The following is the full transcript of Remarkable Episode 8: Jay Posey on Storytelling, from Hollywood to the Moon (and Back)

In this episode of Remarkable, I get to have a conversation with a long-time friend of mine who is a narrative designer and video game developer as well as a best-selling science fiction author.

He's had integral roles in the development of video games for Red Storm Entertainment, an Ubisoft studio that was co-founded in 1996 by novelist Tom Clancy, known for award winning games such as Ghost Recon, Rainbow Six, and Far Cry.

Outside of work, my guest has written a sci-fi trilogy which was published by Angry Robot Books called Legends of the Duskwalker, the first of which is a best-selling novel entitled Three.

His 4th book, Outriders, is part of a new series, and will be available online and in a book store near you on May 3, 2016.

In this episode, we talk a lot about storytelling and how to craft stories that truly connect with your audience. Whether you're podcast revolves around stories or interviews, you'll learn the keys to great storytelling, the importance of the 3-act structure, and how to bring the art of storytelling into interviews.

You'll also learn where most people go wrong when telling stories and specific questions you can ask to get engaging responses.

Finally, we cover tips for building a loyal fan base and following, the #1 you must do before you can start building an audience, and the keys to creating life-long fans.

I'm pleased to introduce my good friend, Jay Posey.

Dave: Jay Posey, welcome to the Remarkable podcast.

Jay: Hey Dave, thanks so much for having me! Glad to be here.

Dave: Yeah, I'm glad to have you on. Thanks for giving me some time today.

Jay: You bet!

Dave: So, I'm looking forward to talking to you a little bit about what you've got going on, but to start, can you give us a little bit of information about what you do on a daily basis?

Jay: Well, it depends on the day. My day job - I'm a narrative designer with [UbiSoft Studios](#), [Redstorm Entertainment](#). It's a video game development studio that was started by [Tom Clancy](#).

Narrative design is kind of a squishy term in the industry, but it basically can mean game designer and writer.

So, depending on the project, and depending on the day, I may be doing sort of typical creative writer tasks, writing storylines (characters, dialogue - that sort of thing). Or I may be doing more typical game design, system design.

Things like writing out AI plans for how AI would use VO in the game, voiceover in the game - things like that. So, it really depends, kind of, on a day-to-day basis.

And then, in the evenings and weekends, I'm also an author. I write mostly science fiction, and that takes up most of my time.

Dave: I want to go back in time a little bit. Can you remember when you first got interested in writing?

Jay: You know, I think probably like most "writery" types, it was something that I was doing before I realized it was a thing you did.

So, you know, when I was a kid, I used to like to make up stories, and usually I'd write them down on whatever notebook paper was handy.

I do remember I was probably in maybe 2nd or 3rd grade when I discovered my dad's microcassette recorder that he used to record meetings sometimes. I wandered off with that and would tell stories into it.

Dave: For those people listening that have no idea what that is, I'll put a link to it in the episode's shownotes on the website.

Jay: If you can imagine, it's like an mp3 player, except you have physical things that you have to deal with.

So it's like a tape, but very small. Anyway, I think the funny thing about that was that I don't ever remember actually going back and listening to any of the stories, so it wasn't really important to me. I wasn't really into the craft at that time; I just enjoyed telling stories.

So, from that, I think I continued just sort of thinking about writing as kind of a hobby - I enjoyed it, but I didn't really start taking it seriously as like a, "Oh, this is something that people actually could do for a living" until I guess I was in my 20's actually.

Dave: Was there a time when you were younger where you thought maybe you wanted to be a writer, but you just didn't think it was a possibility, or did it just not ever even cross your mind?

Jay: I think, yeah, I mean I definitely think especially when I was in middle school, I kind of had a comic phase; I really thought it would be cool to write comics, but I at the time thought you had to be able to draw comics to also write them, so I was not great with the visual arts style of things.

I also, I think it didn't seem like a thing that you could make money doing and that may have been something that my parents encouraged.

It was that, "Well that's kind of a fun hobby, but, you know, it's not something that you can, certainly it's not going to sustain you!" We all know starving artist stories, of course. So I kind of toyed with the idea off and on.

Actually, I was a computer science major, or I guess I was a mathematical sciences major with a concentration on computer science, but sometime in my junior year, I toyed with the idea of switching my major to, actually the journalism school at UNC

with a focus on advertising, because I thought, "Hey, I could probably write ads - that would be a way I could make money writing."

But that conversation didn't really go well with my parents, so I persevered with my computer science degree.

Dave: So, what did you do after getting that degree?

Jay: Probably the worst possible thing, which was I went and got a job doing tech support at a video game company. Which, I mean, it's not the worst possible thing; it's just probably not what my parents had in mind with what I would do with a computer science degree.

That was sort of my, yeah, I've been into video games, pretty much since I saw my first arcade. For the kids these days, you used to have to go to places to play video games.

Dave: And take a lot of money with you.

Jay: And take money.

During college I started kind of investigating game development in general, and that was sort of a thing that I thought, well, that would be sort of a creative outlet where I could use my CS degree, but also do some creative things.

It's sort of a notoriously difficult industry to get into. So my master plan was to get a job in tech support and then kind of see if I could make a lateral move once I got into the company. Which, that didn't pay off directly.

But it actually did... the contacts that I made doing that came back around several years later. I left the industry after a little over a year in tech support and then re-entered it about 11 years ago.

The contacts that I made during that tech support time were valuable when I wanted to try to get back into it.

Dave: What did you do during the hiatus that you took?

Jay: Several things. So, I forget the order of events, but I went and worked for a startup web developer, and then I worked for University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Business School in their web development department.

I did a lot of database back end kind of programming type stuff which was soul-sucking for me personally. Just, you know, obviously being very creative-minded and doing that was not a great fit.

