

Introducing Asteria Press

Holly: [00:00:00] Hi, I'm Holly.

Aimée: And I'm Aimée.

Holly: And together we are Asteria Press, an indie publishing house focused on community fun and feel good fantasy.

Aimée: This podcast is a place to indulge in your love for all things bookish. From book recommendations to sneak peaks behind the scenes of indie publishing house to discussions about big topics in the book industry.

Holly: Today's episode is titled Behind the Scenes of Setting Up an Indie. We're gonna take you through the steps of setting up an indie publishing house in the 21st century. We're also gonna introduce Asteria Press' values and inspirations, and give you a little insider look around at our current projects and goals for 2023.

Aimée: Make yourself comfortable and let's dive right in.

Holly: Marvellous, right? I think. Let's get going with Aimée. Can you please introduce yourselves? Yourselves? Yourself to our lovely.

Aimée: Yes, I'm Aimée and I'm just the one person

Holly: sorry. [00:01:00]

Aimée: No, you're all good. I got my start in publishing in academic publishing and it was lovely, but I really like fiction.

So when I switched to fiction, I started doing freelance work, working with independent authors of fantasy fiction. And I've worked on some really exciting projects through that. So that's what I do.

Holly: I'm gonna ask to you to give yourself a random fact, you know, on top of the marvellous editing that you do.

Aimée: Oh, my random fact. Oh, I have so many random facts, Holly. This is too much. My random fact is on my desk right now is a grow your own Mushroom kit. There you go. That's my random fact. .

Holly: I love it. Your desk is much cooler than mine. I'm just gonna put it that way, probably much more. I actually currently have a roll of toilet paper on my desk, but that is simply because I've been painting today.

Not because I go to the toilet on my desk. We need to edit that bit out. Right. Moving swiftly on.

Aimée: We won't yes. Tell me about you. What do you do with your. What [00:02:00] do I do with my life?

Holly: You know, that that is a, that is a loaded question right there, . But for, for the sake of this podcast I am a writer and an artist.

I illustrate children's books and do commissions for people, mainly working with watercolour and line marker or ink. And when I write, I'm currently really into writing fantasy. . And so I've written one novel, which is currently being edited and I am currently writing some short children's stories based in fantasy, superhero, environmental themes.

It is very exciting. I am having so much fun with it, like just coming up with all the, all the really fun stuff that I used to love, like make believe as kids. Just getting to put that all into these little stories. So that is great.

Aimée: And you're a random fact.

Holly: My random fact my random fact is I thought I would share with you what my favourite Disney song of all time is. And that is Son of Man by [00:03:00] the Legend Phil Collins from the film Tarzan. And I, in fact have been listening to it earlier today while I was painting. So that is my random fact. Go watch. It is wonderful. A delightful random fact. I thank you. While we're at it Aimée, what are you reading at the moment?

Aimée: See that's, that's my loaded question because I don't read just the one thing. It's poor habit. I want to blame uni, but it was before uni.

Holly: I mean, you can give us, give us a load of titles if you want. Or just go with your favourite.

Aimée: Oh, I'm gonna pick the one. I'm gonna pick the one. So the one I'm picking is Anthony Horowitz . I should have prepared this the Magpie Murders cause I've gotten , deeply into cosy mystery at the. And it's a wonderful book. I'm listening to it on audiobook, which I think really suits the storytelling style

actually. And it's about a murder as like as it would be. It's a cosy [00:04:00] mystery. So it's about a murder in a village, two murders in fact, that they're trying to get to the bottom of and untangle all the horrible village gossip, and I'm enjoying it.

Holly: That Sounds amazing.

Aimée: I like cosy mystery. The only, the only deviation from cosy, cosy mystery is a genre that there is, is it's, is that the detective is actually like a professional real detective as opposed to an amateur, which I think adds a really interesting dynamic to the story. Yeah, no, that sounds really good.

What about you? What are you reading?

Holly: I'm actually doing a reread at the moment because I read this book. I'm gonna say last year, it was actually like two months ago, but you know, it was in 2022, so counts last year and I loved it so much and then my husband read it and then he loved it so much that I got jealous that he was reading it.

And so I decided to reread it the second he finished it. So I am reading House of Earth and Blood by Sarah J. This is [00:05:00] also where I need to have done my research, refine mass or. Sarah Mass. It is a fantasy story, but it is totally unlike any fantasy I've ever read before. It has wonderfully original characters and world.

