

The Crime Cafe with Andrew Allan

Presented By:



Debbi (01:43): Hi everyone. My guest is the author of the Walt Asher thriller series. He also writes Grindhouse Pulp, which we've gotta talk about. He is an infomercial writer and director. He's also into wild cult movies, making them I believe, and runs a website called Dailygrindhouse.com. My guest today is Andrew Allan. Hi Andrew. Thanks for being here.

Andrew (02:11): Hey, Debbi. Thanks for having me.

Debbi (02:13): Sure thing. I love your resume. I mean, your bio is just fascinating to me cause I love film as well as books. I assumed that you were an infomercial writer-director before you started writing books.

Andrew (02:28): Yes. Yeah. I, my career is a little bit weird in the sense that I went to film school and then I broke into commercials while I was working on developing some movies. And then I ended up getting a job at the home shopping network, which is based here in St. Pete Florida. And it's as bizarre as everyone presumes it is, but it was a really great experience. And I learned how to do a lot of things, including sell on TV and that morphed into doing infomercials, which is selling on TV. So, and I have to say, I love it as ridiculous as it sounds, it's a great profession.

Debbi (03:08): I mean, that sounds really cool actually. What made you decide to do infomercials and what prompted you to start writing books?

Andrew (03:20): Money prompted me to start doing infomercials. One cause you know, we all need it and we all like it. But the real reason was like I said, I learned to basically sell on television when I was at HSN and that is a natural transition into infomercials. And when I decided to leave HSN, I knew I wanted to make my writing or sorry, make my living still writing and directing and producing commercials. And what was great about infomercials was that it was a niche. So instead of just saying, Hey, I'm a commercial writer and there's 10,000 other people I'm competing with, I decided to be an infomercial writer and you know, there's maybe 10 people I'm competing with, so now I can like authentically say I'm one of the top infomercial writers in the world and I've got a ton of experience and I've done thousands of commercials in the past decade and all that sort of stuff.

(04:24) So it's, it's great. And that's how that came to be. The reason I started writing books was because for a number of reasons. One, I was creatively frustrated. I had been making movies and I had been writing screenplays, which were fun. And some of them got made, some of them didn't, but all of them required collaboration. And I had reached a point where I didn't really want to collaborate anymore, at least for a while. I needed a beather and that's even on projects that I absolutely loved. A movie that I was making with my best friend. And even then, like we would get in arguments about it and I just needed a break from that. So I wanted to do something on my own and that's when I decided to write a book, I had a story kind of kicking around that I'd never been able to turn into a script.

(05:23) I finally figured out how to make that work in book form, which was the first Walt Asher book and took it from there. The other, the other part of that story is I was actually reading a book by a very famous author that we all know who I'm not going to name and not to sound arrogant, I thought it was terrible. I was like a third of the way in. And I actually caught myself saying, I can do better than this. And you know, a very arrogant thing to say for someone who's never written a book, but I decided to see if I could back it up. And I think I did. Humbly speaking. I do think I was right.

Debbi (06:07): It's funny. Cause I think a lot of writers actually do start off with those kinds of thoughts. Oh, I could do this.

Andrew (06:15): It wasn't even looking down at the writing. It was more or looking at the idea of being a writer. It was more like this story is not entertaining me. And I know enough about story structure from screenplays and things like that to where I could look at this and say, really, it was about me thinking this guy should be doing a lot better for how big their name is and how much money they're probably making.

Debbi (06:43): Yeah. well I have to give you points for originality on coming up with a protagonist who is an infomercial writer and director. But I see that you've drawn from your own background or at least I assume you have Tell us a little about Walt Asher. How is it gets into the kinds of situations that would lead to a thriller series?

Andrew (07:16): That's kind of what I had to figure out. He comes from my background. I did go down the road of write what you know, and that's because as confident as I was writing commercials and as confident as I was writing movies, I had no confidence whatsoever writing a book. So I figured I ought to, you know, rely on everything that I could to kind of get off and running with this. So, and then plus the idea of him being an infomercial writer was intriguing. You know, I had like all of us, I'd read a million books about cops and lawyers and soldiers and detectives and reporters. And I'm like, that's great. People are probably doing it better than me. So let me try something completely different. And I think it worked, it worked because I think, well, what I like about Walt and what I like about these books is that he has to rely on persuasion to kind of get by. Doesn't mean he's not physical.

