

# Bad: All About Crime Transcript - Crime Writers Talking Books for Lismore Library

## **SPEAKERS**

Chris Hammer, Catherine Du Peloux Menage, Michael Robotham, Lucy Kinsley, Candice Fox, Kate Evans, Andy Muir, Suzanne Leal

### **Suzanne Leal 00:05**

Welcome to our podcast Bad: All About Crime brought to you by Bad Sydney Crime Writers Festival and the City of Sydney. I'm Suzanne Leal.

### **Andy Muir 00:13**

And I'm Andy Muir. And each month we'll be exploring the big questions in crime and crime writing, subscribe to our podcast, then jump onto the Bad: All About Crime book club page on Facebook, to be part of the conversation. And thanks for listening.

### **Catherine Du Peloux Menage 00:29**

Welcome, everyone, to this new episode of the Bad: All About Crime podcast. My name is Catherine Du Peloux Menage, and I'm the artistic director of Bad Sydney. This is a very special episode as it's a recording of our episode for Lismore Library. You will all remember the appalling floods in Lismore and indeed throughout New South Wales and into Queensland this year, but what caught my imagination and my attention vividly was a picture that was posted all over social media of books being thrown out of the window at Lismore library and just piling up on the ground outside, enough to break anybody's heart really, certainly a book lovers heart, and that inspired us to try to do something to raise some money for Lismore to buy books or anything else that they need. We appealed to our wonderful crime writers and three of Australia's best crime writers, Candice Fox, Michael Robotham and Chris hammer, agreed to join us to talk books, for Lismore Library, you're going to hear them in conversation with Kate Evans, from The Bookshelf on Radio National talking about libraries, books, and indeed how to set a crime in a library. So that shouldn't give us any ideas, of course. And also joining us from Lismore on the evening, was the Acting Regional Library Manager, Lucy Kinsley, who tells a rather grim story of how they just finished recovering from previous floods. The library was new, it was wonderful. And they were hit by not one but two floods, and the water got higher and higher. I hope you really enjoy listening to them. Welcome. Thank you for joining us both at at home on Zoom and in the room to raise funds for the Lismore library, which we all know has been very badly affected by the recent floods. My name is Catherine Du Peloux Menage and I'm the artistic director of Bad Sydney. I was talking to a colleague on the board and she said, "Oh, we should do something, you know." So we did. And here we are. We've raised I think, close to \$16,000, which is really good. Last night, we were talking to the fabulous or Sue Turnbull who was talking to the fabulous English crime writer Lynda La Plante and halfway through the session, I got this message from one of her staff saying, Lynda's going to donate, how does she do it? So that was just fantastic, and really incredibly kind. Libraries, of course, are all about the stories they contain, and we're going to have an evening of stories, you may actually have a nice surprise. But I'd like to acknowledge before we start that we are in the land of the Gadigal people of the

Eora nation, great storytellers themselves. We acknowledge their continuing connection to land, waters and culture, and we pay our respects to their elders past and present. I'd like to thank the State Library of New South Wales for making the event tonight possible, at such short notice and with such goodwill, it's not been easy, actually. Thank you so much to Marcelo, particularly and his team are doing everything they could to make this happen. In a few moments, we'll cross to Lismore. Well, I hope we'll cross, where Lucy Kinsley, who is the Acting Regional Library Manager is going to speak to us briefly about what's happening at their end. After their second flood she told me this morning that they've got water in the library again. Then I'll hand over to Kate Evans from the ABC, ABC Radio National's The Bookshelf, who will talk to three of Australia's best crime writers, and in order of where they're sitting not in any other order, Candice Fox, Michael Robotham and Chris hammer. Thank you. So we're gonna talk crimes, we're going to talk libraries. But now we're going to hand over to Lucy.

**Lucy Kinsley 04:38**

I thank you and I have to say thank you for everybody involved in this whole project. It's been absolutely wonderful. And the response from across Australia has been overwhelming. So thank you to everybody. As you know, we were inundated to 14 meters, well, literally four weeks ago and today we just started cleaning out again, this time we water came into the ground floor to waist height. So we're starting to clean out again. Over 29,000 books were written, thrown out the windows at Lismore library. And at the moment, we are starting to find out how many were destroyed in people's houses. And what you see on television has no relationship to what it actually is like to live in Lismore, at the moment, you just drive through streets where houses have had all their walls removed, the windows are open, some houses have tape around them, it means that they are damaged beyond repair. The community is coming together and but it's just overwhelming, just overwhelming. It's hard to understand. And now we've been here again. But it's community events like this, and that are raising the enthusiasm, perhaps not the right word, but the coming together of the community to build, to develop, to grow and look at other options on how we will step forward. And all I can say is thank you again, for attending this special event. Thank you to the authors, so generous of you to give your time, the State Library, to Bad Crime. Thank you for thinking of us. It's just been an experience that I hope I never have to repeat again. And that's all I can say. But thank you again. And so looking forward to hearing this event. So over to you. Thank you.

