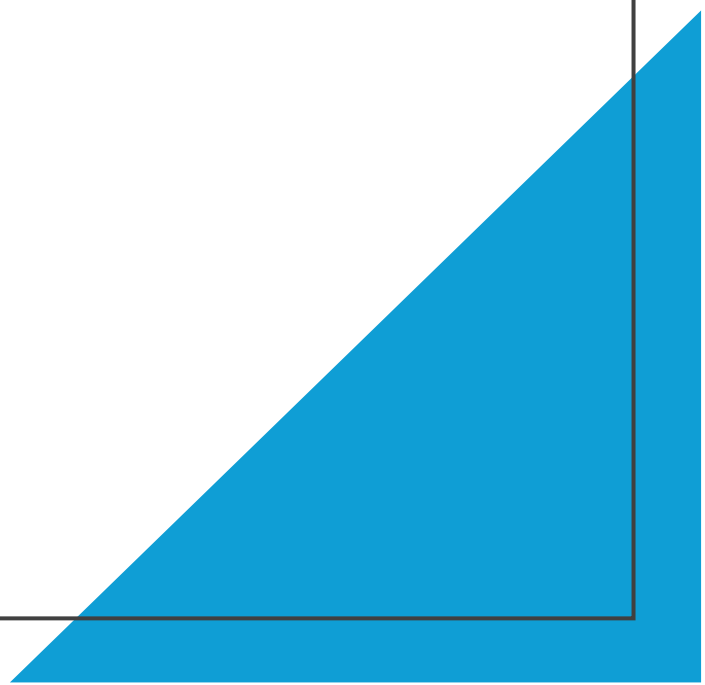# How My First Kickstarter Funded Over 900% and How Yours Can Too
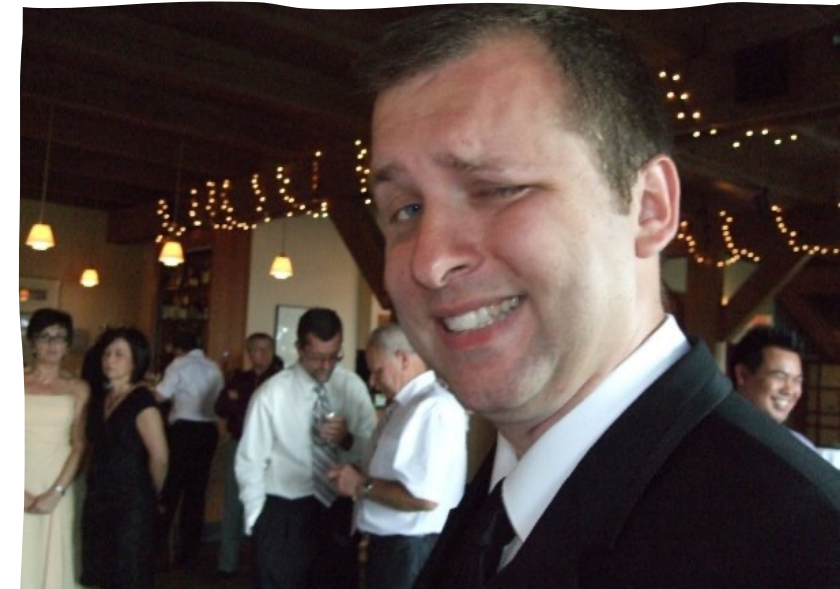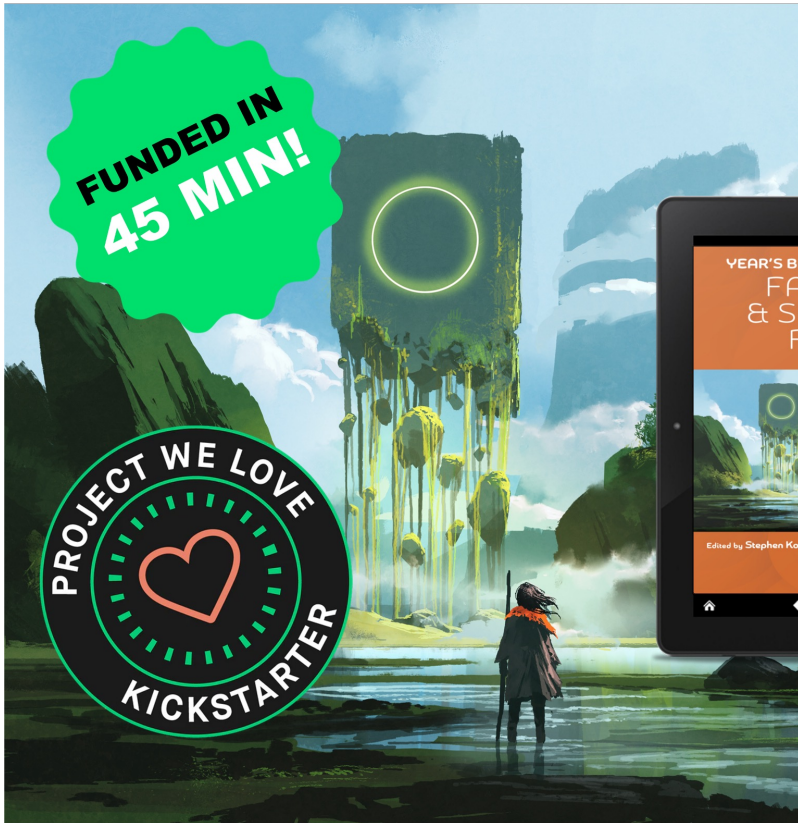
Stephen Kotowych