(08:17) There's a lot of action in the books. But he is a true amateur sleuth who has nothing to do with justice. And basically it starts out, he lives on the Rainbow River, which is a real river in Dunnellon, Florida, about two hours north of where I am and he's in the river. He goes down to his friend's house via the water and he finds his friend dead on the bank of the river with an alligator in the process of chewing them up. But it's clear that the alligator did not kill him. So one thing leads to another and the villain in the story overplays its hand and attempts to kill Walt. And it becomes very clear that he has to do something about it. It's known ... A paranoia. It's legitimate and he's going to die if he doesn't figure it out, [cross-talk] piece it together.

Debbi (09:19): Let's see you also write Grindhouse Pulp. That's a series also, correct?

Andrew (09:25): Correct.

Debbi (09:26): What are those books like? Define Grindhouse first, I guess.

Andrew (09:30): Okay. So basically the Grindhouse was 42nd street movie theaters in the Sixties and Seventies and Eighties in Times Square. And you know, they kind of just show like all the really gross horror movies, the karate movies, all kinds of stuff, you know, movies that were generally looked down upon, but also provided extremely visceral thrills. And I love those movies. I think they're great.

Debbi (10:05): I know. I love cult movies.

Andrew (10:07): I love cult movies. And so my Grindhouse Pulp series is basically me coming up with ideas for Grindhouse movies and putting them in book form. It's different than Walt. Like, the Walt Asher stuff is more thriller, mystery, thriller suspense. Grindhouse Pulp is, I push things over the edge a little bit

more and you know, there's more violence and there's just, you know, just like, you'd see in those insane movies and they're really, they're books of movies I would love to see.

Debbi (10:44): Yeah. Yeah. You should check out the public domain. Cause there are some really crazy things out there. You probably already know that.

Andrew (10:55): I've seen a lot of them. That's for sure.

Debbi (10:57): Oh my gosh. Have you ever seen *Manos: The Hands of Fate*?

Andrew (11:01): Sadly, I have. Yes.

Debbi (11:03): Oh, my God. That's all I'll say about that. There's some movies that are just so bad, you have to see them. That's one of them.

Andrew (11:12): Well, that's a little part of my resume. I produced Herschell Gordon Lewis' last movie.

Debbi (11:19): Huh.

Andrew (11:20): If you don't know who Herschell is, he's the guy, he was the first guy to put gore in a movie back in 1963 in the movie *Blood Feast*. And he did other movies like *Wizard of Gore*, *The Gore Gore Girls*, and *Two Thousand Maniacs*. And he kind of started it all and he was a, you know, a low budget exploitation filmmaker. And I had the great fortune of meeting him and basically getting to produce a movie for one of my heroes.

Debbi (11:54): Wow. That's fantastic. That's wonderful. To get back to Walt is there an overall story arc in the series?

Andrew (12:06): So the first book was really just a test to see if I could write a book. It went well.

Debbi (12:12): I know that feeling.

Andrew (12:14): And of really sort of wrapping the story up? There was a slight, there were a couple subtle hints to where it could go beyond that story. But then, after I thought about it and I liked the process and I thought the book went well and I didn't get demolished by reviews, I was like, yeah, I'll continue this. So as it exists now, there's a three book arc where each is a complete story. They're full length novels, but the villain is the same in the three of them. The antagonist, because the antagonist is more of a secret organization kind of thing than just one person specifically. So there is an arc with that. And then in between each novel, I wrote a novella and those are side stories featuring Walt and some of the same characters from the book, but not related to that big overarching story. So which is kind of nice, it's sort of like a breather in between, but you still get to spend time with the characters.

Debbi (13:21): That's cool.

