

Crime Fiction Addiction

Issue 03 - October 2023



In this issue:

- Unsolved mysteries
- true crime stories
- From Femme Fatales to Sleuths:
Tracing the History
of Women in Crime
Fiction
- Writing: The Art of
Crafting Engaging
Story Arcs



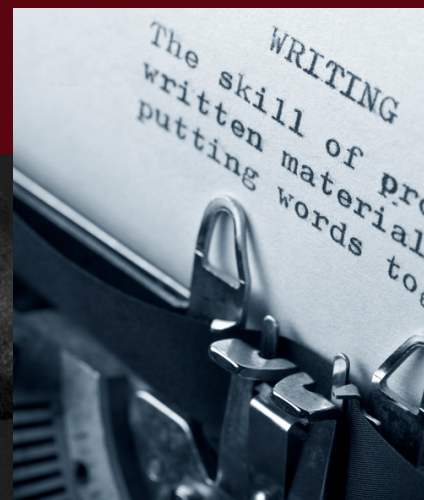
True Crime

Unsolved Mysteries



Femme Fatales

Women in Crime Fiction



Writing

**Crafting Engaging Story
Arcs**



Welcome

Dear Fellow Crime Enthusiast!

Welcome to issue #3 of the "Crime Fiction Addiction" newsletter, dedicated to all things crime and crime fiction.

From classic femme fatales to indomitable sleuths, we trace the intriguing journey of female characters who've left an indelible mark on the genre. There's a closer look at the intriguing unexplained disappearance of Joan Risch, and for aspiring crime writers and enthusiasts of the craft, we delve into the art of crafting engrossing story arcs.

I'd love to hear from you. If you'd like to contribute, do get in touch and don't forget to enter to win a free signed copy of 'Justified'. Send me your pics, something you're writing or your thoughts on anything discussed in this newsletter.

Most of all, thank you for being here.



Wendy

www.wendyturnerhargreaves.com



From Femme Fatales to Sleuths: Tracing the History of Women in Crime Fiction

When it comes to crime fiction, strong female characters are often at the forefront of the action.

They bring a unique perspective to the genre, one that challenges traditional gender stereotypes and offers a refreshing alternative to the usual male-dominated narrative. These characters are smart, resourceful, and never back down from a challenge, no matter how daunting it may seem.

Crime fiction has long been a popular genre, capturing the attention of readers with its gripping plots and suspenseful twists. And while the genre is often associated with male detectives and hard-boiled protagonists, women have been an integral part of crime fiction from its earliest days. From the classic femme fatales of the 1940s to the modern-day sleuths, here's a brief history of women in crime fiction.

The Femme Fatale Era

The femme fatale era of crime fiction emerged during the 1940s, a time of great social upheaval. World War II was raging overseas, and at home, women were entering the workforce in large numbers to support the war effort. This led to a shift in traditional gender roles and challenged the notion of women as passive and submissive.

In the world of crime fiction, this changing social landscape was reflected in the portrayal of women as complex and multi-dimensional characters. The femme fatale archetype emerged as a response to the shifting power dynamics between men and women.

Femme fatales were often depicted as beautiful and alluring, using their sexuality and charm to manipulate men into doing their bidding. They were smart and cunning, often outwitting the male detectives who sought to bring them to justice.

But while femme fatales were powerful and independent, they were also deeply flawed characters. They were often motivated by greed or revenge, and their actions often had dire consequences for themselves and the men who fell under their spell.

One of the key themes of the femme fatale era was the idea of female agency. Femme fatales were not passive victims or objects of desire, but active participants in their own lives. They challenged traditional notions of femininity and defied the expectations placed upon them by society.

At the same time, however, the portrayal of femme fatales was often problematic.

They were frequently depicted as immoral or evil, reinforcing negative stereotypes about women and their sexuality. In many cases, they were punished for their transgressions, either through death or imprisonment.

Despite these limitations, the femme fatale era marked an important milestone in the history of women in crime fiction. It paved the way for future generations of strong and complex female characters, who would challenge gender stereotypes and redefine the genre in their own image.

One of the most iconic examples of the femme fatale is Phyllis Dietrichson from James M. Cain's "Double Indemnity." The novel was adapted into a classic film noir in 1944, with Barbara Stanwyck portraying Phyllis as a scheming housewife who conspires with insurance salesman Walter Neff to murder her husband. Other notable femme fatales from this era include Brigid O'Shaughnessy from Dashiell Hammett's "The Maltese Falcon" and Kathie Moffat from "Out of the Past" by Daniel Mainwaring.





