

The Crime Cafe with Mark Schorr

Presented By:



Debbi: Hi everyone. My guest today has the most interesting background. He has worked as a bookstore manager, private investigator, nightclub bouncer, newspaper reporter, freelance writer, and is currently a licensed psychotherapist. Along with the diverse interests he has, which include - well, I'll get into that later - he is also an Edgar-nominated author of 11 mysteries, mystery thrillers, I should say, with titles in France, Spain, and Japan, and three books under option for adaptation. That's impressive. My guest today is Mark Schorr. Hi Mark. How are you doing today?

Mark: Good, Debbi. Nice to see you. Thank you for having me.

Debbi: Well, it's great to see you too. Among your novels, you have a series about Red Diamond, Private Eye. That caught my eye right away. I love the name.

Mark: I thought it might when I saw your stuff with Philip Marlowe. Raymond Chandler is an idol of mine in terms of as a writer. Not as a person, but as a writer and my first dog we named Marlowe. The first three books, the idea is this cab driver has a miserable life and his escape is reading, reading the hardboiled fiction, and then he has a trauma and he comes to believe that he is Red Diamond, this ace private eye, and gets involved in all sorts of misadventures.

Debbi: Oh, wow. That's interesting. Does that happen in the first book, the misadventure or does it happen ...?

Mark: The first book is the trauma, and he starts getting involved in misadventures and then it continues for two more. There is [*Red Diamond*](#), [*Private Eye*](#), [*Ace of Diamonds*](#) and [*Diamond Rock*](#). All featured the character. Simon Jaffe is his cab driver name, but Red Diamond is his P.I. name.

Debbi: I love it. That's so cool. I was going to ask you if you came up with the name after watching *Murder by Death*, which I think had the character Sam Diamond in it.

Mark: No, I just like the idea of Diamond. That is hard and Red was my nickname when I was a kid, way back when and had reddish hair. The interesting thing is I found out subsequently there's a writer named Gerry Petievich who did *To Live and Die in L.A.* and a few other books. He's a former

Secret Service agent, and he had a villain named Red Diamond in one of his books.

Debbi: Ah!

Mark: Just coincidentally.

Debbi: That's a very interesting coincidence.

Mark: Yes, yes.

Debbi: Wow. So do you plan to write any more of those books?

Mark: I'd like to, but by the third one it was not selling great, and it's been a long time. The first three were the ones that were optioned and the rights are still held by a movie studio, and I don't think it's ever going to get made. There were changes in management and things like that. So, it's not like it can sell to Hollywood. Rights are a little bit tied up. I did have another idea for Red Diamond where he would actually meet the creator of the Red Diamond stories, the author. It's almost like playing with sort of a father figure relationship. I had a few ideas along that path, but I don't think there's going to be another Diamond book.

Debbi: Hmm. Have you ever by any chance seen the British mini-series, *The Singing Detective*?

Mark: I've heard of it, but I've never seen it.

Debbi: You really should see it.

Mark: Okay.

Debbi: It's about this guy. His name is Philip Marlowe.

Mark: Ah.

Debbi: It was created by Dennis Potter, and basically the guy has, I think a condition that Dennis Potter had, and there's all this weird stuff with hallucinations and flashbacks to his childhood. It's really interesting.

Mark: I'll check it out. Thank you for the recommendation.

Debbi: Definitely check that out. Let's see, your other books are standalones. Do you have a preference for doing those versus series?

Mark: Three of them were thrillers featuring a Zen counterterrorist. [*Gunpower*](#), [*Seize the Dragon*](#) and [*Overkill*](#) are also a series. But other than that, I think there's something to be said for both of them. There's something nice about a standalone and starting fresh each time, but there's something nice about the familiarity of being able to build on what you've presented in a book. I mean, the tricky thing is how much do you rehash what's in the original book, or how much do you assume that people know. You need to do some refreshing of the recollection, but you don't want to be having pages and pages of ... "and then there was the time when blah-blah-blah". It gets kind of slow.

Debbi: Yeah. You don't want to do that.

Mark: No, no.

Debbi: You don't want to bog down the story with all that backstory.

Mark: Backstory, right. For people who have read the previous book, you don't want to punish them by just presenting too much backstory.

Debbi: Absolutely. Let's see. Among your diverse interests, I noticed you've been an international courier, among other things, which calls to mind all sorts of images. Were you carrying secret documents?

