

The Crime Cafe with Lee Matthew Goldberg

Presented By:



Debbi (00:54): Hi everyone. My guest for this episode writes thriller novels and he writes for adults and young adults. His books are in various stages of development for film and TV. He's also editor-in-chief and co-founder of Fringe dedicated to publishing fiction that's outside the box. That sounds interesting. He is a contributor to several publications, including Pipeline Artists. His pilots and screenplays have been finalists in Script Pipeline, Book Pipeline, Stage 32, WeScreenplay, Screencraft, and the Hollywood Screenplay Contest. He is also co-curator of the Guerilla Lit Reading Series. I'm very pleased to have with me today, author and screenwriter Lee Matthew Goldberg. Hi Lee. It is wonderful to have you on.

Lee (01:52): Hi Debbi. Yeah, thanks so much for having me on,

Debbi (01:54): Oh, it's my pleasure. Believe me and I, I had to get in the mention of Stage 32 because I'm on there, too. And it's just ...

Lee (02:01): Oh, it's good. It's, it's a good, it's a good resource. I think if you, you know, are a budding screenwriter and you're looking to like get in the industry and figure out how.

Debbi (02:11): Yes, yes, absolutely. I couldn't agree with you more. It, it is an excellent resource. So let's start off. I wanted to start off. How did you start off writing novels or screenplays?

Lee (02:26): I mean, if we really go back in time, I was like a kid trying out writing screenplays, but my first actual publication was a novel in 2015 and then I had my second book optioned and there was some interest and it, it all seemed great and then everything fell apart. And in my mind I was like, well, let me just try to adapt all of my works. And then I could be the one trying to feed it to producers and try to make something happen. So that's kind of my goal now. I, I, I write the scripts of all my books and try to see what could happen.

Debbi (03:03): Mm-Hmm <affirmative> is there a form you enjoy? Do you enjoy doing both equally or do you prefer one format over the other?

Lee (03:14): I mean, definitely I'm a novelist first and you know, the, the time it takes to create a novel, you're giving yourself over a lot more. But I almost like screenplays now as like palate cleansers. Between books, it's a good way of me, like, you know, recharging my mind to get ready to write the next book ultimately. And if a screenplay happens and it can go forward, it winds up being a lot more money than a novel sometimes. So it could help you know, financially.

Debbi (03:49): True, true. Just outta curiosity, do you find writing screenplays more emotionally involving than novels?

Lee (04:00): No definitely novels are more emotionally involving. Screenplays like I'm working? I'm, I'm developing one of my books with a, with an actress right now into a TV show and I'm, I'm almost at the whim of her and her people, so it's like kind of whatever they want in a good way. But you, you kind of have to detach yourself a little bit from the characters, the character being turned over from the book is becoming a, a different person almost, and it's better for a TV show, but ultimately as a writer, it's like, you have to let go of the character a little bit.

Debbi (04:36): Mm-Hmm <affirmative> I was gonna say you do adaptations then?

Lee (04:41): Yeah. Yeah. I have, like one or two scripts that are original, but most of the time I'm adapting my own stuff and trying to make it happen.

Debbi (04:51): Mm-Hmm <affirmative> yeah. That's excellent. An excellent strategy, by the way. How do you divide your time between different projects?

Lee (05:01): So I'm pretty much always writing every once in a while. When I finish a project, maybe I'll take a week or two off. But I'm always working on something. So like right now I'm finishing up edits for a book I've been working on a really, really, really long time. And then after that, I'll probably take a break and maybe adapt one into a script and, and, and do that. And yeah, I, I pretty much work every day. I come I'm in Central Park now taking a break from working. So usually you could find me there under a tree in, in nice weather.

Debbi (05:35): <Laugh> I was gonna say for anybody, who's listening to this, as opposed to watching it on YouTube he's sitting in Central Park, there's a tree behind him, and the sun is shining at such an angle, but it gives him almost an angelic look.

Lee (05:48): <Laugh> yeah, there's the, there's the sun. <Laugh>

Debbi (05:52): Very nice.

Lee (05:54): It's good for me to sorry to interrupt, but just living in the city and it being so chaotic all the time. I find just being in nature, it's, it just really helps my creative mind.

Debbi (06:07): I hear that loud and clear.

Lee (06:08): Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> yeah, yeah.

Debbi (06:11): So your books are all thrillers, correct?