It's kind of, it's quite an urban fantasy rather than a rural kind of setting for the whole thing. And what I think I love about it and what I think is her genius is she. She's great at getting the characters really deep, and it's the characters that drive the story. And I think so often I read books now where it's really the plot that drives the story and it's, it's always gotta be action, action, action.

But here she has this wonderful observational way of describing the, the really deep and complex characters that she's created. I'm gonna say slightly Jane esque, despite the fact that the story. It is nothing like Jane Austin . But [00:06:00] she's got a real gift for it. So I am very much enjoying reading that at the moment.

Aimée: Ooh, this sounds exciting.

Holly: It is very exciting. Right. I think we should move swiftly on. So just to let you lovely listeners know what we are gonna be talking about in this podcast. We're gonna start off by walking you through what it's like to set up an

indie press in the 21st century. And then at the end, we will just introduce Asteria, press a little of who we are, what we do, what we're about, and have a look forward to our goals and aspirations for 2023.

So, jam packed episode full of lots of tasty things in here for you. And let's move on to setting up an press. So Aimée, can you tell us a bit about. Where the idea of setting up a publishing house first came from, because really, this one's on you, mate.

Aimée: All I can say is, I'm sorry, . [00:07:00]

Holly: Where did the idea come from,

Aimée: I had gone to Bristol where you were at the time to go to a wedding, and the wedding was on a Friday, so I stayed over at your house.

My husband and I slept on your living room floor under your many cosy blanket. While we were there, I think as a joke it came up that you are writing a book and I edit books. And also you are marvellous that all of the auxiliaries. Why don't we just have a publishing house? And it was all a lot of fun and we moved on with our lives except for it turned out you were going to Ely the next day.

Yeah, I want to. So we were going to be getting back to Cambridge, where we were at the time, the, the same day as you would be an Ely and driving back through Cambridge. So we, we were like, well stop for tea. It's a long journey. Stop for a [00:08:00] cup of tea because we're, we're grownups and that's what we do. What we also do is while is we write an entire business plan and present it to our friends when they just pop in for a cup of tea. So I think you were expecting maybe a slice of cake as a surprise. And what I, what I gave you instead was a business plan. Is that, is that an accurate, is that

Holly: That is a very accurate, that is a very accurate summary. I'd actually forgotten the fact that we'd discussed it in Bristol. I just remember being like slightly bowled over by this business plan in, in Cambridge.

Aimée: It was so briefly, it was only as a joke. We were like, ha lol, we could set up a publishing house. And then, what, what concreted it more for me was we were chatting about it and every skill I was [00:09:00] missing, which is a lot you.

So you, you are creative and artistic and mathematically sound and, and you know, all those good things.

Holly: No one's ever called me sound before, but I'm, I appreciate it.

Aimée: So just the more we talked about it, the more things fell into place.

Holly: I think one of the wonderful things was cause we've always had a love of books and really shared that. All of a sudden it was like almost like the next step along that journey was just, you know, from obviously going from being book nerds to well why don't we create the things and, and do it together with and see where it goes.

Aimée: Yeah, absolutely. I like reading books to, I'm going to make a financial investment

Holly: I do remember it took me a little longer to be convinced of the. I think you were all enthusiasm from the get go, and I, I needed a little while to [00:10:00] kind of think through it and decide whether it was for me, partially because, Aimée, you'd set up your business two years beforehand, and so I think you had more of an idea of how, how you would go about such a thing.

Whereas the whole setting up a business was still completely new to me at that.

Aimée: Look at you now successfully commissioning art. [Note for the transcript readers: I meant taking art commissions!]

Holly: But yeah, it was very, very exciting and very random. And what, what, I think what the thing is once the idea had been suggested, it would've been, it would've been a shame just not to go for it.

Aimée: Like, yeah, what would we have done with our lives if we hadn't have just said yes. Every time we saw each other, we would've had to have looked back and gone. But was that the right call.

Holly: Exactly. This has suddenly got very deep. That's done.

Aimée: And I think it brings us, well, it doesn't bring us at all nicely to, to our genre.

Holly: Our genre. So I think we just kind of settled naturally into [00:11:00] finding a niche. So when you're talking about setting up any business one of the big pieces of advice out there is find your niche. So it's. Enough just to decide, yes, I want to set up a publishing house. You really have to figure out what's gonna make you stand out, what's your specialism going to be?