TIAC 2024

kotowych.com/TIAC

3 Takeaways from Today

- Resources, mentors, and hivemind to succeed from a zero follower/fan/community base
- Mindset for a successful campaign
- Building, running, promoting

Who *IS* This Guy??

- Freelance business writer
- Acquiring editor, Oxford University Press (15yrs)
- Instructor, TMU Publishing Program (5+ yrs)
- Award-winning author
- Indie pub author!
- Jackass

FUNDED IN 45 MIN!

943% funded!

Funding Goal **$750**

PROJECT WE LOVE — KICKSTARTER

YEAR'S BEST CANADIAN FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION
Vol. 1
Edited by Stephen Kotowych

FUNDED IN 25 MIN!

717% funded!

PROJECT WE LOVE — KICKSTARTER

YEAR'S BEST CANADIAN FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION
Vol. 2
Edited by Stephen Kotowych

Funding Goal **$1500**

How My First Kickstarter Funded Over 900% and How ~~Yours Can Too~~

Your Second One Can Fund Over 700% But Actually Make You More Money

Stephen Kotowych

Aurora Award nominated!

If you regularly vote in the Aurora Awards, see me after...

What this presentation is NOT

- Cheat code
- Magic template
- Secret handshake
- Gaming algorithms

The real secret?

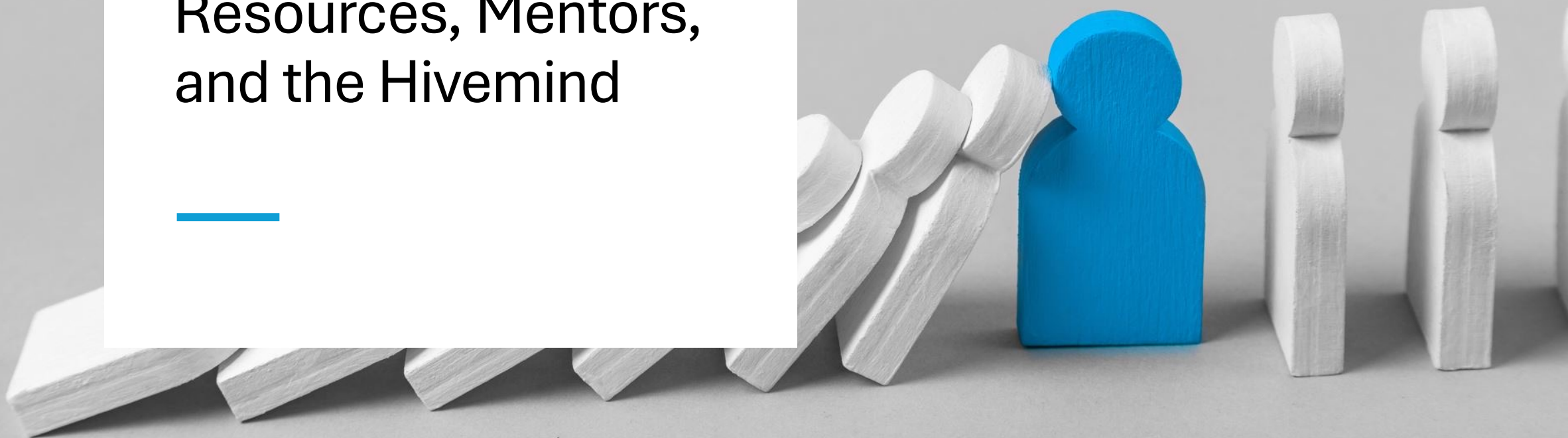Kickstarter rewards **ingenuity** and **hard work** and **good ideas**

So what IS this presentation?

- Quick-start guide
- Best practices
- Field-tested knowledge → crowdsourced!
- Way to avoid common early mistakes

1

Resources, Mentors, and the Hivemind

Sources & References

Kickstarter Best Practices for Fiction Writers

- Free course!

