

The Big Interview: Bestselling Crime Novelist Leigh Russell



DI Geraldine Steel is the character creation of crime novelist and English teacher Leigh Russell. She recently became the number one bestselling female detective on Amazon's Kindle. With three successful crime novels to her credit, Leigh's motto is, 'Be brave, work hard, be lucky and you just never know!'

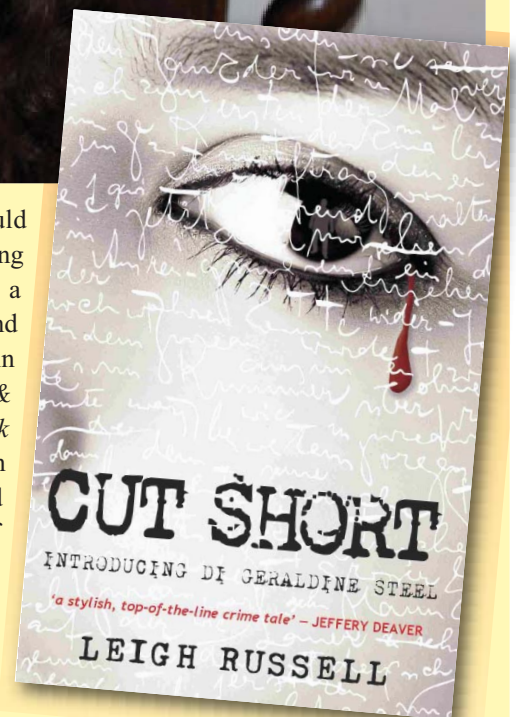
Q: *What inspired you to write your first novel, *Cut Short*?*

LR: I was walking through my local park by a tangled copse of trees and shrubs when a man came towards me round a bend in the path. I've no idea who he was, and I'm sure he was a really nice guy, but a thought struck me. What would I do if I walked on and saw a body in the bushes? When I got home I started thinking about this body. Who was she? What was the killer's motivation? I started writing for fun. I wrote and wrote and wrote and before I knew it I'd written a book.

Q: *You got a publishing deal very quickly. How did that happen?*

LR: You could say I fell into writing like Alice down a rabbit hole. I found three publishers in the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook* who specialise in crime fiction, and sent my novel off to see what would happen. A couple of weeks later I had a phone call from *No Exit Press*. I'd assumed their submission was a

wasted stamp as I only realised after submitting that they didn't accept unsolicited manuscripts. But they happened to be acquiring (*new authors*), read it and liked what they saw. They signed me up for three books and here I am.



Q: Is Detective Inspector Geraldine Steel your favourite character and does she still surprise you?

LR: She does surprise me and is developing as I'm going through the series, but the characters I really enjoy writing are the killers. People who kill other people are either born with no concept of good or evil or they've been damaged in some way. Trying to understand and get inside the head of your killers means it is difficult to make them completely evil. I know it sounds warped to say it's fun writing about bad guys but it is.

Q: What sort of research goes into your novels?

LR: Pretty much everything I haven't experienced I research, other than actually killing people – that's a complete flight of fantasy! I like to talk to people. For my fourth book I was in contact with the Human Remains Department at the *Natural History Museum*. I took advice from a Professor of Forensic Medicine for my second book, *Road Closed*, and I have a lot of contacts on the police force now.

Q: If you had to name three writing ingredients that are key to make a good crime novel what would they be?

LR: Character, plot and structure are the essentials. Characters must engage so there's some emotional commitment from the reader. Good plot to keep readers turning pages. And, being a crime novel, structure so there are no loose ends or things that don't make sense.

Q: When do you find time to write?

LR: Holidays and evenings but the actual writing is not so time-consuming. What takes the time is the thinking and research. It's in my head all the time. I very often churn things over when stuck in traffic or standing in a queue at the supermarket. And if you see someone in a restaurant scribbling on a serviette that's probably me!

