

Crime Fiction in the UK - Video Transcript

Jane: Hi, I'm Jane. This report is about fiction and becoming a fiction writer. However, we're not looking at science fiction or fantasy novels, but at crime fiction. Since the days of Sherlock Holmes, crime fiction has been one of the most popular genres in the UK. So we're going to meet a crime fiction writer and visit a book convention to find out why so many of us enjoy reading about crime.

Matthew: My name's Matthew Hall. I write novels as M R Hall. I also write television screenplays. Before I was a writer, I trained and practised the law. I was what's called a barrister which is a courtroom advocate. In Britain, a barrister both has to prosecute and defend, and what happened to me was that I found that I enjoyed defending people and I really hated prosecuting them. I was quite a bad prosecutor, several people escaped prison because of me I think. But what happened was that I got a lot of stories from the people I defended and I've used them in my writing in the years since.

As a writer I'm marketed in the crime fiction genre. That's the biggest genre that we have in British publishing. It's not so much crime that interests me as notions of justice and injustice, and how justice is achieved. My experience as a lawyer always taught me that justice has to be really fought for by individuals, so my books are always about that struggle for justice.

Jane: For fans of crime fiction, who want to learn more about their favourite books and authors, book conventions are held all around the world. One of these conventions in the UK is called *CrimeFest*.

Adrian: Hi, I'm Adrian.

Myles: Hi. I'm Myles.

Adrian: And we're in Bristol for *CrimeFest*.

The difference between *CrimeFest* and other crime-fiction conventions in Britain is that any author can speak at our convention and it's a very social occasion, where authors and readers can actually mix and hang out together.

Mathew: It's great to meet people who've been reading your books and to get their responses. It's not always the responses you want to hear, but that's actually interesting as well, so it's always, usually, a good experience.

Myles: Crime fiction is a story. People love stories. There is nearly always a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion. And people like the whole idea of completion. Unlike possibly literature where you can be left hanging, you can have a story, but it doesn't necessarily have conclusions, whereas crime fiction nearly always does.

Adrian: I think another reason that crime fiction is so popular is because a lot of books have got central characters that return, and readers like to grow with the characters and the family around them.

Matthew: The central character in my series of novels is called *Jenny Cooper*. She is what's called a coroner. In Britain, when someone dies an unnatural death, that death has to be investigated by a coroner and the cause of it recorded. She acts as an investigator and also a little like a judge at the same time. She crosses swords with the police quite often, so her mission always is to find out the cause of a death which other agencies have failed to discover.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

Video Series

Jane: Cooper has her office in the north of Bristol, but she lives across the river in Wales, which is a different country from England. And increasingly these two countries are moving a little bit further apart, so I use that as part of my storytelling. Jenny drives every day over a big bridge between England and Wales and that becomes a metaphor for all sorts of things in the books. She's dealing with life and death, so crossing the bridge is a central metaphor for life and death, I suppose, as well.

Aside from writing books, I also write television screenplays. It's a very different experience from writing books. In television you are very much part of a team as a writer. It can work very well if you are in a good team of people and you all have the same vision, but quite often you don't have the same vision and you get a fight. Ultimately, you don't have an awful lot of freedom in television, but it is wonderful seeing things come to life on the screen. Writing books is completely liberating; nobody tells me what to do, so I've come to see writing books as freedom and television is great and it also pays well.

The book which I've just published is called *The Flight* and it tells the story of an Airbus A380, the world's biggest and most sophisticated aircraft. These aircraft are effectively flown by computers, which is very important to the plot. We follow a plane as it takes off from Heathrow and after 15 minutes, it gets into trouble and it crashes in the Severn Estuary and some of the bodies from the wreckage wash up in Jenny Cooper's area, and she has to find out how they died, and it leads her into an investigation into the cause of this air disaster.

Myles: My advice to any young writer would be just to keep at it. Get used to the idea of rejection because it will happen to you. Take any advice that is given to you with this rejection, but just keep going and keep pushing.

Matthew: Most of writing is storytelling, so what you really have to do is learn the craft of storytelling, and the way I did it, was that I went on a number of courses and I read a number of books about story structure, and it took me about three years really to learn the rules of how a story is constructed. And once you have that basic understanding, then everything else flows from it, so it really is worth learning those rules to begin with.