powerful and important women around him as well. It's, it's, it's most likely true. So, hopefully, you'll be interested. It is suitable for everyone. There is some violence in it, but it's not about battles. It's about the personal relationships and who helped him overcome enemies, and to the Christians who helped him in his cause as well. So that's it. I hope you like that adventure story.



Maggie Lynch 35:21

Wonderful. Thank you everyone for listening. And as usual, I will have all of these URLs in the show notes and it will be in part of the transcript. So thank you for listening to Dust Jackets: Conversations with Authors.