

# The Crime Cafe with Matt Coyle



**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 e-books for sale: the nine book boxed set and the short story anthology. You can find the buy links for both on my Web site [debbimack\[dot\]com](http://debbimack.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.

**Debbi:** [00:01:02] Hi everyone. Today our guest is the author of the bestselling Rick Cahill crime novels. His books have all either been chosen as finalists or won various awards including the Anthony for Best First Novel. It's my pleasure to introduce our guest Matt Coyle. Hi Matt. Thanks for being here today.

**Matt:** [00:01:25] Thanks for having me.

**Debbi:** [00:01:26] Well, how is San Diego?

**Matt:** [00:01:28] It is a beautiful day today. It really is.

**Debbi:** [00:01:31] Oh God.

**Matt:** [00:01:33] It's exactly the kind of day people think about what they think of San Diego.

**Debbi:** [00:01:36] Yeah. I love San Diego. Such a wonderful city and the weather is fantastic. So tell us about Rick Cahill. Who is he and what's his story?

**Matt:** [00:01:51] Well, when the first book opens, which is Yesterday's Echo which came out 2013, it's been about eight years for Rick since his wife was murdered. He was a police officer on the Santa Barbara Police Department, arrested for his wife's murder, but never tried. He was released but never exonerated.

[00:02:13] So he was kicked off the force eventually and he moved back to his hometown of San Diego, went to work in a restaurant kind of behind the scenes and

eventually worked his way up to manager. We had to be more out in front because when he was arrested for his wife's murder, obviously the press was all over him. There was a *48 Hours* episode on it, on her murder, which made him look like he was guilty. So he had all that baggage since his wife's death. Now, in the first book, he's managing a restaurant, helps a woman in peril. Now in Book Five, which is *Wrong Light* he's been a private investigator for five years. And a radio station has hired him to try to find out the person who's calling himself Pluto, who this person is, and why he's harassing their breakaway talk radio star Naomi Hendrix, and bad things ensue.

**Debbi:** [00:03:20] Uh huh. So in the bio that you wrote with your guest post, you credited Raymond Chandler with inspiring you to write crime fiction. What was it about his writing that inspired you?

**Matt:** [00:03:34] You know I read him very young. My father gave me *The Simple Art of Murder* when I was ... I think I was 12 to 13, 14. Somewhere around there. And of course I read the short stories in the book and I read his thesis on writing detective fiction. I just liked the idea of someone living by their own code. He was a man of honor, but he had his own code. I always see the private eye as kind of a gunfighter who rides into town alone and has to deal with sometimes competing forces, and all he has is his honor and his code. And Rick's very much that person. He actually lives by the credo handed down to him by his father who was a disgraced cop before him, which is sometimes you have to do what's right, even when the law says it's wrong. And with each book, Rick takes that more and more extreme.

**Debbi:** [00:04:21] There's almost a Dirty Harry-ish side to that sort of philosophy. Do you sort of get some kind of inspiration from that kind of story?

**Matt:** [00:04:38] Course I loved all the Dirty Harry movies. But I think that when you live by this kind of code, you have to be careful, because as the books go on Rick does start to question his own sense of what is right and wrong. Because I think that that's how all despots start really. You know, I'm here to help people. I'm doing it my way. It's my way or the highway. When they get too much power, obviously things go very wrong. So it's something he has to be very careful of. He doesn't have the law enforcement behind him like Dirty Harry. In fact, often he's at loggerheads with the law, because obviously when you hire a private investigator, it's because the police haven't handled your

problem. I'm very much a law and order guy. My brother-in-law was a cop in L.A. for 33 years. His son's a police officer there. Now it's probably been 14 years. But of course, when you're writing fiction and there's a PI, there has to be a reason for him to take the case. Generally, it means the police ignored something.