I then left that job and then was a screenwriter for two years, and then after screenwriting, I actually got back into the games industry.

Dave: Anything come out of the screenwriting period?

Jay: Well, I did not ever sell any screenplays. I was a reader, essentially for a producer who was running kind of a development house out in L.A.

I did not move out to Los Angeles. I'm based in North Carolina and I didn't quite have the fire in my belly enough to want to move out to Los Angeles to pursue the screenwriting dream.

And I was pretty convinced that I was so good that I could write from the east coast and everyone on the west coast would want my stuff.

But, I did make contact with a producer and so he would basically go out and find scripts that were in development, you know, being - people had written them, but they hadn't been picked up yet or whatever, and he'd send them to me and get my opinion.

That was actually a really valuable time for me - both in just learning story structure, learning kind of the mechanical side of why stories work and why they don't.

I probably analyzed on a couple dozen scripts over that time. I had to break down, did this story work at all? If not, how would you fix it? If you fixed it, what's the minimum you could do to fix it, and then what would be the major overhaul?

So, it was really a good training ground for me to really do a deep dive on kind of the - as I said - the craft of it, which paid off quite a lot when I started in the games industry and I started having the opportunity to do narrative design and writing there.

Dave: You said you got back into the gaming industry. How did you go from that to getting your first novel published through Angry Robot?

Jay: It was kind of a parallel process. So screenwriting, as I said, was really helpful for both learning sort of the mechanics of storytelling and then also, being very economical and efficient in writing, especially in dialogue.

Dave: For those of us that don't know, what do you mean by economical in writing?

Jay: Just getting the point across in as few as words possible.

Dave: Okay.

Jay: So part of screenwriting is being able to very quickly establish a scene. It's a mistake when you're writing a screenplay to try and describe every single detail of, you know, the seedy bar where your characters are having this conversation or whatever.

My common examples I use when talking about this is just saying like, you know, we see the bar. Even the barstools are greasy, you know?

Dave: Right.

Jay: Or even the jukebox is greasy or whatever. That's enough to give you a sense of like, oh, this is not the nicest…

Dave: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jay: Most kept up place. And that's enough for, you know, a screenplay is basically a blueprint. You're not really, you're not writing a movie, you're writing a plan for someone to go make a movie out of.

So, they just need enough to set the scene and to know what's going on and to be able to visualize that for themselves. So, that's kind of what I mean, you don't necessarily have the time in a screenplay to explore particularly flowery prose.

It's more about getting your descriptions across quickly without losing any of the power of the scene that you want. So, all that training helped out a lot in game writing.

I came into Red Storm as a-this is going to be a confusing term-the term was a scripter, but it's not actually a writer. It's writing code in games; but it was in the design department.

I got brought in because of my CS degree, and then there was a project that came up that was a little bit behind schedule, and one of the guys needed some help, so I just sort of volunteered and said, "hey, I've got…I can take on some extra tasks if you want. I've done some screenwriting in the past" and he was like, "Oh, great! Here."

So, they kind of gave me a test run and they were very pleased with that.

A little bit later, probably a couple years - maybe about 18 months after I started at the company, we started on a new project and they were taking kind of an open call for pitches for the storyline for the game, and I actually didn't think that - you know, I still felt like I was kind of the new guy and fairly junior, so I didn't really think that they were going to care what I wrote.

I just figured this was good practice for me. I'm a big believer that really no writing is never wasted, so I was like, you know, I'll just write something and I'll give it to them, and of course nothing will happen, but it's good practice for me.

Dave: Yeah, yeah.

Jay: And I gave it to them, and they liked it so much that they asked me to be part of the core creative team for the project.

Dave: Awesome!

Jay: So, narrative designer is a fairly new term in the industry. Well, I guess it's probably about ten years old now, so maybe not quite that new.

But I actually was one of the first to have that title officially in the industry, and I believe I was the first at UbiSoft actually to have that title officially, which isn't really a pat on the back for me, it's just that's kind of how young the title was.

It was like, "Oh, this seems to describe what you might be doing as a designer and writer. Let's call you that!" I was like, sure, that makes sense. That's kind of how I got started on really on the game writing front.

Part of the thing about working - so UbiSoft is one of the largest publishers of video games in the world. I think they're #3 right now.

They're kind of the game development equivalent of your Hollywood blockbuster movie. And, as you might imagine, your amount of creative control working for them is probably not as great as people might think.

Dave: Sure.

Jay: So, we very often are told, "Here's the game that we want you to make. And we want you to make it about these things."

So I discovered that I just wasn't feeling quite as creatively free writing that stuff as I had thought that I would be, just because there's so many constraints, so many different things that you have to do to meet your mark and all that stuff is kind of beyond your control as a writer.

So, I'd had an idea for a novel for a long time, and I'd kind of been poking at it for awhile - probably several years at that point. But I'd never really been able to get past the first few chapters of it because I just kept going back and rewriting it and going back and rewriting it.

I finally realized like, oh, what I'm doing right now is I'm trying to write my Lord of the Rings. I'm trying to write my magnum opus right out of the gate.

I just wasn't the quality of writer I needed to be able to do what I wanted to do. So, I picked another idea that I had that I wasn't quite as in love with. It was just, kind of, this other, you know, anybody who's creative probably has about 100 times more ideas than they can ever implement.

Dave: Right.

Jay: I just picked another one and my only goal for that one was to finish it. So I said, alright. So, just to see what the process is like and to be able to say, okay, I've written a book. Now I know what it takes to write a book.

I'm going to use this idea and I'm going to write it and see what happens.

And, of course after I got like two or three chapters into it, I completely fell in love with the book and had almost the same problem that I had with my previous one of not being able to finish it because I wanted it to be this thing that I wasn't sure I could actually write yet; but I did manage to finish it.