**Kate Evans 06:44**

And thank you very much Lucy, because like everyone here I've also been haunted by that image of the ruin books in front of the Lismore library, and a community impacted so terribly by these deluges and of course, as we know, it's happened again this week. So in solidarity, this one small gesture initiated by Bad Crime, Bad Writers Festival. So welcome everybody again, both in this room here at the State Library of New South Wales and online. As Katherine said, my name is Kate Evans, I present a weekly Books program on ABC Radio National The Bookshelf and I'm delighted to be here with these three crime writers, all of whom write both series and standalone novels, all of whom have terribly twisted imaginations, and all of whom include levity and humor, as well as suspense, mystery, blood and drama in our work. And actually thinking of suspense, one thing that always gets me at events like this is the occasional phone that goes off. So before we get too much into it, just double check that you've put your phone on silent. Because you never know you might feature in a library murder, should your phone go off at the wrong time. But I'd like us all to imagine a body or two in a library, or think about what it means that a detective might enter a library, because that happens in an awful lot of detective fiction, all the way back to noir and Raymond Chandler. There are reasons why libraries are important as repositories of knowledge of local history, they play so many different roles and I'd like to speculate they

might also be quite good venues for imagining a fictional crime, and we might try to work something out as a group. But just to give a bit more detail about the people before you, Candice Fox writes series as well as standalones, she also collaborates with American writer James Patterson. Her novels include Eden, Gathering Dark and Redemption Point, and Crimson Lake which is on screen right now as Troppo on ABC iView, which I hope you've all seen. Hello Candice.

**Candice Fox** 09:05

Oh, hi.

**Kate Evans** 09:08

Michael Robotham's novels include the Joe O'Lachlan series, When She Was Good, and the Evie series as well as standalones including his latest When You Are Mine. His next book is coming out in June, Lying Beside You, which returns to Evie and Cormac Hello, Michael.

**Michael Robotham** 09:26

Hi. Thanks Kate.

**Kate Evans** 09:28

And Chris Hammer's books include Scrubland, Trust, and Treasure and Dirt. Hi, Chris.

**Chris Hammer** 09:34

Hello, how lovely to be here.

**Kate Evans** 09:36

And although we are here to have some light hearted fun and to speculate on things in the crime fiction world, you know, there's a pretty serious reason that we're here as well. So I wonder if we could start by thinking about floods and Chris Hammer, you've also written nonfiction, you've written about rivers, you've written a book about the Murray Darling Basin, so I wonder what that knowledge means to you as you've observed these floods over the last month.

**Chris Hammer** 10:02

There's, there's different types of floods in Australia, the floods out west, particularly the ones out in Queensland on the outside rivers like the Paru are fantastic because you get a month's notice that rains up in the mountains, but the land gets so flat, the flood moves so slowly that you can walk in front of it, and up there, they're a cause of real celebration. The graziers will go and buy more stock, so they've got them there because they know that the floodwaters coming in, there'll be feed and, and whatever. So floods aren't always bad. And in those rivers that can be very healthy down in South Australia. They're really helpful for flushing the salt out and trying and getting them out the mouth of the Murray River open. But these floods, the ones the ones that at Lismore, you know, I have a nephew who lives in Lismore, and he's been communicating, he's a school teacher there. And just you know how dramatic the impact on the communities been a place that's actually used to flooding but nothing like this. Someone commented the other day, well, that's a one in 500 year flood, you know, twice in a month.

**Michael Robotham** 11:19

That's not to say it's interesting, sort of really, when it comes to floods, we've got this strange sort of connection because my dad is from Lismore and my mom was from Kyogle, and my grandparents on my father's side that is where I spent my childhood going there and they were in a flooded area right in

the center of town. And periodically their entire bottom floor would flood and we couldn't get in to see them. And I was born at Casino and from there we moved to Gundagai. Now Gundagai is the scene of the worst, most deadly flood in Australian history and the sort of 70s I think it was and I saw the ABC did a piece to camera last week where they sent someone to Gundagai because after that flood Gundagai was rebuilt on the hills surrounding the floodplain in North and South Gundagai and they were speculating whether that was potentially what might have to happen in somewhere like Lismore than you know what they look at actually rebuilding the town. But yeah, just those two places and my childhood was dominated by by Lismore and Gundagai. It's where I spent all my childhood.

**Kate Evans** 12:29

Well, you jumped the gun on my question there because I was going to ask you about Gundagai because I knew you had that connection. But of course that's also that flood is the story that features in Anita Heiss' novel. *Bila Yarrudhanggalangdhuray* and so that was an interesting point of connection across those floods.

**Michael Robotham** 12:50

Yeah, no, absolutely. I mean, that was, I mean, that's a beautiful book, actually, in terms of you know, and because the indigenous people save so many lives that night that the death toll, which ran into the 70s would have been so much higher. And it's funny, I mean, within Gundagai, it's that that flood, even though I mean, I was there in the in the, in the mid 1960s. And that flood still was the town. I mean, it just passed down from family to family stories that flood and, and you could still see on the floodplain where they had the show ground and the golf course you could still see the remnants of buildings that were destroyed in that flood.

**Kate Evans** 13:30

Yeah, I mean, these these events have shaped the landscape of Australia and then in in buildings and all around Australia, there are flood marks, but what's it meant to you Candice watching these events?

**Candice Fox** 13:41

Whenever you're facing a natural disaster, I think it's, it's, it's kind of an equaliser, it's coming through the door, you've got to pick up everything you have and leave. And and there's a moment when you're watching this on the TV, when you think I'm going to respond to that or not, you know, how much do I care about that? Do I know those people? Do I not know those people? How much heart that I have? And I think that that's it's really wonderful when you see a bunch of people getting together and saying, That's not okay, I'm going to help with that because the world is so full of disaster, you know. And at the moment the the last few years I've felt to myself, you get this fatigue of how much badness there is out there. But Lismore has attracted so much love for what it's it's going through right now. I think that's that's that's the lovely side of what a terrible what a terrible event this is.

