

# The Crime Cafe with Avanti Centrae

Presented By:



Debbi (00:12): Hi everyone. My guest today is the best selling author of the VanOps thriller series. Her first in the series, *The Lost Power* has received several awards and upon its release was a Barnes & Noble bestseller. *Solstice Shadows*, also a Barnes & Noble bestseller after its release, as well as an Amazon bestseller, is her latest book. It's a pleasure to introduce my guest Avanti Centrae. Hi Avanti. Thank you for being here today.

Avanti (02:20): Yeah. Hi Debbi and everyone who's listening. I'm thrilled to be here to chat a little bit more with an audience that enjoys crime as much as I do in the fiction sense, of course. Yes.

Debbi (02:33): Naturally, of course. Let's see, tell us about the VanOps series. You've been compared to authors like Dan Brown and Clive Cussler. So action packed might be a good word for it. Yes?

Avanti (02:48): Action packed. Yes. A lot of readers have said they're literally glued to the edge of their seat. I've had people tell me they are holding their breath, and that's fantastic. Yeah, the other two authors that I'm often compared to are James Rollins and Steve Berry. So it's smart pulp fiction. It's filled with intrigue and history and science and mystery kind of all wrapped up in a non-stop action package.

Debbi (03:18): Yeah, I was gonna say I started writing down what your book was like—the first one. And I wrote "like a travel guide with an adventure story, plus mysticism, history, artifact hunting, and spycraft."

Avanti (03:33): Pretty much encapsulates it. Yeah. I've always been an overachiever. Yeah. I've always been an overachiever. And yeah, I like to provide readers with, you know, their money's worth as I'm a reader, too. And I like books that are richly textured with characters that jump off the page, you know, and I've always enjoyed history, and traveling and cruising to, you know, places around the world and wanting to include all of that in my books.

Debbi (04:13): Well, you've done very well with that. I mean, you've done a great job because I was the same way. I was kind of on the edge of my seat, reading your first book there. And your protagonist is Maddy, who is an aikido expert. I thought that was really cool. What inspired you to create this particular character?

Avanti (04:35): Yeah, that's an insightful question, Debbi. And I also liked Erica Jensen in your yeah, I just read, I just read *Damaged Goods* and really enjoyed her, too. Maddy they, they both meditate actually. It was kind of interested to see that your character is dealing with some, you know, deep emotional stuff and uses meditation as a way to, to deal with that. And Maddy's got a little bit more of a pedestrian background than Erica does. So Maddy has been an app designer for her job. She was an almost Olympic athlete, so she's got some physical skills, and since high school she's enjoyed aikido. And the reason that I chose aikido is because I see a lot of books in our genre where the protagonist is almost callous, you know? Oh, bang bang. I had to shoot somebody again. Oh, well.

Avanti (05:36): Well, I wanted somebody that was more morally conflicted about having to use violence. And I thought what's a better conflict? Because great story's all about great conflict, right? So what's better than having somebody who is morally opposed to violence being shot at by Russian snipers? I thought that would be a wonderful setup, and it turned out really good.

The theme of that whole first book is around you know, violence and force and what's appropriate to use, and what's not in our culture. So I also like having, you know, bigger themes in my work, too. That one was a fun one to explore.

Debbi ([06:21](#)): Yeah. I mean, I love, love that idea there of using something like aikido, which does not encourage violence, but responds to it in a sense.

Avanti ([06:32](#)): Exactly.

Debbi ([06:33](#)): It uses the violence of somebody else against them. Isn't that how it works?

Avanti ([06:38](#)): Yes. I had the opportunity to study aikido for a little bit 20 or so years ago and was just fascinated because it uses the opponent's energy against themselves. So if, if you've got somebody attacking you know, other martial arts might attack back, right. But aikido is more about maybe turning and allowing the attacker to, you know, run into a car or, you know, they turn, and you're, you're able to you know, put them in an arm twist or something like that. To use their own energy, to bring them back into a nonviolent situation. So you're trying to stop them from their own violent thing that they're trying to accomplish. And so that just fascinated me. And there's been some aikido masters that are so good at that, at sensing the opponent's energy that they can just kind of step aside and then do like a one-finger pin. And it's almost magical. What like Steven Seagal is one of these, you know, umpteenth-level aikido masters. And it's, it's fascinating. I love doing the research to be able to see what these guys could do with energy.

