

Fiction

BLEED A RIVER DEEP

Brian McGilloway
Macmillan £12.99

Brian McGilloway has won acclaim for previous novels featuring Benedict Devlin as their hero, and he's kept the standards high here.

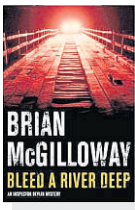
This time Devlin is in hot water after a US diplomat is shot and injured on his watch.

In a story that features subjects as varied as environmental issues, people trafficking and murder, the police inspector is kept extremely busy – even while he is on suspension for the aforementioned misdemeanour.

Unlike so many of today's cop heroes, Devlin is a likeable chap, with a wife and family.

Of course, he's obsessed with "the job", but refreshingly he also has a life outside of work.

Bleed A River Deep boasts a well-plotted storyline, which has enough twists and turns to keep the reader enthralled to the final page. A great way to pass a rainy day!
Sandra Mangan



IT'S BEGINNING TO HURT

James Lasdun
Jonathan Cape £16.99

New York-based British author James Lasdun's third collection of short stories, following his critically acclaimed novel *Seven Lies*, is nothing short of a revelation. Dealing with fear, love, hatred, insecurity, lust, guilt and shame, each story is linked by the author's incredibly incisive prose.

The many highlights include *The Incalculable Life Gesture*, in which a man feels death's hand on his shoulder when he discovers he may have throat cancer while attempting to resolve a strained relationship with his sister. *A Bourgeois Story*, in which a high-achieving accountant is confronted with the Communist ideologies of a former student friend, is another highlight.

Highly intelligent, elegantly composed, darkly haunting and greatly moving, few writers could even hope to compete with the literary brilliance that Lasdun displays.

Dean Haigh



50 WAYS TO FIND A LOVER

Lucy-Anne Holmes
Pan £6.99

Sarah Sergeant is bubbly, attractive and loved by her friends; she is also single and spends an indecent amount of time in her pyjamas crying. Fast approaching 30, her loving friends and family decide to kick-start her love life and encourage her to embark on a hilarious dating adventure to explore 50 different ways to find a man.

Sarah is introduced as a modern Bridget Jones, only she has left the diary behind and is documenting the experience on an internet blog. However, she is not merely a reproduction of the well-known spinster aimed at a new, more technology aware audience.

Despite the similar flaws and insecurities, author Lucy-Anne Holmes has drawn on her own blogging experience to create a refreshing and entertaining character that readers can easily relate to and support.

A fast-paced, smart and very funny read.

Rebecca Taylor



This week's big read BLEEDING HEART SQUARE

Andrew Taylor Penguin £6.99

John Le Carre, Colin Dexter, PD James and Ruth Rendell have all been winners of the most prestigious award in English-language crime writing.

Add to their ranks the name of Forest of Dean author Andrew Taylor; now the proud owner of the Cartier Diamond Dagger.

It's awarded by the Crime Writers' Association, with the recipient decided by fellow crime writers.

It's for sustained excellence in writing and Andrew, who has 40 novels to his name, more than qualifies.

"It's like a lifetime achievement award," he said. "It's the apex of a career because it's for a whole body of work and not just one book."

"But I still have much more I want to write, so it feels strange being given an award for a lifetime's work."

His first novel, *Caroline Minuscule*, was published in 1982 at the same time as he and his wife moved to Coleford.

He is currently writing a novel set in the 18th century, called *The Anatomy Of Ghosts*.

"It's about how ghosts were thought of in the 18th century – quite different to now. There'll also be a few corpses in it, too."

Andrew – who is one of the star names at this year's Crimefest (see below) – wasn't even sure his first book was a crime novel, but his publishers decided it was, and he hasn't looked back since.

"I was reading Patricia Highsmith novels, such as her Mr Ripley series. Rather than the typical whisky-drinking private eye or the whodunit on the village green, neither of which interested me, she had a psychopath as her hero, someone who killed. I guess I wanted to do something similar but in a more English vein."

Or indeed, a Forest of Dean vein: "For me, I think the Forest is a constant influence – it's not quite England or Wales and it's absolutely fascinating."

