

The Crime Cafe with

Dana Haynes

Presented By:



Debbi (00:02): Hello everyone. My guest today is an award winning journalist who spent more than 20 years in Oregon newsrooms. I like that. He is not only a thriller novelist, but also a screenwriter. In fact, his first screenplay, an adaptation of his first thriller novel *Crashers* made the Nicholl Fellowship semifinals in 2005. That's pretty impressive. It's my great pleasure to introduce thriller author, screenwriter, and Pacific Northwest native, Dana Haynes. Hi Dana. Thanks for being here.

Dana (01:16): Hey, it's good to be here.

Debbi (01:18): I'm so glad you're with us. Oregon is just a beautiful state and Portland's an awesome town. Do you do a lot of signings at Powell's? You know, back when you could do signings?

Dana (01:31): Yes, we are incredibly fortunate to have many good independent bookstores in the Portland metropolitan area. We have several, so I will do one at the Powell's downtown or the Powell's in the suburbs or at Annie Bloom's. We are very, very fortunate to have this ring of independent bookstores that go from the coast up into the mountains.

Dana (01:49): And it's one of the blessings of being in Oregon, how many independent thriving, independent bookstores we have. Quick story. My wife and I went to Powell's the other day on a Saturday and everybody stood outside six feet apart and everybody had masks on, everybody was patient and they're on the phones. You finally got to go in. The lines inside were very, very long. Nobody was kvetching, nobody's complaining. The luxury of having a bookstore, a world-class bookstore like that in the heart of downtown is something we just don't ever kvetch about.

Debbi (02:18): I think that's awesome. That is so awesome. I love it. All of it. I'm interested in how you decided to branch out into writing thrillers from journalism to thrillers. What brought you from one to the other?

Dana (02:33): I'm not sure it was that order because my father was a huge fan of thrillers. And so when we were growing up, Dad would read books that he thought were exciting and terrific, and he burst into your bedroom and throw them on your bed and say, "You've got to read this!" My father was a high school basketball coach. They talk like that. Quick, you got to read this. And so early on I was reading *Gunga Din* and *Beau Geste* and *The Four Feathers*, and I was being brought up with those stories cause my dad thought they were incredibly cool. So when I was, this is a true story. When I was in high school, I thought I was either going to have a career in journalism, which was my first love or as a novelist writing the kind of stories my dad would read, and lo and behold, I'm doing them both. I'm the most fortunate guy in the whole world.

Debbi (03:17): That's fantastic. That's really wonderful. And you're doing screenplays. At least one,

Dana (03:25): Not successfully. But they're great fun. They're really, really fun. I've had zero traction on them, but you know, whatever.

Debbi (03:30): Well, I understand that feeling. Choosing to do screenplays, I sometimes wonder what the hell was I thinking, but what is *Crashers* about? Did you write it with the thought in mind of adapting it into a screenplay?

Dana (03:50): I did not. In about 1994, I read an article in *The New Yorker* magazine called "The

Crash Detectives" by Jonathan Harr. And it was the story of the National Transportation Safety Board. Those people who put together crash teams called Crashers that would ... If an airplane falls out of the sky, these are the people get together to figure out why. And I remember reading the article and thinking, Oh my God, that's fantastic. What a wonderful thing to do. And somebody is going to write a great novel about that. Years passed, years passed, and nobody wrote it. And I kept thinking, Oh my God, what a great book. Great concept, I mean, so eventually around 1999, I decided, damn it, they're gonna make me write the bloody thing. So I started doing the research. I'm not a technically oriented person. So it took me a year to do the research into airplanes and wings and engines. And then I decided it had to be an ensemble book. It was going to have fourteen protagonistic characters. And that was really a difficult thing to do, too. But I'm real proud of that book. That book is a book that I'm awfully, awfully proud of. Cause I got some real good compliments from the actual NTSB and some buy-ins.

Debbi (04:59): Oh, my gosh. That's awesome. That's absolutely fantastic. Wow. Cause I have to say, I looked at the description and I thought, whoa, I want to read this. By the way, I love your poster back there. That's fantastic, too.

Dana (05:18): My friends at Blackstone are really good about doing promotions for their authors. And, by the way, this thing. I'm talking to you from my kitchen and I can assure you, my wife, Katie King does not normally have this up. This is up just for you. We'll put it down and put up in [inaudible].

