

# The Crime Cafe with D.P. Lyle

Presented By:



**Debbi:** [00:00:12] 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 boxed set and the short story anthology. You can find the buy links for both on my website [DebbiMacke.com](http://DebbiMacke.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.

[00:01:01] It's my great pleasure to have with me today an author, forensics expert, and consultant. My guest has won and been nominated for multiple prestigious awards for his works of fiction, and along with writing numerous works of fiction, he consults with other novelists and television writers on shows that include: *Law & Order*, *CSI: Miami*, *Diagnosis Murder*, *Monk*, *House*, *Pretty Little Liars*, and more. My guest is none other than DP Lyle. It's so great to have you on today, Doug. Thanks for being here.

**D.P.:** [00:01:49] Thanks for having me, Debbi, I appreciate it.

**Debbi:** [00:01:50] To say that you have an impressive body of work is understating things. For the benefit of listeners, how would you describe the types of books that you write?

**D.P.:** [00:02:01] Well, I write both nonfiction and fiction, but my fiction works are mostly darker thrillers. But my Jake Longly, my newest series is comedic thrillers. I like comedy. And, you know, I'm a funny guy. What do you mean? So I write these comedic thrillers, and I'm really having fun with them. I was working on the fourth Jake book this morning. So, yeah.

**Debbi:** [00:02:28] That's awesome. Tell us about Jake, then. What's he like? What's that protagonist like?

**D.P.:** [00:02:34] Well, there's a lot of me in Jake, of course, and there's a lot of Jake in Jake, but he's an ex-professional baseball player who now owns a bar in Gulf Shores, Alabama. And his idea of life is to own a bar and chase bikinis. And his father, Ray, is ex-military spook world, special ops guy who's a P.I. now. And he doesn't understand

why Jake won't work for him. But Jake always ends up mainly through his new love interest, Nicole, gets drug into Ray's world and all these cases. So you would say that Jake is a reluctant P.I. He doesn't want to be there, but he always ends up there.

**Debbi:** [00:03:18] Hmm. So the chasing bikinis part always makes me think of John McDonald.

**D.P.:** [00:03:25] Right.

**Debbi:** [00:03:26] So he's not quite the white knight. Or is he?

**D.P.:** [00:03:29] Oh, no, no. No, Jake's got his history. He's got an ex-wife named Tammy the Insane, as he calls her, who actually married the attorney that handled the divorce and that kind of thing. But then so Tammy always calls Jake for advice, though she doesn't like him. And she argues with him all the time. But she always calls him for advice, and it drives him crazy. And then Nicole, his new love interest is hot, but smart and tough and clever and focused. And so she's different than Jake, too. Jake is kind of one of these guys that gets through life on good looks and wit and charm. But he gets forced into situations that forces him to use skills he had no idea he had.

**Debbi:** [00:04:17] Mm-hmm. That sounds interesting.

**D.P.:** [00:04:20] It's a fun story. They're all comedic based, I mean. They're situational comedy, so to speak, with a lot of murders.

**Debbi:** [00:04:30] Oh, that's always cool.

**D.P.:** [00:04:32] Yeah, exactly.

**Debbi:** [00:04:33] Murder with laughs is always cool.

**D.P.:** [00:04:36] Exactly.

**Debbi:** [00:04:38] How did you end up focusing on forensic science? You practice cardiology, right.

**D.P.:** [00:04:45] Right. Well, when I started writing fiction, you'd go to writers' conferences and writers would come up to you and want to ask you questions about stuff. Now, if you go to a cocktail party in the general public, they want to know about their gallbladder and their cholesterol, you know, when they find out you're a doctor. But in writers' conferences, they want to know about poisons and gunshot wounds and what dead bodies look like. And so I started researching it for that kind of to help writers and to answer questions for them. And I think I've got about six thousand questions on my computer from writers over the last 25 years about their stories and the forensic science. It wasn't hard to learn. I mean, it would be hard to learn and actually work in that field, which I don't do. I just work with the science of it to explain it for writers. But the language is the same as medicine. It's exactly the same science. So that's something, you know, I've done for 40, 50 years. So I know that science and like I said, the vocabulary of any new field is the hard part. Once you understand the vocabulary, you can understand the field. Well, I already knew the vocabulary. So the difference between pharmacology in a hospital and toxicology in a crime lab is really none. It's just one you're dealing with dead bodies and the other you're dealing with living folks. But the science and the chemistry is the same.