Dave: How long did it take you?

Jay: I think I worked on it for about 2 ✤ years - maybe 3 years off and on - but there were significant breaks where I went 3 - 4 months without ever touching it.

Dave: Sure.

Jay: I'd write a bit for a week, and so, it wasn't really diligent. But, I had made some contacts with some other writers just working in the games industry actually.

When I started doing some research, this was back in probably in 2010 or 2011. I guess I started trying to decide - at first my thinking was, "This is just for me. No one's ever going to read it, so it can be whatever I want it to be."

And then as I started getting towards the end of it, I started thinking, "Well, I wonder if maybe it would be worth either soft publishing it or just sending it to a publisher and just seeing what happens, you know, now that I've done the work."

And I ran across one particular publisher that basically when they described what they were looking for...

So, the book that I wrote - Let me take one step back.

The first book that I wrote was very much a "no one's ever going to read this, so it can be whatever I want it to be." And what are the things I like?

Oh, I like westerns, and I like technology, and I like martial arts, and you know, all of these things that don't go together. So I basically made a world that they all made sense in...they could fit together and live happily together.

So, it was this really weird, really hard to describe science fiction book - post-apocalyptic, kind of western style, cyber punk, kind of book. I really had no idea how to describe it to anyone.

So this was when I found Angry Robot books. They're kind of what I would call a boutique publisher I guess. They're based out of the U.K. and they're a fairly small operation in terms of staffing. But they punch way above their pay grade.

They distribute through Penguin Random House, so they have global reach. And when I found them and found what they were looking for it was basically like, "We like really weird stuff that you can't describe."

Dave: Ding, ding, ding!

Jay: I figured if these guys don't want this, probably no one will, so I'll use them as my test case. And I actually had met some other writers in the game industry who had also written novels, and one of them had published with Angry Robot.

So, I sent him the manuscript for my novel and he took a look at it and said, "Yeah - I think this would be something that they would like to take a look at."

So, he kind of made a side door introduction for me. I sent it to them and about nine months later, I had an offer for two books and was very surprised about that - and excited. So, that is my grand journey from one place to the next.

Dave: When did that first book come out?

Jay: First book was 2013.

Dave: And it was [Three](), that was the name of the book?

Jay: Right, yes. Confusingly titled - book one of the trilogy is called Three. It is a trilogy - the third book came out last - what year is it? Last summer.

Dave: The summer of 2015, is that right?

Jay: Yeah.

Dave: How was the experience with the trilogy for you since it didn't sound like you were anticipating writing a trilogy, but that's kind of what it turned into?

Jay: It was funny because the first book I wrote to be a stand alone novel, but as I was getting to the end of it, I realized, "Oh, this might actually be the start of something." And it wouldn't just be another book - it would be a trilogy. So, it kind of leapt from one book to three books in my mind.

When Angry Robot kind of asked me - you know, there's a period. You submit, in the traditional publishing process, you submit a sample.

Basically you write a letter and you say, "Here's what this book is about. Here's why I think it's a good fit for your publishing company."

Different publishers have different requirements, but Angry Robot asked for like the first five chapters. So, you kind of have this dialogue back and forth. If they like what they see, then they might want to see the full thing and then if they like that, then there's some discussion.

So, they asked me what my plans were for it and if it was a series or a stand alone, and I just told them that basically, that "This book is a stand alone. I could easily see it becoming a series."

Which, I kind of lucked into that because that was the truth, but that's also kind of, I think, what publishers want to hear.

It's like, "If you get this book, you're not committing to a series, but if it's successful it could be."

Dave: That's right.

Jay: So, that worked out well for me. And then, obviously the offer that they came back with was to buy the first book and then publish that, and then also they wanted me to write a sequel to it.

It was interesting because that, I kind of initially thought, "Well, I've written one book, so certainly now I know how to write books - this will be much easier." The second book was actually much more difficult than the first book.

I didn't know until later, when I started making more author friends, and they're all like, "Oh, yeah, and the second book is always the worst; that's always the toughest."

Dave: And why is that?

Jay: I think part of it is because you get ...you've just had your first taste of success, and now it's like, "Oh, was that a fluke? Do I actually have another book in me?"

When you're a debut author, when you're brand new, nobody's heard of you - they have no expectations for you. Once you've got something out there, now it's...you're at risk of disappointing people that maybe liked your stuff the first time around.

I think there's just this kind of weird, creative anxiety that comes over you. Like with a lot of endeavors, anything that you start, you kind of start feeling like a fraud in some ways.

Like, "Oh no, I'm not really an author, and people are going to find out because I can't finish the second book." Which is funny because after I finished the second book, Angry Robot came back and wanted to finish the trilogy with me, and also start a new series.

So, I started the third book and I was like, okay, surely this will be easier than the second book, because the second book was atrocious, and it was almost as bad - as difficult, I should say.

And that one was just because with a trilogy, now I have to...not only do I have to write another book, and I had the same struggle as, 'do I actually have a third book in me?' but it's also, 'I've set all this stuff up with two books, and now I have to stick the landing, and what if I don't?'

I've dragged people along for two years and they've read some thousand pages of my nonsense and then I blow it up at the very end.

Dave: You've come all the way down the ski slope - the slalom, and then you just kind of fall across the finish line.

Jay: Exactly. Pretty much - you just face plant into a tree or whatever.

Dave: So, let's dig into storytelling just a little bit. You said that you learned a lot reviewing scripts from other people, as well as writing a couple of your own. What do you think is the biggest lesson that you learned from the script writing phase?

Jay: That's a good question because it was...there was a lot to learn there.

Dave: Did anything stick out?