And really we didn't need to discuss this one very much because I think we both enjoy reading and working on the same things which was extremely handy because if one of us had liked horror and the other one of us had liked ki I dunno, kids' literature, then I think we might have had an issue.

But luckily we both, both. You know what I mean? Luckily, we both have an interest in fantasy. Aimée works and edits fantasy books. I love writing fantasy books, so that was very naturally kind of the, the niche we decided to go down. But we also then decided, you know, it's not enough just to go fantasy.

We need to niche down even more because fantasy itself is quite a broad genre and encompasses many. [00:12:00] Styles. Many of us will be, you know, aware of the, kind of the Tolkien high fantasy style, but there are many different sub-genres within fantasy out there. And I think what was quite important to us was actually we, we really value books that are uplifting and feel good and actually fantasy sometimes.

It's, it can be hard to find those feel good fantasy books, you know, with the romcom, you know, what you're getting into kind of thing and you know, you're getting a, a hug in a book. Whereas with fantasy, there's quite a lot of dark fantasy out there, which isn't a bad thing at all, but it can be a little harder to find those gems, which have those more uplifting themes.

So we decided that was what we wanted to focus on.

Aimée: Lovely. And I'm sorry now, cause I think this, this actually does quite naturally feed on. Make you talk more because this are definitely your wheelhouse. . Tell us about the logo.

Holly: Ah, the logo. Do you actually wanna know where I created the logo?

Aimée: Yes but start with a [00:13:00] name. Cause that all, that all,

Holly: oh, that's a very fair point. So, Asteria Press, where did Asteria come from? Well, we were given a little tip by a friend in the industry who I'm going to, you know, keep unnamed as you know, our exciting anonymous source.

Who said it, it can be a good thing to start business names with an A because they come higher up on lists and things like that.

So we decided we were just gonna take this tip and run with it. However, we then needed to find a name beginning with a, that didn't match with any current publishing house out there. I just

Aimée: One of your suggestions, go on them. Them. We could have been Aardvark Press. You can continue.

Holly: We could have been, but we're not.

And we really struggled actually finding a name that we were both happy with. I, I had a bit of a, an obsession with animals at the time, which I think didn't help s nodding at me. You can't see that. But yeah, she's got that long suffering look in her eyes. But eventually I was doing some research into.

Sort of Greek [00:14:00] gods and goddesses, Roman gods and goddesses thinking, you know, that might be a handy place to look for names. Beginning with a, that happened to be fantasy related and came across the name Asteria and she was the Greek goddess of shooting stars. And there was just something about the idea that, of that symbol of the shooting star, which just kind of encapsulated both the, the positivity and the enthusiasm with which we were running at the slightly mad project.

But also that sense of, of magic and of mystery and of awe and of wow the, you know, great fantasy books really encompass. And so I ran the name past Aimée and she jumped at it. And so we decided naturally that, because our whole theme was this shooting star theme that we were going to go for the image of a shooting star for our logo.

Both kind of getting across that fantasy field, but also the kind of the dreams and aspirations we had in doing something a bit bonkers, like setting up a [00:15:00] publishing house. So that was really where it came from. The, the idea behind the logo, and it's a delightful logo, surprisingly difficult to, to incorporate such a dynamic image into a logo as well.

Aimée: There were lots of iterations.

Holly: There were many iterations. I was quite lucky in the, really, really randomly my husband had happened to watch a YouTube video on how to create a logo like the day before Aimée and I had the discussion about me

creating a logo. And so he gave me quite a few really good tips, including random logo fact for you.

You should be able to slice the logo in half, either vertically or horizontally, and it's still be recognisable. As your logo and

Aimée: You definitely can with ours.

Holly: Yeah. I was pretty proud. I used Word to create it, the, that well-known illustrative tool. But actually part of it was because good logos tend to be made from strong shapes and really [00:16:00] recognisable shapes, and that's part of what gives them their power and their a catching recognisable nature and. So actually it was really good just going really back to the basics and making the, the shape itself quite simple. And so, and then playing around with colours was great fun. I do remember Aimée did not like my initial colour choices, so with, with, which was absolutely fair, you know, had very, very valid comments.