Lee (06:16): My young adult series, I would say is not a thriller. But all my adult books are and some of them have a little bit of a sci-fi kind of connection to it.

Debbi (06:27): Mm-Hmm <affirmative> your thriller, your adult books are all standalones though, right?

Lee (06:35): No, actually my, my current books that just came out is a five-book series. But other than that, yeah, they've all been standalones. So there's, there's one I'm thinking of maybe writing a sequel to, by I book the ancestor. I would love to go back into that world, but yeah, right now my, my series, *The Desire Card* came out. So the fourth book just dropped this week. And it's called *Vicious Ripples*, and it's about a really awful organization called *The Desire Card* that promises any wish fulfilled for the right price. And usually the price is you know, more menacing than anybody could imagine.

Debbi (07:14): Uh-Huh <affirmative> yes, yes. There goes your soul, right? <Laugh>

Lee (07:20): Yes. Yeah. That's literally the tagline, you know, it's those whose souls are indebted to this organization basically.

Debbi (07:27): Hoo boy. <Laugh> Let's see. Your YA books. What are they like and what brought you into writing for young adults?

Lee (07:37): Yeah I, I kind of wanted to take a break from thriller writing and like killing people <laugh>

Debbi (07:43): <Laugh>

Lee (07:45): So I wanted to show like kinda my sweet side and I had this really great idea about a girl in the 1990s who runs away from home to become a grunge singer, like her idols Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love. And each chapter, it, it almost reads like a mix tape. Each chapter is set to a different song from the grunge era. And it's called *Runaway Train*, which was a big song by Soul Asylum back then. And yeah, it, I don't know. I always like to challenge myself. So it was, you know, in the voice of a 16-year-old girl. I am not that. So it was just a way for me to see if I could try a different type of character. And, and that's the series actually that I'm working on developing into a TV show right now. So it it's, it's got the most notice in that world randomly,

Debbi (08:38): Well, that's fantastic. That's great. It's great to write in that character's voice and not be that person, you know? <Laugh>

Lee (08:46): Yeah, yeah. It was really fun. I mean, I, I sort of found her humor first and then I related to that and then just, you know, remembered my own experiences from being a 16-year-old back then. And I kind of just, you know, molded the character around that. So it's a three-book series, so I was, I was in her head for three books actually.

Debbi (09:06): <Laugh> So you really get to know this character.

Lee (09:09): I get to know this character well. Yeah, yeah. I know, I know Nico pretty well now. And now that we're, you know, adapting it potentially as a show the, the character's changing a, a lot she's, she's a softer Nico than in the books. She's, she's a lot like harder and a little more unlikable and TV really likes characters to be likable. So that's, that's been, the biggest hurdle is really making her like vulnerable

Debbi (09:37): Mm-Hmm <affirmative> yeah. Likable enough for TV.

Lee (09:41): Yeah.

Debbi (09:41): Yeah, yeah. I mean, other than *Better Call Saul*, you know, I'm trying to think of a dislikable character, who you could end up liking.

Lee (09:51): Yeah. Yeah, I mean, you could go back to like *The Sopranos*, *Breaking Bad*, you know, all of those shows, but you know, like even in *The Sopranos*, like, you know, he fed the ducks. Like there was always like a nice quality about a character like that. But, but with Nico, we're really trying to, especially there there's an actress interested, so it's her role, so it's a lot of her input into what she wants the character to be, and I'm completely open to that. I like when actually a movie or a TV show based on a book kind of takes on its own life and becomes its own project. So I'm really open to whatever is best for the character in the show.

Debbi (10:34): Cool. Have her save a cat. <Laugh>

Lee ([10:37](#)): Yes, yes. Yeah. There's there's, there's no animals, you know, killed in this at all. Yeah.

Debbi ([10:44](#)): Excellent. Good to hear. I have to say I'm impressed with how well your screenplays have placed in various contests.

Lee ([10:51](#)): Oh, thank you. Yeah, it's been really cool. It it's helped me meet people in the industry. I, I don't know if anything has directly like happened from it. You know, a lot of my projects have gone like two steps forward and then one step back. But I've met a lot of people through it that I'm, that I've stuck in touch with. And I think for any, you know, budding screenwriters, it's, it's such a tough industry to bring into that any feedback you can get, I think is good feedback really, you know, from professionals.

Debbi ([11:25](#)): Yes, absolutely. I agree with you. That's wonderful. You said you write these screenplays is kind of palate cleansers between novels. So is your process to kind of roughly outline and then sit down and take two days and just bang it out or do you take a little bit longer and ...