Jay: I think, it was interesting to see how consistent structure could be and still be interesting. So, if anybody out there has done any sort of research into screenwriting especially, or into storytelling in general, there's a lot of discussion about the three act structure and what you do in your first act - I'll give you a very brief version.

Dave: Sure.

Jay: Sort of your first act is where you establish your main character and what normal life is for that main character. And then you give them some incident that changes their life dramatically and now must be dealt with. That's frequently called the inciting incident.

Then Act 2 is sort of this development of where the character is trying to learn to navigate this new world they've been thrust into because of this incident.

You see this is where they tend to - they get a challenge, then they make a change and overcome it, then they get another challenge and then there's a lot of back and forth and character development.

And then all that leads to your big third act where there's the climax and you kind of see how the character has grown and changed and you have your ending.

If it's an American movie, it probably ends very happily and everything works out just fine, but if it's not, then there are more options there.

So, that's kind of the general, the very, very general, flow. And that's obviously almost trivializing it.

To see that you have this sort of framework - it almost seems like it's too rigid - it's like, 'oh, well now you're just using this formula,' but actually it can be so incredibly flexible and still work so powerfully.

That to me was just - not only seeing it done well and seeing how it works, but also a lot of the scripts that I saw were not in great shape all the time, and so seeing like, 'oh, here's why that structure works because this screenplay's not doing that, and it's not interesting, it's not fun, or it's not, meaningful.'

Dave: Where do you think people mess up? Based on that experience or just from reading other stuff. Do people intentionally veer away from that formula or do you think they accidentally veer away from that formula? Any insight as to what to look out for?

Jay: Well, I think a lot of what I noticed is that people got sort of caught up in thinking that if things were happening, it meant progress was being made in the story.

Dave: Kind of like in real life.

Jay: Yeah. There's a lot going on onscreen, things are blowing up and cars are going around - it should be exciting. Well, it would be exciting if I cared at all about any of these people that are involved, but you've done none of the work to make me care about any of the people.

I think that's one of the major things is, if people don't establish some kind of connection between audience and character.

Sort of one of my examples I reached for this is that some of the most amazing, exciting, and also terribly heartbreaking stories are available to you every single day, and we call it the news.

But for the most part, the stuff that we see on the news is just kind of information, because we don't know the people that were involved.

So you get some of those newscasters who kind of try to humanize the stories to draw you in and they give you some details about the people that were involved, but a lot of the times what happens is people get caught up in giving the information and trying to get the information in an exciting way, and then they forget that it's actually the people that we care about - it's the people that matter, right?

So, you end up with these incredibly expensive screenplays, calling for like -- this is going to be the 65-car crash that's going to be super exciting, and you're like, yeah, but I don't even know who the main character is in your screenplay. So, that's a pretty common one I think.

Dave: Let's fast forward just a little bit, back to the trilogy that you wrote - any big lessons in that? Maybe the difference between what you learned from the screenwriting phase to the science fiction novel - something that we can take away as a tip or a little bit of an insight into what makes a great story?

Jay: I think, again, it's always going to come back down to the people. For my sort of rambling description of my first book - this is a thing that I think especially science fiction runs into a lot where people get excited about the ideas and forget to connect them to the people in the world.

It was interesting to me because storytelling really can touch any facet of communication. It's not just writing fiction or creative writing.

We see it in advertising copy, in podcasts - in really any sort of human endeavor can use storytelling, and a lot of it just comes back to humans are social creatures and we learn most of what we learn through watching the people around us and through their experiences, right?

Dave: Right.

Jay: So, pretty much as far back as we go in history, and probably even farther than that, we had oral history long before we had written history and all of that was just a matter of the elders of the tribe telling the stories to their younglings: "Gather round the fire."

Writing a fiction novel is very different in terms of format from screenwriting because they're doing different things; and you can be more poetic; you can be more - you can take more time with description, in building a sense of place and giving a texture to the world.

With fiction writing, you can do a lot more of internal... you can really get inside a character and see what that character's thinking and feeling and have a much sort of closer attachment. But from a structure standpoint, a lot of the same things work.

Again, I think it all comes back to getting attachment between your audience and your characters and then constantly putting your characters into situations where the stakes are interesting, right? As long as your audience is sitting there asking themselves, well, what happens next, what happens next - you're doing your job.

Again, that can be - whether that is in a movie, or it's in a book, or it's in an interview, or even advertising to some degree, it kind of builds that sense of, "Hey, if you have this product, imagine what your life would be like. You could do this, and then what comes next; well, you could do this." It's the same sort of idea.

Dave: Like one of the commercials that keeps coming to my mind - I guess I'm thinking about the Olympics - the last winter Olympics with the parents holding up all their little kids from ice skating and snowboarding and they just kept falling down and they kept falling down but the parents were there, so you're emotionally attached, and then at the end, the parents are there when they're winning the gold medals.

Jay: Right.

Dave: And it's this commercial, but you're tied to the emotions of the parents and they're kids growing up.

Jay: And you're kind of tearing up too..."Thanks mom!"

Dave: I want to bring that into podcasting a little bit more specifically now...and one that comes to my mind that I'm a big fan of is Dan Carlin's "Hardcore History."

Jay: Oh, yeah, it's great.

Dave: And I was thinking about the Wrath of the Khans and he's able to take this history and bring it down to the people. You're engaged with the story of the Khans

and Genghis Khan, because of who they are and what they're trying to accomplish, and what their purpose is, and how they're trying to expand and take care of their family.

Are there any other podcasts that you've listened to or that you think of that are focused on storytelling that you think do a job or are worth noticing?

Jay: It's interesting. Two that come to mind: one is [Script Notes](#) which is with John August and Craig Mason - and they're both screenwriters out in L.A.

They talk about a wide range of topics. Obviously, most of them pertain to screenwriting.

