

## EPISODE 003

# HUGH FRASER

**Adam:** Episode 3 and we're starting to get the hang of it now. There's me, of course, Adam Croft, and we've got one of the best-loved British actors and a fantastic crime writer to boot. That's our guest for this week. And we've also got Bob.

**Robert:** Hello!

**Adam:** This is Episode 3 of Partners in Crime. So, Bob, what have you been up to this week?

**Robert:** Well, I've been getting into another television crime series. How do I get any work done, I ask myself very often?

**Adam:** You don't.

**Robert:** Well, no. This is a very good point. Rebecka Martinsson is a new series premiering on Channel 4 this week. It's set in Sweden, the very far north in Sweden in the arctic circle in a town called Kiruna and it follows the heroine, Rebecka Martinsson, a lawyer who travels out from Stockholm for the funeral of an old friend. And of course, gets drawn into a murder/investigation which keeps her in that vicinity for longer than she was planning. Anyone who saw *Midnight Sun* will recognize the setting, that extraordinary beautiful part of the world, and strangely lonely environment. Again, it's nothing we haven't seen before, but small-town community with murders; everything's entwined, everyone's connected, a lot of people are related. And, of course, she comes back to her hometown and decides to stay. But it's well-worth a look. It's based on a series of books by Åsa Larsson who would've heard of anyone who enjoys scandi murder-mysteries will know of her books. This series is based on 4 of them and I recommend Rebecka Martinsson wholeheartedly.

**Adam:** Excellent. I've been on my televisual travels as well this week; I've been watching this series called *Le Mante*, which is a French crime series on Netflix. It translates as *The Mantis*. And the background of it is that it's to do with the copycat killings, or a serial killer called *The Praying Mantis* who killed 8 people 25 years ago and is now in jail. And a copycat murderer is essentially re-enacting the murders that happened. And the Mantis gets in touch and says that she can help the investigation on the condition that she collaborates with her son who is now a police officer called Damian Carrot or Damian Carrot if you read it in English. There are scenes where he's in there, being referred to as Captain Carrot and of course if you're watching

with the subtitles, English which you have to, cause my French is tres poor, it comes out as Captain Carrot. Which sounds like the worst superhero in the world.

**Robert:** Is that a silent T? I had bangers and mash with peas and carrot last night.

**Adam:** I wouldn't want Captain Carrot to be investigating my murder, I think. I have to say, I wholeheartedly recommend that. I binged on the whole thing. It's only one season so far, but hopefully coming back for more. It's been left with a bit of an open-end anyway, and it's just fantastic, I really, really enjoyed it.

**Robert:** Right, it's next up after Rebecka Martinsson.

**Adam:** Excellent. And of course we're talking French drama; we're talking French drama in the next episode as well. We'll get into that a little bit later but definitely French crime drama is the thing that we're going to be talking about over the next couple of weeks. I also got my own new book out, which has been doing quite well. Tell me I'm wrong, a psychological thriller I might as well put a plug in, why not?

**Robert:** Please, I don't like to know that you've been unplugged. Put the plug in!

**Adam:** It's a psychological thriller with the tagline 'What if you discovered your husband is a serial killer?' and that's been doing quite well. So, I'm very happy, it's hopefully helped pay for the podcast.

**Robert:** Yes, and I have started it – that is my book for the week, strangely enough, and I'm absolutely hooked on that as well, so I think, it looks as if you've done it again.

**Adam:** Well, let's hope so. On this week's show though, we're going to be speaking to Hugh Fraser who is a star of stage and screen and also a fantastic writer these days as well with his [04:43] he played Capt. Hastings on the TV series Poirot; he's narrated the Agatha Christie audio books, he's got his own series of fantastic crime thrillers published by Bain and he also happened to come to write a theme tune for a children's TV series. We'll tell you all about that in the interview later today, we'll find out lots about that. And in fact, it's linked to last week's episode where we spoke to Dreda Saint Mitchell in a way cause they both had a childhood growing up in London with exposure to criminal gangs and that's something that no two people would've had the similar kind of background, but they are.

