

The Crime Cafe with Andrew Nette



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 website 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.

[00:01:02] Finally, I'd like to tell you about another podcast that might interest you. Kings River Life has a new mystery podcast called Mysteryrat's Maze. Episodes consist of mystery short stories, and first chapters of mystery novels, read by local actors. To listen to the episodes and subscribe to the podcast, you can go to mysteryratsmaze.podbean.com, iTunes and Google Play.

[00:01:33] Hi, everyone. Today on the Crime Cafe, it's my pleasure to have a writer of fiction, non-fiction, a reviewer, and a self-proclaimed pulp scholar. It's my pleasure, as I said, to introduce Andrew Nette today.

Andrew: [00:01:54] Thank you, Debbi. Nice to be here.

Debbi: [00:01:58] I'm so happy you can be here.

Andrew: [00:02:00] Yes. It took a bit of organizing, but we did it.

Debbi: [00:02:03] We did it. We did it. How would you describe your particular type of fiction writing?

Andrew: [00:02:13] I think without trying to make it too complicated I like to say that I sort of write elevated sort of genre novels. It's hardboiled fiction with the sort of noir tinge, although I don't think you can call yourself noir. You have to let someone else call you that. But I do try and I do try and put a lot of work into them. I try to make the writing the best I can and I try and inject quite a bit of politics and setting into my into my crime novels. My second novel is called *Gunshine State* and it's a heist novel. It's a heist gone wrong novel. I love heist movies, and I've always wanted to write that Australian heist gone wrong novel, because there's so few of them. But it's also quite political and it's set

in a number of places. It's set in Queensland, which is in northern Australia. It's also set in Melbourne. It's also set in Thailand, where I lived for quite a while.

Debbi: [00:03:21] I see. Well, I'm reading it now and enjoying it very much. Can you tell us a little bit about your first novel *Ghost Money*?

Andrew: [00:03:30] Yeah. *Ghost Money*, a novel dear to my heart. I worked as a journalist in Cambodia in the 1990s for a wire service for a while. I lived in that part of Southeast Asia for about seven years, and I spent quite a bit of time in Cambodia. I always thought Cambodia would be a great setting for a crime novel, partly because things happened every day in Cambodia. You just couldn't make up ... terrible things, but also wonderful things. Also, I'm fascinated by the notion of what constitutes justice and law and order in countries which lack a great deal of justice and law and order and which have had something like the Khmer Rouge that did the horrendous Pol Pot regime happened to them. But when I was working in Cambodia in the 90s, I always thought this would be really great to set a crime novel here. And I never got around to it. I was too busy working as a journalist, and then later on I sort of came back to it. That was in the mid-90s, and then basically in about 2007, my father died and I had this epiphany. I thought I have to write this novel. So my family and I went and lived in Cambodia for a year. And I wrote a novel that's called *Ghost Money*, which is set in Cambodia in the mid-90s. And the key character of which is a Vietnamese Australian former policeman who now works as a private investigator and is hired to go to Phnom Penh, Cambodia--the capital of Cambodia--to look for a missing Australian gem trader. And, yes, that's my first novel, *Ghost Money*.

Debbi: [00:05:26] How much of your inspiration for these novels comes from just reading the headlines?

Andrew: [00:05:35] Oh, for that one, so much. And a lot of history. It's a very rich, historically rich novel. Some people think that there's too much history in it. That might be the case. It was very much based on fact. In fact, I didn't use a lot of material that I just thought people simply would not believe, a lot of real material. So it's a fictionalized version of a whole lot. I mean the central the central spine of the novel, the search for the missing gem trader, is actually also based on a sort of semi-real life event that happened in Phnom Penh back in the early 2000s. The murder of an Australian gem

trader in a hotel room in a luxury hotel in Phnom Penh, which was never solved. There's a whole backstory to that. That was the sort of germ of it. The novel is set at a point when the Khmer Rouge ... because a lot of people may not realize the Khmer Rouge insurgency was actually still going right up until the early 2000s. I mean they'd been pegged back in terms of their territory a lot. By 1996 when I was working there was a journalist, the insurgency was still going very strong.

[00:07:01] So the government versus the Khmer Rouge and complicated by the fact of course that both sides are also trying to make money. And what happened in the mid-90s is that there was a big split in the Khmer Rouge and their foreign minister a guy called Ieng Sary, a person who had been their foreign minister who had this big base on the Cambodian side of the Cambodian-Thai border. He split from the main body of the Khmer Rouge. Without going into any of the details that was in a sense we didn't quite see it then, but looking back at it now that was really the beginning of the end of the Khmer Rouge, because they started to fall apart very quickly after that. When Ieng Sary split, he was in a town called Pailin on the border or on the northeast border in Cambodia. Very few people have been in Pailin, and there were always rumors about how many soldiers he had and how much influence he had on both sides. At that time, Cambodia was ruled by a very unstable alliance of two parties that have been at civil war with each other for most of the 80s. And the U.N. had brokered a very unstable truce with them to form a coalition government and they were fighting the Khmer Rouge and they were fighting each other and as soon as Ieng Sary split, both these sides of this coalition government started trying to woo him, because they were lining up for what would eventually be the armed conflict, the very brief armed conflict that those two sides of the Coalition government would have.