Dave: Imagine that!

Jay: It's crazy! Being out in Hollywood, they also give you this glimpse of what the working life is like out there. So, they just have some great stories of like, "Oh, we were working on this thing, and these things happened."

So, that's probably kind of an odd example of it because it's not really a storytelling podcast, but they make good use of it because they really do a great job of drawing you in and making you feel like you're at the coffee table in L.A. with them, along for the ride.

Dave: Getting some behind the scenes conversations and things.

Jay: Exactly. So, you feel like you've got access to a place you wouldn't normally. And it actually - [Tim Farris](#), I think- his show - he does a great job of drawing stories out of his guests. I just listened to an episode, actually, that you recommended to me, I think.

It was the [Cal Fussman](#) interview.

Dave: We were just talking about that briefly.

Jay: Cal has written for [Esquire](#) for, I don't know, forever, pretty much, and has just lived an incredibly interesting life and has such a gift for storytelling. I think the podcast might be - is it close to two hours? Or an hour and a half or so?

Dave: I think it's over two hours.

Jay: Is it over two hours? It doesn't seem like it at all. When I got done listening to it, I was like, "Awe, is it over already?"

And I realized, "Oh wow! This was really a long one." So, those two in particular (since you already took Hardcore History).

I think Hardcore History's probably one of my favorite examples because - specifically because I really did not enjoy history growing up. That was largely because of the way it's typically taught, I think, which is, "here's the information."

Dave: Nothing about the people!

Jay: This gets back to what we were talking about before about the connection, right? Dan does such an amazing job of giving you the context of the world, like, "Well, this is the state of the world at the time, and these are the major players in this world and here's why those two things matter."

Then he takes you through how all of these things go together, and he's very skilled at implying the sort of impending doom. Or he'll tell you about this character and then he'll go over and talk about this character, and then you know those two characters are going to meet.

Dave: Right.

Jay: You're just not sure when. So, he does this great job of framing everything in a way that you almost don't realize that you're getting the same information.

But then when you're done with it, you have this sort of mental movie that you can play back and be like, "Oh, remember when Subutai went and all those knights went on a raid against him and he sent out his diplomat and they talked to these other allies and they got those allies to temporarily betray their..."

This crazy stuff, right?

I probably would not remember that if I had read it in a textbook. But just, again, his skill at understanding not only what the important information is but how it matters to the people that are involved in the situation, and then communicating that to the audience.

He's kind of one of the best in the business at that.

Dave: Yeah, I would agree. One question then, and you might not have an answer for it and that's okay, we can move on. I've been trying to think about how to, for those

listeners and those of us that do an interview style podcast, how do you go about making a story arc through the interview?

Not just asking the person on the other end to tell a story, but actually making the interview itself somewhat of a story. Do you have any thoughts or maybe tips or ideas that we could take away on how to structure.

Maybe in our notes ahead of time, or interview questions, any ideas there?

Jay: Those are great questions. I would not use the haphazard three act description that I gave you earlier. But there's a lot to that, where a lot of times when we're interviewing people it's because they have interesting expertise, or they've got some kind of experience, or they're in a place that we would like to be, or whatever it is.

But the interesting part is always how did you end up where you are, and to get there, you can kind of go back and say 'well, before you were who you are now, what was life like for you kind of before you did all that?'

Dave: Right

Jay: What was the point that made you realize that this was the thing you wanted to do, or this was the kind of person you wanted to become.

Because usually we'll find that there's a moment when a decision gets made, whether it's imposed on us because there was some tragic accident or, you can have really dramatic ones like, 'oh, well, I was rock climbing and my rope broke, and I fell, and I thought I was going to die; and I realized I wasn't living my life right.

Dave: Right.

Jay: Or it can be really subtle things like, 'I was writing an email one day and I realized that the thing I like to do best is to write emails to people that help them and encourage them,' or whatever it is. But there's always some point in our lives where we sort of realize, 'oh, this is the thing.'

And then if you go from there, you say, okay, after you had that decision - you had that moment - what was the first thing that you did? What was the first step that you took? That's always interesting - well not always.

I can't say always. It can be interesting because frequently when you have that flash of inspiration of, 'oh - this is the thing I'm going to do; I've got to go do it,' then you are very gung-ho about it, but you don't really know what you're doing, so you're probably going to make mistakes.

Dave: That's a good point.

Jay: Part of the reason why that's powerful is because I think we tend to look at people who are - for example: if somebody's not an author, not a published author (hasn't written a book yet, but they've always dreamed about it), they probably think, 'wow, this guy has written a trilogy and he's got another book coming. Wow, he's really made it!' No - I haven't made it. I'm still just doing work.

Dave: Right.

Jay: It's easy to put people up on a pedestal and think I could never get there. If you can walk that back to the point of, 'oh, well, this is the first thing I did and it was a catastrophe,' that really encourages other people to think, 'no, this is a process. This takes time; people make mistakes.'

You can come back from mistakes. I think that's also how you draw out a lot of lessons learned. For me, when I decided to take writing seriously, I decided I'm going to go write a screenplay, so let me go get a couple books about writing a screenplay and then I'll do that.

I did it and was pretty proud of what I produced. Now that's sitting in a box upstairs that I will not show to anyone because I think that's not really very good at all.

That was an important step for me to make the decision that that's what I wanted to do and then give it a try and then realize, 'wow, this is way harder than I thought it was going to be' - it turns out that writing screenplays is not just a winning lottery ticket.

There's a reason that not everybody is a Hollywood screenwriter.

I think you can steal that straight from the classic three-act structure of: what was your normal life, what was the moment of change, and then what were the challenges that you faced as you were on your way, and how did you overcome them?

What did you learn along the way? Who did you meet? What people helped you? Who were your biggest obstacles - people who made it difficult for you?