**Robert:** Well, he's a fascinating chap. I've known him for many years now. And he's turned into a, as you say, a terrific thriller writer which we'll be talking to you all about. I think that's a great guest and again crossing, straddling two worlds of acting in crime dramas and going back home and hitting the QWERTY and creating his own crime thrillers which he does supremely well.

**Adam:** We should say at this point, all jokes aside about who pays for the podcast; the fact is it's Kobo. They're a fantastic book seller, they've got over 5 million titles available on their website in eBook and audiobook form and you can get 90% off your first eBook at Kobo, a

massive, massive discount. If you're not already a Kobo customer, you can download the app for free for your phone or tablet so you don't need any e-reader or anything like that. You can read on the go with 90% off your first eBook. Just go to Kobo.com and enter the promo code CRIME at the checkout.

**B:** Well, we're delighted to welcome to partners in crime that wonderful actor, Mr. Hugh Fraser, known to millions of people throughout the world for his marvellous performance as Hastings in Poirot and The Duke of Wellington in Sharp or Sharp's Rivals as it was first called. Not many people know he was also an extremely fine musician and over recent years he's been hitting the keyboard of his personal computer and creating The Adventures of Rina Walker, a woman assassin who works in London in the 1960s, in fact worldwide. His books: Harm, Threat and Malice have hit the bestseller lists and are great reads, I can recommend them wholeheartedly. We recorded this interview with Hugh a few months ago, just before the publication of Malice.

**Adam:** Hugh, the subject matter of your books is very dark, very different from the Agatha Christie world which obviously you've inhabited before, playing Captain Hastings in Poirot and narrating the Agatha Christie audiobooks. Is that all completely a work of imagination, that dark underworld of MI6 and spies or have you done research into that or is it purely a work of your imagination?

**Hugh:** Yeah, well, as far as the spies at MI6 is concerned, yes, of course, I've got no personal experience of it at all beyond what I read in the papers, and that doesn't give us much as we all know. So I have delved quite heavily into the world of espionage, particularly this sort of Kim Philby, Burgess and McLane era where the espionage that appears in my second book, Threat, it takes place. But as far as the actual, the majority of the criminality, the London clubs, the strip clubs, the protection rackets, the London gangs, the thugs, the criminals, that really came out of a love for the photographs of Roger Maine and Burt Hardy who documented street life of the poorer areas of our cities in the 40s and 50s. And I've always been fascinated by the Teddy boys and the Teddy girls and the kids in the streets in those photographs. And I also lived in Noting Hill in the early 60s which was very different from the way it is today. There was obvious criminality around, you'd go into the pub and you'd see a table full of men in dark suits and Fedora hats, sort of looking forbidding and mean in the corner. And it was very often, there was drug dealing in the streets and the protection rackets were very obvious; you heard about it from the local people. So, that is very much Rena Walker who's my central character, that's very much her background. So she grew up into a world of London gangs basically, strip clubs, protection rackets, hostess clubs in Soho and so on and so forth. And the rivalry between the gangs.

**Adam:** It's a fascinating world. Your books cover not only the cities of this country. London. But also, your characters, I've noticed, travel abroad and you do bring in some different geographical locations. Are these all places you've been to or again are there other sort of research methods involved there?

**Hugh:** Well, I have been to Berlin where Rena goes at one stage; I've been there a couple times as an actual fact. Mexico, which also figures heavily in the first book I've never been to, but Google Earth has.

**Adam:** That was going to be my question – it's a fascinating tool. I know a lot of writers use it, I've made extensive use of that myself.

**Hugh:** It's incredible. You can be in a street, you know, basically moving along the street, looking at the shops on either side, factories, whatever it is you want to see. It's actually extraordinary; you can effectively be there.

**Robert:** Wonderful tool for cheap research. Hugh, you know I'm a great fan of your books and I haven't read the third one yet which I'm really looking forward to, and I think one of the many successes is your ability to do pitch perfect descriptions of London and go between the two timescales you have of the 50's and the 70's in the first book, and it's wonderful writing. And, at the same time, having such a terrific but narrative drive that you keep literally – it's a much-used cliché – but a page-turner. How do you manage to actually get the joys of the detail describing where you are in these situations with that terrific drive that you have with your books? The pace.