[00:08:38] Anyway, the book is set amongst that backdrop. It's a crime novel, very much so. But I was also very keen to talk about Cambodia I suppose back then as a broken country, but also as a country where people were trying to put it back together and what it was like for ordinary Khmers. So I was trying to be very faithful to that while at the same time deliver a really sort of exciting dark crime novel. So that's what I mean I suppose when I say elevated genre stuff. You're trying to kind of be political, you're trying to have setting. There's a lot about Cambodian history. What Phnom Penh was like in the mid-90s, but none of that is any good. I think if you're not delivering also a really interesting exciting crime novel.

Debbi: [00:09:28] Of course not. Yes, because there's the entertainment factor.

Andrew: [00:09:36] Yes, it's just didactic otherwise and you're just preaching at people.

Debbi: [00:09:40] Exactly. You don't want to do that. Hey, if I wanted to write a political speech, I'd do that. In any case, I was just going to say, you must do a lot of research for your books.

Andrew: [00:09:53] Well, that book was a lot of research, because you're trying to recreate Cambodia in the mid-90s. I had been there, but then it was 10 years later that I lived there again. And Cambodia was changing very rapidly, I did a lot of history for that book. I did quite a bit of research for *Gunshine State*, my second novel. I'm doing a bit of research for the sequel to *Gunshine State*, which is called *Orphan Road*, but I'm trying to do less research, and I'm trying to make them accurate and still trying to retain those elements I was talking about. I'm trying to not do quite as much research, since I did the most research for *Ghost Money*. If I had to do that with every single book, it would take me forever to write them.

Debbi: [00:10:41] Yeah, yeah. I mean, at some point it's like, it's fiction. Okay?

Andrew: [00:10:45] That's right. A thing a lot of people seem to miss these days. Yes.

Debbi: [00:10:51] Yeah, yeah. Okay. I've got to ask you this. You write book and film reviews. I was going to say that basically you have my dream job--writing book and film reviews. I have to ask how did you end up working for Noir City?

Andrew: [00:11:13] I've only written once or twice for them. So Noir City as the magazine of the Film Noir Foundation. A terrific organization. I think I just pitched them. People. Just pitch.

Debbi: [00:11:36] So no special connections there, eh?

Andrew: [00:11:37] Not particularly, no. No and I have met Eddie Muller [founder and president of the Film Noir Foundation]. I have been an attendee in the past at an event which is held in Philadelphia. A wonderful event called NoirCon.

Debbi: [00:11:52] Aha. I've heard of it.

Andrew: [00:11:54] Yeah. And he was there one year. So I have met him and I've had a bit of e-mail correspondence with him, and so yeah, I would like to write more. My God. I don't make a living doing film and book reviews. I'd like to. I might supplement my income doing that. But I mean, as I was saying to you before, I'm currently doing a PhD. So that's really put a crimp in my reviewing at the moment. I'm just not doing nearly as much as I'd like to.

Debbi: [00:12:24] Well, I admire your going out for the PhD in pulp paperback publishing in Australia.

Andrew: [00:12:33] That's right.

Debbi: [00:12:34] That's a heck of a subject there.

Andrew: [00:12:37] Yeah.

Debbi: [00:12:39] Tell me a little bit about what makes it Australian literature or crime fiction even unique.

Andrew: [00:12:47] Well, everyone's crime fiction is unique.

Debbi: [00:12:52] What's peculiarly Australian?

Andrew: [00:12:59] It's a really interesting question, and I think, well, it's changed, too. If you look very broadly at the different stages of crime fiction in Australia in the 50s and 60s, our crime fiction was very I would say--I mean there's always exceptions to this--a lot of our crime fiction but the dominant crime fiction was very faux American. So we were part of that wave that took place across the Anglo-American world. It happened in Britain as well. You know, Australians writing crime novels set in America, and in fact

one of the people in my PhD, probably the least known, most successful crime writer in Australia is a guy called Alan Yates, who wrote a very long series under a pseudonym called Carter Brown. And that was all faux American crime fiction. He started in the early 50s, but actually that series was sold to Signet in New York, who published it for another 10 years. So you can sell ice to Eskimos and you can sell faux American crime fiction to Americans. There you go. Then into the local crime fiction and the Australian crime fiction that really reflected what was going on in Australia and Australian themes that didn't really happen then until the 80s. In the very early 80s, there was a crime writer Peter Corris and he started writing P.I. novels set in Sydney, and they were infused with a very Australian sense of place and class and vernacular. That rode throughout the 80s, and modern Australian crime fiction kind of took off from there.