**Debbi:** [00:05:49] Let's see. Has your protagonist changed over the course of the series? And, if so, in what ways?

**Matt:** [00:05:56] Yeah he has. In the first book, he was kind of trying to find himself. He'd gone back to his restaurant roots, as I said earlier, but he was out of the spotlight. And he met a woman who all of a sudden needed help. He was kind of forced back into more of a confrontational mode. So with each book, he's gotten a little more secure in his own skin, if you like, which is not always a good thing for him, because he does live by that code. So I think his arc has become ... his whole life now since his wife was murdered, it's a quest for redemption. You have to read the first book to find out whether he killed her or not. But he was arrested for her murder and whether he did or not he feels responsible for her death. So he's on this journey to try to gain redemption and through five books. I just turned in Book Six. I think people looking from the outside might think it's OK, Rick, you're redeemed, but internally I don't know if he's ever going to get there. So with this sense of redemption and to find the truth, he sometimes makes bad decisions that actually hurt the people he's trying to help.

**Debbi:** [00:07:21] So morally complex and complicated from an emotional standpoint as well. Have you ever thought of writing another series or a standalone?

**Matt:** [00:07:35] Yeah, I have. I don't really have an idea. Like I said, I just turned in Book Six. I'm in discussions with my publisher about seven and how many more to go. I mean I love writing Rick. Most people know in the book business know it's hard to make money and I'm trying to find a way to make more money. So that might mean I have to write a standalone and go to a different publisher, maybe, which my publisher is aware of. They're very good to me, but they understand the financial consideration. I just quit my job December 31 to write full time. So I don't really have a standalone hard idea. I've got some ideas. I don't have anything I can really get up and run with right now. I do have a very good idea of the next Rick book, but yeah, I think everybody that writes a series eventually has to write a standalone, anyway, no matter how tied you are to that

series. You just kind of need a cleanser, to get refreshed, and then oftentimes with obviously say Michael Connelly that starts another series and you still have your old one but then you're doing *The Lincoln Lawyer*. I think there's always that possibility, but I think I'm getting close to writing a standalone but the idea is not really solid yet.

**Debbi:** [00:08:50] Mm hmm. Well, that's interesting. When did you start writing fiction with serious intent to be published?

**Matt:** [00:08:57] It's a good question.

**Debbi:** [00:09:00] I ask because you had all those other careers before you started writing.

**Matt:** [00:09:03] Too late. Probably. I knew I wanted to write ever since my dad gave me *The Simple Art of Murder* when I was 14 or so, but it took me 30 years to figure out you actually have to write to become a writer. So I was working, I was helping put the fourth golf company I'd worked for in 10 years out of business when I realized, because the handwriting was on the wall I'd seen this happen before, so I knew this company was going down. I said well I was 42 or 43 somewhere around there, and I said to my self, well, this is it. The line's in the sand. You have an opportunity, you can have some free time, you got enough money saved up for a few months at least. Now it's time to write that book or shut up about it. You can't talk about it anymore. You can't have those dreams. You have to find a real career, instead of just a job each time.

[00:09:55] So I drew that line in the sand, which was about 16, 17 years ago. And I wrote a first draft in five months. And I thought, well, I thought it was a book, because I had a beginning and it had the end at the end. So I thought that made a book, because I didn't know anything about the writing. Of course, I came to realize that. It was just a first draft, and those won't get published.

**Debbi:** [00:10:20] Yeah. We all have our first draft.

**Matt:** [00:10:25] Right. And so you know I went through the whole getting an agent, but I would say at that point, once I started doing it I realized, yes, you're really doing what you're put on earth to do. So I would say when I was 43, and it took me 10 years to get

published. But, at that point, I knew once I started doing it every day and forcing myself, I realized well this is what you're supposed to be doing. Even though it's hard most days, this is what you should do.

**Debbi:** [00:10:51] Yeah, yeah. People don't realize I think sometimes how hard it is to do sometimes. So what advice would you give to someone who wants to write crime fiction in particular?