**Hugh:** I'm really glad you feel that about the books. I suppose my instinct has always been to write what I'd like to read, the kind of book I'd like to read. And while I think description is very important, I'm not keen on books that linger over it too much, you know, and paint too detailed a picture. Whereas I think with a couple of instances, just maybe a couple of sentences you can set the scene quite effectively and then move on with the action.

**Robert:** That's exactly what you do, and I'm wondering, one of the questions I wanted to ask was, as one of our leading actors in this country, how much is your acting, working with scripts and telling stories in pictures as it were influence your style as a writer?

**Hugh:** I think there is one aspect which is extremely helpful, coming from an acting background, and that is as you do, Bob, and I'm wondering if you'd agree with me: that your access to a character, when you first of all get a script is what they say, it's the dialogue basically, is your way into character, is how you assimilate a character and it's also how you express a character. And I think there may be some kind of cross over about having a character in your head as a writer and getting them on paper through what they say rather than describe – I use first person narrative, so I don't describe how Rena is feeling at any point, I express it about what she says and what she thinks, of course. So, I think there is a kind of crossover there from the point of view of finding a character through dialogue as an actor, and then as a kind of reverse process, of expressing a character through dialogue when you're writing.

**Robert:** And does that help your experience as an actor, get into obviously each of your characters, to get into their mindset, and do all of the what ifs and the details there. So, when Rena is speaking and telling her story through the actions of her life, have you felt very at ease with the way that many different characters express themselves? Cause it's often a criticism of

some writing that writers can be wonderful writers, but many of their characters sound pretty much the same. That's certainly not the case with you; I got the feeling that every one of your characters were thought out and you walked a mile in their shoes, so you could actually be authentic in writing from their POV.

**Hugh:** Yes, I think that's true and I'm sure you must find this as well Bob, where if it's the Dowager Duchess talking, you can replay the Dowager Duchess for a second.

**Robert:** Oh, how I wish!

**Hugh:** The costumes are wonderful! But, and then the busboy comes in or the maid comes in and you kind of become the butler or the maid, and so I think there's definitely a crossover there and one's acting experience can possibly help the ability to kind of slip into character as it were, which is I think what you do – funnily enough, one thing about Agatha Christie that I love is her ability to invest every single character with a real personality and a really distinctive manner and delivery and all of that. The tiniest character, the maid who opens the door to Poirot and Hastings will have adenoids or will be with the look put upon or whatever, and she can do this so deftly with such tiny strokes of the pen. I think character is vital to books; without it, I don't think you've got a book, really. You've got a story.

**Robert:** Absolutely.

**Adam:** You were speaking about dialogue a moment ago Hugh and dialogue is something a lot of writers do have problems with in making dialogue sound authentic. I think with your background as an actor, as you say, the first thing you know about a character is their dialogue and the way they speak. Does that make writing dialogue easier for you as a writer?

**Hugh:** I think it probably does because I must say, I find dialogue very quite easy, relatively easy to write as opposed to description where I'm often thinking is this too much, is this too little, how is this going to read? Whereas with dialogue, it tends to come quite easily, I think.

**Adam:** Something else I noticed about your books as well is that, as Bob was saying earlier, the first book is set in the 50's and the 70's. The second one fills in that gap in the middle in the 60's. That kind of historical context of the books, is that something you particularly enjoy? I know you spoke earlier about having kind of seen a bit of that world as well. Is that something that you really enjoy exploring, this kind of thriller genre through a historical lens?

**Hugh:** Oh, I very much do. It is based on personal experience. I used to go to the Flamingo all-nighters in '64 in Soho, in Water Street and enjoy exactly that life. Seeing Graham Barnum and Eric Clapton and John Mayall Bluesbreakers and all the bands that appear in my books. So, and yeah, I very much enjoyed that. At one point she's walking down, I think it's Water Street and she sees these mots coming the other way, all piled up and there's a fight breaks out, you know, outside a pub, that sort of thing. And these are things from personal experience basically. So again, it's relatively easy to be authentic because one was actually there.