- Dean Wesley Smith

- WMG has run 40 Kickstarters, raised $750K+

- Dean will look over your campaign in prelaunch!

- He'll list you in his newsletter to other Kickstarter runners

Sources & References

**Nohelty/ Leonelle, *Get Your Book Selling on Kickstarter***

- Run 20+ campaigns, raised $300K+

- One of the most comprehensive books on Kickstarter for Publishing projects

Sources & References

Sharp, *Kickstarter for Authors*

- Anthea Sharp, runs Kickstarter Authors Facebook Group

- Distills advice from running that group

- Book was a successful Kickstarter!

- Incredible step-by-step checklist
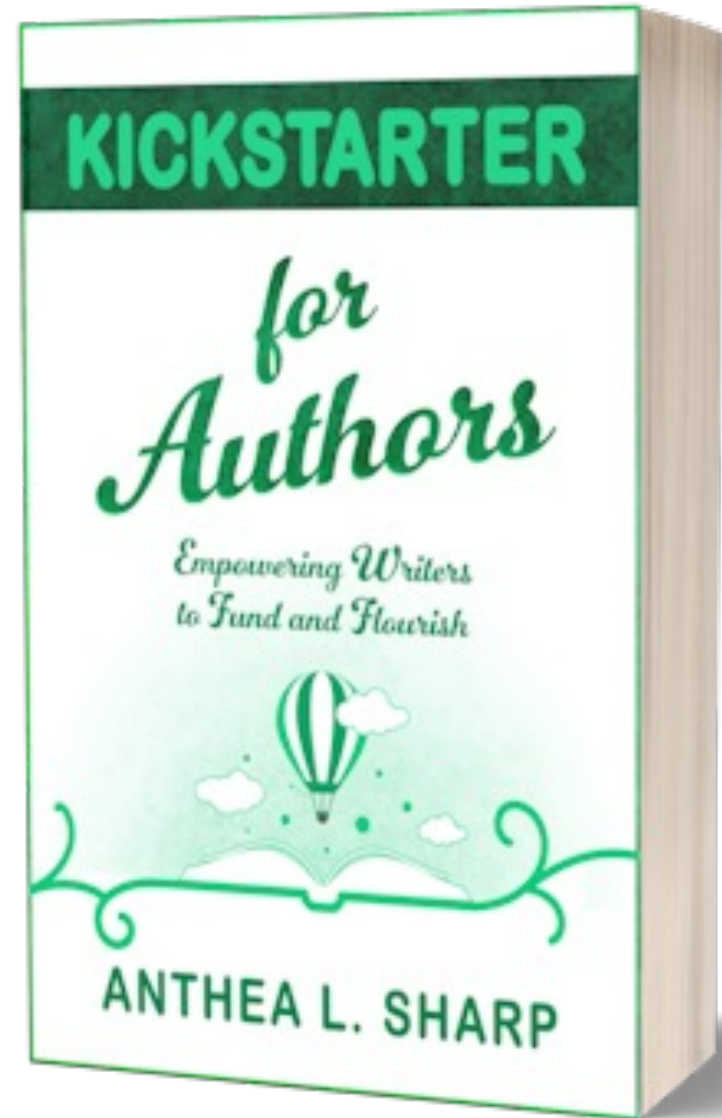
Sources & References

Kickstarter Authors Facebook Group

- Great place to crowdsource wisdom & experience from 4000+ members

- Subgroup: (Experienced) Kickstarter for Authors Cross-Promotion

- Cross-promotion is a secret weapon!

2

Mindset for Successful Campaign

Why Crowdfund?

- **Build reader community:** Expand your readership, mailing list → or start one from zero base like I did!
- **Start in the black:** Fund upfront costs for publishing, avoid/lessen self-publishing debt
- **...and many more**

CROWDfunding

- You can't crowdfund without a crowd
- Kickstarter emphasizes COMMUNITY → excite backers to come on a journey with you
- Start building community early

Before You Crowdfund

- It's not easy money → ton of time & hard work

- Start small → $500 goal, not $10K

- Most of the revenue will go towards making the awesome thing, not into your pocket

Expenses vs Revenue Breakdown

Volume One

Fiction = $1250

Poetry = $150

Translation fee = $300

Interior art = $1000

Cover art & design = $600

Printing = $1000
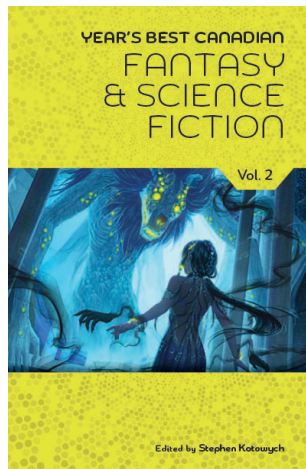
Shipping = $850

Kickstarter fee = $680

Expenses
$5830

Net income
~$1000

Expenses vs Revenue Breakdown

Volume Two

Fiction = $1500

Poetry = $200

Translation fee = $300

Interior art = $1000

Cover art & design = $600

Printing = ??? ($2000)

Shipping = ??? ($1000)

Kickstarter fee = $917

Expenses
$TBA

Net income
~$2500?

