



# Beyond the Book®



## Interview with Kent Anderson – aka Andrew Kent – Author of “Johnny DeNovo” mystery series

ANNOUNCER: Welcome to a podcast of *Beyond the Book*, a presentation of the not-for-profit Copyright Clearance Center. Copyright Clearance Center is the world’s largest provider of copyright-compliant solutions through a wide range of innovative licensing services and comprehensive educational programs for authors, publishers and their audiences in academia, business and research institutions. For more information about *Beyond the Book* and Copyright Clearance Center, please go to [www.beyondthebook.com](http://www.beyondthebook.com).

Q: Well, the mystery has been solved. If you’ve been wondering who the author of *The Green Monster* and *Spam and Eggs*, two Johnny Denovo mysteries is, Andrew Kent, his identity is now revealed.

Kent Anderson, executive director of product development for the *New England Journal of Medicine* is joining me today to tell me a bit about his books, but also about his book publishing experience. Welcome to *Beyond the Book*, Kent.

A: Thanks, Chris.

Q: What I want to do is start off right away by giving you an opportunity to tell us about the books themselves. There are two currently out, a third expected early next year. Tell us about your character, Johnny Denovo, what makes him a special sort of detective and what kind of mysteries he tries to solve.

A: OK. I’m happy to do that. Johnny Denovo is a pseudonym for a neuroscientist named John A. Novarro and his name was changed in a terrible copy editing mishap that was fully supported by the government during a cover up to give him his new identity.

And he is a detective of the mind and where the idea for him came from was the notion that how we think is in metaphors and how we speak is metaphorical, and so there was a – I saw a place where a detective who used metaphors to solve crimes and used them to untangle crimes and anticipate what criminals might do would be exciting. And so that’s how I pursued it.

Q: There’s a long tradition in detective novels, I think, for just that sort of thing, where language plays an important part. The way a hardboiled novel by Hammett or Chandler is

written is essential to the story. It's not only the plot that's engaging. It's the language itself.

But I was thinking too, as I read some of the background on the book on your blog and elsewhere, of whether it would be the detective in *Crime and Punishment* or some of Poe's very early detectives. They're all sort of struggling with this emotional, rational thing and that's clearly involved here. There's always a split personality. Your detective, in fact, has this split personality.

A: Exactly, and I'm really glad you picked up on that. One of the things that I really like about this character is the fact that to me, he feels classic. And there are illusions in both of the first two books to Poe and to other detectives that would rapidly come to mind. And it feels like he is a slightly new facet that you're looking at on an old gem.

Q: Right. And it seems to me too that given your professional background, working at the *New England Journal of Medicine*, it puts you, I would say, from 9 to 5 in the rational side of things, very scientific, very much research-driven and factually driven. And yet, you're probably diverted from time to time – even at work, but mostly after hours – with the more artistic side of your own personality. So in a fashion, your detective is a reflection of your own twin interests.

A: Yeah, I think that's absolutely right. How he came about is – there's a little bit of a story here – is that what I do is product development and that's really a creative process. And what we were struggling with a lot in product development was how to get to the essential truth of what a user wanted, what they valued. And so we engaged a qualitative researcher who used research into the metaphors of the mind to uncover these unspoken needs and unknown – even to the person themselves – desires for wish fulfillment.

And it was very striking. These people told us things that still stick in the minds of people who have seen them. It was the most insightful and palpable reality we've seen. We've done focus groups and surveys and all of those things, but to really get under their skin, we had to go this direction.

And seeing that really struck me as a new way to have a detective, but also really opened doors on my professional side as far as product development to remember that there's an emotional side to that, that we have a rational reaction to our emotions, but that often isn't sufficient to explain the emotions.

And so, there is yin and yang between the creative and the professional here in that I'm always dabbling with both of those in both areas of pursuit.

Q: And business is about relationships as much as it's about products and services, and relationships inevitably have an emotional aspect to them.

A: Oh, definitely, definitely. And one of the things that the detective does in these books, Johnny Denovo, is he'll use his knowledge of the mind and the metaphors that people

prefer to insert just the most disruptive move, countermove or insinuation into their lives so that he can really unnerve them and see what's going on.