Debbi (05:32): Well, it looks nice. I like it. I would put it in my kitchen, but then that's me. I'd put a poster like that up if I had something like that. Wow. Let's see. I thought the the concept for the series was interesting, because you said just now fourteen protagonist type characters?

Dana (05:55): I did two books of the NTSB series when I was with St. Martin's Press. There was that one and *Breaking Point* and I realized early on that they had to be ensemble books. And I realized after I'd written them how influenced I was by Michael Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain*. I went back and re-read it a few years ago. And I thought, Oh yeah, it's a whole bunch of people, government bureaucrats who come together with their different forms of extra expertise to solve a problem. And in the event of an airplane crash, you're talking about pilots and pathologists due to the autopsy engineers. You've got your cockpit voice recorder expert, your flight data recorder expert, all these people bring their own expertise with them. And it's very much it, it, it had to be an ensemble book. So that was, that was it was fun and challenging to do that one. And I'm really proud of those two books. The next two books at St. Martin's, I decided that was too difficult to keep up. So we took one of the characters from those two books and we gave her her own breakout books, the next two have like two protagonistic characters. And that was a much easier road to travel.

Debbi (07:01): To say the least, I mean, to start off a series tackling an ensemble. I mean, some people can't even write an ensemble show well, let alone an ensemble book, all of this stuff you need to put into it, you know?

Dana (07:21): I will say, I will say too, that my editor at St Martin's Press Keith Kahla had written these two books about airplane crashes and the investigations. And he took me to lunch one day in New York and said, "Dana, do you know where we sell books? Airports. You're not helping." So that was, we had to get rid of that theme.

Debbi (07:39): Oh my gosh. Wow. Other than the NTSB. Okay. What made, what inspired you to focus on somebody else? I mean, why did you choose the protagonists you ended up choosing for the later books in the series?

Dana (08:00): She was, she spoke to me Keith again was my editor and he said, I don't think we ought to do another ensemble book. I think we ought to do a single protagonist book. And I don't mind it being a breakout book from the, who is it going to be? And I said, it's going to be Daria. And he said, yup. That's who I think is going to be as well. Daria Gibron is a former Israeli soldier, a former Israeli spy. And what I really ... All the other protagonist characters have PhDs and master's degrees. And she's the person with the gun who actually runs toward the bad guys. And she was tremendous fun. I got to tell you, at my age, I grew up with Emma Peel of *The Avengers* and *Modesty Blaise*, that brilliant British comic strip. And so I was inculcated with tough, strong women protagonists when I was a little kid. The people who do the rescuing in these stories are the women. Right? And so I, when I had a chance to do to a single protagonist, I said, it's got to be Daria. And Keith said, yep. That's who I think it is, too. And her dialogue is fun to write. She's an absolute blast. And I really, I did two books with her before my contract at St. Martin's ended. And they were, they were a blast.

Debbi (09:12): Well, I got to tell you, they sound really fantastic to me. And I always love a book with strong female characters in it. So, yeah. And you got me with Mrs. Peel right there. So I also picked up a copy of *St. Nicholas Salvage & Wrecking*, which is not your average thriller title, I must say. And it starts off by just grabbing you by the throat and dragging you right into an escalating conflict. Then the shooting starts and the running. So are you planning to turn this into a screenplay and if not, why the hell not?

Dana (09:53): Well, because when they asked for that book, they said, we want a sequel. So I got busy right away writing *Sirocco*, which comes out in January. And then I got a two-book contract after that too. So I've been pretty darn busy with my side job of, of fiction writing. I still have a day job. I'm a newspaper editor. So that's been keeping me really going. I think my stuff is cinematic by, by nature. And so it's really exciting to translate it. And I think as you know, probably from the Sam McRae books, that screenwriting is a great diagnostic tool. When I adapted *Crashers* screenplay. I found every hole in the plot. And it was I was just thrilled that I did it because it made, I could go back and make it into a better book. So yeah, at some point I really do want to take the protagonists of these new books, Finnigan and Fiero, and do a screenplay of them. Cause I'm enjoying them a lot.

Debbi (10:47): Well, that's fantastic. And I got to say, it reminds me of something that somebody once said to me, you're a novelist with the screenwriter screaming to come out. It's just really, you know, there's kind of just this urge to do it, I guess. I mean, and I can't explain it. I don't know. But the real bones of character and story come out in that format when you come down to it. Tell us, let's see, what are you working on now?

