

FEATURE: LEFT COAST CRIME

Bloody books

Bristol is to become the first British city to host Left Coast Crime, America's second-largest crime writing festival, later this month. **Alison Bone** offers a sneak preview of the events in store for crime fiction fans from home and abroad

America's second-largest crime fiction convention, Left Coast Crime, is coming to Britain for the first time, and publishers in the UK are gearing up for big sales. "It's not unusual for punters at the festival to walk around with a trolley, and fill it up with books," co-host Adrian Muller says.

It is likely to be at least five years before Left Coast Crime crosses the Atlantic to the UK again, so this is a real opportunity for the UK to get on board. Around 400 delegates—half of these American—will be at the event, which takes place at the Bristol Marriott Royal Hotel from 16th to 19th March, and costs £100 a head, including a convention goodie bag, and access to all panel discussions and author interviews.

Fans from America

Authors attending include Boris Akunin, Jacqueline Winspear, Jeffrey Deaver and Andrew Taylor. "Left Coast Crime is particularly interesting this year because so many of the audience will be from North America," Taylor says. "So it's a chance for British authors to reach out to a new audience—and *vice versa* of course."

Blackwell's will be the official bookseller, sharing a conference room with US book dealers. Anna Vines, deputy manager of Blackwell's in Bristol, said she would be bringing in more than 4,000 books and around 400 different titles.

"This should be a fantastic opportunity for publishers in terms of sales," Vines says. "We will get Americans looking for titles by English authors

before they are published in America—they just ship pallets of books home." Muller has lined up shipping company Mailboxes Etc to help US delegates to send their books back.

A grant from the Brunel 200 initiative, organised in Bristol to mark the bicentenary of the birth of the great engineer, has enabled Muller and fellow co-host Myles Allfrey to commission a short story by Andrew Taylor which will be given free to delegates and distributed in Bristol's libraries. The story, *Fingers to the Bone*, will be serialised in the *Bristol Evening Post*. Delegates will also receive a convention bag with one or two free books, provided by publishers including Piatkus and Penguin.

Penguin has a room at the festival, and will launch its new crime website there. Book proofs will be on offer, and Penguin is inviting authors to the room for signings. The website showcases up-and-coming crime writers, with exclusive articles and news about Penguin authors.

Mira Books aims to use Left Coast Crime to establish itself as a *bona fide* crime and thriller publisher. It is hosting a cocktail party for International Thriller Writers Inc, and is publishing an anthology with ITW in October. "This is a good opportunity for us, being relatively new in the genre, to show our faces and let everyone know we're here," Catherine Burke, Mira editor, says. "Whether they are authors, agents, or other publishers, it's a good way of announcing ourselves at an international level."

Crime talks

Left Coast Crime has a busy programme of events with panel discussions ranging from "The Thrill of the Odd Job: Unusual Occupations in Thrillers", to "Is That a Truncheon in Your Pocket? Differences in Police Procedurals Either Side of the Pond", and "The Unusual Suspects: How Far Can You Go? Sex and Violence in Crime Writing".



THE BRUCE ALEXANDER AWARD SHORTLIST

Spectres in the Smoke **Tony Broadbent**
(St Martin's, US)

Night's Child **Maureen Jennings**
(McClelland & Stewart, Canada)

Pardonable Lies **Jacqueline Winspear**
(Henry Holt, US)

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Anna Vines,
Blackwell's,
Bristol

The shortlist for ITW's inaugural Thriller Awards will be announced at the festival, including best novel and best paperback original. Winners of the Lefty award, for best humorous crime novel, and the Bruce Alexander Award, for best historical crime novel, will also be announced; these awards are open to British authors for the first time.

Science fiction and fantasy conventions are swamped with die-hard fans dressed as Yodas or Frodos, but although crime and thriller fans are loyal, "people don't show up in fancy dress," Muller says. "It's probably just as well. We wouldn't want people impersonating Hannibal Lecter."

Taylor points out that festivals provide a unique forum for authors and readers to meet. "Authors can promote themselves to their core readership, and festivals are a good way to acquire new readers—fans of Author A may start reading the works of Author B because A and B appear together on the same panel." He also believes that regular appearances at festivals give authors greater visibility among booksellers and publishers.

Beverly Cousins, editorial director for crime and thrillers at Penguin, is intrigued to see how the festival will go down with UK fans. "Because Left Coast Crime is usually in America it is full of zealous fans. We're much more sedate in the UK—people go to mingle and socialise—it will be interesting to see the mix." www.penguinmostwanted.co.uk

THE LEFTY AWARD SHORTLIST

Cue The Easter Bunny **Liz Evans** (Orion, UK)

The Big Over Easy **Jasper Fforde** (Hodder & Stoughton, UK)

Highway 61 Resurfaced **Bill Fitzhugh**
(Morrow, US)

Cast Adrift **Peter Guttridge** (Allison & Busby, UK)

Fags and Lager **Charlie Williams** (Serpent's Tail, UK)