A: We're here in a Boston hotel lobby having a not-very-secret conversation right out in the open, as it were. But I can imagine in a place like this even, it would surprise people that office meetings and business meetings going on so much, but here we're talking to an author at the same time that they might be transacting some kind of contract or something like that. It's going on around us all the time and it's great to have a character that sort of combines those two things.

What you've done with the aspect of publishing that we want to talk about for *Beyond the Book* is to bring over some of your own professional experience into bringing these books out, and yet they would seem very different at first glance. But tell us how you've learned to take what you do on the job into what you've done after hours.

A: One of the things about these books is they're self-published and I very quickly, after querying with the first book, realized that to have the integrity of the vision I had for the books and also to learn a lot about what is really an emerging type of publishing – and e-books and self-publishing, print-on-demand technologies and all of those things are really driving this change – that to learn about that, I wanted to pursue it.

So having the background in layout, having a background in graphic design, having a background in editing, having a background in print business and publishing business really let me step into that role very easily.

And then also with the e-marketing that you have to use if you're going to pursue that path, it was very easy for me to again step into that, because I've been doing a lot of digital work as well.

Q: So much of what we want to talk about is about that digital work, but first, I want to compliment the books themselves, which are right in front of me here. They are indistinguishable from any product one would find in a Barnes and Noble. The typeface is very elegant. Each chapter has a lovely little decoration in it, if you will. They're very much a professional product. That was important to you, I imagine?

A: Oh, definitely, and I was very pleasantly surprised. I went into it with some concern that you would come out with a book that would look like it was done at a Kinko's. The paper would be too bright. It would be clearly a photocopy. The cover would have bad color saturation and things like that.

But instead, it turned out they're beautiful. The paper is a nice ivory. They are indistinguishable. And I really, throughout it all, I wanted it to look and feel like a book. That means you want a frontispiece. It means you want the kind of pages at the beginning and the end. You want chapters that play off of the theme. I want to lose a reader in the book.

And to do that, you have to have the book disappear. And to make the book disappear, it has to look right so that people can compartmentalize it in their mind as, OK, I can let this go away and you're not having bright paper, bad ink and a bad reading experience get in the way.

Q: We once had a guest on our program who was an indexer and we were talking about indexing, and I said at the time and I maintain it today that if you love books, if you love the experience of reading, then you care about all aspects of the book itself. An index, a really well-put-together index, is a beautiful thing. It's the original search engine.

The way that a book feels, as you say. The way the typeface reads on the page. These are all critical elements and once your attention is drawn to them, you never can not notice them any longer, right? It's the sort of thing where when you buy a new car, you see that new Corolla around everywhere. Once you are aware of the differences in typeface, it strikes you when someone does it well and when someone doesn't do it well.

A: Yeah, exactly. So I sweated the details on the graphics, on the layout, on the typeface, on the chapter names. I would make whole lists of the chapter names and make sure that sequentially they made sense and that they actually had a dramatic arc in and of themselves. All the things like that. The copyright page looks right. In the second book, the interior is a little bit more developed because I could spend the extra time on that, too.

Q: For each book, how much time did you spend from start to finish? I'm not talking about the writing, but about the publication piece.

A: The publishing piece took about probably about four – three to four months from start to finish. You submit the manuscript and then you get into a queue and their production people get to it when they can and they lay it out and all of that.

There are faster ways to do it. The company I chose to go with is Dog Ear Publishing and the reason I went with them is because the contract was the most advantageous as far as the rights I retain and the exit clause if I decide to stop using them.

Actually, I'm really glad I retained the rights because I've already had two inquiries from Hollywood, so it was nice to be able to know straight out that I have the rights, where a lot of people who aren't in publishing I think have gotten into contracts with some of the cheaper services where they don't realize they've given up significant portions of their rights.

Q: That's a message at Copyright Clearance Center we keep pounding home to any author. Read your contract. Make sure you know what you're rights are.

One thing you have joined – there are two pieces of the self-publishing world that you have joined that I want to ask you to highlight. One is a consortium called Backword Books – and that's word, W-O-R-D. And then there's also something that you're participating in called Operation eBook. Tell us about both.

A: Right. Backword Books is a consortium of authors who have written literary novels, and mine is the only sort of commercial mystery in that group. But these are fantastic authors. One's a professor of English at UCLA. Other writers. There's one in Maine who's a fantastic writer. I'm reading her book currently and it's just amazing in sections of it. Others in the consortium.