"You go for a walk in the woods and you can peel away the layers of history going back to the Iron Age. It's all there among the trees and you never know what might be around the corner."

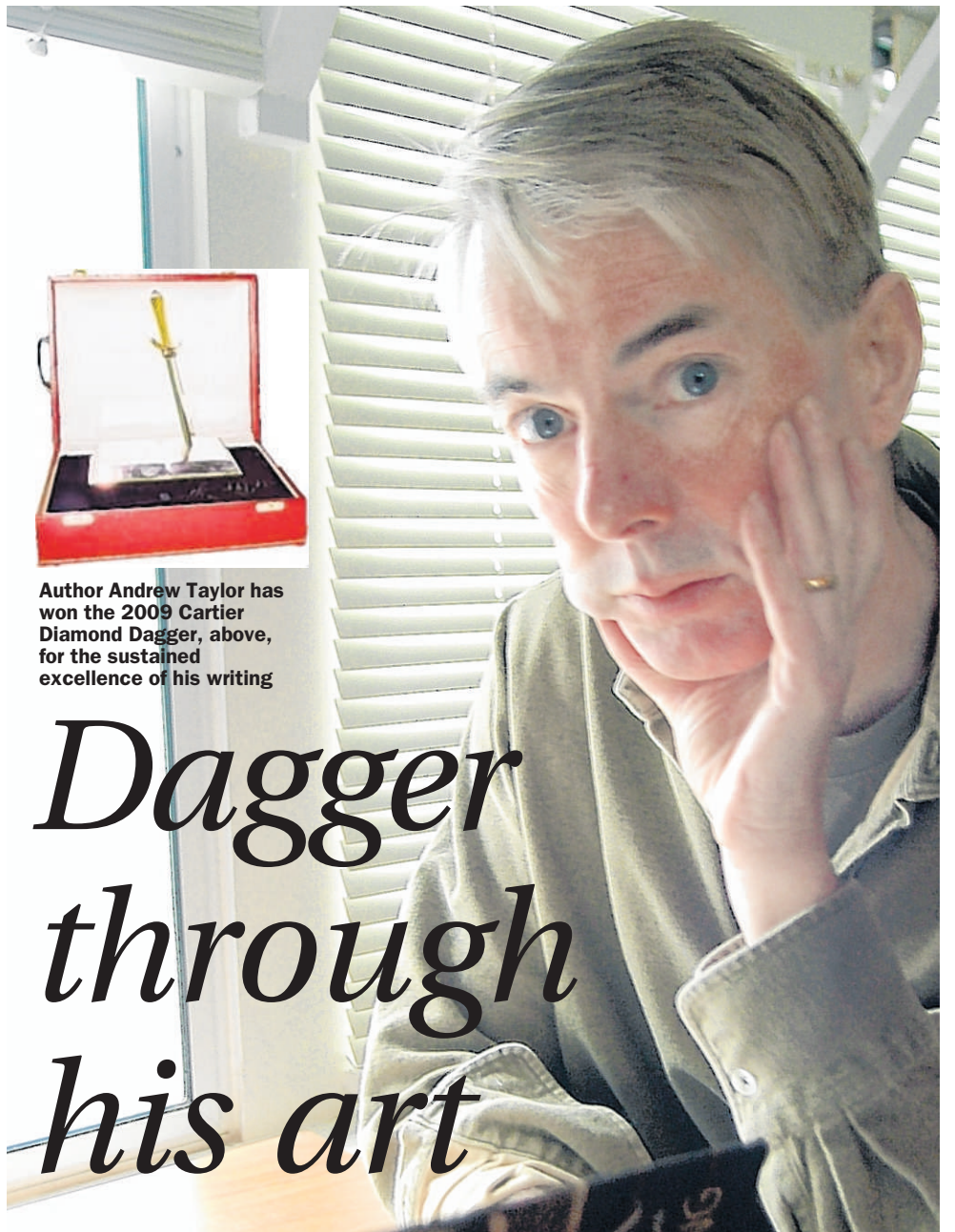
"We'd been visiting the Forest since the late 1970s and even my first novel was partly written here. From my second novel onwards, I started basing my locations on places in the Forest – *A Castle In Waiting* was based on St Briavel's Castle."

