

The Crime Cafe with Andy Rausch



Debbi: 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 guests, I'll just remind you that the Crime Cafe has two eBooks for sale, the nine-book box set and the short story anthology. You can find the buy links for both on my website www.debbimack.com under the "Crime Cafe" link.

You can also get a free copy of either book if you become a [Patreon](https://www.patreon.com) supporter. You'll get that and much more if you support the podcast on Patreon, along with our eternal gratitude for doing.

So, well folks it's good to be back for a fifth season of this podcast. I got to tell you it's been cool and I'd like to thank the people, I think it's Kings River Magazine [correction: [King's River Life Magazine](https://www.kingsrivermagazine.com)], who put up a nice mention of the podcast recently online.

In addition, I'd also like to put in a good word for my cover artist, the one who works on my books, his name is Stewart A. Williams and he has a business called Stewart A. Williams Design, and I totally recommend him, highly recommend him for anybody who's interested in self-publishing and finding a good cover artist. His website is www.stewardwilliamsdesign.com and with that, let's get to my guest.

My guest today is Andy Rausch, he is the first guest of the season. He has that distinction, and he is a man of multiple talents. Andy is an author, a film journalist, a screenwriter, film producer, actor, and I believe, also a graphic novelist now. Did I manage to get all of it in, Andy?

Andy: I think so, pretty much, you know. I do political activism. I do a lot of stuff. I'm busy. I'd like to think I'm good at some of them. I try, I try.

Debbi: That's good. Well, it's a good thing to be busy

Andy: Right and I write a lot of nonfiction, too, as you might have seen. About 30 of my books are probably nonfiction and then the other... I mean this year, I'll have my 38th book out and only one of them was self-published and I mean I know that's corny, because that stigma's gone, but you know when I came up there was a stigma about self-publishing. So, I always thought, you know, you got to do it, but I mean some of the publishers they don't sell, so what's the difference, you know you might as well do it your way and get what you want done and I get that, I think that's amazing. But I do a lot.

Debbi: Yes, yes, and keeping busy is good, as long as you're keeping busy with the right things.

Andy: Right, right. Well, I figure if I stay busy with these things, it'll keep me out of trouble and unbusy with the bad things, you know?

Debbi: Yes, yes, good point and just so you know, he's giving away kind of a two-book package. Is this correct, your latest novella *Bloody Sheets* and the anthology *A Time for Violence*?

Andy: Right, so I just wanted to give away the books to, you know, bring it to more people's attention. I do work with a lot of publishers. Some of them are little, some are big. These are books that I'm very proud of that are with a smaller publisher, and you know, so whatever it takes to get readership I'm down for. I tell people if you can steal them, whatever you need to do. The publisher probably shouldn't appreciate that, but my thing is just read them. I'll give them away, you know, I don't care and that's always been the way, I don't care to be rich. That'd be great, but I don't really care. I just want to get them out there.

Debbi: All right, well, um, I have to ask you about the book I just finished reading, *Elvis Presley, CIA Assassin*? Oh, my god! That story is freaking hilarious. I felt like I was reading something out of Quentin Tarantino's movies. What prompted you to write that book?

Andy: Well, you know what's funny is Quentin had actually had an idea at one time before he made it, and he had thought about writing a book about Elvis Presley working for the FBI, because there is a thing, you know, where Elvis had approached Nixon about being in the FBI and going undercover, which is a hilarious concept, because he's the most well-known face on the planet at that time. How would that ever work? But you know Quentin never did anything with it, and I liked the idea, but I wanted to make something different obviously. I don't rip off the man, but I do admire him. He's a hero of mine, and you know he worked with me on my last non-fiction book that comes out next month.

And so anyway, I had this idea, well, what if he was in the CIA and he was an assassin, because I feel like an assassin is a whole other thing. He's not out here doing sneaky stuff, he's out here killing people. And when I write, it tends to be about hitmen a lot of times, and again that's Quentin's fault, I think. It's his influence. So, anyway, I had a lot of fun with it, but it's my only comedy and I'll say this. I'm glad you liked it. I don't think it connects on the level that a lot of my fiction does with people. I don't necessarily think it's ... not that it's funny as much as it is the format, as I tried to write it as an oral history, and I'd never seen a novel done like a true oral history.