Dana (11:24): Well, the sequel is done. It's called *Sirocco* and it takes two characters, Michael Finnigan and Katalin Fiero into their next adventure and quickly where the, where the series came from, I'm a journalist. And in my research, in my newspaper world, I discovered that the international criminal court has got lawyers and judges and clerks and technical people, but they don't have cops. There is no law enforcement arm at the international criminal court. And I remember thinking, well, that's, that explains why when Slobodan Milošević and Radovan Karadžić

from Yugoslavia were brought forth on war crime trials, it took 25 years to get them there because they essentially invited them to come to be tried. Would you care to show up for a trial? We'll have it catered, you know, it's like, that's the way it works. So I thought, ah, in the real world, there's a need for somebody who goes to find the worst of the worst people and drop them off at the court.

Dana ([12:18](#)): And so that was, that was really fun. The second thing I really wanted to do in this book, I really want to do this because I wanted to have a male and a female protagonist who are co-equals and not love interests. In no way is this Michael's book. And Katalin is, is around it, nor is it Katalin's book and Michael's around it. They they are very much co-equal and they're best friends and they complement and supplement each other and they understand each other's weaknesses and, and character deficits. And I just had not read that in a, in an action-thriller-mystery realm before. I had not seen that male and female co-protagonists. And so that was really exciting to me to try that. So this was fun.

Debbi ([13:00](#)): Yeah. I like that idea a lot. No need for a romantic interest. Just two people working together, who happen to be male and female,

Dana ([13:10](#)): They just have to have a great deal of respect for each other and have different skills. And so it's, they're fun to write.

Debbi ([13:15](#)): So basically the premise is that these people find bad people and bring them before international tribunals, is that right?

Dana ([13:24](#)): Yeah, exactly. And Michael's an ex-cop and believes there's, you know, things should be done by the book. And he's very stern about it. And Katalin is a former spy and assassin for the Spanish king. And she believes there is no book. There's only a win and a loss, and anything you can do to stay on the win category's fine. So somewhere between those two people, one who's got a big old stick up his butt, and one who doesn't believe in any rules at all. They have to find a way to come together and bridge their, what they lack in each other. So Michael brings one skill set and Katalin Fiero brings another skill set. And basically what they're doing is criminal. I mean, they are kidnapping people and taking them across international borders. And they, both of them have very large families that they're hiding this from. Michael comes from a cop family in New York, Katalin's mom and dad are liberal aristocrats from Spain in academia and the business community. So getting them to find this orbit that has nothing to do with their familial orbits is, is has been a fun needle of thread. I've really enjoyed it.

Debbi ([14:29](#)): There's almost a spy-like aspect to their lives. There's a secret part that they can't tell anybody else. I can't talk about my work stuff. What do they tell people, if somebody asks?

Dana ([14:43](#)): St. Nicholas Salvage & Wrecking is a fictional Marine salvage operation based out of Cyprus where they have their headquarters and that's how they launder their money. Now, by the way, laundering money is the national pastime in Cyprus. I think you could actually get a Letterman jacket for laundering money in that country.

Debbi ([15:03](#)): I'll have to keep that in mind. Not for me, but for my characters.

Dana ([15:07](#)): That's where the Russians go when they want to launder money. They go to Cyprus. And by the way, I got to go to Cyprus to do the research for this book. And they have

this, they have this business on the side that they don't do anything with, but the banks in Cyprus are so corrupt, they don't need to. They can just say this is what they do, and they make up business cards and then they're fine. So that was that was a fun bit of business. And their having to hide from their families. They're close to both of their families. What it is they actually do made for a, kind of a fun dynamic. I was really enjoying it.

Debbi ([15:43](#)): What sort of research did you have to do to really get to know the characters and situations in the different books you've written?

Dana ([15:52](#)): I am incredibly fortunate that I've had the luxury of traveling. So I went for the for this book, I went to the former Yugoslavia and drove with a friend through all of that area. I went and spent two weeks in Cyprus meeting people, talking to people. I went to France, went to Spain. For the next book, *Sirocco* coming out, I did spend a lot of time in Spain and I've been incredibly fortunate to be able to do that. And I basically do a very weird and broad kind of research, which is I go to these places and I hang out and I talk to people and I find out what's going on, but I don't go with a checklist. I just kind of go and say, what am I going to see? And got to Cyprus. And Cyprus has the last split capital in the world.