Lee ([11:44](#)): Yeah, it usually takes a little bit longer.

Debbi ([11:46](#)): <Laugh> Some people are just like--wham!--I do it during a weekend.

Lee ([11:51](#)): <Laugh> Yeah. I mean, they, it definitely is faster than writing the book itself. But the real challenge is you know, like killing all your darlings, like so much has to be cut from a book, especially if it's being made into a TV series, extended, but, you know, a movie that's 90 pages from a 400-page book, you know, a lot has to go. So that, that I find is the biggest challenge and I've actually once done it in reverse. I wrote the script and then I adapted it into a book and it was like an action thriller. So it, it almost became like a really great outline that then I was able to, you know extend.

Debbi ([12:34](#)): Yeah. Yeah. It's almost as if by writing the novel that, you know, based on the screenplay, you can improve the screenplay, too.

Lee ([12:42](#)): Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Both like hand in hand, like as I'm getting it to be a better screenwriter, it's helping me become a better novelist and like a lot more of like eliminating anything unnecessary I've learned. That's been a really good trick where maybe I was a little too flowery before in my prose.

Debbi ([13:03](#)): Yeah. I get where you're coming from on that. <Laugh>, Let me see. What's the experience of having your books optioned been like?

Lee ([13:16](#)): Well, <laugh> not great to be honest. Yeah, I mean, I've had stuff be optioned and then it fell apart pretty much every time. With one of my projects in particular, it's happened multiple times. This current thing with the, with the young adult series is the furthest something has gone in terms of, you know, people attached, in interest. So this project has been great so far. Everything else? No.

Debbi ([13:50](#)): <Laugh> Wow. Sorry to hear that.

Lee ([13:54](#)): Well, you know, it's sort of just the way it is, but it makes me be like, okay no project is ever dead. Options expire, the rights revert back to you. And then, you know, I try again basically, you know, and if this thing goes forward, I think that will obviously open up a lot of doors for a lot of the other ones. So, you know, I'm motivated and patient as much as possible.

Debbi ([14:21](#)): You have to be when you're in this business. It's just amazing.

Lee ([14:26](#)): And sometimes, I mean, this wasn't my experience, but I, I know a lot of people, their works get optioned over and over and over again, and it's a good paycheck that you wind up, even if it never gets made, that you wind up just getting. So sometimes you could pretty much live off the option. Mine were not those, but <laugh> maybe one day, maybe one day.

Debbi ([14:51](#)): Yeah. Keep at it. It'll happen.

Lee ([14:53](#)): Yeah. Yeah.

Debbi ([14:55](#)): So tell us about Fringe. What kind of outside of the box fiction does it publish?

Lee ([15:01](#)): Yeah, so we actually haven't started up yet. We originally were going to start right before COVID and then COVID happened and it just kind of put a wrench in it. But it will happen eventually. And what, what I'm looking for is like books that would be on the fringe that should be published by the mainstream publishers, but for whatever reason, they're afraid of it. It's too out there. Those are the kind of books that, that I want. And I'm interested also in authors that have also a screenwriting background, because I wanna try to feed those books as much as possible into producer's hands and, and people like that. And, you know, make it happen beyond just being a novel. So we're maybe aiming for 2023, but I have a feeling it'll probably be like 2024.

Debbi ([15:57](#)): Hmm. Wow.

Lee ([15:58](#)): It'll happen when it's meant to happen.

Debbi ([16:01](#)): So this could be an interesting opportunity for writers out there who are ...

Lee ([16:05](#)): Yeah. Yeah, definitely. There's a few manuscripts that I sort of have in my back pocket of people that we were interested in. My business partner and I just need to do it when it's absolutely the right time for myself. But I'd really like to be able to put works out there that would potentially be overlooked because they're too weird. Almost like if David Lynch was to write a book, that's what we're looking for.

Debbi ([16:38](#)): That's awesome. I like that.

Lee ([16:39](#)): <Laugh> Yeah. Yeah. I love David Lynch so like a David Lynch novel, send it along. Yeah.

Debbi ([16:46](#)): Wow. I, I love this concept.

Lee ([16:48](#)): Thank you. Thank you.

Debbi ([16:50](#)): How did you get involved in curating the Guerilla Lit Reading Series?