It's just a very dynamic group, very supportive. We have a strategy that we're trying to execute as far as raising awareness of what – the reason we were brought together is that the editor of a site called *Self Publishing Review* had read all the books and he thought that they stood head and shoulders above anything else he'd read and he really wanted to put those out in the market and give them additional support.

And so that's been a really great experience. They're really talented people. I've learned a lot from them and I think vice versa.

And that led indirectly to Operation eBook, which is a – because a lot of these authors are publishing on the Kindle, they are also participating in something called the Kindle Boards, and there is a person at Patterson who's a former military person who also publishes his own books and he had gotten word that soldiers were using Kindles and the e-book readers when deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

So he started to solicit from authors that if they could, please make some books available to these soldiers for free, and that came through Backword Books. And I've been participating in that for a couple of months now.

And about every day – last night I got two. The night before I got three – we get these requests from soldiers and I probably provisioned, I would say, a hundred books out to these soldiers. And you get e-mails back that are just amazing and I'm keeping all of them because – I'm the mother of Soldier X and that meant so much to him to have that. I'm sending – that's going to mean so much because I'm sending the Kindle off right now. Or, I've been in Afghanistan for four months and now I have something to read. Thank you so much.

So it's been – not all the rewards in this are ever going to be financial. There's the creative rewards and then the rewards of being able to offer the world something that will be a diversion and entertainment and give them something to remember fondly.

Q: The notion of a self-publishing house, that's not so far away from, again, a long tradition in publishing of authors or groups of authors or authors with like interests deciding at some point to come together, and you mentioned professors and so forth. So this is not simply, if you will, people who are coming to writing for the first time. They're very experienced in their own fields.

And I think this is evidence of the way that the digital publishing revolution – and we’ve been talking about that for a long time now, but it is still going on – is changing everything. Back to that, then.

So for you, how important is it to have e-book versions of the book and Kindle versions of the book? How are you managing that? How are you thinking about pricing? What are some of the challenges that are different in that world, because you don’t have the same challenges there as you did, as you described the print side, with the look and feel there? It’s much more about the way it’s delivered and the price.

A: Right, right, exactly. On the e-book side, my books are available on the Kindle. They’re available for Sony eReader. The major distribution sources are Amazon and a company called Smashwords and both of those make it very easy to post an e-book. Amazon, you just put up a Word file and it processes it and turns it into a Kindle format. Smashwords, you put it into something they call the Meatgrinder and you get out of that HTML .mobi file, LRB, I think it is for the Sony Reader and Kindle version and all of those things.

And it’s been – it’s definitely supplemented sales. It’s definitely gotten to a different audience. It’s been a source of double sales in some cases, where people start with the e-book and they maybe sample it and they get so excited by it that they go and buy the hard copy because they want something to keep. I don’t know how common that is for authors, but I bet you that people who really like books read the book for the content and then say, oh, I really like that. I want to keep it. And then it allows me to do things like Operation eBook and reach more people.

I have not experimented with pricing that much. What I have found though is that it seems like the device availability is driving more of the sales. So the Kindle is driving more sales because more people have Kindles.

Q: And just tell us then, what is the price of one of these books, *Spam and Eggs* or *The Green Monster*, on the Kindle, and how much are they in the print side?

A: They’re \$14.95 for print. They’re \$8.99 on the Kindle and then on Smashwords, actually I did experiment with price there. They’re \$3.49 there.

Then I have experimented on Scribd or Scribed. I forget how to pronounce that quite right. But there, they’re about the same price and I’ve sold zero, which is the only outlet I haven’t sold books through.

The other thing that’s interesting is there are a lot of bookstores that pick up these titles if they read them or somebody they trust reads them, so I’ve made them available through Mystery Lovers Bookshop and Books-a-Million and Powell’s and other things like that.

The other thing that’s been surprising about this is both for the e-book side that’s been helpful with having the e-books version available is that the reviewers like to get pdfs and e-book files to review the books on and there are actually devoted Kindle review boards

now where reviewers have set up their own blogs and they only review Kindle versions of books and look for the quality of the Kindle conversions and the pricing and the value of the book.