But we, we eventually doubled down on the, the teal and gold mix, which I think works really.

Aimée: The very sage advice my husband gave me was sometimes you've just gotta pick one and stick to it.

Holly: I mean, he's not wrong.

Aimée: To the point where we'd, we'd, you'd done so many brilliant ideas, but because you, we've never seen any of them in situ, situ at that point. None of them felt right. And then when you took this [00:17:00] one and you kind of put it into a couple of like mark. And it looked real. It looked, it, it spoke.

Holly: So we picked one and we stuck with it. , I'm pretty proud of it actually, for, for my first time logo creation. I'm, I'm pretty happy. And, and I think it gets across the, the vibe we wanna be going for as well. There's some, there's energy about it, which I think is cool. Aimée let's, let's move on. I think I've done way, way too much talking about now, cause I, I, while I've been working on certifying things and making logos and playing around with shapes and word, you've been doing a lot of the behind the scenes practical admin side of the business.

Aimée: Oh, absolutely.

Holly: I'm sure there will be people here who, despite the fact that they probably hate the word admin, at least, I hate the word admin. You know, might well be interested in what, what does it take to actually set up a business? What does that [00:18:00] look like in the founding stages?

Aimée: Well strap in. This is going to be as interesting about talking about logos.

So I think the notes you've given me are email, social media accounts, lp. So yes, we, I mean, we started with the basics, the email, because you can't do anything without an email. and that gives you access to a Google Drive. We've got a Google email, so Google Drive and that's when I started building all the spreadsheets.

So we've got time tracking, we've got a whole lovely task spreadsheet with a statuses and ownerships and all, all those lovely things. And then, you know, the matter of setting up LPs, I won't go into too much detail because nobody's listening to a bookish podcast to hear about business structure. But setting up as one has been a lot of fun, been a lot of,

Looking into the tax implications and the more I hear myself talking, the more I think, Hmm, you don't want to hear this, but that's alright.

Holly: [00:19:00] let's just say I am very, very grateful that Aimée has shouldered the burden of the practical stuff. That sounds really, really dry, but is really, really crucial to setting up an indie publishing house.

Aimée: You'll have the maths of royalties to come, so don't thank me too hard, .

Holly: It's fine. You'll just have to thank me in return at that point.

But while we're actually here, I think one thing I just wanted to note was one of the things I've been quite surprised about has just been how easy it's. Relatively speaking to set up an indie publishing house in the 21st century. I think there's something about coming from an outsider perspective that the publishing world looks very elite.

It can look very kind of on a pedestal and to suddenly be in this place where actually. We have the resources to just have an idea and run with it and set something up is so exciting. And I know that we, you know, it [00:20:00] means doing things like partnering with Instagram and Facebook and all the rest of it,

which, you know, there are ethical questions there which you know, are there for another time.

But you know, the fact that actually you can be entrepreneurial and you can set. An indie publishing house really quite quickly cause this is what taken us just a few months to get here. And that's been on the side of all these other different professional projects we've got going on has been really quite exciting.

Aimée: I think it has been one of the things that really helps is how supportive other people working in indie presses and running their indie presses have been and how willing they are to give advice and point us in the right direct. And also just a number of different avenues you can take when setting up a press the different formats there are to publish in and the different ways of printing.

There's just been a lot, lot of opportunity and room to make decision.

Holly: Mm-hmm. Yeah, and I think it's worth saying here that as a podcast we wanna [00:21:00] really champion the indie press side of the publishing industry and, and celebrate the fact that we've got amazing. Independent book sellers, book presses authors doing amazing work outside the bounds of the traditional roots.

And yeah, we are really gonna focus on that and, and highlight maybe authors and presses that you haven't heard as much of before, which is super exciting,

Aimée: isn't it?

Holly: Just you sound so sarcastic

Aimée: it's just my natural voice. We're just gonna, we don't have to plough through this podcast knowing that Sometimes I'll say things and it'll sound sarcastic and it'll be part of our charm.

Holly: You are charming,

Moving swiftly on, I think we should move on to talking a little bit about a stereo press and who we are as an indie press, A new kid on the block. So [00:22:00] Aimée can you sum up Asteria Press in a sentence?

Aimée: If I could! See, that was sarcasm.

Holly: I got that one.

Aimée: Nice. Can I sum up Asteria Press in a sentence. See, I could do it in words.