**Debbi:** [00:06:04] Mm-hmm. Absolutely, yes. So you saw a need there, and you decided to fill it.

**D.P.:** [00:06:13] Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And that's kind of how FORENSICS FOR DUMMIES came about. When I wrote that book, obviously for the general public, but I was thinking of crime writers and what would they need? What would they want to know? How would this subject help them? Because in this day and age, even if you're writing a cozy, you know, that doesn't have a high body count or whatever, though, cozies do get body counts. It's just they're not very graphic. But you still have to know about forensic science. You have to know what's out there and you have to know what's possible, even if you don't dwell on it because it's there. And if you ignore it, readers are going to say, wait a minute. I don't buy this. You know? Why didn't they do DNA or why didn't they do a chemical analysis of the hair? Why didn't they do this, this, this, which you don't dwell on in cozies. But they have to be there. They're part of the story. You cannot ignore it in this day and age. The only way to ignore it is set your crime novel 50 years ago.

**Debbi:** [00:07:15] Yes, exactly.

**D.P.:** [00:07:17] Which is also cool.

**Debbi:** [00:07:20] Absolutely. Yeah, no problem with that. You can do whatever you want in the story.

**D.P.:** [00:07:24] Exactly.

**Debbi:** [00:07:27] Let's see. What's the biggest mistake you see writers make when they write about this area?

**D.P.:** [00:07:34] Well, understanding terminology. They don't really understand what a heart attack is. So they say when someone dies, they had a heart attack. But a heart attack is a specific entity that the coroner can 99.999 percent determine. It's a plugged artery with damage to the heart. But people die arrhythmic deaths. They die from the heart for other reasons. And they kind of lump them all into one. I think number two is poisons, that people don't really understand poisons. They want to give someone a poison and have them die twelve hours later. Well, I mean, can that happen? Sure. But they want them to die suddenly and quickly. In general, things that kill you quickly kill you quickly. Meaning shortly after you take it. Cyanide is not going to wait twelve hours to kill you and then kill you in three minutes. It's not going to happen that way. And so I always say poisons don't have timers, and you can time the delivery of the poison. You know, you can put it in their coffee cup and they don't have coffee till the next morning. Fine. That works. But they're going to die pretty quickly. Then I think finally, it's not understanding unconsciousness. How many times have you seen ... this goes back 100 years. Someone gets knocked out, put in the trunk of a car. They drive for three hours, then they open the trunk, throw water on them, and they wake up. It doesn't work that way. If you're knocked unconscious, you're going to wake up in a few minutes, and you're going to be furious, unless something really, really, really bad happened. And then you're not going to wake up at all or you're not going to wake up normal.

**Debbi:** [00:09:09] Yeah. One of the things I've always been amazed by is in these old movies, when the detective gets the crap beaten out him, there is not a single bruise.

**D.P.:** [00:09:19] Not a scratch.

**Debbi:** [00:09:23] Not a scratch, not a bruise, no concussion, no problem.

**D.P.:** [00:09:26] And you can bump into a door and get a black eye.

**Debbi:** [00:09:26] Get up, splash water on your face, walk away.

**D.P.:** [00:09:29] Their hair is perfect.

**Debbi:** [00:09:33] Absolutely. Absolutely. Let's see. Well, I have to ask, since you were on *Diagnosis Murder*, what was it like to work with Dick Van Dyke? Did you get to work with him at all?

**D.P.:** [00:09:45] No, I didn't. I didn't work on the TV series at all. What I worked on was the novels with Lee Goldberg. And I worked on all the Monk novels with him. And so I worked with Lee a lot. I've known Lee a long time. He's a prolific writer. He's amazing. But I work with him on the novelizations of these. I did work with him on a couple of *Monk* episodes for TV. "Mr. Monk goes to Mexico" was one of them. I forget what the other one was, but it's a different world. The screenwriting world and the novel writing world are two entirely different worlds. You tell stories differently. We were talking about it earlier before we went on the air. Anybody can write a screenplay, but not anybody can write a good screenplay. It's very, very difficult. It's a lot harder than it looks. You see all that blank, all that white, and you say, oh, I can do this. Well, sure you can do this. You can write a screenplay in a week, but it'll be awful because of the economy of words. But novels take more time. And Lee's great at it. So I worked on the novels for those.