Before You Crowdfund

- Be part of the ecosystem → be there to give, not just take

- Find 5 campaigns you like and back them before starting your own (even at $1 = ACCESS)

- Find and follow those creators → what's their strategy?

- Mirror look and feel of successful campaigns in your category → why are they doing well?

Before You Crowdfund

- Be strategic → do you plan to release this book no matter what?

- What is your shipping & fulfillment cost?

- Hardcover, special editions, offset print runs → need higher funding

- Alternate strategy: all-or-nothing project. If it doesn't fund, you don't do. Initial ask could be higher (up to $1000), even for POD

Design for profitability

Double the value to backer, double the value to you

- If possible, only build tiers that deliver (at least) 2X the value to the backer and 50% of the funds as profit to you

- Low-margin tiers can kill profitability

Digital rewards are your friend. Limit number and kind of physical rewards

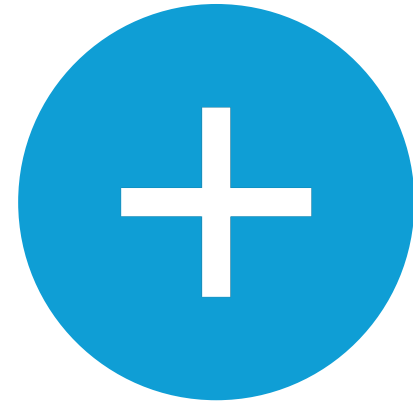- Backers want physical rewards...but digital rewards are high-margin

Digital rewards = profitability

NO OR ULTRA-LOW
DELIVERY COST

HAVE TO PRODUCE
AN EBOOK ANYWAY

GREAT AS ADD-ONS

Digital rewards = profitability

My digital add-on $$$ for Volume Two

- Short story collection → $5 x 7 backers = $35

- Year's Best Vol 1 → $5 (discount!) x 43 backers = $215

- Two ebook bundle → $7 (discount!) x 35 backers = $245

→ $495 from existing digital assets in my back catalogue

3

Building, running &
promoting your
campaign

What's your idea?

Popular projects in 'Fiction' category:

• Trilogy

• Next book(s) in a popular series

• Hardcover Special Edition(s)