Debbi ([07:58](#)): Well, I think it's really cool because it just goes to show that women are capable of taking care of themselves.

Avanti ([08:09](#)): Absolutely. And I wanted to, you know, we've got, again in our genre, we have a number of situations where people have series, where there are strong women in there. And we're seeing more in kind of the FBI side of our genre, where you've got a lot of strong female protagonists, but in the action side of our genre, we have strong women, but often they're part of a team that's run by strong men. And I wanted to flip that dynamic a little bit and have a team where I had, you know, strong men, you know, love interest for Maddy and her twin brother, but I wanted her to stand on her own and be, you know, a, an integral part of the team. And so, you know, most people when they read it see Maddy as the primary protagonist and the two guys as the secondary protagonists. But I think different readers, you know, relate to different, you know, characters as is often the case. But yeah. I wanted, you know, a kick-ass female protagonist who could definitely take care of herself. Yeah.

Debbi ([09:17](#)): I love it. Absolutely love it. So, I thought you did a great job of summing up *Lost Power* in your guest post, but for anyone who didn't read it, could you give a brief description of the story?

Avanti ([09:34](#)): Yeah. So I really enjoyed all the research for *The Lost Power*. And it's basically about Maddy Marshall, who's our aikido expert taking on a sniper, a Russian sniper, and they're racing to try to find Alexander the Great's mysterious Egyptian weapon that has been lost for a millennia. And, you know, you can imagine, gosh, you know, Alexander the Great and what he accomplished and what if he did have a weapon that he found while he was taking over Egypt that allowed him to do, you know, basically he commanded the entire known world at the time.

And so I kind of take that idea of what if he did have this weapon and what if one of Maddy's ancestors found it back a thousand years ago and hid that weapon and then Maddy and Will are thrust into this situation where on a foggy Napa morning, they go to their father's place: a vineyard because he's called the family there and all of a sudden, shots ring out and their father is killed. And, with his dying breath, he tells them they have to go to an attorney in Sacramento and she gives them a letter that he had planned for which sets off this entire chain of events, where they quickly realize that they've been pulled in way over their heads, because Will's an engineer, Maddy's an app designer. And all of a sudden they're being chased by trained operatives from Russia.

Debbi ([11:12](#)): It's amazing. It's something else. It's a great story. Did you do a lot of research before you started writing or do you do the research as you're writing?

Avanti ([11:23](#)): I do both, Debbi. With *The Lost Power*, I had had the pleasure of traveling all over the world and pulled in a lot of that research that I had done in my earlier days when I had done a tremendous amount of traveling. So that fed my story and I'm a big outliner. And so, as I outline, I like to go through and think, think through the scenes, you know, I can see them in my head kind of, as I jot them down on paper. And I like to out, where are we going? You know, which particular places do, does it make most sense for this story to focus on? And I had to do a ton of research about Ramiro I who ended up being Maddy and Will's ancestor. So at the outline, stage it for the lost power, it took me well over a year to outline it, get some feedback, go back to the drawing board, redo it.

Avanti ([12:20](#)): And then as I write chapter by chapter, I tend to get into the nitty gritty, you know, so that's where if a scene is set under the streets of Jerusalem, for instance, I'll do some research on those caves that people in the Middle Ages or earlier had used and try to bring in some realistic detail. So I'll do that, you know, so there's big picture research at the outline level and then chapter-by-chapter when I'm in a setting. So if I've never used the particular weapon, for instance, that the antagonist is shooting, I'll, I'll dump into those details at that time.

Debbi ([13:00](#)): Yeah. I tend to do the same sort of thing. Yeah, definitely. Cause, you know, I won't always be able to anticipate what I need to know. So I start off with a certain amount of research and then suddenly I'll find myself going, wait a minute, I need to know more about this. So yeah, for sure. And it does sometimes take a lot of research to really understand something. I found that out the hard way by taking on a Marine veteran protagonist and never being in the Marines. So I had to learn a lot about military life. Anyway ...

Avanti ([13:36](#)): You did a great job with that though, you know, and I hadn't had to, my dad was in the Marines and I had Bear, Maddy's love interest, as a Marine. And so it's so I thought you did a great job with that with the realistic struggles that she has. And I have a different character in a story that I'm shopping right now that has PTSD. And I also thought you did a great job with that aspect of her life. That's hard to render. Yeah.

