

The Crime Cafe with Paul Heatley



Debbi: [00:00:13] Hi, everyone. This is the Crime Cafe, your podcasting source of great crime, suspense, and thriller writing. I'm your host Debbi Mack. Before I bring on my guest, I'll just remind you that the Crime Cafe has two ebooks for sale: the nine book box set and the short story anthology. You can find the buy links for both on my website [debbimack\[dot\]com](http://debbimack[dot]com), under the Crime Cafe link. You can also get a free copy of either book if you become a Patreon supporter. You'll get that and much more if you support the podcast on Patreon, along with our eternal gratitude for doing so.

[00:01:02] It's my pleasure today to have as my guest the author of the Eye for an Eye series, one of which I'm currently in the midst of reading and thoroughly enjoying, as well as other novels and more than 50 short stories. Very impressive. I mean, it just amazes me. Anyway, from northeast England, it's Paul Heatley. Hi, Paul.

Paul: [00:01:29] Hello, Debbi.

Debbi: [00:01:30] It's great to have you on.

Paul: [00:01:32] Thank you. Good to be here.

Debbi: [00:01:34] Excellent. How would you describe your books in terms of genre or subgenre?

Paul: [00:01:43] Crime fiction noir. That's the best way to describe them. Sometimes I set them in America. Sometimes I set them here in northeast England. I think it just depends on what kind of story I'm trying to tell and how I think it can be best presented. Some story ideas come to me and I just think that wouldn't work in England.

[00:02:03] But I do watch a lot of American movies and a lot of American TV shows. I read a lot of American books and I think that's what has a big influence on me and why I end up setting things in America and why when I get ideas, after going through them. I'm like, "Is this English? Is it American?" And that's how the creative process grows as the setting process.

Debbi: [00:02:24] That's very interesting. I noticed you did mention a lot of American authors as influential. James Ellroy, Jim Thompson, and Chester Himes being your big

three there. And I've read all of them and enjoy all of them. They're great authors. Are there any particular books by them that you find particularly inspirational?

Paul: [00:02:48] Yeah. For James Ellroy, it would be *Black Dahlia*. That was probably the first crime book I read that had a big impact, because that was a big shock for me to see that crime fiction could be dark. And that sounds silly, but I read it when I was about 16 or 17, and up to that point, my only knowledge of crime fiction was ... it wasn't anything I'd read. It was adaptations of Agatha Christie, and you know, if you're not in that kind of thing, you're not going to be into that kind of thing. But then I read James Ellroy and you had these incredibly dopey policemen and sociopathic serial killers, and it was just something incredible to read and to discover and that's really what turned around for me. And Jim Thompson again, he came after Ellroy. And he was another one that kind of opened my eyes to what crime fiction is and what it can be, because at the same time as discovering Ellroy, I don't like police procedurals.

[00:03:48] And Jim Thompson doesn't write that. Jim Thompson, for the most part, writes from the bad guys' point of view and that's what I like. I like to read from the criminals' point of view. That's why I like noir. And *Savage Night* by him is my favorite. That's just totally off the rails. It's just great. Chester Himes ... anything, anything Chester Himes. I just think he's fantastic.

[00:04:12] There's not a single book particularly sticks out. I think if I had to pick one it would be *A Rage in Harlem* because that was the one I read first. And again he's another one, a bit like James Ellroy. I was kind of shocked. The level of violence and darkness that he was actually putting in these books are incredibly graphic. I flicked through one a little while ago and I just came to a page where somebody gets their head cleaved in half. I was like, yeah. Chester Himes.

[00:04:39] I'll just quickly interject Chester was a big influence on the Eye for an Eye series that you mentioned. When I came to write the story and I knew I had the two characters, I was thinking of Coffin Ed and Gravedigger Jones. That's the genesis of Graeme Taylor and "Tracksuit" Tony came from. It was from Chester Himes.