Andrew (13:22): Yeah. Most of those are rooted in the fact that Walt's basically best friend up on the river where he lives is a guy named DG who is actually a criminal biker and he's into all kinds of criminal stuff, but he's just kinda like one of those Florida good old boys who are fun to be around. And for whatever reason he likes Walt, who's completely not of his world. So in the novellas those tend to focus

on DG, getting Walt to do something for DG and that usually can put him in danger, things like that. And that's what *Sell Shock*, which is the giveaway book for this interview, is one of those things.

Debbi (14:10): Yes, yes. I noticed that. Actually I got a copy and I started reading it and it's quite interesting. I like it. Let's see you do make cult movies, also. I do. Got any titles to lay on us?

Andrew (14:32): I made a movie called *Brainjacked* in 2008 which is about a doctor who kidnaps teenagers puts this like brain control implants in their minds and then sends them out to kill. Which I like that. And then I produced the movie for Herschell Gordon Lewis and I've had a movie in progress for a while now which we're still working on finishing up. It's called *Bigfoot Mob Boss*. And it's as dumb as the title sounds. Bigfoot comes to Tampa and he takes over the criminal underground.

Debbi (15:10): Sounds wonderful.

Andrew (15:13): I think I probably sound arrogant, but I'm humble. I mean, it's, it really is turning out good.

Debbi (15:20): That's very cool. Is there any way we can watch your movies?

Andrew (15:24): The *Brainjacked* distribution deal has lapsed and that's only because I had been too distracted with books and other things to kind of set a new one up. It'll probably be streaming on Amazon or something here soon. *Bigfoot's* Not ready yet. The Herschell movie, which is called *The Uh-Oh Show*. That's out and about and can be purchased on Amazon.

Debbi (15:51): Cool. Fun.

Andrew (15:53): Yeah. Those are on YouTube.

Debbi (15:55): Fantastic. Good to know. Let's see. Who are your favorite writers?

Andrew (16:00): I can tell you with clarity that my two favorite writers are James Ellroy and Harry Crews. Most people listening to Crime Cafe podcast probably know who James Ellroy is. And I love his work cause it's just, it's the kind of work that makes me feel ridiculous for even trying to write books in a way it's like, they're so dense and they're so good. And they're so, just have such a high velocity to the story that it's, you know, it feels like dynamite in your hands when you crack the book open and he's done that consistently for decades. So it's like, you know, to me like, just like nobody even comes close in sort of crime genre type stuff. And then Crews is, he's kind of the same way in that his stuff is really potent. He deals with a lot of strange characters and a lot of people don't, I don't know if you're familiar with the stuff, but he is--

Debbi (17:08): I'm not familiar with him. No.

Andrew (17:10): Even though I think he was published by Simon & Schuster, he wrote in the late Sixties, Seventies, Eighties into the Nineties, and he's from Gainesville, Florida.

(17:22) He's just like this, he's basically, he would, well, he was basically a redneck, but he was also very smart and an unbelievable writer. And he used to teach at the university of Florida and believe it or not, he was one of Michael Connelly's writing teachers. It's pretty wild. Cause he's, I mean, this is a guy who'd go out in like the swamps, and catch catfish and hang around with hillbillies and stuff like that. And then

he'd just come back and write these searing novels about the human condition and broken people and stuff like that. So I don't think I'm selling it very well, but it's, it's, it's an easy decision. If someone were to ask me who my favorite authors were.

Debbi (18:09): Actually, I was going to say that that sounds like a, just the background you would need to explore some of the darker side of life. Living amongst, you know, people who are doing these things, you know, getting down and dirty and so forth. What was his name again? Martin Smith?

Andrew (18:27): Harry Crews, C-R-E-W-S.

Debbi (18:30): I don't know where I got Martin Smith.

Andrew (18:35): Cause you're thinking Martin Cruz Smith.

Debbi (18:38): Yeah. That's it. Yeah, I got it. Like crew cut. Okay.

Andrew (18:48): Like even just wait'll you see his later author photos, ... Like, okay, I see where this is going.

Debbi (18:56): Wow. Interesting. Okay. what are you working on now other than the movie?