**Kate Evans** 14:37

Well let's let's focus then on something that is more positive, but that is also an equaliser in a way and that is the role of libraries, because they're communal and civic spaces. I mean, here we are in the State Library, a place where you see researchers and homeless people and school children and all, using these spaces. But because we're here, you know, talking about fiction and the imagination, I'm really struck by how often libraries appear in fiction. Yeah, there's a lot of it in fantasy fiction. There's a lot of flying books and, you know, libraries where knowledge is sort of manifest through, you know, really inventive ways. There's a lot of it in literary fiction. There's a lot of it in crime novels, particularly

pre internet, where detectives like, I mean, I know Harry Bosch has done it and Kinsey Millhone has done it, Sara Paretsky has done that. They have to go into the local studies collection at the library to try to track back a story. But I'm curious about the role of libraries in your own lives. Chris Hammer what have libraries meant to you?

**Chris Hammer** 15:51

As a child, that's, I'm the youngest of three, every week, we would go to the library to the to the ACT central library. I grew up grew up in Canberra, there was a library at school and there was even strangely a small library across the road from the school. And they were all as they were in those days brilliantly stocked wonderful books, just an escape, an imagination, it was always a trade. I mean, mum would never, if it was the swimming pool or the library, we were in the car before she was other stuff not so much. But oh, yeah, absolutely essential. Really, I mean, these big libraries like this a beautiful, you know, I live in Canberra, so you have the National Library, and you've got a series of wonderful libraries at the ANU. But you know, in some country towns, where you don't have a bookstore, the library is absolutely central. And they're, they're a social hub. You know, it's where you get your book clubs. It's where people where people can go to get out of the heat, when people go to use the internet, because the internet's often not very good, you know, a lot of elderly people. It's like a social hub for the town. It's really important part of the fabric of this country, I feel.

**Kate Evans** 17:17

And really important for like for kids who don't have anywhere to do their homework or to study at home. But Michael what have libraries meant to you?

**Michael Robotham** 17:24

I mean, Gundagai had so few people, we didn't have a cinema. So the nearest one was in Wagga, the nearest drive and was 50 miles to a drive in cinema. The one thing Gundagai did have for a population of 900 were six pubs and three clubs. But the library I mean, I'm one of four, and mom and dad couldn't afford to buy books, and there was no bookshop in town, so the library was was dominate, was the place. And I sort of, i'll tell you a little story about you know, I mean, my mother has always been this amazing sort of, you know, she took us along, and she still uses the Library and when I, when I wrote my, my very first novel, you know, got sold around the world on a part manuscript, and I was so excited, it was going to be published around the world, and I sent my mother an advanced reading copy. And I waited, and I waited, and I waited, and I heard nothing. And I phoned her and said, "Mum, did you get a chance to perhaps look at that book, the one with my name, and huge, huge type on the front?" And she said, "Oh, dear, I had three library books to get through. Did you want me to read your one first?" And I then said, "No, mum. Honestly, when you get to it, that's fine." I told that story at Coffs Harbour library, that's where we were living at time, and my mother was sort of slid under her seat. And then the librarian came out and gave her her a friend of the library award at the end of the evening, because any mother that would read library books before her son's first novel, was truly a friend of the library. Just to finish that story. When again, I waited weeks and I finally I thought, she must have read it by now and and I phoned her and said, "Mom, the book." "Oh, yes, I finished." "What did you think?" "It took me a while to get into but then I did." I put that on my website underneath the Washington Post and The New York Times reviews author's mother "took me a while to get into but then I did." I might have to invite her on The Bookshelf as a reviewer. We do like people to be, you know, firm in their opinions. Candice libraries?

**Candice Fox** 19:42

The library for me was a refuge from the mean girls because I was very unpopular in high school. I'm one of six and then my mum fostered 155 kids as I was growing up. So we're a very freaky family. I was really, you know, riddled with hair lice and very grungy and goth and just not very popular at all. So I would escape to the library and I would write, you know, and writing and saving my work and the computer at the library meant it was safe from my brothers. My writing. So yeah, but the librarian hated me initially, because I'm a two finger typist, which I, you know, I've written 15 novels or something, and I'm still two fingers and I hammer the keys really hard. And she really hated she hated that and she was terrifying woman as well. But you know, what happened is I eventually was borrowing. I was borrowing a book, and I saw, you know, I wasn't particularly well read at that age, and it was Little Women and I was like, "Oh, what's this?" You know, I'm a little woman, I guess I'll borrow this. And she was so impressed. She was like, Oh, here we go. Getting into the classics. And, and, and so just every week, I would borrow something really impressive. I wasn't reading them, just going there and I'd be like, "oh, yeah, you know." I just just borrowed a series of and they were getting thicker and thicker and thicker and, and then she asked me what I thought of one of them. And I just choked. And yeah, just said it, the relationship ended really badly. But I, I love that. I went out and made friends and I stopped hanging out at the library. And we got a home computer as well,

**Michael Robotham 21:36**

When I went to high school, because I had to go to little country, high schools where my dad was teaching. So you can imagine that I was bullied and beaten up and so I hid in the library as well. But my head librarian Mrs. Fitzpatrick, I discovered Lord of the Rings, and I borrowed it so often, and reread it so often, that she forbade me ever taking it out again. Because she said some other child should have the right to, so I took the hiding it in the library, and coming in every recess and lunchtime to escape the bullies. So I could read this book, and she caught me. And I thought, I'm in big trouble here. And she gave me the book. I still have it at home, this beaten up copy. And she said, "You've earned this" and she gave me gave me a copy of the book to take home. And it's still when people say, "what's, what book are you most proud of?" It's and I say it's the book, the first book I ever earned and it's Lord of the Rings. It was held together with gaffa tape.