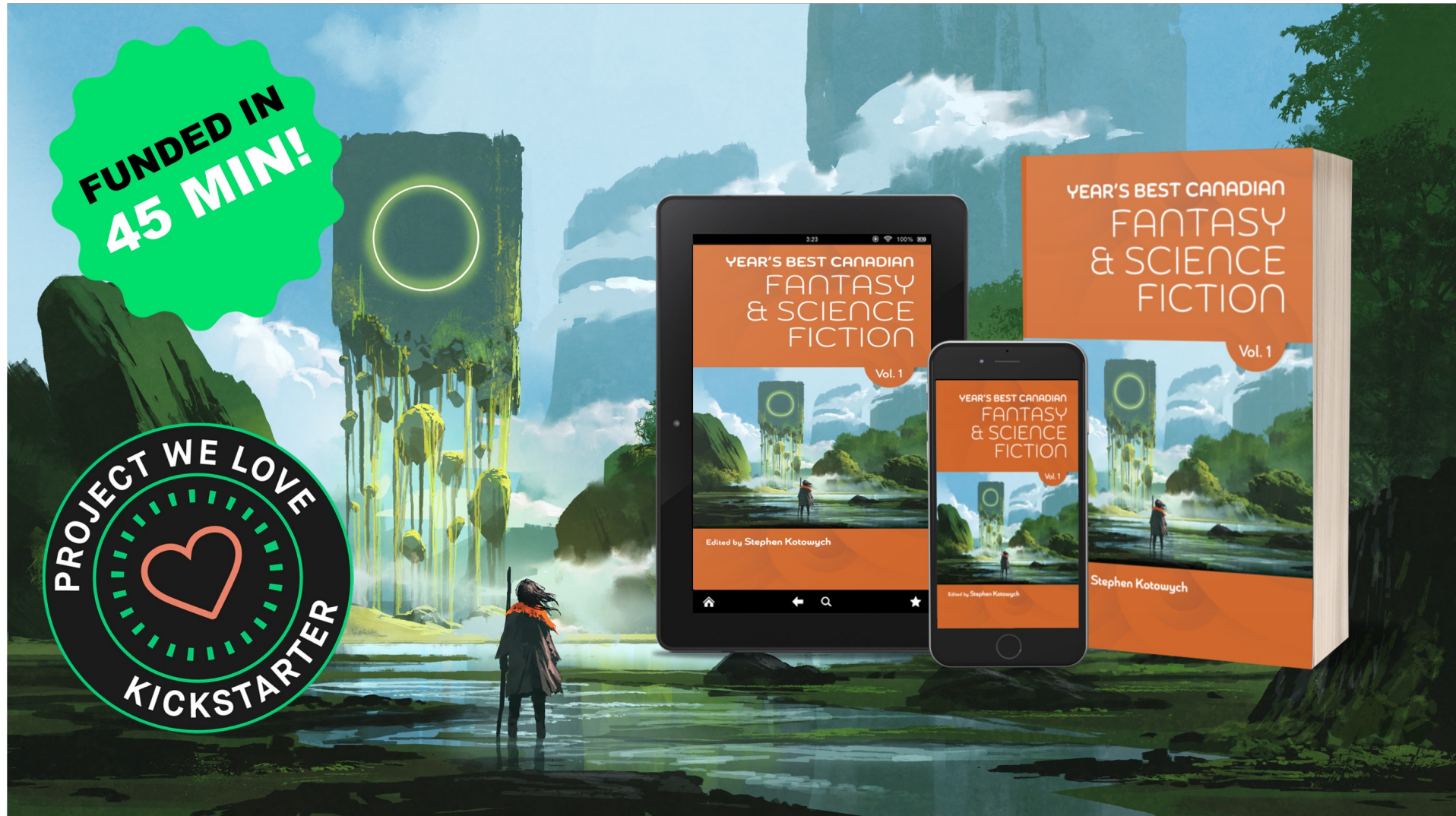• Book Box / Loot Crate

• Anthology

Banner Image

- Uncluttered → is it clear and understandable at 1/6th size?

- Avoid text (or at least too much type)

- Include 3D mock-up of book → esp. if hardcover. Make it seem real to the backer

- Design with 'Funded in' or 'Project We Love' buttons in mind?

Banner Image (at launch)

Banner Image (with buttons added)

Project Video

- Technically optional, but do one (at least for your first campaign)
- 80% of successful projects have a video
- Cell phone video with good light and good sound is all you need

Project Video

- Aim for 90 seconds (3 min **MAX**)
- 50% of viewers stop watching after 1 min, almost all stop by 2 min
- Video for Volume One campaign = 113 plays...but only 34.5% of plays completed → 2m30s ☹
- Video for Volume Two = I forgot ☺
- And since Volume Two did better faster than Volume One…

Your Story

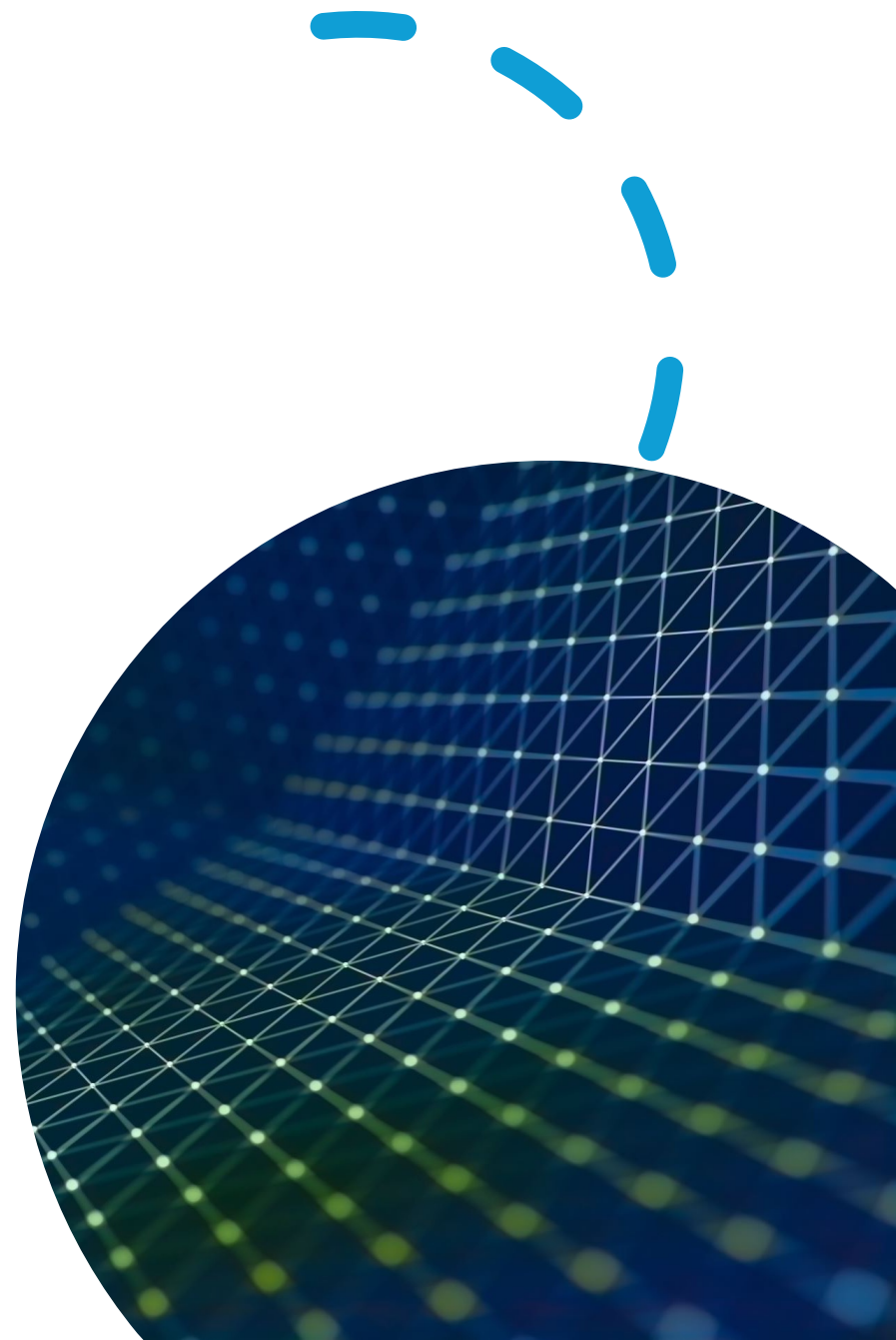"BREVITY IS THE SOUL OF WIT" - HAMLET, ACT II, SCENE II