Especially if you do your homework ahead of time, if you're doing an interview style podcast, you can lead your guest down that path and get their personal story out of it while also getting this nice narrative arc to the whole interview.

I think part of the key to that is if you've got a really cool guest on the show who everybody thinks has made it, and you lead with that.

'I'm talking to so and so, who is this awesome person, who has done all these things that you wish you had done.' You give people that end point and then you back up from there. Now they know how it ends, but they don't know how you got there.

It's the journey that is the most interesting part, right? All of that can be applied.

Dave: Really good tidbits in some of those questions. I'm going to include some of the questions that you brought up in the notes so people can go back and check them out (if you're listening and you're driving in your car), I'll include some of the questions that you can ask to help get through some of that.

Let me jump around a little bit and move over into the aspect of what we all need to actually make money from our endeavors. That's the audience (the fan base). How have you gone about building your audience and your fans? From the last we spoke, your first book has done well.

I think it's been an [Amazon](#) bestseller, tens of thousands of copies sold. How have you gone about connecting with your fans and building that fan base?

Jay: It's a long-term investment. I think for me.. well, the first thing you have to do is you have to produce something. That helps to have...

Dave: It's been really hard to build up fans of my podcast without actually releasing the podcast.

Jay: Yes, it is funny how that works. You can do it. You can start and maybe have two or three people who are waiting for it. I say that half jokingly.

But, producing quality work is an important step, that you put something out there that you've put your time into and that you feel good about. On that note, I think that... I guess I would call it an honest work.

What I mean by that is something that's true to you - that you're bringing your personal experience and perspective to. I think that's important because if you're really looking for a genuine connection with an audience, then that's what's going to most quickly connect you with the people who will be your lifelong fans.

If you're trying to guess what the market wants, you're going to be wrong most of the time. If your heart's not really in it probably once you get about 20% of the way into producing the thing, you're going to lose steam. 'I don't even like this thing and probably no one else is going to.'

I think it's important to focus on something that you feel like you alone could produce. That doesn't necessarily mean that it has to be innovative or unique; it just means that you have something personal and of value to add.

I think that's the first step to connecting to the right kind of audience. I think it's sort of a matter of... I'm a big believer in generosity in all of its forms. That can just mean time, that can just mean attention.

When I meet someone who's read my work, or interact with someone on Twitter, or get comments on my blog or emails or whatever - I try to take time to genuinely appreciate that person.

It was real easy at the beginning because I was not getting a lot.

When you get one email a month from someone who has read your book, it's real easy to be like, 'hey, I really appreciate you taking the time to contact me' and ask them how they're doing and that sort of thing. It's gotten to be a little bit more of a challenge just in terms of time as my audience has grown.

That's still the philosophy behind it is to treat each person as an individual that you care about and then you just replicate that times 100 or 1,000 or 10,000 or whatever it is that you've got going on.

For me, I'm uncomfortable self-promoting anyway, and it really does make me genuinely happy if something I have produced is of value to someone else.

So, when somebody contacts me and they're like, 'thank you so much for writing this book,' and I'm like, 'thank you so much for reading it, I appreciate your time.'

Again, I think just being genuine - I'm never really out to ask more of anyone, so if someone contacts me about my first book, I don't instantly hit them with, 'did you know you can buy my course on writing for $150?'

Of course when I have a new book coming out I do contact people and I let them know I've got this thing coming out - if you liked my other stuff, you will probably like this. Of course I do some promotion, but that's maybe 10% of my interaction with people.

Dave: Do you have a story from a particular fan or anybody that has stood out to you, that's been a meaningful connection?

Jay: There are several. Probably the one that has been the most significant to me, I think, was actually an email I got from a 15-year-old kid who said he loved my trilogy and that he had never been much of a reader, and actually didn't even like books and didn't like reading, but had just happened to come across Three in the bookstore.

There was some element of how he had gotten a hold of the book. I don't think he was in a bookstore; I think someone had just given it to him or he may have gotten it from the school or something. It was like he wasn't even looking to read, but somehow this got forced on him.

After he read it, he thought, 'now I realize how much I've missed from books and now I want to read everything.'

Dave: That's awesome!

Jay: You can't beat that, right?

If you are the gateway to the world of reading for someone. So, that was really powerful for me. There have been some others that have been kind of humorous to me. I got one email from a guy who was just very effusive; he was very kind in his appreciation of my work.

Then, at the very end of it, just his email signature said he was a software architect at NASA. So, there's some things like that where you're like, 'what?!' That was kind of crazy. Hooking someone on reading was probably the biggest impact to have.

Dave: That's meaningful. That's great. I've recently interviewed Jon Nastor from the podcast, "Hack the Entrepreneur."

He talked about building a fan base by responding and giving out his personal email and just a similar type of never taking anybody for granted. He said to this day he still, no matter how many people download (I think he's in the hundreds of thousands) - no matter how many people email him, he tries to respond.

I've noticed you (obviously you and I are friends and we connect) - one of the avenues I've seen that you're able to connect with people is through Twitter.

You've actually used it very different than I have in the past and it seems to be working really well for you.

Have you had a Twitter strategy, per se? What's been your method of operation for using Twitter, and how has that helped you?

Jay: I'm kind of an idiot sometimes - I like to make just random comments about things probably no one else is thinking about. When I first got started on Twitter I didn't really know what to do with it. I was kind of like, 'well, some people are talking about Twitter.'

I was hesitant at first because probably like most people I thought, why would I want to see what people are eating for breakfast - what do I care? It took me a little bit to realize this is an amazing tool for connecting with people I would never be able to connect with otherwise.

I kind of lurked around for a little while and was using it primarily as a news feed. Then I started connecting with some authors.