**Candice Fox 22:35**

I built up one and a half thousand dollars worth of library fines at the university. Yeah. The University of New South Wales library, I borrowed One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and they're, you know, you got to bring that book back, you got to bring it back emails, we're going through an account that I never checked. And then they finally called me and they said, you've got this library fine. And I was like, how much is it? And they said it's one and a half thousand dollars. I had to go in there but I had to find the book inside my apartment. I had to go in there and be like, here it is. And I'll even buy you another new copy. Yeah, they forgave me they forgave me the money.

**Kate Evans 23:14**

So have any of you already set a part of one of your novels in a library,

**Chris Hammer 23:20**

yeah, in, I'd sort of forgotten about this, but yeah, in Silver. Martin is researching what happened to his family back when he was a kid and so he goes into the library, and the town up on the up on the hill and gets into the newspaper archives. I hadn't realised and I suspect there might be another one. Oh, no, no in Trust, this State Library. There's a scene set. Not here. But in the other building. Like the cafe in the reading room downstairs.



**Kate Evans 23:53**

Yes. It's interesting how often the detectives do have to go in and find something from the past because so much crime fiction, presents something in the present and then some deep mystery in the past. And often it's a library that holds that repository doesn't it.

**Candice Fox 24:12**

I this is just talking about, you know, the things that like I discovered trove, which I believe is associated with the National Library. Yeah, it's all the libraries. When I bought my first house, I started looking through those archives for my house and the street and had anything ever interesting ever happened in the street. And in the 50s in my street, a fireball had descended from the sky. It was this tiny little news article like this, a fireball descended from the sky and hit a man and then he was he was able to crawl to someone's household where he was taken in for two days and he was sort of semi conscious saying, Oh, it's so bright, and all the women in the street, you know, sort of got the vapors or whatever and had to go to bed because of this incident. It was this tiny little article like this. And I thought, Where are you ever going to find that, you know, except in a library. Only a crime writer could take a tiny little article like that, and spin it into that. I remember him going it's so bright and then an automobile had hit a horse and cart.

**Kate Evans 25:25**

And that, indeed, is the pleasure of archival research. And I know, Michael, that one of your novels came from a tiny newspaper clipping.

**Michael Robotham 25:33**

Yeah, it was to two paragraphs in the Herald and it was March the 20th 1985. I read the article, and a guy had served two life sentences, and escaped the day he was due to be released. And then I did a bit of research and discovered that a year earlier, he, he was due to be released and escaped. And a day later, he gave himself up, and he was sentenced to another years imprisonment, because he was it sort of 30 something years for these two murders. And he was due to be released again and escaped. And he's never been seen since no one bothered looking for him. So figured he'll be back tomorrow. You know, he's, he's Australia's least most wanted criminal. Because he had become a model prisoner. By the time after 30 odd years. He wasn't a danger to anyone. But he's never been never been found. And but I just used that as the seed of an idea.

**Chris Hammer 26:30**

When I was a student up at Bathurst, where my writing teacher was one Peter Temple, there was a guy who got so drunk, he thought he was climbing into one of the student residences, but was actually trying to climb over the wall in the into Bathurst maximum security prison. And I always thought that would be a good idea for a crime. Well, unfortunately, Trent Dalton got there first.

**Kate Evans 26:59**

Now, we could, we could easily spend the next half hour talking about the sort of incidental ideas that you would find by doing research in a library, but I'd rather place us more literally, in a library. There's actually lots of titles that include crimes that happen in libraries. But if and this is where I'm not thinking of a collaborative work thinking of you each, three individual crime writers, given the way that you write the style that you write in. Candice, if you were to include a library, in the type of fiction that you write,

what would it be for? I mean, would it be the building? Would it be somebody who works there? How would you incorporate it?

**Candice Fox** 27:49

I've been thinking about this. Yeah, cuz the novel I've just finished, I've just finished a draft and sent it away, you know, last week. And the thing the question, I was asking myself, when I started that novel, was, what could you hold hostage? There is no person, you know, um, and, and because I was thinking of TJ Newman's book Falling, where a plane is taken over, you know, and and for this novel that I've just written, it's a forensics lab, they hold up the forensics lab. So I was thinking, what could you hold up in a library and make people do things? So I asked, I asked the director of the library just before what is the most valuable book that is in this library, Captain Cook, Captain Cook's written journal! Estimated an estimated \$60 million. Anyway, I think to myself, you know, what could I do if I got hold of that? Or if I was the in the room with that journal? Like if I said to him, burn that journal? Or I'll shoot you in the kneecap? What would he do? You know? And if it's if it's,

**Michael Robotham** 27:49

you see, he's gone.

**Candice Fox** 28:29

Oh, I know. That's why I'm talking about him like this.

**Michael Robotham** 28:58

Hes gone to make sure the book's ok

**Candice Fox** 29:05

Yeah, you know, or if you stole it, how would you move? How would you move a book like that? You know, but yeah, being inside the library, you know, because you don't think about it, you come in and you leave it but there are 10 floors, there are 10 floors underneath this, with really rare stuff that's completely locked up. You can't just wander around in there. But if you did get in there, what could you do? What could you make people do particularly die hard book, people like that, who make their whole lives about libraries. If I said to him burn that book oh, there he is. What do you do? What do you do?