Dana ([16:35](#)): Like Berlin used to be where you walk up to the Turkish guard and you hand them the passport and they stamp it and you walk twenty paces and hand it to the Greek guard and they stamp it, because Turkey controls the upper one-third of the island in Turkey and Greece controls the lower two-thirds of the island. It's been that way since 1974. So that was fascinating. And also I was doing an international thriller book and Cyprus is in Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey's directly above it. And Israel is due east of Syria and Egypt is due south. So if you were going to do an international thriller book, you can't do better than them. You know, location, location, location. I mean, that was really grand fun. And then the former Yugoslavia was just, and I always learn things when I'm on the ground in places like that, that I had no idea I was looking for. If you go with a very specific checklist of research, you'll find those things. But if you just go with an open mind and look around, you will be knocked out by the stuff that you get that gives you a depth and breadth of your research. That just adds a *je ne sais quoi* to your knowledge. I've been very fortunate.

Debbi ([17:43](#)): Wow. So you do a lot of research, basically boots on the ground, as well as say online research.

Dana ([17:50](#)): Yes, I do a lot of online research. I don't trust because online research can be intrinsically wrong. So being a journalist myself, I will find something that seems pretty darn interesting. And then I will search further into the internet to see if I can find some second source or third source or fourth source that agrees with it. And once I do, then I think, oh, that's pretty good. My wife is a as a writer as well. And so Katie and I, when we travel I take notes, copious notes, she takes photos. And then later I have both my notes and her photos for research purposes, which has been tremendously handy. I want to tell you, when you go to a place like Milan, Italy, for instance, in Europe, the cathedral, the soldiers in front of the cathedral, A) look to be 12 years old and B) have Uzis, which is a frightening combination.

Dana ([18:37](#)): Nobody should have acne and Uzis at the same time. And so I have a hundred pictures of my wife, Katie King in one corner of the frame and behind her is a soldier that I'm shooting. So I can say what the soldier's uniform looks like, what kind of gun he's got whether or not they have a sidearm or whether or not they were beret or whatever, because I don't want to be

shooting photos of these guys, because they're, they look like they're adolescents with guns. So I shoot photos of my wife, who's an incredibly good sport and get like her eye and her ear. And the rest of them are images of these soldiers. She's an awfully good sport. That's all I can say.

Debbi ([19:15](#)): That's great. Well, she's a writer, so she understands. Let's see. And you mentioned Michael Crichton. Who else would you consider among your favorite writers?

Dana ([19:28](#)): Crichton was really influential for me, although he wrote some books that weren't very good. And he wrote one about airplanes called *Airframe* that I thought it was dreadful. And then *The Andromeda Strain* was a huge influence on me. There was an English author named Philip MacDonald who wrote about 30, 35 mysteries. The most famous one he ever wrote was *The List of Adrian Messenger*. Note: do not see the movie, the movies too dreadful. Do read the book, because I go back and reread the book about once every 10 years, because *The List of Adrian Messenger* is an absolutely stunningly brilliant analysis of how to put together a mystery. It's just, it's just tremendously good. Of modern writers, writers, who I really think keep me inspired and keep me excited Meg Gardiner is really wonderful. I'm going back and reading her early ones right now, but she's got a new series of Blackstone that's I think is brilliant, brilliant, too I'm a huge Lee Child fan.

Dana ([20:24](#)): I'm sorry to see that Lee Child retired this year, cause I think his Reacher books have been quite tremendous. And then as I said earlier, I was influenced by the books my dad read. *Beau Geste* and *Gunga Din* and stories of adventurous exploits. I ordered a book through Powell's. I got to tell you that this summer, with the pandemic, I've been ordering one book from an independent bookstore every week. And I bounce which independent bookstore it is because I want these guys to stay alive. So, but I just got in the mail yesterday *The Count of Monte Cristo*, cause I've never read it. And I thought, well, this is your opportunity to get to it. So I'm influenced by some really old and traditional mystery writers and then some people who are writing right now who just knock my socks off.