Debbi ([14:06](#)): Thank you so much because I really was, I really didn't want it to be stereotypical, but I wanted to show the pain and all that kind of stuff. Yeah. So that's great to know though. Thank you. Have you been to all the places that you depict in your book?

Avanti ([14:26](#)): Most of them, yeah, I've been, I've been to most of them. And what I like doing is when I can't go to a particular place it's kind of fun how things just sort of work out. So I was

working on *Solstice Shadows*, and I had a scene in a, in a couple of scenes in Turkey, in Istanbul. And I was at a party back when we could still, you know, be social. And I ran into somebody who had just been to Turkey. And I said, well, tell me something interesting about Turkey that I can't get from my online research. And he said, well, you know, besides serving olives for breakfast, he said apparently Istanbul is really big for men to have hair transplants. He said, so you'll walk around the town and all these guys all over the place have bandages on their heads. And so I love finding those kinds of little realistic details that, you know, and so it's, it's fun, you know, how I do the research, too, when I can't go to a place. And I've been grateful that people have been unable to tell whether or not I've been to a place. And I think the fact that I traveled all over the world for so many years really lets me zero in on those aspects of a place that really make it feel like you're being there.

Debbi (15:52): Yeah. That's one of the things I love about travel. You really get to be a part of, get immersed in the culture of wherever you're at. I'm not the accidental tourist, you know, I like to be in there, you know, seeing what people do, real people hanging out, stuff like that, just observing.

Avanti (16:15): What are some of your favorite cultures that you've seen? Is there one in particular that you really liked the best as far as a culture?

Debbi (16:22): As far as me? I thought in particular, well, it's funny. I mean, I don't know if I could pick a favorite because everybody's so different and everybody has something to recommend them in a way. But one of the things I noticed about Italy is that the food was fantastic and they eat late and everybody was real ... You know, there's a siesta period where they close. It's kind of laid back. It's kind of, but at the same time, there's a quickness to it. When you come to the coffee break stuff, you know, the espresso culture. It's not sit around sipping coffee. It's gulp and go.

Avanti (17:07): It's a drug.

Debbi (17:09): Yeah, it's a drug. It's definitely, yeah. And there's something really, really appealing about the little espresso hits. I love that. And I love the morning cappuccino. I mean, all that stuff, the food was fabulous. The art was fabulous. Everything about it was wonderful. The weather. Italy was wonderful. Rome just blew me away.

Avanti (17:33): Florence, did you make it to Florence?

Debbi (17:35): We got to Florence and saw that. Didn't have as much time there as I would have wanted, but we did get to climb Il Duomo?

Avanti (17:45): That was my favorite that, that dome, yeah.

Debbi (17:50): It was like 462 steps. I'm like, can I make it up? And I did. I did. Thank God. And but then when I went to Ireland, we went to, we did this kind of thing through the UK and Ireland. We started in Ireland, went to Scotland, then went to England and Ireland. I was just blown away by how friendly everybody was and how much people love talking about books. I would say, oh yeah, you know, I write mysteries and I was at this pub in Dublin and it was a restaurant and the waiter's like talking to me and he's like, Oh, well, have you read so-and-so and so-and-so. And I'm like, well, no, actually I haven't. Then he would just, he was just giving me all these recommendations. I was like, wow. Okay. This is our waiter, you know?

Avanti (18:45): That's fantastic.

Debbi (18:47): Yeah. I mean, I'm sure maybe he was being nice to me cause I'm a tourist. I don't know. But everybody there was so nice and they were so interested in books.

Avanti (18:57): That's good to know. Our next trip, I think, is going to be to the British Isles. We've actually been considering doing that next fall. Yeah.

Debbi (19:07): Yeah. I just loved the culture there, in general. I mean, it was great in Ireland, it was great. I enjoyed Scotland. I enjoyed London, we went to London, I met a reader who I met through blogging in Brentwood, England, which is just outside of London, kind of a suburb. And, yeah, took the train and just met him. It was like my husband and I just met this guy and his friend and we went to a coffee shop. I had coffee, they had tea. So it was great. It was fun. Every single part of it, of every trip I've been to has had some kind of interesting, cool moment like that, you know?