From Femme Fatales to Sleuths: Tracing the History of Women in Crime Fiction

The Rise of Female Sleuths

As the years went on, the portrayal of women in crime fiction began to shift. Instead of being relegated to supporting roles or being portrayed as dangerous seductresses, women began to take centre stage as detectives and sleuths.

The 1970s saw the rise of female private investigators like Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone and Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski, who broke down gender barriers in the genre and proved that women could be just as tough and capable as their male counterparts.

In the 1990s, the popularity of cosy mysteries soared, and female protagonists became even more prevalent. These books often featured amateur detectives or small-town sleuths, and their heroines were typically smart, resourceful women who used their wits to solve crimes. Series like "The Cat Who..." by Lilian Jackson Braun and the "Miss Marple" novels by Agatha Christie paved the way for a new generation of cosy mysteries, and female authors like Janet Evanovich and Charlaine Harris became household names with their bestselling series.

Modern-Day Heroines

Today, female protagonists are more prevalent than ever in crime fiction. They come in all shapes and sizes, from hard-edged detectives to amateur sleuths to forensic experts. These heroines are strong, complex characters who challenge readers' expectations.

One of the most popular modern-day heroines is Lisbeth Salander from Stieg Larsson's "Millennium" series. Lisbeth is a brilliant hacker with a troubled past who becomes entangled in a web of corruption and violence. She's a survivor and a fighter, and her unapologetic approach to life has made her an icon of feminist crime fiction.

Another popular series featuring a female detective is Tana French's "Dublin Murder Squad" novels. French's protagonists are complex and flawed, and their investigations often bring them face-to-face with their own personal demons. In "In the Woods," for example, detective Cassie Maddox is forced to confront her past when she investigates the murder of a young girl who bears a striking resemblance to her.

Secondary characters

In crime novels, strong female characters can take on a variety of roles. They can be detectives, witnesses, victims, or even villains.

Regardless of their position in the story, these women are multi-dimensional and powerful. They're not just sidekicks or love interests - they're the driving force behind the narrative.

Although there are some notable female detectives in crime fiction, there are other, secondary characters who have just as much impact on the storyline and plot:

Three stand out for me:

Lucy Farinelli from "The Scarpetta Factor" by Patricia Cornwell

Lucy is a forensic investigator who works alongside the main protagonist, Dr. Kay Scarpetta. She is highly skilled in her field and provides invaluable insights and support to Scarpetta throughout the investigation.

Annie Cabbot from "In a Dry Season" by Peter Robinson

Annie is a police detective who works alongside the main protagonist, Detective Inspector Alan Banks, to solve a decades-old murder case. She is intelligent, resourceful, and not afraid to challenge Banks when she disagrees with his methods.





From Femme Fatales to Sleuths: Tracing the History of Women in Crime Fiction

Dr. Maura Isles from "The Surgeon" by Tess Gerritsen

Dr. Isles is a medical examiner who works alongside the main protagonist, Detective Jane Rizzoli, to solve a series of gruesome murders. She is highly skilled in her field and provides valuable insights into the victims' injuries and cause of death.

I would also add Lisbeth Salander from "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" by Stieg Larsson and Katrin Siska from "The Man Who Watched Women" by Michael Hjorth and Hans Rosenfeldt.

These characters are all strong, complex, and multi-dimensional, and they play important roles in their respective stories, proving that women can be just as capable and intelligent as men in the world of crime fiction.

In a genre that is often dominated by male characters, these women provide a much-needed balance. They prove that strength and intelligence are not exclusive to men and that women can be just as capable in high-pressure situations.

The vulnerability of strong female characters is what truly sets them apart in crime fiction. While they may be incredibly capable and intelligent, they are not invincible, and they are not perfect.

They are flawed, they make mistakes, and they struggle with their own inner demons, just like any other human being.

It's this vulnerability that makes these characters so relatable to readers. We see ourselves in their struggles and their triumphs. We understand what it's like to face obstacles and challenges, and we root for these characters to succeed, even when the odds are stacked against them.