Debbi: [00:05:10] Well, I'm going to have to read more of your books and Chester Himes because I've read one of Chester Himes..

Paul: [00:05:17] Nice.

Debbi: [00:05:19] And I picked that one because I remembered there was a movie by that name. So I have to read more of those books, because I really loved *Cotton Comes to Harlem*. But that's very interesting, the way you picked your characters that way. So I was reading your guest post and found myself nodding along with a lot of what you were saying. This whole notion of "write what you know". I mean, come on. I mean, I've never killed anybody, but I can write mysteries. So seriously, how you get into the head of killers and things like this, since you've never killed anybody?

Paul: [00:06:06] I think everyone has inside them that notion of violence where you can get pissed off and you can get pissed off to the point where you don't really know what you're thinking anymore, what you're doing anymore, and it's just a case of tapping into that moment in time and thinking, "How did I feel when that guy pissed me off?" This is how I felt and this is what I wanted to do to him. I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't knock somebody out with a hammer. You know. That would be silly, but that's where it comes from.

[00:06:37] I think once you just get going and I think once you get into a character's mindset, and if they're a psychopathic character, write them a certain way that they're a bit crazed as you go along, it becomes a natural progression. Yeah, he told me to punch this guy in the face and break his nose. Yes, he'd kick him while he's down. Yes, he'd stomp his ribs, and it kind of just gets easier as you get into the character.

Debbi: [00:06:58] Mm hmm. You can kind of understand where they're coming from.

Paul: [00:07:02] Yeah, because sometimes the story just takes off and you realize this is what's going to happen. He wouldn't do what I've planned. He wouldn't do this that I've got in outline. He's doing this thing.

Debbi: [00:07:13] Exactly. Exactly, yeah. Because the story has to come out of the character. That's one thing I've noticed in writing. No matter what you started off thinking, your character is going to take you in a certain way or if you want your character to do certain things, they have to come at it from a certain point of view.

Paul: [00:07:36] Yeah.

Debbi: [00:07:38] Understanding where that comes from is important. So you mentioned *Get Carter* in your guest post. It's a movie that I absolutely love, and I thought it was interesting that it was made with the tropes of the Western in mind because I had no idea that northeast England was like the Wild West in that way. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Paul: [00:08:07] Oh, yeah, definitely. *Get Carter* always had a big influence for me even before I knew what it was, because where I grew up was near that area and I was born in Gateshead where a lot of the movie takes place. And whenever we went into Gateshead, the bus stop was directly opposite the big car park that he throws guy off. And it was a very famous building that's not there anymore. They knocked it down. And so it always had a looming presence in my life and had a looming presence I think in a lot of people's lives in the northeast, even if they didn't know anything about it, even if they'd never seen it. And I didn't see it until I was like 18 or 19, and it's a fantastic movie. It's brilliant. And I think you asked about the Western aspect of it.

[00:08:55] Mike Hodges, who directed, he said that he spent a lot of time up in North Tyneside, because the book itself is not set in Newcastle. I think it's set in or somewhere a bit further south, and Mike Hodges spent a lot of time in Newcastle and he always had the idea of setting a story in that area. I think something about the grey and the bleak really appealed to him as a Northeast setting for a Western effectively, where it's the stranger rides into town and he's looking for revenge for the people that killed his brother. It is just a Western story. Michael Caine is "The Man with the Name". A brilliant role for Michael Caine, too. It's not really a part that we see him do, playing a very cold-blooded psychopath.

[00:09:47] There was a story I read where one of the first lines in the movie, he walks into a bar, he asks for beer, and the script said, "In a tall glass, please." And Michael Caine decided to read that line, "In a tall glass." No please, no manners. He knows what he wants and he wants it. He's not going to ask you nice.