**Matt:** [00:11:06] I would say first of all, write, as it took me 30 years to learn. I mean that really is the thing. You have to sit in that seat every day and write. But I would say ... obviously you read your genre. If someone wants to write whatever genre crime fiction, they should have been reading it all along, because where is your interest? It has to be there. So read all the time, read crime fiction, join Mystery Writers of America, Sisters in Crime. There's probably some other organizations out there. So you start to go to meetings and meet other crime writers. You meet published authors, big name published authors. Go to writers conferences, and there's plenty of crime writers' conferences. There's one coming up in March called Left Coast Crime, which will be in Vancouver, British Columbia. There's California Crime Writers coming up in June, which is in L.A. And then of course there's Bouchercon, which is a huge mystery fan conference in Dallas later this year. It starts on Halloween, actually. There's probably smaller ones you can find. And just get immersed in the community. It really does make a difference. And one thing, go to book signings. Go see your favorite authors, authors you may not know, because it really does pay off down the line getting blurbs, because you need to get those when you get published. Things like that plus you'll find that if you really want to write crime, you need to be a part of the community. And once you become part of the community, you'll be amazed at how great people are, how willing they are to help you. It's an amazing community.

**Debbi:** [00:12:40] I agree with you 100 percent on all of that. It's a fantastic community and all those suggestions are great.

**Matt:** [00:12:50] Now, I would say also join a writers group, too. I would say join a writers group, because of the early feedback, because you don't know if you're telling the story you think you're telling. Because it's always in your head. But it may not be the same on the paper. That's my sermon.

**Debbi:** [00:13:05] Yeah. I'm in a writers group that is absolutely fantastic. And I agree with you so wholeheartedly on that. I mean, really, getting to know other authors, being in writers groups, just being part of the community is an important thing. Who are your favorite authors other than Chandler?

**Matt:** [00:13:32] Of course, I read a lot of Ross Macdonald, too.

**Debbi:** [00:13:35] Oh God, yes, I love him.

**Matt:** [00:13:35] Yeah. In fact, I went to UC Santa Barbara and Ross Macdonald lived in Santa Barbara, I guess later in his life. And I was taking a detective writing class, if you can believe they actually had such things. It was great. We read Chandler, we read Macdonald, and he was going to come in and talk to our class one day, and he wasn't able to make it that day and to me that's a big hole in my life where I almost have the opportunity where I almost had the opportunity to meet Ross Macdonald, a million years ago. Anyway, Macdonald, Chandler obviously. Contemporarily, I read Robert Crais. Huge fan of him.

[00:14:12] Michael Connelly, T. Jefferson Parker, C.J. Box. An author I always mention, but she's just on such a different level than me, is Megan Abbott. I love her. I love her writing. But when I read her and then I go back to my own writing, I feel like I'm in the West, when they ask you to sign a document and you just sign an X. I feel like that's the difference between my writing and hers. It's such a different level. It's so dense, it's so beautiful that I'm a huge admirer. But I have nothing in common with her. She's a very nice person.

**Debbi:** [00:14:47] Oh, you know, she is a very nice person and does write extremely well. I agreed on all of those. Is there anything else you'd like to add before you finish up?

**Matt:** [00:15:00] No, I appreciate you having me on. For one thing, plus we had a scheduling deal. No I think it's a great opportunity and I like the fact you've got a working office there.

**Debbi:** [00:15:13] Oh, definitely.

**Matt:** [00:15:14] I could not have [my interview] in the office, because it's just not cleaned up to where I want it to be. I said when I quit my day job that I was going to get the office together where I wanted it, but of course things always come up, so I'm not there yet. I would just say I appreciate the opportunity, and your question was a good one about what should an aspiring mystery author do, and I think that the things we talked about are a great way to go.

**Debbi:** [00:15:40] All right. Well, thank you again so much. And I would just like to say to everyone, don't forget to check my blog for his book giveaway, which you still have time to enter.

[00:15:55] So while you're there, you can also check out my own books as well as the Crime Cafe boxed set and anthology, which you can find the buy links for on my Web site: [debbimack\[dot\]com](http://debbimack.com). And we also have a Patreon page, if you'd like to check out the perks and support the podcast. So if you enjoyed the podcast please do leave a review.

[00:16:20] Even a one-liner with a star rating helps a lot. So next time our guest will be (barring disaster) Andrew Nette. So with that, I will simply say thanks for listening, and until next time happy reading. And I'll see you in two weeks.