THESIS PARAGRAPH, 3-5 SUPPORTING PARAGRAPHS, CONCLUSION

MAKE A COMPELLING, CLEAR, AND CONCISE CASE

IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, EMPHASIZE COMMUNITY

Visuals

Customers associate high-quality imagery with professionalism

Break up text with images

Good way to define features & benefits of a project at a glance

The average successful Kickstarter has 11 images

Book cover, illustrations, author headshot, quotes/reviews over royalty free image, memes, etc.

Relevant stock images

What rewards to offer?

1

Already done: Have as much content & rewards complete before campaign starts as possible date → >75% is ideal
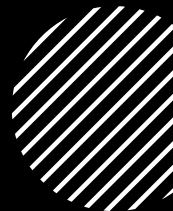
2

Easy to deliver: Digital content is your friend! Large, heavy, bulky items = $$$ and easier to damage in transit

3

Easy to warehouse (at your house): If you're not drop shipping, do you have a place to store stuff during fulfillment?

My reward tiers

$2 follow-along supporter + digital wallpaper

$5 acknowledgement in book + digital wallpaper

$10 ebook (plus acknowledgement & wallpaper)

$25 print & ebook combo (plus acknowledgement & wallpaper)

$50, $75, $100 writer packages w/ print & ebook (plus acknowledgement & wallpaper)

$250 dedication w/ print & ebook (plus acknowledgement & wallpaper)

Add-Ons

Add-On income (Vol 1)

$240

32%

Add-On income (Vol 2)

$1295

86%

An à la carte menu of additional items → backers can "Build-a-Bundle"

Good way to pick up bonus funding

List all of your reward items/stretch goals from the campaign

Include anything/everything from your back catalog

All advice about digital products, physical products, shipping costs, budget, etc applies to Add-Ons

Stretch Goals

- Expand/enhance the main product → make core offering bigger, better, cooler

- Content goals

- Format goals

- Add value for backers, but keep them affordable (to you) → ** *cough digital rewards cough* **

- Pace stretch goals to speed/value of campaign

Campaign length & timing

- Less than 30 days → ideal is 21-24 days
- You must manually launch your campaign → manually set end date and time, too
- Start on a Tuesday morning (9am – 11am)
- End on a Thursday evening (9pm - 10pm)
- Avoid start/end on weekends or US/Canada holidays