**Debbi:** [00:10:58] Cool. Lee's a funny guy, too.

**D.P.:** [00:11:02] He's insane. I'll be seeing him in a couple of days. I'm sure we'll go have a steak.

**Debbi:** [00:11:08] Well, tell him that Debbi Mack says hi. Please, because he's cool. Let's see. And *Monk* is cool.

**D.P.:** [00:11:18] Oh, yeah. Yeah.

**Debbi:** [00:11:20] Other than book writing and consulting, what do you do?

**D.P.:** [00:11:26] Practice medicine and play golf.

**Debbi:** [00:11:28] All right. That sounds like fun.

**D.P.:** [00:11:32] Yeah, that's pretty much it.

**Debbi:** [00:11:35] Do you have a favorite or most inspiring crime author?

**D.P.:** [00:11:39] Oh, sure, sure. It comes down to two people, James Lee Burke and Elmore Leonard. I've met them both. I've had a chance to talk about writing with both. But I've read virtually everything both of them have written. It's a textbook on how to write. On James Lee Burke's, I really love the Dave Robicheaux novels that are set in Louisiana. Being a Southern boy, I really like that. He creates incredible characters, incredible stories, gritty crime novels. But he does it with such poetic writing that sometimes it takes your breath away. You're reading and you read a paragraph and you say, oh, my God, and you stop. And then you go back and read it again, because the writing is perfect. Elmore Leonard is the exact opposite. He is mean and lean and his prose is clean. He's known as the, you know, the father or the guru of dialogue, because he can write dialogue without quotation marks and you can hear the people talking. He does it all the time. But he is also a textbook for learning how to tell a story cleanly, quickly, efficiently with no fluff. You get from point A to B to C to D, and you know exactly where you are and there's no distractions. And he creates such unbelievably awful characters. None of them have social redeeming values. But you love every one of them.

**Debbi:** [00:13:03] Yes, yes. I love Elmore Leonard.

**D.P.:** [00:13:07] I do, too.

**Debbi:** [00:13:09] He's one of the greats, for sure.

**D.P.:** [00:13:13] He told me something very important many years ago. We were sitting and talking. I talk about characters and I said, you know, you have these great characters. They're all scumbags, but we love them. How do you create these guys? I said, do you do character sketches or anything like that? Like a lot of writers do. I don't, but like a lot of writers do. He said, naw, I don't do that. He said it may take me a few weeks or a couple of months to come up with a name. But once I know the name, I know the character. And the brilliance of that hit me right then, right there. It was like, yes, he lives with these people in his head. And once he knows them, the name is inevitable. And so Chili Palmer is not the president or a neurosurgeon. He's a loan shark. He's a Shylock. Couldn't be anything else. Raylan Givens is a U.S. marshal. Linda Moon is a lounge singer. She couldn't be anything else with that name. And so the point is, is that he gets to know the people. And it taught me how you develop characters in your head, number one. And number two, that names are critical.

**Debbi:** [00:14:21] The point that you made in your guest post.

**D.P.:** [00:14:25] Exactly, that names are critical.

**Debbi:** [00:14:28] It's an excellent point, too, and thank you for making it, actually. I really enjoyed reading that.

**D.P.:** [00:14:34] Oh, good.

**Debbi:** [00:14:35] I hope that everybody listening to this will check it out, because it's really a good read. And it tells you a lot about the art of writing, the craft of writing, and how important certain elements of writing are and character names being one of them.

**D.P.:** [00:14:52] Absolutely.

**Debbi:** [00:14:52] So is there anything else that you'd like to add before we finish up?

**D.P.:** [00:14:59] No. Go to my website. I think it's on the post, but it's DPLyleMD.com. And when you go there, you can see all my books. One thing, of course, my cat will appreciate that. But also I have a blog and I have a podcast series also called Criminal Mischief. And I talk about science and crime writing and all that stuff. And then some of you may know Crime and Science Radio, Jan Burke and I did for three and a half years. We did 70 shows and they're all archived on my website. And you can go there and listen to the experts in the field do 50-minute Q and A's, when Jan and I quizzed them about what they do for a living. Everything from dog training to hunting down men to psychological profiling. You name it. Toxicology, all that. So go there and you can you can connect to everything.

**Debbi:** [00:15:58] Fantastic. Do. I would recommend that everybody go to Doug's website, DP Lyle's website, and check it out and prepare to be awed when you look at his bio. That's all I'll say. I want to thank you so much for being here today, Doug.

**D.P.:** [00:16:14] Thank you so much for having me. Anytime.

**Debbi:** [00:16:18] It's my pleasure.

**D.P.:** [00:16:19] It's my pleasure.

[00:16:21] So to everyone out there, thank you for joining us. And don't forget to check the Crime Cafe link on my website where you can find links to where you can buy the boxed set of nine novels or the short story anthology that is under the Crime Cafe label. And the website again is DebbiMack.com. And we also have a Patreon page, and I am going to be offering Twitter and Instagram shout outs to anyone who contributes at any level to the campaign.

[00:17:01] So please consider doing that. And if you will, please consider leaving a review for this podcast, because every little bit helps. And if you're listening on iTunes, just leave your review right there. Or Stitcher. Or wherever you're listening to it. Please. Thank you.

[00:17:23] And on that note, I will just say, our next guest will be Jamie Freveletti, a thriller writer. So I hope to see you all in two weeks. In the meantime, happy reading.