Once I realized that I could tweet at people and sometimes they would respond, it became a good tool for me to just have very easy and causal contact with people (authors) that I might end up being at a convention with at some point.

It was sort of a very low-risk way to establish some early connections with people which was good for me because I'm an introvert - I would say I'm severely introverted.

Dave: You can just pretend you're not there at some point.

Jay: Basically. Again, with the limit on characters, you're not going to get into a real big conversation. It's not like writing an email to someone.

When I started on it, there was this sense that Twitter was essentially like your local pub where you could go and sit at your table and watch what was going on and every now and again make a comment or bump into someone and say, 'hey, that was cool.'

I think that was sort of the...I was not strategic about it at all, but that's probably the closest thing to a philosophy I had about it, which was I don't mind occasionally making an offhand comment about something that people are talking about. I don't mind mentioning this cool thing that I saw.

When my books came out and people started searching for me because they'd read a book or heard about me, or they'd seen me somewhere, it became a really easy avenue for me to connect with readers.

For me it's such a low impact thing. Twitter - I can hop on there for a couple minutes and just check what's going on. It doesn't have the same mental barrier for me as sitting down and checking email.

It doesn't feel like a thing I'm committing to doing. It's just kind of a thing I'm glancing at. The same sort of thing - if someone takes the time to tweet at me, I try to tweet back at them and at least thank them for their time or whatever it is.

I think a lot of people are surprised that I take the time. Sometimes people get the impression that I'm a much bigger deal than I actually am, so they're like, 'Mr. Posey, I just read your book. It's so great. Thanks for writing it.'

They probably think that's all it's ever going to be. Then two minutes later, I say 'thank you so much. I really appreciate it.' And they're like, 'oh, I can't believe it! He tweeted me, he tweeted me!'

I also use it...I find it's really great for promoting other people. I think I probably do that far more than I promote anything that I do.

That's not out of some kind of scheme of, if I do this, they'll do this for me. It's genuinely that these are people that I like and whose work I think is good and I want them to have more visibility. It's really been a great tool for raising awareness for things that I'd like other people to know about.

For example, I work with a group called [Hope for the Warriors](#). They're a veteran's care group that specializes in helping post 9-11 military members and their families that I do some work with.

It's great to be able to - as people come to me about my stuff, then they're also seeing great things like that which I'm able to promote and bring attention to.

All of those things work together for me. I think part of it is the mental barrier - it's such an easy thing to just hop on and do for just a little bit that it's easy for me to be consistent about it where a lot of the other things that I probably should be doing in terms of promotion and audience building, I just don't have the mental capacity or the energy to commit to it.

Like blogging: I've tried to be diligent about blogging regularly, and just have never really been able to get on that train.

Dave: Are there any bloggers or other authors or sources that you go to for inspiration and writing help? I know you already mentioned the Script Notes podcast, but as far as other authors or bloggers?

Jay: Not consistently. I think I'm kind of far enough along in the craft side of things - a lot of bloggers I've seen that are about writing, they're not writing to me. I do check out a few particular author blogs every now and again, but it's typically because I know the author.

[Chuck Wendig is actually one](#). His blog is at terribleminds.com/blog. I have to caution you; I'm trying to remember his actual tagline, which I'm not going to quite get right. It's probably not safe for work.

He is an absolute artist at being able to use profanity. He has some shocking turns of phrase, so, not for everyone. He has a pretty hilarious way of talking about things. He's one that I probably bounce to more frequently than others.

[John Scalzi](#) is another one. He's one of the more famous science fiction writers. He's actually been blogging consistently since 2005 maybe. It might even be longer than that actually. I may have done him some injustice.

He doesn't necessarily - I mean he does blog about writing and the publishing industry, but that's not all he blogs about. He blogs about whatever he wants to blog about. I think his blog is actually called "Whatever." I think it's whatever.scalzi.com.

Dave: I'll include that as well. Just a couple more questions here.

You mentioned a fourth book which is not out yet as far as I know, but it's coming up. Tell us a little bit about that book. It's not part of the trilogy, right? It's a whole new franchise, a new brand.

Jay: That's right. It's a brand new series. It's called Outriders. It will be out May 3rd, it's a Tuesday, and May 5th worldwide. May 3rd in the U.S. for whoever.

Dave: Yeah, listeners are everywhere.

Jay: It is a military science fiction so I was kind of leaning on my Tom Clancy roots there. I decided to write a story about a small, special operations team that's trying to stop the first interplanetary war. It's about a conflict between Earth and Mars.

In that world, we basically colonized Mars and got kind of content there and didn't really try and decide to explore much further out. In terms of space, it's still a pretty local neighborhood.

Dave: Awesome! How hard was it for you to go about the post-apocalyptic world here on Earth to an interplanetary situation? Was that an easy transition for you, or was it difficult to kind of change gears?

Jay: Once again, I foolishly thought it was going to be an easier book to write than it was because I was like, 'well, now I'm doing...I've been writing military stuff for a decade; I can do this.'

It was quite a mind shift because, the Duskwalker series - that's the name of the trilogy, [The Legends of the Duskwalker](). It is a very gritty, post-apocalyptic world; it's pretty grim. I wanted to go the other way.

The Legends of the Duskwalker sort of thematically has a lot to do with what happens when technology goes really, really bad. I should say, when the human element neglects to control technology.

With [Outriders](), I kind of wanted to go a different direction with that. An aspirational, what can we do if we put our minds to it. It was really a more...now that I'm done with it, now that I'm done with the process of writing it...it is a lighter book...it feels a little lighter to me. It's really a military thriller set in space.

It's certainly science fiction but it reads more like a traditional sort of military fiction kind of book. Even though there is conflict going on, I think there's a lot in there that's really meant to be inspirational about how awesome things can be...

