

BLOOD AND GUTS

Every year Bristol turns bloody, as writers and fans gather at Crimefest

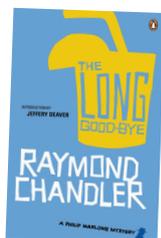
As every librarian knows, when other genres fade and moulder, crime flies off the shelf. Everyone likes a stabbing, relaxes with a murder and demands a red herring or two. You find one writer, Rankin say, and read him to death before tipping out the body and moving on to Larsson. And there are so many great crime writers it's murder keeping up.

Last month, as they do every year, the most deviant, blood-thirsty, scheming and darkly laconic of the bunch came to Bristol. Along with Crimefest co-host Adrian Muller, we asked them who or what made them turn to crime...

Lyndsey Davis

Serial killers, locked-room mysteries, action-adventure: her dryly-humorous Falco, detective of Ancient Rome, won her the Cartier Diamond Dagger and Premio Colosseo

My favourite would be Raymond Chandler, the archetypal wise-cracker who also writes exquisite prose bejewelled with elegant metaphors. His vision of LA controlled by the corrupt rich and inhabited by the disillusioned and disappointed is the classic setting for Marlowe, the classic private eye. It is peopled with unforgettable characters – think of Moose Molloy – and home to archetypal situations. What could beat the ghastly, sluggish rise to the surface of the corpse in *The Lady In The Lake*? But my absolute favourite is *The Long Goodbye*, with its extended story and painful examination of a very complex friendship.



Peter James

Film producer, big-selling horror writer and creator of Roy Grace, a man rasping at the dark underbelly of Brighton

Graham Greene wrote the novel that made me want to be a crime writer – *Brighton Rock*. At 14, growing up in Brighton, I was blown away by such vivid writing about the place I knew so well: It was the first time I had read a crime novel which broke the culture of the traditional English detective story – the kind of Agatha Christie scenario which began with a dead body and was all about the puzzle of solving it. *Brighton Rock* had little detective work in it, instead focusing on the inner lives of the criminals, and creating one of the most chilling portrayals of evil, in the teenage gangster Pinkie, that I have ever read. I subsequently devoured everything Greene wrote and regularly re-read him. He is a master of compelling first lines: *Brighton Rock* starts “Within thirty minutes of arriving in Brighton, Hale knew they meant to murder him.” Equally, few other novelists can create characters in a few, short brushstrokes that leap so vividly off the page. I've learned so much from him.

Left: From pulp to Penguin, Chandler's prose turned crime into great literature

Adrian Muller

Co-host of CrimeFest

Val McDermid's *A Place of Execution* is easily one of the best crime novels ever. Authors whose books I never miss: Laurie King, who has married off Sherlock Holmes in her Mary Russell series with great results; Dana Stabenow's Alaska-based Kate Shugak books are both fun and dramatic, and the author is brilliant at character relationships; Ariana Franklin sets her series during the reign of Henry II; Meg Gardiner's Evan Delaney thrillers will have you turning pages late into the night – and morning. C.J. Sansom writes a great historical series, John Straley – another Alaskan author – is responsible for the beautifully written and poignant Cecil Younger novels. Paul Johnston's Quintin Dalrymple books, set in the futuristic city state of Edinburgh, are unique and out of print but well worth seeking out. If you like audio books, you will not find a better reader than John le Carré who gives every character his or her own voice in the (mostly) abridged versions of his books.



Deon Meyer

Meyer's men are addicted to drink and tobacco, misery and rage. He writes in Afrikaans and translations have won awards worldwide.

Don's Book Exchange was a dusty second-hand bookshop about half an hour's bicycle ride from our home in Klerksdorp – an oasis of affordable reading for a fourteen-year old South African kid from the wrong side of the tracks. It was where I bought my first Ed McBain. For fifty cents. It was, in retrospect, a rite of passage. Regrettably, I can't recall which of the McBain's 87th Precinct titles was the first one I read. However, I do remember the fever and intense pleasure of discovering a new kind of book – grown-up, thrilling, wry, suspenseful, gritty, witty, human ... and a whole new genre, the police procedural, that somehow captured my imagination like none before or since. It was like coming home.

And for the next four decades, I would buy and devour every book the late, great man wrote, including a signed hardback copy of *Alice in Jeopardy* for \$22.50 from Mysterious Galaxy in San Diego during a US book tour, my most prized possession. (The very thought that I was sharing a space Mr. McBain had also visited, thrills me to this day. And my only real claim to fame is that he and I shared adjacent pages in our mutual Dutch publisher's catalogue some years ago.)

His books have inspired, taught, and greatly influenced me as an author. From the vivid city settings, to the fallible, affable cop characters, the great dialogue, the perfect plotting, the word economy, and his incredible work ethic, he will always remain, in my estimation, the King of Crime.

CrimeFest is an international crime fiction convention for people who like to read an occasional crime novel and die-hard fanatics. Next year is the 5th CrimeFest with authors including: Lee Child, Jeffery Deaver, Philip Kerr and many, many more. www.crimefest.com