[00:14:59] I'm still not sure if I've answered your question. I mean, because at the moment, what's popular in Australian crime fiction at the moment is rural small town crime. That's huge at the moment, but that seems to be quite big everywhere, at the moment. So I suppose what makes really good Australian crime fiction--the sense of place, the sense of Australia, the sense of what some people call Sunshine Noir. That very sunburnt, very it's a large country with a lot going on. I suppose one thing that's starting to be picked up a lot in our crime fiction that probably hasn't always been reflected is also our unreconciled history to our indigenous people who we treated very, very badly and continue to treat quite badly. And that's a theme that is starting to come across in a lot of our crime fiction now. But it's very diverse. It's a huge country. So there's crime fiction set in the cities. A lot of it's now set in the bush and in the Outback. That's really very big at the moment.

Debbi: [00:16:15] Yeah. I was going to say that the Outback seems like one of those kind of bleak landscape noir settings.

Andrew: [00:16:23] It's bleak. It's stunning. It's beautiful. It's hard, it's tough. It has all those qualities. Absolutely, absolutely. There's a terrific book. I think one of the best books, though, is ... maybe lots of people might not like this, but I think encapsulates a lot of it, is a book called *Wake in Fright*, which is about this sort of middle-class English teacher who's stranded in the Outback for a weekend, stranded in this Outback town for a weekend. It's by Kenneth Cook. They made a film of it in the early 70s. Amazingly

surreal book about masculinity and drinking and really captures what the Australian Outback was like for a long time and arguably what aspects of it are still what.

Debbi: [00:17:12] Huh. That's very interesting. Before we go I have to ask you who are your favorite authors and what are your favorite films?

Andrew: [00:17:23] Oh wow, crime fiction authors. I love Ellroy. Not so much these days, but I think you can't have a discussion about crime fiction I think without really talking about Ellroy. I love Ellroy. He's made a huge influence on so many writers including myself. I'm a huge fan of an author called Donald Westlake, who wrote a series of novels featuring a criminal character under the pseudonym Richard Stark, and those books are a huge influence on my character Gary Chance, who's the main character in my heist novel you're reading at the moment called *Gunshine State*. I'm a big fan of Megan Abbott, a New York-based crime writer. She's in Queens. I think her stuff, particularly her early historical novels, are terrific. Oh look. Australian writers. There's a lot of them. There's a novelist in Perth called David Whish-Wilson. Perth's on the other side of Australia to me. I'm in Melbourne. I think he's probably one of the best and least-recognised crime novelists writing in Australia at the moment.

[00:18:42] There's so much. I'm just looking at my bookshelf over here. There's Don Winslow. I'm a big Patricia Highsmith fan. There's so much so much good stuff when you even get the time to read it.

Debbi: [00:18:58] Uh huh. And films? Favorite films?

Andrew: [00:19:02] Aw, look. That changes all the time. I'm a big film noir fan. Old movies, new movies, I'm just a movie buff. I'm trying to think what I've seen recently that I really liked. There was an American film called *Widows*. A sort of heist about this group of heisters, this heist gang and they all get killed or we think they all get killed and their wives have to basically take over this particular job to get out of debt. I really like this. I'm pretty promiscuous with my taste in movies.

Debbi: [00:19:48] Cool. I can appreciate that.

Andrew: [00:19:50] Now I have to watch superhero movies as my daughter's into them, so you know.

Debbi: [00:19:56] So, you're open to that sort of thing.

Andrew: [00:19:59] I really, really am pretty much open to anything, actually.

Debbi: [00:20:03] Cool. Well that's an excellent way to be, and I totally agree with you. I love all sorts of movies. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Andrew: [00:20:13] No, just thank you very much for having me.

Debbi: [00:20:16] It was my pleasure to do it, Andrew. Am I saying your last name right? Is Nett-ee?

Andrew: [00:20:23] You got it right. Most people don't.

Debbi: [00:20:25] Thank goodness. I was going to ask you before we got started and I forgot. Anyway, so I'm glad I got it right. Excellent. So again I'd like to thank Andrew for being here and it's been fun talking and I hope you've enjoyed the show. If you have, please leave a review on iTunes. I'd really appreciate it. It helps the show a lot if you can do that. I'd also like to encourage you to check out my books and the Crime Cafe e-book boxed set and anthology on my website, debbimack.com. Just click on "Crime Cafe" and you'll find all the information about how to subscribe and the Patreon campaign to which I am currently contributing serialized accounts from my latest work in progress. And I'm going to be doing that over the course before ... these are pre-edited drafts for anyone to look at who supports the Patreon campaign. So, in any event I hope you'll check that out. And with that, I'll just say thanks so much for listening and Happy Reading. And I'll see you in two weeks.

[00:21:51] Our guest next time will be James Longmore.