Debbi: [00:10:11] That's pretty cool. Yeah, I like that. The stranger who comes to town. Yeah, yeah. Great Western tropes in some of these noir movies. And I'm noticing like Spaghetti Westerns have a kind of noir influence. Yeah. So I'm reading *An Eye for an Eye* right now. And speaking of movies, there's almost a Tarantino-like combination of violence and humor in it, which I absolutely love. How do you think American noir compares to British noir?

Paul: [00:10:49] I think it differs very much in the humor, like you said there. I don't set out writing to be funny. I think because I know how Geordies speak and how they think. I just write the way they talk. And I think it translates that way to be quite funny. The back and forth they have to take the piss out of each other. They don't necessarily take everything very seriously until they very have to take it seriously. And I think an American noir, I think, perhaps, there's not a great deal of humor. I can't really think of any humor in James Ellroy's novels or Jim Thompson's, perhaps in Chester Himes. I think it is just a lot more bleak.

[00:11:46] It's very much the very straightforward darkness. It's what noir very much is. I think perhaps the *Eye for an Eye* books you could maybe class more as crime fiction as opposed to noir, and yeah I think American noir. I would say even the stuff I've done American like *Fatboy*. It doesn't have that humor in it that my British stuff does.

Debbi: [00:12:18] I enjoy it and I'm also a big fan of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett and a lot of their stuff, while being very dark in many ways, had lots of humor to it as well. So I've always been very influenced by people like that and Ross Macdonald. I don't know if you read them.

Paul: [00:12:43] I haven't read Ross Macdonald.

Debbi: [00:12:45] He's excellent. My God, he's excellent. He kind of like takes the Philip Marlowe character type and translates it into another character. His stories make a little more sense actually plot-wise I think than Raymond Chandler's did, but you should probably give him a look.

Paul: [00:13:09] There's that famous Raymond Chandler line when he was asked, "So who killed the driver?"

Debbi: [00:13:17] "I don't know." Exactly. Yeah. I mean a lot of times that's the way it sounded like, "Who struck John?" "I don't know." And you could get away with it back then for some reason and now you can't. I don't know why. I think that that kind of sucks. But what are you currently working on?

Paul: [00:13:39] In February next year, I've got a book called *Guillotine* which is American set and that's coming out with All Due Respect who published *Fatboy*. And also in the early half of next year, I've got another book called *Bad Bastards* which is coming out with Fahrenheit 13. So I've got the edits to do on them, and work wise I'm editing something set in Northumberland, set in my home town, and I've got another thing that's set in Newcastle which is my *Get Carter*. When I set out to write, when I started plotting it, I was watching the movie, and when I was writing it, this is what I wanted to be my *Get Carter*. I haven't read it yet. I've already written it. I've planned it and written it. I haven't edited it any way yet. So when I come to it, whether I get that impression from it remains to be seen. Fingers crossed, you know, fingers crossed, but that's what I'm planning on editing soon.

Debbi: [00:14:45] Okay, so you have a number of things in the works.

Paul: [00:14:48] Yeah. I keep busy.

Debbi: [00:14:52] Yeah. Very good, very good. Let's see. If any of your books were made into movies, who would you want to cast as various characters? Let's say the Eye for an Eye series.

Paul: [00:15:05] Well, *An Eye for an Eye* I've given thought. Graeme Taylor would have to be Liam Cunningham who plays Davos on *Game of Thrones*, because for some reason he decided to play Davos with a Geordie accent. So I already loved the character from the books, but as soon as he spoke with that accent, I was like, yes! So Liam could I think would make a brilliant Graeme and I did a blog post a little while ago on who I thought would play them and Tony was the difficult one. I still don't have Tony in my head as to who could actually play him. I was thinking recently it could be Jamie Bell. He's young enough and he has that northeast background, too. But for Neil Doyle, who's effectively the antagonist, Peter Mullan, the Scottish actor. I think there's not too

much between the Scottish and the Geordie accent. I think he could probably nail that quite well. And I'm a big Peter Mullan fan. I would cast him in anything. If Liam Cunningham said no to Graeme Taylor, I'd get Peter Mullan.