But this vulnerability is not just a plot device - it's a reflection of the reality that many women face in their everyday lives. Women are often subjected to societal pressures and expectations that can be overwhelming and daunting. They are expected to be perfect, to have it all together, and to never show weakness or vulnerability. But this is an unrealistic and unhealthy standard to live up to.

In crime fiction, strong female characters provide a refreshing alternative to this unrealistic expectation. They show us that it's okay to be vulnerable, to have flaws, and to struggle. They show us that it's possible to be strong and capable while also being human and imperfect.

In today's society, the portrayal of strong female characters in literature is more important than ever.

These characters serve as role models for young girls, showing them that they can be anything they want to be, regardless of their gender. They offer a sense of empowerment and inspiration, reminding us that women are capable of achieving greatness and breaking down barriers.

Who are my favourites?

There are two standout characters for me, both sassy and inspirational women and beautifully written.

Jane Rizzoli – Tess Gerritsen
Detective Chief Inspector Jane

Rizzoli is a complex and dynamic character in Tess Gerritsen's crime fiction novel "The Surgeon." As the main detective of the story, she is highly competent and driven, but also flawed and vulnerable.





From Femme Fatales to Sleuths: Tracing the History of Women in Crime Fiction

Rizzoli is a tough and determined investigator who takes charge of the case involving a serial killer who has been terrorising the city.

She is respected by her colleagues and superiors for her intelligence, attention to detail, and ability to think outside the box. She is also highly dedicated to her job, often putting in long hours and sacrificing her personal life for the sake of the investigation.

However, Rizzoli also has a darker side. She has a strained relationship with her family, particularly her mother, who disapproves of her career and often belittles her. Rizzoli also has a tendency to push people away and isolate herself, which can make it difficult for her to form close relationships or trust others.

Throughout the novel, Rizzoli struggles to balance her personal and professional life while also dealing with the trauma of her own past, which is connected to the case she is investigating. Her weaknesses and faults make her a relatable and human character, and her determination and strength make her a powerful force in the story.

Detective Chief Inspector Jane Rizzoli is a well-rounded and compelling character who adds depth and complexity to the crime fiction genre.

Jane Tennison from "Prime Suspect" by Lynda La Plante

Jane Tennison is a strong and complex character in Lynda La Plante's crime fiction series "Prime Suspect." As a female detective in a male-dominated profession, she faces many challenges and obstacles but rises to the top of her field through her intelligence, tenacity, and perseverance.

Throughout the series, Tennison's character develops and evolves. In the beginning, she is often dismissed and underestimated by her colleagues due to her gender. However, she proves herself time and time again through her excellent detective work and determination to solve even the toughest cases.

Tennison is portrayed as a flawed character, with a complex personal life and a tendency to struggle with alcoholism. However, she is also highly dedicated to her job and is willing to put in the long hours and hard work necessary to succeed.

One of Tennison's defining traits is her willingness to go against the norms and expectations of her profession and society at large. She challenges gender stereotypes and expectations of how a female detective should behave, often facing criticism and pushback from her colleagues.

Despite the challenges she faces, Tennison is a highly competent and respected detective who is able to solve even the most difficult cases. She is a powerful representation of a strong, independent woman who can succeed in a male-dominated profession through her intelligence, hard work, and determination.

Jane Tennison is a dynamic and multi-faceted character who adds depth and complexity to the crime fiction genre. She is a powerful representation of a strong female character who challenges the status quo.

So, strong female characters are a force to be reckoned with in crime novels. They bring a fresh perspective to the genre and challenge traditional gender stereotypes. These characters are multi-dimensional, powerful, and relatable, offering readers a glimpse into what it means to be a strong, capable woman in today's world.



Joan Risch: The Mysterious Disappearance That Haunts New England



This one is for all you mystery enthusiasts out there.

Sometimes inspiration comes from unexpected sources, and I uncovered this mystery thanks to my amazing 10-year-old daughter Pippa. She's a little sleuth in the making, and during one of her recent reading comprehension exercises, she stumbled upon the perplexing case of Joan Risch.

I was intrigued too, and we set off to find out more.

On October 24, 1961, Joan Risch disappeared from her home in Lincoln, Massachusetts, leaving behind a trail of perplexing clues and unanswered questions.

Joan, a 31-year-old mother of two young children, appeared to be living a relatively normal life in the quiet town of Lincoln, Massachusetts. However, one autumn day in 1961, Joan's husband, Martin Risch, arrived home to discover a scene of apparent chaos.