**Kate Evans** 29:39

Candice is writing a novel in which the the sort of the point of friction is the cook corner journal, she's somehow got somebody right there. Are you going to be you know,

**Candice Fox** 29:53

I asked the question. If I if I said to you this \$60 million Captain Cook original handwritten journal, if I said to you burn it, or I'll shoot you in the kneecap, what do you say? That's a question that I Yeah. that I would ask and would a reader believe that?

**Michael Robotham** 30:20

He looks like he's got dodgy knees anyway?

**Chris Hammer** 30:26

Just with people on Zoom? The answer was he'd take the bullet.



**Candice Fox** 30:30

Yeah, you take you take the bullet for the book see, and you obviously have a love of books, you know.

**Kate Evans** 30:37

I mean, I think there's all too much crime fiction, or perhaps filmed versions, where you end up in, you know, like creepy playgrounds or something. Whereas, you know, what's underneath this library, there are labs to conserve books and artifacts, there are photography labs, there are compactor shelves, there are all sorts of spaces, behind the scenes in libraries that might make quite good settings.

**Candice Fox** 31:07

There's also you know, national security. I started a PhD and I had to give it up because of the novels. And part of it was on, so I have three quarters, i'm three quarters of a doctor. I'll take it anyway. Excuse me, I was my, my focus was on banned books. And there are actually only two books completely banned in this country. There are levels of of banning and restriction and importation. But there's two that are outright banned. And they're by this guy named Abdul Azim and they were banned in 2005, after the the London bombings. Anyway, they're completely banned, and they still are completely banned. And if you want to legit read one of those, you know, you can download them, but then you're on a list somewhere, probably, and they're going to have people come through windows, you have to go to University of melt, you have to apply and go down to the University of Melbourne and go in a room and they don't let you have a phone, no laptops, anything. No pencils, nothing. And you have to be in a secure room. And you just you just read them. And so I went there and I did that. And yeah, that's its national security libraries, you know, they take care of that kind of thing.

**Kate Evans** 32:20

So it feels like we're upping the stakes here. If we're, if the book that Candice is reading that is, you know, absolutely in her style, we've got tension, we've got mystery, we've got some violence. And you know, there's the potential for political, you know, conspiracies to ramp up. So that's one version of a book in a library, Michael Robotham. What are you gonna do?

**Michael Robotham** 32:45

Look, I don't know, Stephen King has always been a really great supporter of mine. And I don't sort of write horror. But it was really one of the things I always remember about crime. Like people imagine that we as crime writers, because we write about such a dark subjects that we, we, you know, double lock our doors at night and have extra security because we think the world is full of serial killers, or people that're going to snatch our children out of params at any moment. And I'm certainly not like that. I mean, I know exactly what the crime figures are, in terms of violent crime per head of population, there's less of it now than there was 20 years ago. You know, the only thing is probably more dangerous as a child riding a bike on a road. But I do know that there are more serial killers on the shelves in the library here than have ever existed in all of human history. There are more murders on the shelves here, and more murders have been committed. I mean, I mean, I personally have killed at least 38 people, you know, in my writing career, and I'd have to dig up the bodies to do a proper count, you know, and so, you know, it's, it's, I think, if I was gonna write something, and I just like, I know, the way Stephen King would handle it, he just talked about what would happen in the library of this size late at night, if some of those killers in those books suddenly could walk again. You know, I mean, I'd be more interested in exploring that sort of idea of escaping from the bookshelves.

**Kate Evans** 34:18

What about you, Chris Hammer?

**Chris Hammer** 34:19

Well, I wouldn't say this is typical of my style, but I was thinking a killer book, you know, a book that if you read it, it puts your life in danger. So the idea I had, I've thought it through I mean, I've got the whole plot. You're in a small country town, let's say an Outback town because they're popular.

**Kate Evans** 34:48

There wouldn't be as secret in the country town would there?

**Chris Hammer** 34:50

No, no. What happens is that people start getting killed, and the local police have no idea. But then the very astute, brilliant librarian at the local library, let's call her Kate, works out that all the victims are all members of the library. So she races us to the police and tells them and the police say it's an Outback town, everyone's a member of the library. There's nothing else to do. Kate undeterred, goes back and finds that all the victims are not only members of the library, but they're members of the Book of the Month Club and have all been reading the same book by struggling struggling local crime writer Candice Robotham

**Candice Fox** 35:42

because we got married,

**Chris Hammer** 35:44

Again, again, Kate goes to the police and the police go, oh, you might be onto something here. But there's 100 members of that club. Why have these five been killed? Kate goes back to the library. It's late at night. She's online, and she cracks it. Only these five have dared to give Candice Robotham a one star review.

**Candice Fox** 36:12

I can't see it.

**Chris Hammer** 36:15

And at that moment, she realised that she too had just given a one star review. So then the knife wielding author comes through unfortunately, the police are there just in time, and it all ends happily. Except there is there is a postscript. As Candice Robotham is being sentenced for the murder of these five reviewers, the judge says Do you have any revolt or remorse? Is there some contrition here? To which the author goes, Well, hell no. Thanks to the publicity, I'm now the number one best selling author in Australia and the only people who were harmed were people who gave crime writers one star reviews on Goodreads.

**Michael Robotham** 36:59

I thought the postscript was going to be sitting in the back of the courtroom taking notes to write a nonfiction best seller was an author called Chris hammer.

**Kate Evans** 37:08

I think there's more that we can do with this. Because you know, here we have three terrific crime writers. We have potential sites all around the country if we imagine a library somewhere. And so this is your chance to knock out a collaborative novel. Now, Candice, you've written collaborative novels.