I mean *World War Z* is called an oral history, but it's not presented as an actual oral history book. So I wanted to do that *Rashomon* kind of style, and I thought it would be fun and it was great fun to write it. It's just finding an audience has been more difficult for that one, which I thought would be a given considering it's about Elvis, but what you get is that in my research, I'm going to be frank. I liked Elvis a

lot when I was younger and he's okay, but I was finding when I was researching that he wasn't the brightest guy in the world. You know, he was great or whatever. So, in the book, I kind of joke about it at times. He kind of does these things that are kind of dopey ... so that pisses fans off that are purists. And that's generally who's going to go after that book, so I think that's part of the problem too.

Debbi: Well, I thought it was absolutely hilarious for what it's worth, so you have at least an audience of one on that one.

Andy: Oh! I appreciate that.

Debbi: I also read *A Time for Violence*, which is a great collection, so.

Andy: Well, no. I appreciate it.

Debbi: Uh-huh, go ahead.

Andy: Good, I was just going to say, comedy I think I can do, but I think I do better when it's not a whole comedy. There's comedy in all of my work, but it tends to I think work better when it is done within really serious scenes. With comedy, people will laugh and say, "You know, I laughed 'till I cried" or whatever. I blew out my drink or whatever, you know. And I think that's more my style. Like I wanted to be a comedian when I was younger. It was not in the cards for me. I can be funny, but not consistently funny, and I think I have to pick my spots, because the only two comedies I've done, one was a novel and it was *Elvis* and I think it's funny. But again my sense of humor isn't everybody's sense of humor. I don't have always that broad sense of humor and that's what a lot of people tend to go to.

And the other thing I wrote that was a comedy was the movie *Dahmer vs. Gacy*, which is not a very good movie, and I have to take a lot of the blame for it. I like it, I don't care, but when you go on Netflix, there are a lot of bad reviews.

Debbi: Wow.

Andy: So, yeah, I know. We had a movie that had good distribution. I wrote it. I'm proud of it. And it was meant to be a \$500 movie and then we got a fifty thousand dollar budget, and I wasn't responsible for shooting it you know. So they did things in a way that sometimes I wouldn't have done, and they added scenes that I didn't write. And then I feel like, dammit I get credit—not credit, but I get blamed—for some of it. But you know I'm proud that it's out there, and hopefully the next one will be better.

Debbi: That's a heck of an achievement, you know no matter what kind of movie it is I think.

Andy: Right, right.

Debbi: So, *A Time for Violence*. Great collection of short stories by some of the best in the business. It definitely lives up to its title. You described it in the foreword as “a love letter to the great anthologies of yesteryear.” Can you expand a bit on what you meant by that?

Andy: Well, it just seems like you know in the 80s all of a sudden there were anthologies everywhere, like that was a golden, one of the golden periods for short stories. And I may be misremembering it a little, because I was in middle school in the 80s, but you know I was reading all of these books, these anthologies, like the Dark Visions books and all these things that would have all of these great ... but they were almost always horror. And I wanted this to be something different, I mean but one of those ones with the big-name people in it. I wanted to put together horror and crime, which is primarily what I write is crime, but sometimes horror.

And I met Chris Roy, who's been on your show, and I said hey, man, like you know writers, I know writers. Let's put them together. Let's put out this anthology. And, by and large, I'm very proud of it, you know. Joe Lansdale was in it. Two of my very favorite writers ever are Joe Lansdale and Max Allan Collins, and you know and I got them both in there. And if you look, I did this strategically. It was just for me, because I didn't know if I'd ever be able to do it again, but if you look at the table of contents, my story is right in between theirs, because I thought you know what? At least I can be close to the greatness. But, in the reviews, that story that I wrote does get pointed out a lot as a favorite, and I'm very happy with that. I'm proud of it, it was remarkable to be to work with those people you know, and Chris was great to work with, too.

Debbi: I did an interview with Joe Lansdale last season. That was my last one of the season. He was just wonderful to talk to. He is also one of my favorite writers and Max Allan Collins, as well.