The scene inside the Risch home was horrific. Blood smears and stains were found throughout the house, including the kitchen, suggesting a struggle had taken place. Most disturbingly, Joan was nowhere to be found. The phone was off the hook, and their children, two-year-old Lillian and four-year-old David were in the house, unharmed but unable to provide any information about their mother's whereabouts.

As investigators delved deeper into the case, they uncovered a series of cryptic clues that only deepened the mystery. Joan had recently borrowed several library books on infamous disappearances and murder cases, leading some to speculate that she may have been influenced by them.

Then, a curious note was discovered in her car, suggesting that she may have planned her disappearance.

In the days following her disappearance, there were unverified sightings of a woman matching Joan's description in different locations, fuelling theories that she may have voluntarily vanished to start a new life. However, there was no concrete evidence to support this theory. Joan's family and friends insisted that she was a loving and dedicated mother who would never abandon her children.

Despite extensive searches, the case went cold, and Joan Risch was never found. Over the years, countless theories have emerged to explain her disappearance, ranging from the possibility of amnesia to involvement in a secret life.

The passage of time has not dimmed the fascination surrounding her case, and amateur sleuths (a bit like my daughter) and professional investigators continue to explore the many puzzles and contradictions surrounding her disappearance.



Pippa the super sleuth

Get in touch 
wendy@retroriver.co.uk

Plotting and Pacing: Creating Engaging Story Arcs and Maintaining a Good Rhythm



Storytelling is an art that has captivated humanity for centuries. Whether through epic novels, gripping films, or captivating oral traditions, the ability to craft a compelling narrative is a skill that continues to be treasured. Two critical elements of storytelling are plotting and pacing, which play a vital role in creating engaging story arcs and maintaining a good rhythm.

Plotting: Building the Blueprint

Imagine a story as a house; plotting is the blueprint, the foundation upon which your narrative rests. It outlines the structure, the rooms, and the connections between them. A well-constructed plot is the backbone of your story, providing direction and purpose. Here's how to build a strong plot:

Introduction: Start with an attention-grabbing introduction. Set the stage, introduce your characters, and establish the story's world. This is where you pique your audience's interest.

Conflict: Every great story hinges on conflict. It's the driving force behind your plot. Introduce the central conflict early, and ensure it's compelling, relatable, and high-stakes.

Rising Action: The story should gradually build tension and anticipation as your characters face challenges, make choices, and undergo personal growth.

Climax: This is the story's turning point, where the central conflict reaches its peak. It's the most intense, critical moment that often decides the fate of the characters.

Falling Action: After the climax, the story's intensity gradually decreases. Loose ends are tied up, and the consequences of the climax play out.

Resolution: Conclude the story in a satisfying way. Readers or viewers should feel a sense of closure, even if there's room for speculation or open-endedness.



Plotting and Pacing: Creating Engaging Story Arcs and Maintaining a Good Rhythm



Pacing: Finding the Right Beat

Pacing is the rhythm that carries your story forward. It's about controlling the speed at which your narrative unfolds.

Too fast, and your audience may feel overwhelmed; too slow, and they might lose interest. Achieving the right pacing is an art that requires careful consideration:

Varying Pace: A story should have moments of fast-paced action and moments of quiet reflection. These ebbs and flows create a dynamic and engaging narrative.

Character Development: Use slower pacing to delve into your characters' thoughts, emotions, and motivations. This builds depth and attachment to the characters.

Dramatic Tension: Increase the pace during pivotal scenes and conflicts.

Quick, back-and-forth dialogue and action sequences can keep the audience on the edge of their seats.

Transitions: Skillful transitions between scenes and chapters help maintain a consistent rhythm. They allow the audience to mentally adjust to shifts in time, place, or perspective.

Reader Engagement: Pay attention to reader feedback and reactions. If they express boredom or confusion, it may signal issues with pacing that need adjustment.