Mark: No, no. It wasn't as glamorous as that. There was a thing when I was living in LA where they used to use - and I don't think they do it anymore - but for example, if Federal Express had a small shipment like 20 bags or something like that, and they didn't want to use an airplane, they would use your baggage check-in privileges. In other words, if you were on the flight, it only cost them a per-bag cost. So they would have couriers go over and just fly over to - I flew to Japan, I flew to Thailand - and they would use my baggage check-in privileges. I could only have a carryon bag, and they would ship a whole bunch of bags with me on a commercial flight.

Debbi: Oh, wow.

Mark: So, I think it was DHL subcontracted, and I'm not sure about Federal Express, but some of the bigger shipping companies would contract with this company that then had hired me to just fly over there so they could use my baggage check-in privileges.

Debbi: Wow. Very interesting. I had no idea such a thing existed.

Mark: I didn't either. I forgot how I found out about it. This goes back to when I lived in LA, which was more than... It was about 33 years ago or so. So, it goes back a bit.

Debbi: So how does a person get involved in something like that?

Mark: I guess probably nowadays you could Google it if there is still such a thing. I know at that point, they were also running things from New York to the Caribbean and South America. I don't know if they had them going to Asia or it was based on the coast, each coast kind of thing. I suspect that's the way it was.

Debbi: That's fascinating.

Mark: New York would be Europe and South America.

Debbi: Wow. That's something. You were also a Tai Chi instructor?

Mark: Yes.

Debbi: A subject in a federally-funded ESP test or tests?

Mark: Yes. Yes. So, the Tai Chi. I've been doing martial arts ever since I was about 8 years old, and as I've gotten older, the joints are less forgiving of bouncing off of the mat or blocking punches or whatever, so now I do Tai Chi and I teach Tai Chi to a couple of people. There's a thing in Tai Chi called Push Hands, which is a real time exercise where you are trying to off balance the other person. So that's the more martial part really of the Tai Chi, as opposed to kind of slow set, which is what most people are familiar with. But Tai Chi has weapons, swords, all kinds of things, a staff.

But the actual federally-funded ESP experiment was what sparked my latest book, [The Mastermind](#). My late wife and I were in this experiment back in the '70s in Brooklyn where they had us go to a lab in a hospital,

and they wired me up with an EEG, and then they had me sleep, and my wife would project messages, images randomly chosen. They had like a Viewmaster and used random numbers to choose a particular image that she would look at and project to me while I was sleeping. Then they would wake me up when they saw in the EEG that I was dreaming after the dream and asked me what I was dreaming about. That was one experiment.

Another experiment was with a thing called the Ganzfeld, where they put basically red colored ping pong balls on my eyes and white noise on my ears. And then I had to talk stream of consciousness, and again, my wife would project images to me. So ultimately, our results were not statistically significant, but there were some times where there was just an amazing hit where she would be looking at something and I would describe it. It just was a fascinating thing.

Back then was when the Central Intelligence Agency and Defense Intelligence Agency were doing a lot of research on ESP, and in fact, there's something like one million pages that have been declassified on the research. Project Stargate was the main one, but there was all sorts of stuff. The feds were mainly interested in remote viewing, which is kind of like an individual being able to do like Google Earth kind of thing. Again, they had some fascinating stuff where there were real incredible hits by people, but not statistically significant. And some of them actually did provide good, usable intelligence data, but it's hard to separate the wheat from the chaff. There was a thing involving a submarine base that someone described accurately even before they were able to get intelligence on it.

Debbi: Good heavens!

Mark: Yeah. The parapsychologist who ran the experiment that I was involved in was a very nice guy. But as the premise for [*The Mastermind*](#), I made him the villain and I made the protagonist actually have significant ESP ability, and then it's pretty much the parapsychologist has been pursuing Thomas Lord, the main character ever since he took part in the experiments. I sort of was inspired by some of the real evil that psychologists did for the CIA like teaching them how to better torture people and things like that. So that was the spark for *The Mastermind*, being in that experiment.

Debbi: Very interesting. It sounds like a fascinating book. Is it part of your other series of thrillers or is this separate?

Mark: It is a standalone.

Debbi: Right.

Mark: There was a long gap between. Actually I had two novels that were connected, [Borderline](#) and [Obsession](#). They were connected. They involved a psychotherapist in Portland, Oregon, which is clearly close to home, getting involved in some thriller stuff, but then there was like an 8-year gap. My wife got cancer and passed away and just life was too intense there to have time for working and taking care of her and writing and just all of that stuff.

Debbi: I'm sorry to hear that.