Can I do it in a sentence? I would say it's an adventurous step towards redefining fantasy and bringing feel good literature into the arms of readers.

Holly: Beautiful. Beautiful. That was, that was very impressive. I'm gonna pick up on one of the phrases you used there because I'm sure it will have been one that, you know, made some ears twitch and prick up.

When you say redefining fantasy, can you tell us a little bit about what that means and what Asteria Press is trying to. When we're trying to redefine fantasy.

Aimée: Absolutely. I think part of, part of what we're really [00:23:00] excited about is cross genre and taking risks and doing things with fantasy that aren't typically done and just, just blending different genres.

Holly: I think one of the exciting things is when. Trying to move forward and push boundaries as you're never quite sure where it's gonna go. And so actually we haven't got a, an alternative fantasy we're gonna be moving into, because that's something we'll be doing together with our authors, with our readers in partnership.

Forging new ideas can only be done one step at a time. So thank you very much for introducing that. And I think the, the values that I hope have really, you know, sprung out to everyone listening is that, you know, yes, we're about fantasy, but we're about feel good stories, we're about fun. And actually one of the core pillars of our in press we've decided is gonna be really central to what we're about is community as well.

And [00:24:00] really, you know, welcoming a community of readers, helping build and grow and nurture a, a community. Readers who love that fantasy, who are excited about new sub-genres of fantasy coming out. And so that's gonna be a big part of, of what we are and what we do.

Aimée: Love it.

Holly: Nice. Shall we move on to just giving everyone a little insider look at our current projects?

Aimée: Shall we do a sneak peek?

Holly: We deserve a sneak peek. Could you tell us a little bit about what we're doing at the moment in the Asteria Press?

Aimée: We can, I'm gonna reveal the working title, if that's okay. You go for it. Yeah. So, working title Dragon Outlaw because "Book 001 by Holly Möller" is just, you know, it's not, it's not sexy.

It's now in developmental editing, so I am [00:25:00] just over halfway through reading it. We'll be working on it for, well, I'll be working on it for two months, writing up a good report, whole bunch of notes in the pages to hand over to our lovely Holly here. And it's the first up step of production. So we're, we're marching forward towards having our first book and it is wildly exciting.

Holly: That is wildly exciting. It's very, it's just awesome to be having our first book, you know, already in that first stage of production, in the developmental editing stage. And we'll be letting you know how it goes along its journey. The other thing we've of course been doing is setting up this podcast which has been, you know, impeccably organised behind the scenes.

She says, both of us not having a microphone right now. Sorry about that. But yes, we have been setting up this and starting to get an online presence. So you'll be able to find us on [00:26:00] Instagram and on Facebook and on Twitter. Generally we are called Asteria Press. And that's where you can find us with the sole exception of Twitter, where that name was already taken. And so we Press Asteria. So if you wanna look at look up Asteria Press on Twitter. That's the way to find us.

Aimée: Ah, no one uses Twitter anyway.

Holly: No, no. It does seem to have slightly imploded . Well, if you wanna find us on Facebook or Instagram where a stereo press, and you will see the shooting star logo on the profile picture.

So hopefully you will recognise us straight away.

Aimée: To find us on Mastodon, we are @AsteriaPress@bookstodon.com

Holly: marvellous. Was that it so far?

Aimée: That is it. That's the socials.

Holly: That is the socials. Ah, very sociable over here. Right? I think, I think we can wrap up. So just to let you know, we hope you've really enjoyed this, our first podcast.

We do apologise if the sound quality isn't quite as, as [00:27:00] crystal clear as it could have been. We'll be endeavouring to get microphones for our next podcast. That is definitely on both of our to-do lists and we'll be back in a fortnight's time to give our first indie book recommendation off the podcast.

Aimée, do you wanna drop the name of the book? We'll be reading in case anyone wants to go and have a. Sneak peek at beforehand.

Again, I'm not

Aimée: very organised, but the book is Hester by Laurie Lico Albanese, yes. Fantastic little book. Gorgeous cover. You'll never want to put it on your shelves cause you'll want out on the coffee table all of the time.

Holly: Well that is how to judge a book really, isn't it? By by its cover.

Aimée: Absolutely.

Holly: So we will be checking back in with you in a fortnight's time. And until then, sending you lots of love and keep reading,

Aimée: Keep reading.