**Candice Fox** 37:31

I have Yeah. And I had a Look, that, our relationship James and I, he's the number one best selling author of all time. You know, he has Guinness World Records for that kind of thing. And, and our relationship works so well, because I think from the very moment we started working together, we're both you know, 100% Clear on who's in charge, which is me, obviously. So I think if we can just agree on that. Okay, you're in charge.

**Kate Evans** 37:32

With James Patterson What do you start with a with a sight? Do you start with with characters? Do you start with a body? Where do you want to start?

**Candice Fox** 38:08

Yeah Jim and I we start with what interests you right now what's interesting you right now? you know, like, I got a real thing about conmen at the moment because I watched the Tinder Swindler, and and all of that, and I just love fraud. I'm very interested in conmen. But I mean, I'm asking you to as my collaborators and me being in charge, what is what's really interesting, you?

**Michael Robotham** 38:30

Great problem, because I don't I don't write A) I've never written collaboratively and B) I don't plot at all so and so where do you start? I start with a man escaped from jail, and the day before his due to be released, why would that happen? And I just said, I will let's have him escape and see what happens. So I write in the escape, and I just see where it goes.

**Candice Fox** 38:48

So why would someone break in? Like start with a question that why would someone break into a library

**Michael Robotham** 38:57

steal a \$60 million Captain Cook book.

**Kate Evans** 39:01

Why would somebody break in?

**Chris Hammer** 39:03

I think some sort of con artist,

**Candice Fox** 39:06

A con artist, yes, whosw left something behind in a book in the library that will reveal his

**Chris Hammer** 39:14

combination to the safe.

**Kate Evans** 39:18

What about I mean, I, I said before, and it was only partly joking, that one of the conventions of crime fiction is to have a crime in the present that connects to the past? Is that something that you think is central to crime fiction that there should be something in the present and something in the past?

**Michael Robotham** 39:36

There are lots of books that are written that that way? It's, there's no hard and fast rule. You don't have to have an old library.

**Candice Fox** 39:45

You asked the question before, have you ever done the library, the detective sitting in and I have done that and that was Eden and part of that is 60s Kings Cross and present. So it is exactly that so, it's, it's just fun to do. It's fun to imagine. And I have a very long convoluted story. About six months ago, my mother revealed to me that she had an encounter with a serial killer. I was like, I'm sorry, ma'am. For the last eight years, I've been trying to be the foremost crime writer in this country, could you have possibly mentioned that? At some point, but I might be doing a podcast on that it's in the works and part of that involves going and poring over the microfilms and looking and reading the old articles and that kind of stuff. So not only is it a cliché, but it does actually, it does actually happen. Yeah, because it's fun. It's mysterious and, and that's what you're asking your readers to do when they read crime fiction, is to participate, and to imagine themselves poring over you know, things and trying to solve the puzzle and looking at the clues and, and it's safe to do it, so if you wish to do it in a library, because you're not out there, in an alleyway with a gun...

**Kate Evans** 41:01

You're hearing this, anybody can be here, that's the thing about this book that you're setting in the library. So its that absolutely anybody can come into the library. So it's a very democratic space, which could be useful for this book you're writing together.

**Michael Robotham** 41:16

I'm going to tell the story while these guys come up with the plot. Quick, think quickly. Now, one of my favourite stories about libraries is getting off the subject a little bit is story of Val McDermid tells and goes to crime fiction. And she tells a story about a particular woman who would go went to the local librarian and and said, I need I need some crime novels. And but they've got to be violent, they've got to be really dark. And so he librarian suggests just a few writers and she goes off and brings the books back after several weeks going, yeah, it was fine, but they're not dark enough. I'm talking I mean, I want really serious torture, type darkness in my crime fiction. So gets given a few more books, comes back down and I want more, it's got to be darker than that. And eventually, after, you know, three or four, four trips back, the woman comes back and says, That's it no more. I can't read any more. Too much for you. No, my husband's dead from now on, it's only romance.

**Kate Evans** 42:20

Can I just take a swerve away from the question of the past in crime fiction, because the other thing that crime fiction does really well is write to the present. And it can feel very vibrant and vital and like things that are happening now. And I think some crime writers write as if, you know, write for the moment that their books going to be published. How hard is that to do? When there might be an unexpected, I don't know, pandemic, or a catastrophic flood.

**Michael Robotham** 42:57

I got caught on on, I can't remember which novel, it was where it's actually set in March 2020. And there's no mention of the pandemic, because it was ah,

**Chris Hammer** 43:10

It think it's your second Evie book.

**Michael Robotham** 43:12

Yeah and there's no mention at all, of a pandemic. And in the end, apart from the acknowledgments, I had to tell people, this book was finished before we ever had a pandemic and I apologize, there's no reference to it. But oddly enough, now, if you put the pandemic in all my editors around the world, so take it out, I don't want it, take out all the references, they say, fewer references, the better people don't want to be reminded about it. But I mean, there are, sorry, Chris, just legendary stories though there was a very quite, a book that sold for huge amounts of money at the at the Frankfurt Book Fair, which were, which was called Tales of silence, and it was had the twin towers on the front and it was due to come out and on the day that Twin Towers fell, and that book, despite having sold in many translations just died a death at that moment.

**Kate Evans** 44:01

And the Scottish crime writer Christopher Brookmeyer, he wrote a book that came out around the time of September 11 and it was quite damning, his books are very funny. But one of the subplots was all about how terrorists are wankers, this was basically his line on it. And the book just sunk without a trace, it was the wrong time to be being playful about terrorism.