Avanti (20:00): That's the best part about traveling, I think, is making those little connections and, and to some extent, having the awareness that you may never come this way again. And so it made it all much more intense, I think, because it was unique and, and so different and you know, like little ships passing in the night, the people that you would meet. I remember one time in Spain where a friend and I were traveling and we were backpacking all over Europe and we were going from one place in Spain to another. And we got into a a cabin where, you know, we had seats that sat across from each other and it was the middle of the day. And they, they offered us part of their lunch, you know? And we're like, no, no, you know, cause we spoke just this much Spanish and they were just thrilled that we spoke just a little bit of Spanish. And so they insisted on sharing their wine and their meal. I think they had, you know, bread and cheese or something and some wine and they were just so warm and so generous. And that kind of little moment just stuck with me about how warm and generous the, you know, the people that we met were.

Debbi (21:16): It's great, isn't it? Just getting out there and meeting people like that. Yeah. Let's talk about your second book then, *Solstice Shadows*. You delve into the subject of archeoastronomy, is that how it's pronounced? Now, there's a subject that probably requires research, I assume.

Avanti (21:41): I am not an archeoastronomer. So I created a character who was, and yeah, it's fascinating. So, you know, for instance, one of the places that I traveled to I don't know, back in 1990-something was [inaudible] and I was just fascinated by how these ancient people knew enough to align this pyramid with the stars. So that at the Equinox, there would be this shadow show of, of lights that looked like a serpent wriggling its way down the face of this pyramid. I just thought that was fantastic. And I knew that there were other places around the world that had similar light shows that the ancient people had put together. And I wanted to similar to there's a little bit of that. And I think it's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, one of the Indiana Jones movies. And, and so I wanted to play on that a little bit more, but again, with more of a a little bit more depth.

Avanti (22:48): And so the reader gets to experience four or five of these places around the globe that have clues that, you know, so we're trying to save the world. The item that we're trying to find is a superconductive meteor and the Russians wish to use the superconductivity from

this material to fuel a quantum computer. So I have a background in IT and was also able to use some of that knowledge to make a very realistic threat. And you've probably seen the headlines lately that the Russians have been hacking all kinds of our government systems in *Solstice Shadows*, the threat is that they're able to do that by using a quantum computer that gives them the keys to the kingdom. And, you know, I've just been looking at the headlines lately and just horrified, shaking my head, because having them inside all of our systems is so horrible.

Avanti (23:50): But back to the archaeoastronomy, that's a little bit more fun. And you know, I hate it when my threats actually come true because they're meant to be fun-scary, and not real scary. But yeah, it's neat to travel the world with our heroes. We would need to go to, I mentioned Turkey a little bit earlier. We get to go to the Valley of the Kings, and I can't give away where we end up because you know, that that's no fun, but a number of places that just make for fantastic thriller settings with the atmosphere I find.

Debbi (24:30): It's fantastic. I keep thinking. I was going to compare it to Indiana Jones, and I'm thinking like Tomb Raider with Brains or something like that.

Avanti (24:40): Yeah. Something like that. Yeah. One of, one of my fellow authors blurbed it and called it a modern *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Debbi (24:49): I love that.

Avanti (24:51): Yeah. That fit pretty well.

Debbi (24:53): You are a plotter by nature, and so I was wondering, do you anticipate a certain number of books being written in this series? Have you planned it out?

Avanti (25:09): I've thought about that, but I don't have a planned end date. Right now, I'm working on the third book in the series and it ties together some of the, it will be a standalone and it will pull in little tidbits that we've learned about the characters in the past. So that's really fun. I also just completed a, a standalone that is, is kind of fun too, that one's about Cleopatra. And this one that I'm working on now for the VanOp series is about Nostradamus. So I like pulling in these, you know, big historical figures and finding some interesting threads that their life may have, you know, somehow they're their long shadow may be affecting us in, in present day. So I don't know, seven sounds like a good number, but I don't want to commit to that. You know, I kind of know where the characters are going to end up at the end of the series. And I do think there will be an end of series. I know that as much as I love some of my fellow authors, 13, 15 books in the series, I just get a little bit tired. And I think personally, I might get bored if I write more than I dunno, seven or something, but we'll see. I'm just going to take it a book at a time and, and see where, see where the heroes take us.

Debbi (26:35): That's awesome. I can't blame you. And I think that Sue Grafton probably came to regret following the alphabet.

Avanti (26:44): *Z Is for Zombie* after reading 26 of these. Yeah.

Debbi (26:52): Imagine writing them and trying to be different, be different each time. To do something a little bit different, tweaking them somehow to make them ...