Lee ([16:55](#)): Yeah, so Guerilla Lit, I think we're 13 or 14 years old at this point. And it was a bunch of people. I got my MFA, the new school and right after we graduated a few of my friends and I were kind of like, oh, it'd be awesome if we started up a reading series where you could support other writers like ourselves, and it's been going strong ever since. So we used to do every month and now we really only do spring and fall. But we'll be back at Dixon Place down on the Lower East Side the last Wednesday in September. So if you're around, come on out.

Debbi ([17:33](#)): That's so cool. Is it strictly a local thing?

Lee ([17:38](#)): Well actually over the pandemic, we did it virtual. So we had people, you know, from all over and then for a minute we did it hybrid. So like I was hosting it, it, and in the back we had a projection of, you know, an author, not from New York City. But it's too difficult to do that every time. So we're going back to just live now. But sometimes we'll get authors who are passing through, they're on a book tour. And we usually aim for three authors a night and we've had, you know, great people over the years. Like I remember Lev Grossman read for us once when his Magicians Series came out. And I mean, you know, a thousand people maybe over the last 14 years, well, no, maybe not a thousand, maybe like 300.

Debbi ([18:28](#)): Feels like a thousand.

Lee ([18:30](#)): <Laugh> Yeah, yeah. I mean, three, three year, 12 months. So about 40 a year. Okay. So 14 years. Yeah. About 600. Yeah.

Debbi ([18:39](#)): Not a bad figure.

Lee ([18:40](#)): No. Oh no, it's been really cool. And I it's, it's helpful to meet so many people in the community as well.

Debbi ([18:47](#)): Yes. Yes it is. Isn't it? What writers inspire you most and who are your favorites?

Lee ([18:56](#)): So I'm kind of all over the place. Like I write mostly thrillers, but I sort of love everybody I'm reading right now. Blake Crouch novel. I love Blake Crouch. This is his new one. I love John Irving, Paul Auster. Going back, one of my favorite books is Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway. If it's a good book, I'll read it. Yeah. Romance. That's probably the only genre I don't read.

Debbi ([19:31](#)): <Laugh> Same here. <Laugh>

Lee ([19:33](#)): Yeah, that's not for me, but you know, and like kid lit too, like I'll, I enjoy a good YA as well.

Debbi ([19:41](#)): Same here. Yeah, YA books are really, I think just universally liked. They can be.

Lee ([19:50](#)): Yeah. I've been reading a bunch of like one set in the nineties. So I just finished this one *Ballad of Suburbia*. I'm forgetting the author's last name, her first name's Stephanie. It was, it was really good. It was like a very hard look at like teenage life in suburbia in the nineties. But

it captured it just so well, like it was just so well written and done. So yeah, I always love a good YA. I'm not so much like fantasy YA. That's not really my thing, but nothing against it.

Debbi ([20:22](#)): <Laugh>, What's the name of that book again?

Lee ([20:25](#)): It's called *Ballads of Suburbia*.

Debbi ([20:28](#)): *Ballads of Suburbia*.

Lee ([20:29](#)): Yeah. Stephanie, the author's last name, start with a Z. I forget the last name.

Debbi ([20:35](#)): Sounds very interesting.

Lee ([20:36](#)): Yeah, it was, it was good. And it was kind of similar to mine. Like it, it was set to music and music was a big part of it. And I wanna say it was written about 10 years ago. See, I read that there was another one. It, it wasn't it's not YA, but it was about sort of, you know, teenage life in turn of the century, this last century. It was called *The Brittanys* and that was really good by Brittany Ackerman. I really like that.

Debbi ([21:06](#)): Hmm. let's see. Time management. How do you manage to do all the things you do?

Lee ([21:18](#)): Yeah, time management's tough. I usually like get all my business outta the way in the morning. And then like one to five is my writing time usually. So afternoons and I, I can't really write for more than a couple hours a day. I find my brain just stops working. So I'll usually kind of force myself to stop unless I'm on my last book, I was on a deadline for, and I, I hadn't really started it. It was part of the five-book series and it was the last one and I've never written a book so fast. I wrote it in like three weeks, three and a half weeks. I mean, it was, it's like a novella, 200 pages. But that I was working like six hours of writing every day. That was crazy. Yeah. Yeah. I don't ever wanna do that again. <Laugh> but I think it turned out well, it, it, it, it reads like a fever dream. So I, I, I think it worked that it was written, so like kind of chaotically.