**Chris Hammer** 44:26

So I um my book Trust which is set in Sydney, I just finished the kind of first draft if you like, you know, sort of editing stage and COVID really hit, you remember, it was like March 2020 or something and it suddenly went from nothing to lock downs. And I was watching, well do I retrofit COVID into it, my problem was that there was all these references to the bushfires the previous summer and I thought well how can I be referencing one disaster and not the other. Do I write it during the pandemic? Because it was the early it was just starting? How long is this gonna go? So I did kind of set it immediately after the pandemic. But not saying how it ended or anything like that.

**Michael Robotham** 45:20

You never quite know if there's a new, if there's suddenly a new

**Chris Hammer** 45:24

Anyway, I'm not sure how it went over but then when I wrote my next book, treasure and dirt, which was right in the middle of the pandemic, it wasn't a conscious decision. I just didn't, i just didn't get it was almost like, maybe it felt artificial sort of putting it into the book by then. And I think readers was your turning to fiction, you know, it's on the news every night, you don't want to read it in a book.

**Candice Fox** 45:52

I wonder if it'll come back for that reason, if you get far enough away from it, you know, 5 or 10 years down the track, you know, will people go oh, I'll write about it and I'll put the pandemic and you know, you might be

**Kate Evans** 46:02

Particular aspects of it. I mean, the latest, Michael Connelly has some really interesting sort of political conflicts within the NYPD. Yeah. And that's about people who are pro or anti vaccination and who's wearing masks. And so it's in there, but it sort of plays out in quite an interesting way.

**Chris Hammer** 46:15

So so the book I'm working on now does have to have some anti vaxxers in there and I think it's something that crime writers often do is, it's not like a deliberate strategy. But we often pick up, you know, Michael Connolly is a fantastic example of this picking up of the concerns of the moment. And you can see that same, Australia, it's sort of with the #metoo movement, there's a lot of books about domestic crime, for example, and trying to give victims voices and things like that. So almost without intending to, I think crime fiction authors are often picking up on just just the sort of the currents that are there in society at the moment.

**Candice Fox** 47:01

It's just got to, you got to do it artfully, you got to sprinkle it. Because otherwise it looks to deliver it like you're making a statement.

**Kate Evans** 47:09

Yes, there's nothing worse than reading a novel and suddenly getting a little lecture, little lecture, halfway through. I'm just wondering if there are other books that you've read that, that have interesting libraries in them. I mean, I, I can think of one that my 11 year old read, which I really loved. Harold Frey, who's an English writer, he's very funny and he's written a book called Filbert Stump, the boy who ran away from the circus to join the library, which is also a fantastic title for a novel, and he did grow up in the circus, but he was desperate to have a library card.

**Candice Fox** 47:42

I have been sitting here thinking about libraries and what libraries mean to me. And I just wanted to get this story in. It's not on that topic. But before we finish, because it's, it's so I, you know, I was thinking back, what have they meant to me? Last night, literally, last night, my husband and I were watching this, this gangster show. And, you know, it's about drug dealers. And I turned to him, and I said, "you know, you've made it as a drug dealer, when you get one of those cash counting machines." And Tim said to me, "when did you know you'd made it as an author?" And I felt like I had made it. My first book came out, you know, I was 26. My publisher said, we want to send you to Tamworth. And I'd never been sent anywhere for anything, you know. And it was like a week after it came out. And they said, "We're going to fly you there. And you stay in a hotel, and we're going to fly you back. And you're going to speak to some people at Tamworth library." And that's when I felt like, I felt like I'd made it. And I said to him, "I said to my boyfriend at the time, I hope someone comes, you know, because who the hell am I and my books only been out for a week, no one will have read it." And 100 people came. And it was because there was nothing else to do. It was a Sunday afternoon at two o'clock in Tamworth. And because it was a Sunday afternoon at two o'clock, and the crowd was mostly elderly. At one point, I counted when I was talking because my mind's going crazy. There were 10 people asleep, fallen asleep. I got I'm talking and I'm racing and racing, and I'm going 1,2,3...Like one of them was like head hanging back mouth open. Um, but just I just wanted to say that because it just popped up to me. What libraries have meant to you. Yeah, the first time I felt like I'd made it because I got sent to Tamworth Library.

**Chris Hammer** 49:35



I too, have been to Tamworth library. Yes. And but part of an initiative that's often organised by libraries in regional areas. I've also done it Walger. It's the one book, one community thing. So it's like a giant book club. They get extra copies of the books. Everyone reads them. And as a crime writer, it's absolutely fantastic because you actually get to see what's in your book, because everyone's read it. Normally when we're out, you know, we've got a new book out, and we're publicising it. You know, it spoiler alerts, you don't want to tell what's in the books, but it just goes to show just how important libraries are in country towns like Lismore.

**Michael Robotham** 50:20

No, and it's, you know, people, you often will occasionally get readers asking you about when you do events in libraries, whether that writers would think that libraries are somehow bad for writers because, you know, people are only borrowing your books. And, and the truth of the matter is that if you're a regular library goer, you're the sort of person that when you can buy a gift for someone, the first thing you think about is a book, you know, so, you know, that fair enough people, you know, the only time I get upset at library goers, is when you get some really narky sort of person that suddenly decides they would send you a Facebook post about how that you've made a mistake in your book or whatever, and they pay out on you. And the very last line is I took your book straight back to the library. I feel like going, Hey, you didn't pay for it? Why are you paying out on me?

**Candice Fox** 51:12

But you can get nice library themed fan mail as well. People write to me and say, the hold like the wait for your book at the library is 26 weeks, you know, and things like that.