Mark: Yeah, yeah. It was interesting. She actually got leukemia 20-some odd years ago and was the first one to respond to this drug. She was given 3 to 5 years, and then she was the first one to respond to this drug that was developed by Dr. Druker up at Oregon Health Sciences University, and it really effectively cured her of the leukemia. But then like 15 years later, she came down with breast cancer and passed from that.

Debbi: Oh my!

Mark: Yeah.

Debbi: What a shame!

Mark: Yeah, yeah. It was hard. Some hard times.

Debbi: Yeah, I know. I know that feeling, the feeling of hard times.

Mark: Yes.

Debbi: Yes. Let's see. You're trained as a mental health professional and crisis management person also, correct?

Mark: Yes. Yes.

Debbi: Do you find that this is a skillset that people are often looking for from you these days?

Mark: Yes. You know, one of the things I don't think it's in my list of things that I do, is I'm also a trainer and I train people in crisis de-escalation. So for example, everywhere from Oregon DMV to the library has a lot of people with mental illness kind of hanging out there, and the librarians didn't receive training when they first went for their jobs in how to work with people who might have a different reality or things like that. So I've trained at the library. I've trained all sorts of volunteers for the city. I've trained people at the animal shelter, just all kinds of things in crisis de-escalation. And in fact, I have one non-fiction book that was self-published. All my books are traditionally published, but I have one non-fiction book that's shorter that was self-published on crisis de-escalation.

Debbi: Very good.

Mark: Yeah, and there is a big demand for that.

Debbi: I guess so. Yeah. I wonder if you've crossed paths with my niece. She works with - well, she had worked at one time with the Department of Homeland Security in the Northwest.

Mark: I've never crossed paths. Another interesting thing that I've done is I've been a decoy for the Department of Homeland Security. The TSA at the airport, they have people and they put a little bit of explosive in your bag or on your person, and then have you go through as if you were an ordinary passenger, and they have the dogs, the sniffing dogs there, and they're tested to see if they'll alert to you.

Debbi: Oh, I was wondering about that. That is really wild.

Mark: Yes. I signed a non-disclosure agreement about as far as talking about it in detail, but I suspect that they just don't want you talking about sources and methods, like if I knew what kind of explosive was put on me, or how big it was or where they put it or anything like that that might give information to a potential terrorist. But just saying that I did it and it was really interesting. It was fun just seeing. Some dogs didn't do a good job, and there was one dog that didn't do a good job, and then I went back three months later for it, and the dog had been well trained then, and

was spot on. So he went from some remedial alert to being really good at it.

Debbi: Very good. So he finally passed the audition, so to speak.

Mark: He passed.

Debbi: Excellent. What books and authors do you find most inspire you as a writer?

Mark: Well, you know Raymond Chandler. I just really love his stuff. I always really appreciate the writing more. There's the classic story told about Raymond Chandler when they were making the movie *The Big Sleep*, and the director asked him who killed the chauffeur, and Chandler went back and looked at his stuff and said, "you know, damned if I know". I mean, I take more pride in my plotting than that, but I take most pride in my writing. I really like the writing, the scene setting, the character development, all of those things are super important to me. So Raymond Chandler, I really like his stuff.

As far as police procedurals, Michael Connolly is just, I think, the dean of that. Reading the Harry Bosch books, the Hieronymus Bosch books are just really ... he does such a great job. When I lived in LA, I worked for the *LA Herald Examiner* for a little less than two years. I was an investigative reporter covering federal court. I didn't have the police beat, but being sort of an investigative reporter, I would overlap with that area and certainly court stuff I covered a fair amount of, and occasionally police stories. So, he does such a nice job at capturing the culture there and just capturing LA just the way Chandler captured LA in the '40s sort of thing.

Debbi: Exactly. Yeah.

Mark: I really enjoy them. Mark Cameron, he does thrillers, and I just really, really enjoy his stuff. Who else? Lee Child. Lee Child, sometimes it's him telling the same story basically over and over, but he does such a good job doing it. I'm happy to go along for the ride. I really liked Robert B. Parker. Again, sometimes he was telling the same story over and over again, but he just did such a nice job doing it that you sort of know what to expect and it's kind of like an old friend sort of thing.

Debbi: Exactly. Yeah. I think a lot of times writers and these characters become like old friends to you.

Mark: Yes. Yes.

Debbi: That's part of what makes these things successful, I think.

Mark: Yes.

Debbi: What are you working on now?