Debbi ([22:23](#)): Hmm. Yeah. What are you watching on TV these days? What's good on TV in your opinion?

Lee ([22:30](#)): Yeah. I love TV. I'm honestly sometimes more influenced by TV and film than books even. I think I remember it was before we started the podcast. We were talking about *Better Call Saul*. I just finished the series finale. It was wonderful. Like just every season of that show was great in its own way. I love, love, love that show. What else? Oh, I loved *Hacks*. That's a great show on HBO Max. I was really into *Hacks*. I, I just watched *The Sandman* on Netflix. <Laugh> I really was into it. And then I wasn't,

Debbi ([23:10](#)): <Laugh>, That's funny how things work out that way sometimes.

Lee ([23:14](#)): Yeah. Like it started out great. And then, I don't know. Sometimes I feel like they fall into like the same plots where it was like a girl in peril and they have to get her and they, you know, like it lost, it's like, you know, mystique to it. So that one, I was a little bit bummed that it wasn't better. Trying think what else. And yeah, I've, I've been seeing a lot of movies lately, so I've just been really influenced by film too.

Debbi ([23:43](#)): What's a good movie that's come out recently that you've liked?

Lee ([23:49](#)): That I've seen recently. The last movie I saw the other day was *Bodies Bodies Bodies*. It's like a teen horror film. But it's satire. So even though it felt a little stupid, it actually was really good. And it had a lot to say about social media and, you know, the generation that kind of came up in it. And it had a twist at the ... I see every twist coming. I did not see this twist coming. So if you're looking for a good twist and like just a good, quick fun movie, yeah, that was really good. *Bodies Bodies Bodies*. Really great movie. The last one was probably *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. That was just amazing.

Debbi ([24:38](#)): That's one I definitely have to see.

Lee ([24:40](#)): Oh, it, I need to see it again. It was just, it was just like a perfect movie. It was so good and weird and interesting. And great action. Yeah, that, that one I highly recommend.

Debbi ([24:52](#)): Well, the fact that you love David Lynch so much wins me over right away. It's kinda like, yeah, I can totally relate. I love that guy.

Lee ([25:00](#)): I remember being like, I don't know, 10 when *Twin Peaks* came out and I just, I never was so obsessed with something. I would like think about it and think about it. And then when it came on, I think it came on like Saturdays or something. I just would be like so excited. And then in my own time, I was like bored in like math classes. So I was writing my own *Twin Peaks*, like when the teacher wasn't looking. And that, that was my first real instance where I was like, oh, I wanna write. So yeah, David Lynch is a huge, huge influence,

Debbi ([25:38](#)): Very influential. What advice would you give to someone who's interested in writing for a living?

Lee ([25:45](#)): Yeah, I mean, I think that, you know, first of all, you have to be able to take rejection and know that rejection is gonna be a huge part of this career and to be able to just shrug it off, but also to take it in and get better each time. So like, you know, writing is all about editing. It's about, you know, making your writing stronger and stronger. So rejection is a good thing. It, it only you know, enhances your work. So you have to have a really thick skin. And you know, it's like somebody who wants to be a singer. Like you have to know how to, you have to have that talent, if you're really gonna pursue this as a career. Not everybody can write, but if you really feel, and you've been told that, like you have the talent, then you're meant to be a writer and that's what you should be doing. Like find, you know, even if you have a full-time job, you write on the side, like find whatever, whether it's an hour a day before work or an hour a day afterwards, you know, just find the time and get all your thoughts down on paper.

Debbi ([26:51](#)): Amen to that. Great advice.

Lee ([26:54](#)): Thank you.

Debbi ([26:56](#)): Is there anything else you'd like to add that I haven't asked you about?

Lee ([27:01](#)): No, this was great, Debbi. And, and yeah. If people are interested in my work, my latest series The Desire Card series is out—four out of the five books. And if you're looking for some good kind of espionage, thrillers pick them up.

Debbi ([27:19](#)): Fantastic. Well, it sounds great. Thank you so much for being with us today.

Lee ([27:24](#)): Oh, thank you too. Yeah, this was amazing. Thank you so much for having me.

Debbi ([27:27](#)): It was a pleasure. Believe me and to all you listeners just remember to please leave a review if you enjoyed the, the episode and if you'd like to access bonus episodes and other perks, check us out on Patreon. On that note, our next guest will be coming up in another week. In the meantime, take care and happy reading.