Debbi ([21:11](#)): Well, that's wonderful all around. I mean that you're supporting independent bookstores that way is fantastic.

Dana ([21:19](#)): They support me.

Debbi ([21:21](#)): That's great. Let's see. Is there a favorite movie you have or one that you wish you had written?

Dana ([21:36](#)): *The Peacekeeper*, which came out in 1998. George Clooney, Nicole Kidman, and it's an absolutely brilliant, brilliant thriller and the reason it's brilliant by the way, those will be some spoiler warnings here, I'll give some of it away. At the beginning of the movie, it appears to be a story about really well organized and really well-financed terrorists who steal 20 nuclear weapons from a train in Russia. And it has a very exciting opening sequence with one train to moving the other train moving and they hijack the missiles off the moving train, tremendously exciting, and they actually leave one behind and blow it up. And there's an explosion on the Russian steppes. Oh my God, this is a very big international story.

Then later you find out the story is not as big as you thought it was. It's actually one corrupt Russian general who stole his own nukes so he could steal them. And now our protagonists aren't looking for this spooky James Bondy type of villain. They're looking for one corrupt guy

trying to get a payday. Then later you find out it's not even that guy. It's one incredibly grief-ridden music teacher from Sarajevo who is so angry at the, at the UN peacekeepers that didn't keep the peace in his country, that he wanted one of those missiles and helped finance the project to get the other 20. And as Nicole Kidman's character says, I'm not fearful of the man who wants 20 missiles. I'm scared to death of the man who wants one. And it starts with the train chase and with the explosion. And it ends with a foot chase where the antagonist who is out of shape and breathing badly and has crummy shoes, as he's running through New York with a backpack, a cheap backpack and a nuclear primer in it. They had the audacity to take the story and get smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller, more human, more human, more personal, more personal. It was a gutsy move by the storytellers. And I'm embarrassed right now to tell you, I can't think of the name of the woman who directed it. Mimi Leder directed it. Brilliant film.

Debbi ([23:41](#)): Thank you for that recommendation. I have to add it to the list. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Dana ([23:50](#)): Oh my gosh. I'm having so much fun with this work that we do that, getting to write these books. And this year I didn't get to go to the world mystery convention or the ThrillerFest in New York City. Really sad not to do that because for your listeners and your audience, if you ever get a chance to go to one of these conventions, you've got to go. And the reason you go is because great, wonderful, tremendous writers are there and they want to interact with the audience there.

You know, you'll ride an elevator up with, I wrote an elevator up decades and decades ago with Sue Grafton. Sue Grafton was like excited to talk to me in an elevator. Sue Grafton. There's not a writer I've ever met who doesn't want somebody to come up and say, "God, I loved your book." Lee Child would blush if you walked up to him and said it, and he was selling billions of books it's that I really do miss the interaction of those thriller festivals there. I think they're tremendous fun. And I learned from them all the time. And God willing, we're going to have a vaccine in the not-too-distant future and we're going to start getting, coming around the corner on this pandemic. But in the meantime, I'm having a lot of fun writing my books and we're going to try and come January, I've got a new one *Sirocco* coming out and we're going to try and figure out how the heck do you launch a book in a pandemic? I don't know.

Debbi ([25:23](#)): I'm sure where there's a will, there's a way. Best of luck with that. That's fantastic.

Dana ([25:30](#)): I greatly appreciate it. Thank you.

Debbi ([25:32](#)): I definitely have to read some of your books now. I mean, I've got the first one there. I've forgotten the name already.

Dana ([25:45](#)): *St. Nicholas Salvage & Wrecking*.

Debbi ([25:45](#)): That's it. Yeah. Thank you.

Dana ([25:47](#)): It's a long title.

Debbi ([25:50](#)): It is. It's an unusual title, too, but thank you so much for being here. I really, really appreciate it. And it's been fun talking to you.

Dana ([26:00](#)): Thanks so much.

Debbi ([26:02](#)): Sure. For everyone who's watching or listening, remember that Dana has a book giveaway going while it lasts. So check that out. Also check out the podcast's Patreon page while you're at my website and looking for his guest post. I give early access and bonus episodes and more for people to support the podcast on Patreon. So please support the pod people. I will avoid making a Kevin McCarthy joke here. In two weeks, we'll have Lindsey Richardson with us. In the meantime, take care and happy reading!