Project Review & Approval

3-5 BUSINESS DAYS FOR APPROVAL → SUBMIT 30 DAYS IN ADVANCE

JUST BASICS OF YOUR STORY & REWARD TIERS → WANT TO SEE IT DOESN'T VIOLATE TOS
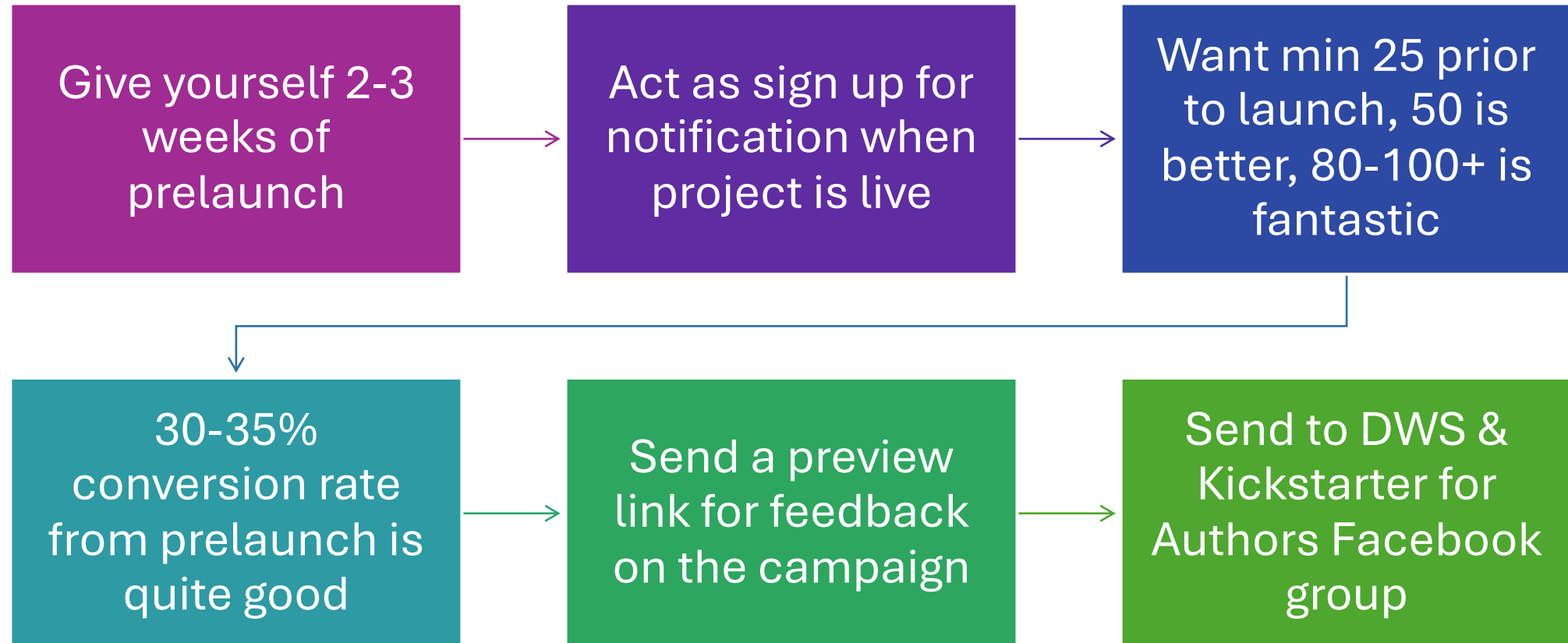
YOU CAN (AND WILL) MAKE CHANGES AFTER APPROVAL

CAUTION: TWO STRIKES, YOU'RE OUT POLICY

Prelaunch page

Give yourself 2-3 weeks of prelaunch

→

Act as sign up for notification when project is live

→

Want min 25 prior to launch, 50 is better, 80-100+ is fantastic

30-35% conversion rate from prelaunch is quite good

→

Send a preview link for feedback on the campaign

→

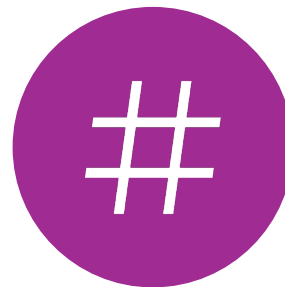Send to DWS & Kickstarter for Authors Facebook group

Promotion

Don't recommend paid promotion/ads for first campaign → SPAMMERS!

Focus on strong messaging via your channels (mailing list, social media, etc.)

Leverage your networks (e.g.: SFWA, SFCanada, Codex, etc.)

Experienced Kickstarter for Authors Cross-Promo Facebook group

The final 5 minutes

- If your campaign is successful, sit back and watch the last five minutes count down live on your campaign page.

- You'll be rewarded with confetti and fireworks on screen!

- Download your advanced analytics in the last 5min of your campaign → they go away after a campaign is done!

Post-campaign

Errored pledges

- Expired credit card most commonly
- Seven day time limit to correct → Kickstarter prompts them, but you should, too

Post-campaign

Backer surveys

- Send these out well in advance of delivery → stragglers

- Plan out your questions → only allowed one backer survey (email & DMs are backups)

- Add an email sign-up!