Andy: Well, I'd love to say that like ... I mean I've done some work with both of them on small levels. I'm doing a—and I love, I love Lansdale—but I'm doing a book on Lansdale with a guy named Mark Slade, who's also in the anthology. We're doing a book for the University Press of Mississippi, which is a collection of interviews with Lansdale throughout his career. So that's been fun and Joe's worked with me on that and I got to have dinner with Joe. That was amazing, and you know he's a cool guy. And Max, I haven't really gotten to know him. He doesn't seem really like a “get to know” kind of guy, but we've corresponded over the years and he wrote an intro for a book I did on movies one time way back like 15 years ago. Oh, yeah. These people are all great you know.

Debbi: That's another thing, you write the movie journalism. I've always wanted to be a film reviewer, so how did you get into that?

Andy: Well, you know, I don't know. I think it seemed at the moment like an easy in. If I wrote nonfiction, I thought this will get me into getting published and at that time in the late 90s, the early 2000s, there were still film books everywhere. You would go into the bookstore, and there were big sections of film books and the Internet has kind of destroyed that, so whereas my earliest books were getting published by great big publishers, you know, like Citadel and Kensington and Chronicle Books and these things, you know and they were in all the stores, like now they're more niche publishers that do a lot of those and so I do a lot of them with a smaller publisher called BearManor Media, which is very nice, very good to me, always treated me great. But early on, I thought it would be an easy in, and honestly again going back to Tarantino, I really fell in love with movies when I saw *Pulp Fiction*. I came to him late, I hadn't seen *Reservoir Dogs* yet, but I saw *Pulp Fiction* on opening night and then I saw it seven more times in the theatre and that, to this day, is my favorite movie

And so it does influence my stuff but I try not to... you know, I do want to expand. I don't want to just be thought of as a Tarantino rip-off, because a lot of things say Tarantino-esque about my stuff, and I admire that and that's great. He is a hero in the same way that Elmore Leonard and Lansdale and Stephen King, but you know I want to be something... I want to be Andy-esque, you know? Andy Raush-esque, that's what I want to be.

Debbi: So, well that's totally appropriate. Every author wants to be themselves. You don't want to be a rip off of somebody else. Let's see. Your novella *Bloody Sheets* in your words is a revenge story? I know it touches on racism in the Deep South. Can you talk about what inspired you to write that?

Andy: Well, two things. I've always said that revenge stories are sort of my bread and butter, for whatever reason. And I'm a nice guy, I promise I don't go out and kill people, but for some reason I really like to write those stories, and those kind of movies have always resonated with me. Movies like *Man on Fire* was a big one for me. The Denzel Washington, Tony Scott movie. You know, there's an old 70s movie that I wouldn't have known about if Tarantino hadn't talked about it called *Rolling Thunder* and one of my books had a blurb by one of the guys that wrote *Rolling Thunder*, Heywood Gould. But I don't know. I've always liked those kinds of stories, so that's one.

But then two: racial issues have always been very important to me. Without trying to be like the dad from *Get Out*, you know. The ridiculously white guy that's trying to you know be the proper you know. I, for whatever reason, to be honest, as corny as this is going to sound, I've always related better with the black community than I have with the white community. When I was a kid, you know, when I was in high school, most of my friends were black. I was a rapper for a lot of years, honestly and almost made it, made it there until I had a performance in

Kansas City with the rapper Tech Nine who's gotten really big. He's the biggest thing that ever came out of Kansas City.

Well, anyway we were on a compilation album together and it was the first time I had ever performed live, and I didn't know I was going to perform until five minutes before, so I'm nervous and I go up and I went on after Tech Nine, who everybody was really there to see. It wasn't like I opened for him. I went up after him, and even then he was a big thing there and to make it more intimidating, I mean, it's just the fact. I was literally the only white guy in the whole room and so it's intimidating, it is, in the same way that I'm sure it was intimidating for Charlie Pride, when he would get up on stage and sing country to a crowd of all white people. So I wanted to do my best. I wanted to impress those people, but the thing was I already had this strike against me, that I went up after the person everybody wanted to see. I was not going to compare to him.