"Something I never do, though, is actually set something in a real place – I always fictionalise it because it gives me more room for manoeuvre, to change details to suit the narrative."

Although outwardly his latest novel, *Bleeding Heart Square*, was based in an old Victorian area of north London, there are plenty of Forest references tucked away. And the bulk of his research for the novel, on the British Union of Fascists, was done at Littledean Gaol, now the Crime Through Time Museum.

As well as Patricia Highsmith, Andrew has long been fascinated by Edgar Allen Poe, whom he researched for his 2003 novel, *The American Boy*, and spoke about recently for a BBC Radio 3 series.

"Most people tend to think of Poe as a late



Author Andrew Taylor has won the 2009 Cartier Diamond Dagger, above, for the sustained excellence of his writing

Dagger through his art

Victorian author; but he was way ahead of his time – he actually grew up in Jane Austen's England. People tend to think of him as a drug-addled gothic horror writer but he's much more complex and sophisticated than that."

Like Poe, Andrew's books are imbued with a dark menace.

"I wouldn't like to say where the dark elements come from," Andrew laughed.

"But if you have a corpse in your story it really gets the narrative moving."

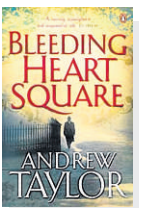
"I don't want to buy into the pornography of violence so I never get too graphic or gory – I feel it's morally wrong and to me it's the difference between good and bad writing. The greatest

thing in the writer's armoury is the reader's imagination."

However, bashing out 6,000 words a day on his computer did take its toll. More than 10 years ago he developed a repetitive strain injury which prevents him from typing for long periods.

"At first I thought it would be strange, because of the whole brain, eye and hand co-ordination thing, but now I'm quite used to dictating and then going in and rewriting bits as I go along. It works for me."

Owen Adams



Crime scene

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Forest of Dean crime writer Andrew Taylor, recipient of the 2009 Cartier Diamond Dagger, is one the featured guest authors at this year's Crimefest crime fiction convention in Bristol.

Best-selling novelists Michael Connelly, Simon Brett and Håkan Nesser are also headlining. Other attending authors include MC Beaton, Gyles Brandreth, Meg Gardiner, John Harvey, and West writers MR Hall and Jenni Mills.

The convention is being held for the second year at the Bristol Marriott Royal Hotel, College Green, Bristol, from May 14-17. It is one of the most popular dates in the crime fiction calendar, and the 400-plus delegates include readers, writers, agents and publishers from around the world.

The slots for aspiring crime writers to pitch

their manuscripts to top agents have already been booked up, but there is still time to register for this year's crime writing workshop. This includes a one-on-one assessment of submitted work, panels on various aspects of writing, and an intensive afternoon class. As part of the registration fee,

students will also be able to enter the Crime Writers' Association's Debut Dagger Competition.

Full Crimefest passes cost £135, and include admittance to all panels. Day passes, priced £65, are available for Friday and Saturday. Tickets to the featured guest author interviews are £12.50. All pass-holders receive a canvas bookbag and a souvenir programme.

For more details about Crimefest 2009, go to www.crimefest.com



WIN A PASS TO CRIMEFEST

We have teamed up with Crimefest organisers to offer two lucky readers the chance to be there for every day of this year's Crimefest convention.

The full passes are worth £135 and entitle the holder to attend all panels and interviews at the event, being held at Bristol Marriott Royal Hotel from May 14-17. All pass holders receive a bookbag and programme, but must pay their own travel costs and accommodation, if necessary, and for the gala dinner if they wish to attend.

To be in with a chance of winning a pass, just tell us the answer to this simple question:

Which prestigious crime fiction award has Andrew Taylor just won?

Send your answers on a postcard to Crimefest Competition, West Country Life, Temple Way, Bristol BS99 7HD. Include your name, address, email address and telephone number. Alternatively, email your entry to a.vallis@bepp.co.uk. Entries must be received by noon on Thursday, May 7.

Terms and conditions: The first two eligible entries drawn at random will each win a Crimefest pass as described. Standard Western Daily Press terms and conditions apply – see public notices on a Wednesday or log on at www.westerndailypress.com/competitionrules