Update backers regularly during fulfillment

- 1-2 message per month during fulfillment

- Be 100% transparent about any delays or issues that crop up

- Don't ghost, don't lie, don't over promise

- Make a "Fulfillment complete!" update when done → Kickstarter likes to see this, too, before approving future campaigns

Turning a Profit (?)

- Not always possible

- Not always your goal

- Building your crowd & starting in the black at retail are biggest positives

Fear is the Crowdfunding Killer...

- Pre-campaign jitters will surprise you...and I'm told they don't go away
- Fear of launching
- Fear of failure
- Fear of the imperfect launch
- Uncertainty = anxiety
- Preparation can make it manageable
- Confidence will come with repeated launches
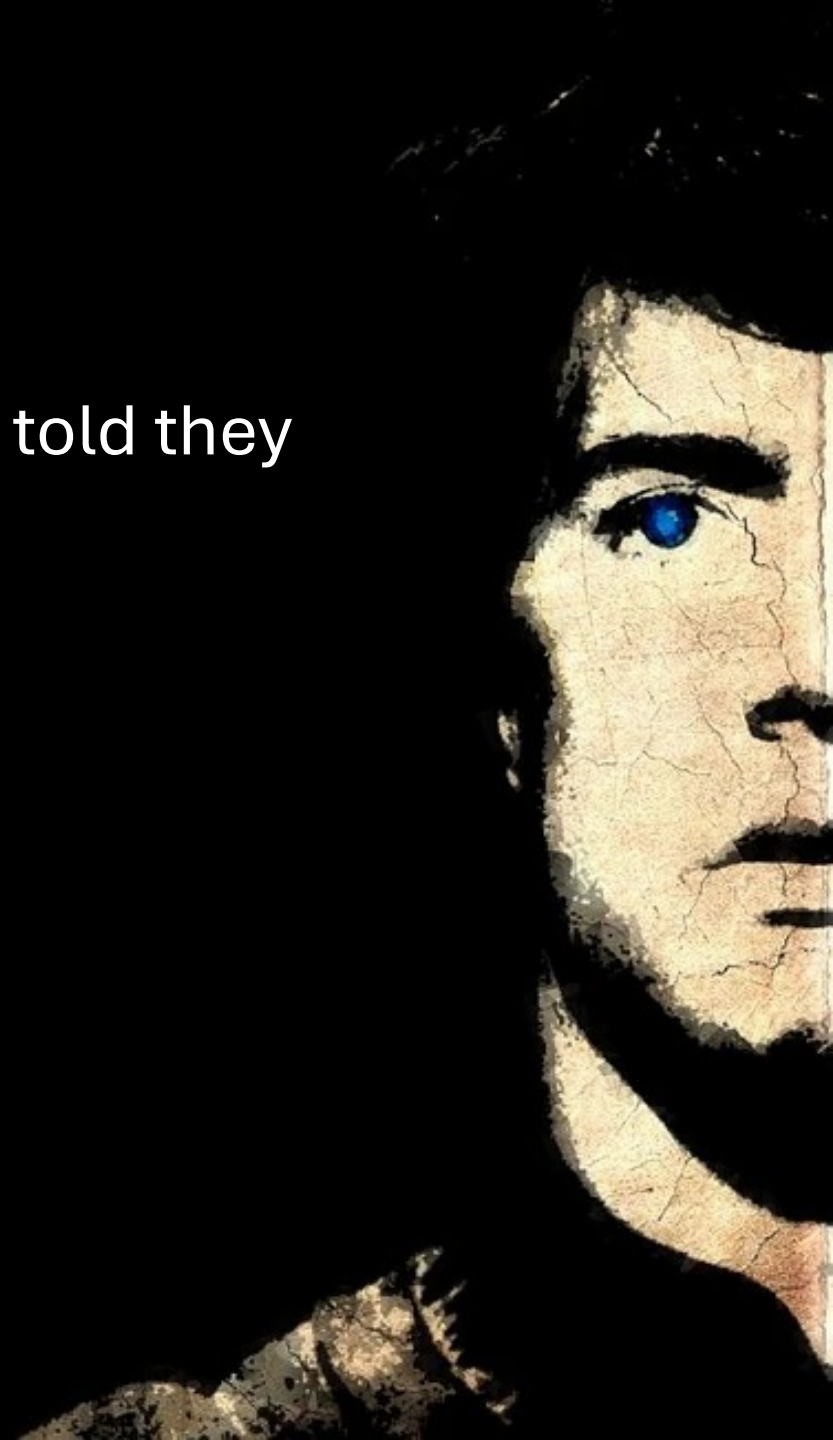
Good news about Kickstarter

98K projects launched since 2009

$610m dollars pledged

4.1m backers

2023 was the fourth "best year ever" in a row for Publishing category

Current success rate: 63% → higher than site average

Success rate for projects with at least 25 backers: 85% → double the site average

Questions?