Andrew (19:04): So I actually have three series. The third series is about, believe it or not, when I started, I was like, I don't want to write about a cop. Well, I'm writing about a cop now. And it's based on this idea I had, which was what if you were the sheriff of the town and everybody hated you and not because you were like an evil, corrupt sheriff, but just people didn't like you and how much harder would that make your job and this and that. And the other thing. So I wrote a book called the unpopular sheriff and it's set in Kansas, partly because I wanted a break from writing about Florida. And also because I have family there and I just thought it would make for like a neat kind of setting. So basically it's about this guy, Sheriff Pete, who is in the small town of Winfield, which is a real town in Southern Kansas.

(20:05) And the story basically starts out. There's a break in, at a farmhouse, nothing crazy, but you know, it gets reported and there's a little bit of evidence left around and they find a fingerprint and the fingerprint goes on to reveal that it belongs to a guy who's in the database and is a known Mafia assassin. And so the question is like, what's a known Mafia assassin doing out here in rural Kansas? And then as they dig into it, they actually find out that the assassin is on the run from his old crew and they're out to get him. So it's kind of you have basically the Mafia coming to Kansas and facing down with like this sheriff and this small police department kind of thing. In a town where no one likes the sheriff, for a lot of reasons. That gets explained in the book.

(20:58) So it was a concept that just stuck with me and I ended up riding it fairly fast and I liked how it turned out, to the point that I am now, actually in the editing phase of the sequel to that, which is called *The Unpopular Deputy*. Wow. Big surprise.

Debbi (21:15): Interesting.

Andrew (21:16): Yeah.

Debbi (21:17): Very good. Well is there a particular cult movie that you would say a person should see, absolutely? If they'd never seen a cult movie before, what would you recommend? Like the one movie that you would say you absolutely must see this one?

Andrew (21:36): I don't know what movie I would necessarily say would be emblematic of cult movies in general. ... I'm one of those rare people who does know what their favorite movie is. And without hesitation, I would say you absolutely have to see *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* by Russ Meyer.

Debbi (21:54): Ah, yes.

Andrew (21:55): Have you seen it?

Debbi (21:56): I have not seen it, but I have been I have been putting up *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* on one of my blogs.

Andrew (22:05): It's on the shelf right back there.

Debbi (22:08): Well, if you ever want to see it with my captions added to it, just go to my blog.

Andrew (22:15): Perfect.

Debbi (22:15): The URL is debbimacktoo.wordpress.com.

Andrew (22:19): I'll check that out. Yeah.

Debbi (22:23): Do. Please.

Andrew (22:25): We can kind of speak the same language on that.

Debbi (22:27): This is so cool.

Andrew (22:30): *Beyond The Valley of the Dolls*, I will say unequivocally is the absolute greatest movie of all time. It shuts down every other movie.

Debbi (22:38): Oh, my gosh. Well, now I really have to see it. I've been getting interested in Russ Meyer, anyway. So is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Andrew (22:52): Well, first of all, thank you for having me. It's been great chatting with you on this interview. And I guess beyond that, I guess I will say, much like Reese's peanut butter cups, you are allowed to get your cult movies in your books and you are allowed to get your books in your cult movies. It's two great tastes that taste great together.

Debbi (23:12): I love it. That's a great attitude and I'm loving it. Thank you.

Andrew (23:19): The main thing behind that is definitely write what you love.

Debbi (23:22): Yes.

Andrew (23:23): I've looked into things like writing to market and stuff like that. And while I don't discount, you know, the strategy behind it, I don't think I could be engaged to write a book. I don't think writing a book I wasn't interested in would hold my attention enough to make it good.

Debbi (23:43): Yeah, absolutely. I'm with you there. I mean the way I see it, you just have to create what you're passionate about or otherwise it's just not going to work. It's just going to be painting by numbers.

Andrew (23:54): Exactly.

Debbi (23:56): So, well, thank you so much for being here, Andrew. I really appreciate it.

Andrew (24:02): My pleasure.

Debbi (24:02): And I wanted to add that the Crime Cafe Patreon page now offers merch at some levels, including a T-shirt very much like this one. It's a little bit different, but it has that logo on it. So do check it out. Just look for the podcast on my website at debbimack.com. Our next interview will be in two weeks and it'll be with Ann Aptaker. In the meantime, take care and happy reading.