Mark: I'm actually not working on a novel. I'm working as a therapist and just enjoying life, but I'm not working on a book right now. The idea of cults fascinates me, and I've been sort of collecting some non-fiction articles about them. I just recently got the names of a few podcasts that focus on cults and things like that, that complete giving up of one's will and how it's done, and how there really is a process of indoctrination that you see across all of these cults. So I suspect if I do another novel that will somehow be a part of it. But I haven't quite thrown myself into the pool yet.

Debbi: I can imagine the internet has made cults easier to spread, cult messages.

Mark: They're out there. Yes.

Debbi: For sure. What advice would you give to anyone who's interested in writing for a living?

Mark: Oh, gosh. It's tough. You have got to love writing because it's really hard to make a living at it. I mean, I've made a living as a newspaper reporter, as a magazine writer, and as a novelist, and all three of them were tough. Newspapers, I'm kind of glad I got out of them when I did. You look at the number of newspapers that have gone out of business in the past 20 years, and it's just huge. It's really, really sad. Magazine writing, being a freelance writer, it was really difficult. I mean, sometimes I'd have too many stories to do, and then there would be a lack of stories. It was real erratic income. Novels, the cliché of write about what you know, but be willing to stretch. Do your research, but don't be obsessed with the research. I sometimes find myself really packing the facts in. I think my fourth novel was about Teddy Roosevelt, and he was such a fascinating character. It's the only historical mystery that I did, but I just feel like I

almost damaged the narrative at times because I was so eager to pack facts into it. So finding that balance between telling a story and packing in facts is something I still wrestle with. Even in *The Mastermind*, I feel like I included a lot of factual information just because there were so many interesting facts. I think interesting facts is what gets me interested in a subject, and then I have to control how much I pack it into the narrative.

Debbi: Absolutely. I agree. You have to kind of have a nice balance there. I mean, that way you're intriguing people with the story as well as the facts. It's kind of like, oh, this is why it's so interesting.

Mark: Yes. Well, it's another writer who I really like - Frederick Forsyth, the thriller writer, who also was always very big on facts. They would be huge; they would call them factoids. You know, you would get to something and there would be a page and a half on how to get a fake birth certificate or what's the best way to blow up a car or things like that.

Debbi: Almost as bad as Michener.

Mark: Yes.

Debbi: Let's see. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Mark: No, just thank you for having me. And to the listeners, thank you for listening and hope you enjoyed it.

Debbi: Well, thank you very much, Mark, for being here. Oh, one more thing. Do you do signings at Powell's Books there in Oregon, Portland?

Mark: I haven't. I did signings when there used to be a mystery bookstore Murder by the Book, but they went out of business. Powell's only has the 800-pound gorillas. They're such a giant. They're such a great local resource, but they'll have James Patterson or Lee Child or someone like that. They're not going to have ...I'm a bonobo and they're 800 pound gorillas.

Debbi: Yeah. They kind of cover the waterfront in terms of publishing, so they won't focus specifically on mystery as such, or crime as such. Even so, cool place.

Mark: Yes. Very cool place.

Debbi: Very, very. Ah, yes. So, is there anything else you'd like to add?

Mark: No.

Debbi: Well, it's been great talking to you.

Mark: Great talking with you too, and fellow Philip Marlowe fans.

Debbi: Absolutely. I love Philip Marlowe. I'm a huge fan.

Mark: I like that little clip you have of Bogart.

Debbi: Oh yeah. Yes. The video there for the podcast.

Mark: Yes.

Debbi: I'll have to put a little link up to it in the corner so that viewers can see it.

Mark: Okay.

Debbi: Thanks so much, Mark.

Mark: Okay, thank you. Take care, Debbi.

Debbi: You too. Hang in there because I want to talk to you after this.

Mark: Okay, very good. Take care.

Debbi: Excellent. I just want to say thank you to everyone listening and if you would please leave a review. Also, check out the Patreon page where you can see the video that he was just talking about with a little clip from *The Big Sleep*, one of my favorite movies ever. And, check out my Patreon page. If you become a patron, you can get ad-free episodes, bonus episodes, excerpts from my books, all this stuff that I offer there for patrons. So, on that note, I'll just say our next guest will be Kim Sherwood, the first female author to write a Bond novel. That's Bond, James Bond who does ... well, he gets a mention in the book at any rate. I don't know if he's going to appear or not. I haven't gotten through the whole book, but it is a cool book. And so bring your martini shaker for this one because it's shaken, not stirred. The book is [Double or Nothing](#), and the author is Kim Sherwood and she'll be here in two weeks. So with that, I will just say thanks for listening, and until then, happy reading.