And so I get up there and I have this eight-mile moment where I blanked out and I couldn't remember the words to my own song. So, I just stood there and I don't know. I just know that it went really badly, and when I got done I realized I'm never going to be able to do this, because I get scared in front of audiences. I've gotten a little better about audiences, but I don't rap anymore.

I did that for a lot of years and I had some success. I was on a national radio show, Chuck D from Public Enemy had me on his radio show, and I was in some rap magazines, and so it's like I found a thing that I was okay at, but I wanted to find something I was really good at and I think that's this.

Debbi: That's cool. See, it's experiences like that that shape us and make us what we are, awesome and capable as we are.

Andy: And not to hijack. I kind of got away from your question, but real quick, racial issues are very important to me. I think there as prevalent now as they've ever been, other than you know we don't have slavery, but we have forms of slavery. We definitely ... the correctional institution has an overwhelming number of African-Americans that are not there because African-Americans are overwhelmingly bad, our system is fucked up. Is that okay to say?

Debbi: Absolutely.

Andy: Okay, well it's fucked up. I'm going to say fuck again.

Debbi: Fuckin' A, man.

Andy: So these kind of things do bother me, and this might turn off half the listeners and they totally are not the people that are going to buy my book, anyway. But you know what like Charlottesville, you know with the moment that Heather Heyer got run over, you know I was already really upset about this. And I'm not going to go into the political aspects of it, but just you know all of that shit,

you know these people think it's okay now to come back out and say those things that they thought all along, but they were at least keeping their mouths shut. I feel like those stories that we're hearing like Emmitt Till, who the book's dedicated to and these people from way back you know. I feel like those things are as relevant today as they've ever been, and I like ideas of stories where underdogs overcome whatever the thing is that's suppressing them or keeping them down and in this case, it's us.

Debbi: Well, that's good. I mean, it's really great because you're so right, that it's as relevant today as ever, if not more so than ever. Well, I won't go into it, we don't want to go that route, so...

Andy: By the way, [I'm wearing] my Colin Kaepernick hat, so this'll just tie right in with the theme. So the half of the audience that already doesn't like what I'm saying that will probably just really piss them off, but it is okay. It's okay.

Debbi: Well, it's okay. You have to be who you are. It's called integrity, people. Let's see. You've also written screenplays, I'm really impressed by that and I also write screenplays and I know that it's harder than it looks.

Andy: Well, we just wrote a screenplay for *Bloody Sheets*. I don't know if you knew that. It got optioned by a production company. I can't go much into it right now. Elvis had been optioned before too, so this is my second thing to get optioned. Elvis never got made, but the checks did clear and that's cool.

Somebody said a long time ago and I don't remember if it was Stephen King or who it was that the best-case scenario is that they option your book and it never gets made and so nobody can fuck up your story and you get the money anyway. I mean, I'd like to see this get made and there are some big names being bandied about. We'll see if it happens. I don't know, but my checks cleared.

Debbi: That's fantastic. How do you balance your screenwriting time versus your book writing time? Do you devote a day to one versus the other? Schedule it?

Andy: I don't really do much screenwriting, anymore. I only did this because I wanted to be able to control my own material, and I wrote it with a guy named David Hayes. It's kind of funny, because the movies that we're known for aren't particularly good and here we're doing this more, I don't want to say artsy, but this more very cerebral serious piece. It was important material and we treated it as such, but both of us were known in the film world for schlock. I mean, the movies that I had worked on. *Dahmer vs. Gacy* was the primary one that I wrote, and the big one that he wrote was one that just came out, was based on a graphic novel he had written called *Rottentail*, which is about this sort of mutant rabbit man that kills people, and I mean they're fun. They're B-movies, they're Z-movies, you know whatever you want to call them. But you know, it's funny. How do I balance it? It's hard to balance anything because I've always got eight or

nine projects going on. My therapist says it's because I'm bipolar, but I don't know. I mean I'm I know I'm bipolar, but I don't know if that's the reason. I do a lot. I do too much.

Debbi: I know that feeling. Do you have any advice for anyone who's interested in doing any of the things you've done?