Q: You have been very much aware of your digital presence. You've got a site for the book, for the series. You're doing a blog tour, you told me. You'll have to explain what that is. And you've been getting lots of reviews – many of them very, very positive – from online readers, people who are kind of volunteering. As we're seeing fewer and fewer book review sections in newspapers, it's not as if the book review is going away. More people are reviewing online and that's really mattering in a community context, right?

A: Yeah, exactly. The reviews have been better than I could have even dreamed of. In fact, I went through a very self-indulgent exercise before the first book was published to kind of benchmark where my expectations were and I said, if I had a dream review, this is what it would be. And the reviews have been better than even that.

One thing that I had heard to do before I published the first one was to reach out to some of the top reviewers on Amazon and see if they would be interested in reviewing the book. And you do that and I've had two people respond positively. I think I sent out four requests. And they responded and they said the premise sounded more interesting than usual and they'd be happy to do that.

And one of them, it turned out to be, was a judge for Amazon's new author competition. That's something sponsored by Amazon and Penguin Books. And she said that it was shame that I had already decided to publish because she thinks I would have won the competition.

But that being said, she's been an extremely good, avid supporter. And then all of the other reviewers – there are online review sites that you can submit your books to and then you have customer reviews, which are extremely helpful. And again, I've just been blown away by the response. It's been fantastic.

Q: Give us an idea of what a blog tour is like.

A: Definitely. So a blog tour is basically just like you would imagine. You go and you ask various blogs that are related to, in my case, mysteries, if they have any interest in having a guest post. Then you have to actually create an interesting guest post if they say yes.

In some cases, I've talked about the genesis of the books. In some cases, I've talked about the aspects of self-publishing. In some cases, I've talked about the dimensions of the qualitative research that went into this. You can talk about the books while you talk about the topic.

They'll feature you for a day or three days or a week, and during that time, you'll get comments and questions and you just drive awareness of your book. It would be just like a

speaking tour but you just do it in writing and you do it via various blogs that are reaching different audiences.

Q: Great. The book, the character, you mentioned, is concerned about patterns and the power of the metaphor. Are there any patterns emerging for you so far in this experience of self-publishing the series? Which again we'll tell people is the Johnny Denovo Mystery Series by Andrew Kent, otherwise known as Kent Anderson. The most recent one is *The Green Monster*. Previous to that was *Spam and Eggs* and you have a third coming out early next year.

So, are there patterns emerging for you? Lessons learned? Maybe some mistakes that you won't repeat next time?

A: Oh, no, not the mistakes! There have been some mistakes. One thing is, I think that for the third one, I didn't have – I desperately tried to get this done for the second one. One thing that's critical is to have, of course, many readers before the book goes out and I'm very lucky that I have four or five people who I can turn to to read the books in very rough stages and they give me great feedback. They tell me about where I'm straying from character, taking a character in a direction they didn't expect, where the plot doesn't make sense, where continuity issues exist.

And then I try to read through for typos and errors and my very patient wife does as well. I think that I will be hiring a professional copy editor for the third book. I tried to do it for the second one. I think there is one error in the book, at least I've found.

In the first book, there were three errors that I've since corrected, which is the nice thing about digital is you can go in and say, oh, there's an extra period here. I'll delete that and it'll go away. Nothing that broke the flow for anybody though, thankfully, so that was good.

I think the other thing that I would do different – I will do differently with the third book – is I will be more aggressive about blog tours. I think they're effective.

I'd probably de-emphasize things like Google ad words and Facebook advertising, which I think has not proven to be all that effective for the cost.

Q: That's the whole thing about the digital world. You get to learn by doing. You get immediate feedback. And we're delighted to help spread the word about the new books and to hope to have you back sometime maybe with some more lessons learned from the self-publishing experience. And if you get that Hollywood contract, we'd love to do lunch sometime.

We've been talking with the author of the Johnny Denovo Mysteries, Andrew Kent, otherwise known as Kent Anderson. He's the executive director of product development for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, based just outside Boston in Waltham, Massachusetts.

This is Chris Kenneally for *Beyond the Book*. Thanks for listening.

ANNOUNCER: *Beyond the Book* is an educational presentation of the not-for-profit Copyright Clearance Center, with conferences and seminars featuring leading authors and editors, publishing analysts and information technology specialists. *Beyond the Book* is the premier source for knowledge on the latest business issues facing today's dynamic publishing industry from initial research to final publication and beyond.

END OF PODCAST