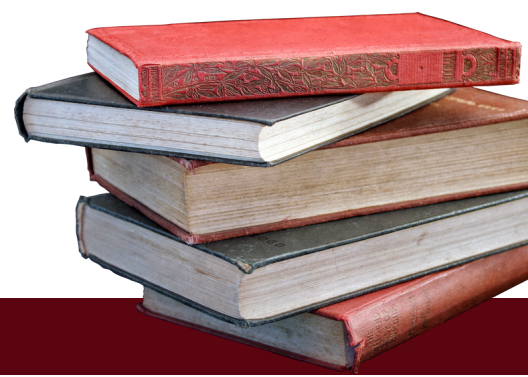
Balancing Act

Plotting and pacing are inextricably linked. The plot provides the structure, while pacing determines how the story unfolds within that structure. Finding the right balance between them is crucial for creating an engaging narrative that keeps your audience hooked from beginning to end.

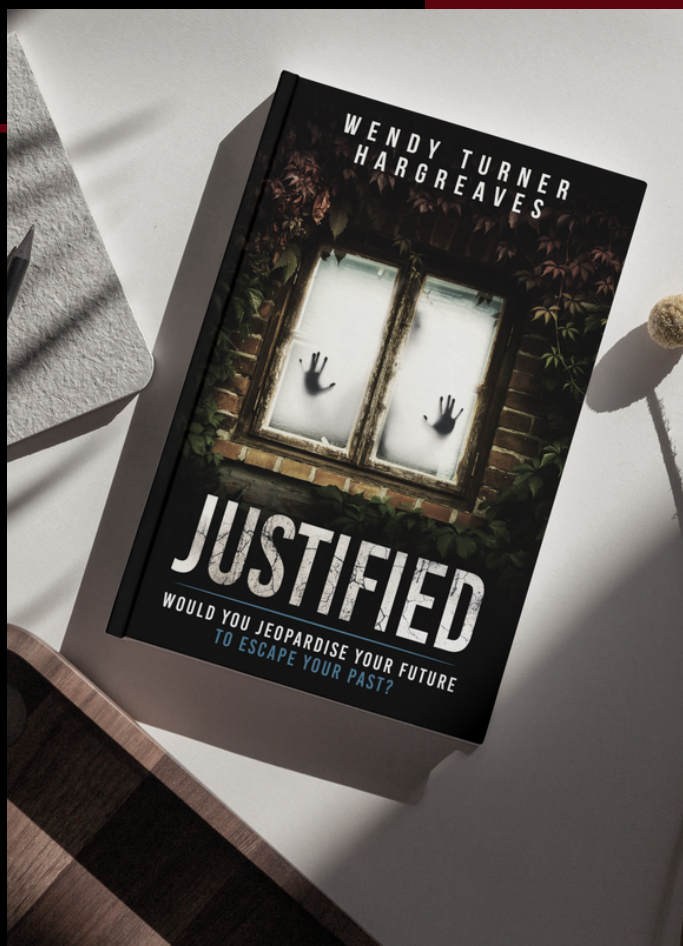
Remember that storytelling is a flexible art, and there is no one-size-fits-all formula. What works for one story may not work for another. Experiment with different approaches, seek feedback, and refine your skills over time.

In the end, crafting an enthralling story arc with a compelling rhythm is a challenge worth pursuing.

Whether you're a writer, filmmaker, or any form of storyteller, mastering the delicate dance of plotting and pacing can transform your narrative into an unforgettable experience for your audience.



Win a FREE Signed Copy of "Justified"



Fancy a Freebie?

If you enjoy a twisty crime thriller, here's your chance to win a signed copy of "Justified."

Simply comment on the page where you're reading this newsletter or post, or pop me an email to wendy@retroriver.co.uk

The winner will be announced in next month's issue, so don't forget to subscribe if you haven't already.

Good luck!

Wendy

y

Last month's winner was Lisa Thompson from Nottingham UK. Congrats Lisa! Your copy is on its way to you. Enjoy!

NEXT MONTH

- **Unsolved mysteries - true crime stories**
- **Sidekicks in Crime Fiction: Adding Depth to Character Dynamics**
- **Writing: Show, Don't Tell: Mastering the art of vivid description and sensory details.**
- **News, quotes and recommendations from your favourite genre**



Did you enjoy the opening of 'Justified' in the first issue? If you'd like to carry on reading, here's the [link to buy](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B08XJZJZJZ) on Amazon. If you missed it, you can read it on my website. Go to <https://wendyturnerhargreaves.com/newsletter>



Would you like to contribute?

Please get in touch if you'd like to contribute in any way - I love hearing from readers and other authors. You can also get in touch via one of my social media channels.



wendy@retroriver.co.uk
www.wendyturnerhargreaves.com