Dave: The possibilities.

Jay: If we put our minds to the right thing. I think the two series are kind of on opposite sides of the same coin in a way for me. One is kind of exploring the darker side of things, and one's the lighter side.

It's nice to get out of the post-apocalyptic wasteland for a little while and think about things that weren't quite so grim.

Dave: How was it for you - and this is probably one of my last questions - in regards to this book specifically. You had mentioned earlier about overcoming imposter syndrome.

So, now that you're more true to your military writing style, and you've already mentioned being buddies online, or following people in that space in Twitter, the special operations... How do you get through the imposter syndrome? Are you still dealing with it now?

Jay: I've had enough success now. I started screenwriting in 2003, so that's 13 years now of writing. I'm finally getting to the point where I think I might have some idea of what I'm doing now, in terms of writing, so I've got some confidence there.

I was very, very nervous about writing military fiction because I have not served.

I have massive respect for our armed forces and for those who have served. I was hesitant to even try it for awhile because I didn't want to seem like I was trying to tread on something I didn't know about. I didn't feel like I had earned the privilege.

Actually, there's a comment that another buddy of mine, [Myke Cole]() - he's an author. He has a very interesting background. I think he served, I'm trying to remember - he was a

civilian contractor and served in Iraq for a while and then came back and was with [NYPD](#) and [Coast Guard](#).

He writes sort of military fantasy. He actually has a book I think that just came out called [Javelin Rain](#), which I've heard is excellent. I haven't gotten to read it yet myself.

I was on a panel with him at a convention and he just said, "The military experience does not only belong to the military. That belongs to all of us."

That kind of helped free me up I think a little bit to realize - this gets into a little bit of a concern I have with our current society. In the United States, we don't have the professional warriors. We don't have a warrior class.

Dave: Right.

Jay: Our military is all volunteer. I think we've gotten dangerously close to having this gap between the military and the civilian world where we think 'those people are fundamentally different than I am. They're military people and I am not.'

That's not the case at all. These are our neighbors, these are our family members, and they're doing a job they volunteered to do, they've been trained to do a job. They go and they serve and they're very generous to do that for our country.

I think that sort of helped me realize that I can contribute meaningfully as a civilian to our understanding of that world. I haven't served, but I've been very privileged to be around a lot of the people - again, because of my work.

In games, Red Storm's always been very concerned about getting things right and so we bring in advisors, largely from special operations. A lot of them are combat vets who've been very gracious to come in and sit down and talk with us about their experiences.

I realize that I've had access to people that most civilians have not had access to. I've gotten a glimpse of that world.

Dave: Right.

Jay: Being a civilian, I've also got a perspective - an outsider perspective in a way. I think there's some work I can do there from my side of the equation to help bridge that gap.

It shouldn't be only on the people who are already serving in our military to also do the work to try and bridge the gap back our way, if that makes any sense.

I was still very, very nervous about it until I got a buddy of mine, whose name is [Kevin Maurer](#). He wrote [No Easy Day](#), which is the book about the Bin Laden raid. He's been writing - he's got a number of books on the military.

He'd been embedded with big Green Berets for several weeks, several different times and has really gotten to be immersed in that world as a journalist and as a writer.

He was kind enough to read the book for me and probably gave me the highest praise that he could which was he felt that I had nailed the character of the men and women who actually do that job. As he was reading it, he kind of forgot that it was a sci-fi book, and it just felt right to him.

Dave: What a compliment.

Jay: So that made me feel a little bit like, 'whew!' After that, I felt a lot better because I think that was my big concern is that - I was very concerned that the men and women who do the job for real were going to feel like I hadn't accurately or honorably - hadn't honored them properly.

Dave: Well, it's been really insightful and you've shared quite a bit. I guess my last two standard questions are, if I say the word "remarkable," is there a particular podcast that comes to mind as being remarkable to you?

Jay: The first one that leaps to mind is one that I just recently started is called "[Remarkable](#)," with Dave Mooring.

Dave: You're too kind.

Jay: I almost get the idea that you did that on purpose. Seriously, you've been doing a killer job and I've been very impressed - to come out of the gate as strongly as you have, and with the guests that you've had, you've been doing a great job. It probably won't be a surprise to your listeners.

Dave: Thanks.

Jay: I think I probably have to go back to Tim Ferriss actually. He's one that I consistently find myself coming back to - both for the quality of guests that he has, but also for his skill at drawing the interesting bits out of them.

I think he does a really good job at not asking the obvious questions. I think, again, if you haven't listened to any of his stuff, the Cal Fussman interview that he did not too long ago I think is a great place to start.

Cal himself is a master interviewer, and then to hear Tim interview him about interviewing and how they work together is kind of a master class in how they talk to people. That would probably be the one that - that's the one that my mind went to.

Dave: Yeah, I would agree. That's a great reference. My last question is, where can people go to keep up with you, learn more about you, connect with you online?

Jay: You can find me at jayposey.com. That's j-a-y-p-o-s-e-y.com. And, of course on Twitter. That's probably the place you'll find me the most is [@hijayposey](https://twitter.com/hijayposey). That's h-i-j-a-y-p-o-s-e-y.

Dave: And if you're listening to this and it's before May 3rd, go ahead and preorder a copy of Jay's book Outriders, and if it's after that, head on over and get that copy as well as any of the first three. You won't be disappointed at all.

Jay: Thank you very much for that, I appreciate that.

Dave: Well, Jay, this has been great! I enjoyed chatting with you and look forward to keeping the conversation going. Thanks for your time and thanks for coming on the Remarkable podcast.

Jay: Yeah, man. Thanks for having me and I hope your people all got something out of it.

Dave: I'm sure they did, thanks!

Jay: Alright, thanks man! Bye!

Dave: Bye!