**Kate Evans** 51:23

I bet your books are also on the fast turnaround lists of the library.

**Chris Hammer** 51:27

The only library user I didn't like was when I was kept waiting a year and a half for One Flies Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

**Kate Evans** 51:37

Well, look, I was hoping that we would end up building a, you know, a plot for this shared collaborative novel but when you know, if, if you don't read a whole lot of crime fiction, you might not know there are two types of crime writers in the world. There are plotters, and there are pantsers and we have a bit of a combination here, do we because you say you're not a plotter?

**Michael Robotham** 51:58

Yeah, I'm definitely I just yeah, seat of the pants.

**Candice Fox** 52:03

And that sounds really because you always say one or the other. But I start and then I slow to a stop. And then I plot the rest.

**Kate Evans** 52:11

And Chris.

**Chris Hammer** 52:12

I'm more the pantsner end of the spectrum. Maybe not as far as Michael, I'm always trying to work out where it goes. But, and I'd love to be a plotter, it just sounds so efficient but instead, I'll get, I go oh, no, I've got a better idea. I'll just have to toss out that 20,000 words.

**Candice Fox** 52:31

See the plotters with their nice journals, and their little stickers and near highlighted colors. And I just had so yeah, but

**Michael Robotham** 52:39

I mean, that's the thing, though, when you get someone like Jeffrey David that write a 250 page outline. He knows next Tuesday at 4:30 what he's going to be writing and that would bore the pants off me.

**Candice Fox** 52:49

Yeah.

**Michael Robotham** 52:49

The idea that, you know, when I come in from, you know, the cabana of cruelty and I and I say to Vivian you would not believe what just happened. Sorry, it's so exciting when you write that way. So exciting.

**Candice Fox** 53:04

James and I because we collaborate we have to plot absolutely all of it. And we've we've done it like eight times now. So about the third time we did it, I started to get my courage up in the relationship to be a bit naughty. So we do this whole big plot and then I'd get to you know, it's my bit and it's two thirds of the way through and I start going like, and then it just goes crazy. And yeah, it always frustrates him and he never sees it coming either. I'm doing this for a while go and run off the rails. But it works. He says it works, so I let you do it.

**Kate Evans** 53:40

Maybe a three way collaboration is a bit hard to do

**Michael Robotham** 53:43

Three ways are always problematic.

**Kate Evans** 53:46

I'm sorry, but yeah, I walked into that one. Any last final words for our northern New South Wales friends, some of whom may be watching right now about books, libraries, or indeed about the terrible crimes that you are imagining.

**Michael Robotham** 54:02

Look, I feel for the Northern Rivers as I say, I feel it's a place it's very close to my heart because I grew up there and my family came from there. And I still have I have 51 first cousins and a lot of them still live up that way, you know, up in the mountains really in the mountains. Now it's but no, I I look it's just about libraries about books. I mean, we're here because you all love books and you love reading and you whether you visit libraries or not I'm sure you know you did with your children and you appreciate what an important job they do. You know, and Lismore doesn't know whether they're going to have to rebuild that library or whether they can you know whether they can want to rebuild or need to have they have the money so every dollar that's raised is going to help them

**Candice Fox** 54:51

I just want to say to them we care about you. I'm just like I have all this love that I want to send because even in a you know in a world that's I'm enjoying so much at the moment, you know, please don't feel unnoticed or uncared about in what you're going through right now. So I don't have any family from there and I don't have any cousins, mountain cousins or anything like that. But I still, I still I still care about that. And I'm sorry, I'm sorry, this is happening to you.

**Chris Hammer** 55:21

Yeah. All jokes aside, I think we all feel for, for what's happening up there. Not just the library, of course. But I think books are about imagination. And books are about empathy. And people who love books can't help but feel particularly the second time around. So we wish you all the best. And, and hopefully, sometime soon, we'll be able to get up there and see you as well.

**Kate Evans** 55:48

Yes, because of course, it's about the tangible and intangible the knowledge, the art, the art gallery, the archives, the libraries that all of these things need to be rebuilt. Look, everybody, thank you so much for coming along. As I said, I'm Kate Evans from Radio Nationals The Bookshelf, and we've been talking to crime writers, Michael Robotham, Chris Hammer and Candice Fox, please do thank them.

**Catherine Du Peloux Menage** 56:10

I hope you enjoyed that as much as we all did on the day at the State Library. And I should say that we're very grateful to the State Library for allowing us to have this event there, everybody, including the library, donated their time and all their costs free of charge, which is fantastic. If you'd like to help Lismore library because of course, the floods have receded but the chaos is certainly not completely remedied yet and it will be some years before it is. So if you'd like to continue to help Lismore library, fill their shelves, with books and meet all their needs, go to the place where you catch your podcasts and have a look at the notes we have given you there all the information that you need to donate money directly to a special fund. Thank you again for listening to the Bad: All About Crime Podcast. As I'm sure you know, we have a festival every year and plenty of online events as well. Our next festival will be taking place on the eighth, ninth and tenth of September at the State Library. We have some wonderful events and speakers for you to listen to and I very much hope that you join us

**Andy Muir** 57:35

We hope you've enjoyed this episode of the Bad: All About Crime podcast from Bad: Sydney Crime Writers Festival.

**Suzanne Leal** 57:40

If you'd like to be part of the crime conversation, head over to facebook and join our Bad: All About Crime Book Club.

**Andy Muir** 57:47

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**Suzanne Leal** 57:56

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**Andy Muir** 58:05

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**Suzanne Leal** 58:12

Until the next thrilling episode keep reading and talking crime