Debbi: [00:16:11] Well, there you go. So if somebody is going to read your books say for the first time, what would you recommend starting out with?

Paul: [00:16:22] *An Eye for an Eye*.

Debbi: [00:16:24] *An Eye for an Eye*.

Paul: [00:16:26] Yeah. Either *An Eye for an Eye*. or *Fatboy*. I think it would depend more so on where your tastes lie. If they lie British or American or as I was saying earlier, if you like a bit of humor. Yeah. Those are the two that I lean towards: *An Eye for an Eye* or *Fatboy*.

Debbi: [00:16:43] Well I'm absolutely loving *An Eye for an Eye* so I'll give it my golden stamp of approval there, for what that's worth. Okay, let's see, is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Paul: [00:17:01] I think I've covered everything.

Debbi: [00:17:06] Where can people find you and your books online?

Paul: [00:17:09] I'm everywhere pretty much. Facebook and Twitter is @PaulHeatley3. Instagram is PaulHeatleyauthor. I'm on Facebook. I think I said that. There is a blog that I don't update a great deal, but you can find it. It's on my Amazon author page, and the books are all available from Amazon. The Eye for an Eye series was recently made available on Nook, so that is also available from Barnes and Noble.

Debbi: [00:17:39] Excellent.

Paul: [00:17:40] Yeah. So I think that covers everywhere I am online.

Debbi: [00:17:46] All right, all right. Well, good to hear. And, oh, one more question for me as a *Doctor Who* fan, I have to ask. Are you a *Doctor Who* fan? [laughs] You're giving me a look. No?

Paul: [00:17:58] I'm not. I'm not against it. I have nothing against it. The thing for *Doctor Who* is I've always felt the theme tune belongs to a different show. There's a real menace to the theme tune. But when you watch the show, it doesn't quite add up. You listen to the theme tune and you think, "This is gonna scare the shit out of me." And then you see all these cardboard and rubber monsters and it's like what's this? I think somebody got a bit mistaken. But, no, it's not my kind of thing. I like sci-fi. It's just *Doctor Who* does not really appeal to me.

Debbi: [00:18:39] Not your thing, huh?

Paul: [00:18:39] It's not for me, no.

Debbi: [00:18:42] Oh, well. that's cool.

Paul: [00:18:44] Sorry.

Debbi: [00:18:44] No problem. I just happen to like *Doctor Who*. What can I say?

Paul: [00:18:49] How's the new one? I didn't watch it. How's the lady doing?

Debbi: [00:18:54] I like her a lot. The only thing is I don't think they're writing the scripts quite up to the level that they should be for her yet.

Paul: [00:19:03] It's interesting you say that, because a lot of people that I work with are big fans and they talk about it a lot and that's what they all say. She's very good. The stories are lacking.

Debbi: [00:19:12] She's fantastic. She is truly wonderful as the Doctor. I'm loving her as the Doctor, but I wish that they would come up with some better scripts for her. What can I say?

[00:19:26] Well, I just want to say thank you so much, Paul, for being on and for everything. And, in any case, don't forget everybody who's listening to please consider buying *The Crime Cafe 9 Book Set* or the short story anthology which is available on my website. [DebbiMack\[dot\]com](http://DebbiMack.com). When you click on "Crime Cafe". Also, you can get both of those for free if you sign up as a supporter of the podcast on Patreon. We have a Patreon page so just go to [DebbiMack\[dot\]com](http://DebbiMack.com) and click on "Crime Cafe" and you can learn more about that.

[00:20:07] So, in any case, thank you so much again for being here, Paul. I appreciate everything that you had to go through to be on here today. [laughs] And it was enjoyable talking to you. Thanks.

Paul: [00:20:24] You too. Thank you.

Debbi: [00:20:27] And with that I'll just say thanks everyone for listening. Happy reading. And I'll see you in two weeks.