Avanti (27:03): Yeah. I'm already having that challenge with just three in the series. It's like, okay, wait, what? So we did that in *The Lost Power* and we did this in *Solstice Shadows* and be great to have this, Oh no, wait. We already had that sort of scene. So let's come up with something else and yeah. But you know, our imaginations are unlimited and I'm sure her fans just, it, there's also something comforting about diving into a world that an author has created for you. You know, there's, there's certain authors that I just love looking forward to their next book in the series because it's you know, I think Greg Hurwitz, for instance, just does a fantastic job with the Orphan X series. And he, he pulls in not only is his character unique, but he also does a good job with bringing some emotion into the story. And as thriller writers, the primary emotion that I think our readers feel is that suspense, edge of your seat. But I think it's the mark of a real master when there's other emotions at play that you can evoke in the, in the reader as well. And I think Greg does a masterful job at that, which makes me want to keep, you know, going back. Debbi (28:22): Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. Characters are extremely important. Characters that a person can relate with at some level, feel for Since your series has such a strong and capable female protagonist, have you ever thought of pitching it as a movie or a TV show?

Avanti (28:43): Absolutely. I'm, I'm waiting for that producer to give me a call. And as a matter of fact, I tweeted Gal Gadot the other day. Well, not her, but I put a tweet out to my followers saying who else thinks Gal Gadot would make a great Maddy Marshall? I think she would just be fantastic. So if anybody out there knows Gal Gadot, please put us in touch. I think she'd be great.

Debbi (29:04): All right. Sounds good to me. Who would you picture playing Will and Bear?

Avanti (29:12): Oh, you know Bear, I kind of picture as a really young Bruce Willis, you know. He's, he's got that stocky shoulders and, and Will, I don't know. I'd let the casting director pick that one. He's, he and Maddy are both tall. They both have dark hair, hers starts out long and then she has to cut it. And so it's been growing. His is kind of, you know, messy curly, and they both have a little bit of olive skin because of their Spanish heritage. And he's got, you know, beautiful, beautiful white teeth, big, big, ornery smile. So I would let the casting director figure out who Will, who Will, would be.

Debbi (29:55): Ryan Gosling?

Avanti (29:57): Yeah, sure. As long as he looks a little bit like Gal Gadot, you know, cause they need to be twins. So maybe Gal Gadot's brother. Yeah.

Debbi (30:08): Cool. Let's see. You've already mentioned a few authors that you love. Are there any other authors you consider favorites?

Avanti (30:18): Hmm. Well, I was just thinking about the Cemetery Forgotten books. Have you read that one? He's got four series, Spanish author, died recently. I'll think of it probably later but his, that Cemetery of the Forgotten Books series. Ruiz, Carlos Ruiz Zafón is a fantastic exercise in atmosphere. It's set in Barcelona back during the war and just filled with smokey cigarettes and fog and old decaying buildings and dark nights. And he just does an amazing job of, you know, building the suspense through atmosphere. Fantastic. And he brings in just a little bit of, you know, the fantastic kind of like I do. And he did just a wonderful job with that series. He had stories within stories. I think there were four books total. Some of them took place at different times during the war. The last one was great. He brought in a female protagonist and it was very,

very well done. And unfortunately he passed away last year. Carlos Ruiz Zafón and the Cemetery Forgotten books. I would recommend that series.

Debbi ([31:58](#)): I'll definitely have to check those out. Is there anything else you'd like to add that I haven't asked you about?

Avanti ([32:05](#)): Oh, I would just like to tell people that my books are available in audio. And there, you can ask for them at your local retailer or get them online and for people who just kind of want to check them out, the first six chapters are free on my website. And if you can't remember how to spell my name vanops-dot-net refers over to AvantiCentrae-dot-com. So if you just want to check out those first six chapters, go to vanops-dot-net..

Debbi ([32:33](#)): All right. Well, I'm so glad you were on today. Thank you so much, Avanti.

Avanti ([32:38](#)): Thank you for hosting, Debbi. It's been a pleasure.

Debbi ([32:41](#)): Same here. Thanks. Remember everyone that the Crime Cafe is Patreon supported and for bonus content and early access to the podcast among other things, you can become a patron. Check out the Patreon page on my website, DebbiMack-dot-com. And our next episode will feature Phillip Thompson. Until next time, happy holidays, take care. And happy reading!