Q: If you were stuck on a desert island with sufficient ink in your pen for one book, what sort of book would it be?

LR: It would be another murder story because that's what I enjoy writing. There's a big divide between crime in fiction and crime in real life. In real life there's nothing engaging, or fun about crime. It's one human being causing another human being to suffer – whether it's burglary or murder or whatever.

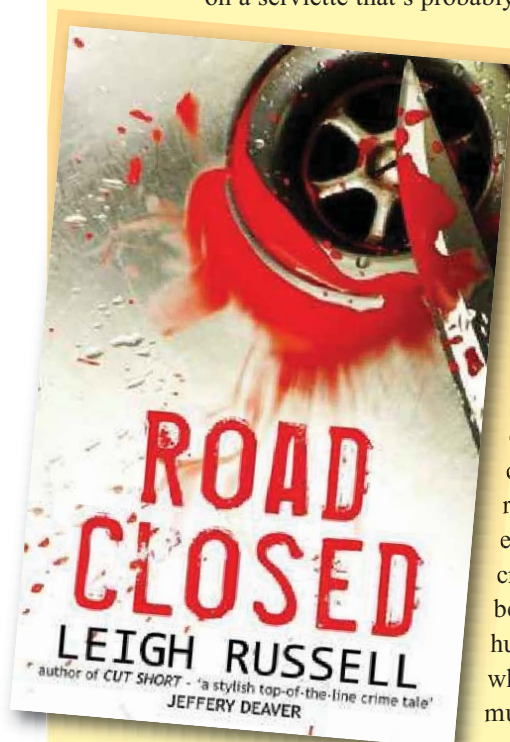
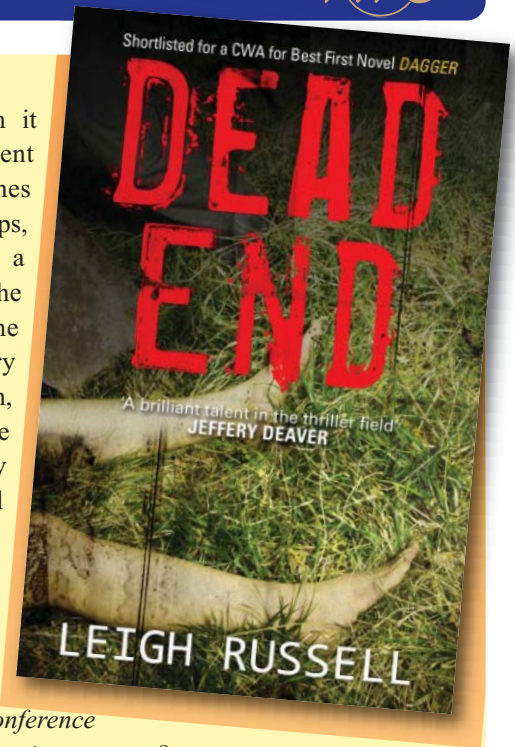
Somehow in fiction it becomes a different animal. It becomes entertainment. Perhaps, it's because having a detective solve the crime and stop the criminal is very comforting. In fiction, moral order can be restored in one way or another, but in real life one can't be so certain.

Q: And finally, you hosted a workshop at this year's *Get Writing* conference but will we see you again next year?

LR: Absolutely! I think it's a great event and such a leveller. At *Get Writing* you might have people just starting out alongside people who are successfully published authors, but we're all writers. And who's to say someone not currently published isn't going to be the next huge success? If you'd said to me five years ago I'd be a bestselling author I'd have said, hang on I've never even written anything. My advice to people is, be brave, work hard, be lucky and you just never know.

Leigh Russell's latest book, *Dead End* is available in bookshops. Leigh has already finished her fourth book in the DI Geraldine Steel series, and is halfway through writing a fifth. Release dates will be posted on her blog: www.leighrussell.co.uk

Steve Barley



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