Andy: Just go do 'em. I know that sounds so basic, but you know what? There's no instant way in. You just keep fighting and you fight and you fight and you know what I think? I mean, I'd like to think that I'm better than mediocre. It's up for interpretation, but I would say this. Passion can get a mediocre person in the door. I'm not saying I'm that person, because I busted my ass for 25 years doing this, but you know and yeah a lot of it is who you know and it's the right place and it's the right time, but passion. And you have to write every day. I mean, you can't say, you know, I'm going to write a page every three weeks. Well, you're not going to probably be very good. You just have to keep working at it, whatever it is, and I also have balls, you know. And I don't mean you know. I know you technically don't have balls.

I'm saying have the audacity to approach the people and to say the things. And it's funny because now I'm on the other end of that, where I'm not huge but I do some things that are fairly big and I have those people come to me now, the way that I used to go to those authors. And I realize I was probably a little bit of a pain in the ass, but you know what? The most they can do is say no. And I had met a writer named Stephen Spignesi who's in this anthology, and he had written a big book for Bantam. A big novel called *Dialogues*, which was an incredible novel, it's his only novel and it was in the early 2000s. But he's written like 70 books. He had written books on Stephen King, as I have, and anyway he became my mentor very early on and that was a big help. And I will say you know, I guess that's common sense, or it should be common sense. If you can find somebody that has knowledge and that has experience, you don't have to exploit it, but you can pick their brain a little at the very least. You know, without Steve Spignesi, I don't think I would have accomplished the things that I've accomplished.

Debbi: I know about the importance of mentors and having people who look at your work and give you impartial evaluation and guidance, very important. To a person who has never read your work but might be interested, how would you describe your writing?

Andy: Extreme. A lot of times, it's extreme. A lot of it's more extreme than *Bloody Sheets*. I mean, you know the book I just finished will be my 38th book when it gets published, and it's my first ... I want to say it's kind of horror-thriller and it was dark. I mean it was so dark, it made me cry sometimes, and I've never had that, but I would say expect extreme language, expect violence. Consequences. People always want happy endings. Not all of my books have happy endings.

That's not real life. Real life doesn't always have happy endings, and I try to keep it very minimalist, you know. I won't have three pages describing what the room looks like and some people can do that. Stephen King will I think over-describe, but he writes, he literally is a writing god. He could write about anything, he could write about this conversation, the boring shit I'm telling you, and make it amazing. It would be a huge hit. That man can write anything. So some people can do it, and I'll read it, but then there are other people just about anybody lesser that I don't want to read three pages of description of the room or all the knickknacks on the wall and what the person's wearing.

I learned from Elmore Leonard, who really is my favorite author, that you don't have to do that, you know. You don't have to not describe anything, obviously, but I mean if you talk about a person, you can describe a lot of what's going on through the dialogue, and I think that's very important.

Debbi: Mm-hmm

Andy: So, that's what I try to do.

Debbi: Yeah, leave out the parts that people skip.

Andy: That's his rule and I love that.

Debbi: Best rule ever.

Andy: It is the best rule ever, and it seems so obvious, but people don't do it. Because when you get into four or five pages of description or repetitive thought, like what's going on in the person's brain that's great, but if it's a little repetitive, trim that shit down. Some of it doesn't need to be there and some people do it and they do it well, but I think if you can pare it down, make it tight, that's what I go for.

Debbi: Yeah, I agree. Well, before we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like to say? Is there anything that I've left out that you'd like to cover?

Andy: I have a new book about Quentin Tarantino coming out next month. I hope everybody buys it. Quentin helped with it. It's about a movie he made before he got famous that never got finished called *My Best Friend's Birthday*. It was an oral history. I have several more books coming out. I would just say please buy my books, and the biggest thing I would say is be nice to each other. That's funny to talk about, coming from a person who writes about so much violence. But, really. Just be nice to each other, folks. That's all I want to see in the world. We can read about it and we can write about it, but let's not do it, you know?

Debbi: Amen. All right, well, it's really been wonderful talking to you, Andy.

Andy: Thank you. It's been nice talking to you, too

Debbi: Great! It's been great having you on, and thank you so much for being here and thank you everyone for tuning in. Wait a minute, you don't tune in to a podcast do you? Maybe you are streaming in, I don't know. Whatever you do, I'm glad you're here, and I'll be back in two weeks with my next guest Earl Javorsky. Until then, take care and happy reading.