**Robert:** One thing that listeners might not know and here's the question: did going to these clubs and seeing those wonderful musicians, because you're a musician yourself, have any influence in the writing of the theme tune to iTV's Rainbow? Which listeners might not know that you were part of a group called Tell Tale and one of the co-composers of that tune which for people of my age group will never leave me, happily.

**Hugh:** It's an earworm, isn't it?

**Robert:** Do you still play?

**Hugh:** Yes. I play bass with a singer called Kenly Moore. We gig around the place from time to time. No, the Rainbow theme was purely – I was in a band and one of the members of the band knew a researcher who was part of getting the Rainbow series together. And she just asked if we simply would like to come up with a theme tune and the 3 of us got together and we tried and tried and failed. And then I went home, we thought we just can't do this, it's not going to work. And I went home on the tube and got the food tower when I got back, and I came up with the riff. Went back to the guitarist's house and said come on, let's go and we just put it together. And we recorded it that night on a very rudimentary machine, a sort of reel-to-reel tape machine with just one microphone, and sent in in and they said yeah, great, come and record it! And then they asked us to appear in the show as well, doing the songs and all of that. So, it's pure happenstance, like everything I'm sure Bob you will agree with me, nearly everything that's happened in my career, and I'm sure yours, has just been pure luck, being at the right place at the right time.

**Robert:** I couldn't agree more. It's absolutely that I look back, certainly to opportunities and they're all linked to situations where I very nearly couldn't be bothered with turning up, like a workshop for this which eventually led to something over there which led to someone, if you go back to your life and try and join those dots it's fairly scary. But I agree! It is a chance, certainly. And we're used to that as actors. Wearing your writer's hat, do you find that being an author as precarious an existence as acting can sometimes be?

**Hugh:** I suppose it's difficult. I'm a novice, only having completed 3 books and not been doing it for very long. I think possibly not, because it's quite a solitary profession, it's quite a solitary activity writing books, and apart from literary festivals and perhaps launches and things like that you don't really mix that much with other writers and people in the industry. I suppose agents, editors, film companies who have commissioning editors, so I think acting's probably much more social in the sense that you go to see shows, you run into people, you might drink in the pub with a certain group of people who have friends who come and go. So I wouldn't have said it's social and therefore not quite so prone to luck of the kind that we've enjoyed as actors as we were just discussing.

**Robert:** That's true. Acting is physically collaborative. The collaboration for an author – I suppose as an author I feel much more in control of things because a collaboration tends to come once a book is written and then it's over to publishers, editors and everything else and that's when the collaboration really begins after that. And then moving forward into the

marketplace, the collaboration continues with interaction with your readers and doing this sort of thing, having a chat on a Friday morning and talking about your work. So, I mean, I suppose the social element comes in far later in being a writer I guess. But the solitariness is something – how do you deal with that? Do you quite like the fact that it is just you? You’re not having to turn up in a rehearsal room of 35 actors doing warmups and go ‘Ha-ha-ha-haa’ you know. Do you quite like the fact that you can go down to your study and close the door?

**Hugh:** Well, to be honest, no.

**Robert:** We’re lucky that we actually manage to straddle both worlds really. So when you’ve had enough of writing you have the opportunity to fly over to Hungary. Where did you go last year to film? You went to –

**Hugh:** Kazakhstan.

**Robert:** Kazakhstan. As you do. To make a movie. So I suppose at any given year you have a fairly varied life, don’t you, Hugh?

**Hugh:** Yes, I’m extremely lucky in that respect. I did a radio play recently with Alistair McGowan and Morgana Robinson. And Al Murray. And it was 4 days of pure heaven, it was such a laugh. Apart from the fact that I like to think we did a pretty good job on the play, it was a complete treat to be with incredibly amusing people.

**Robert:** It is, I’ve had 3 days this week knocking my head against the wall trying to get through a particular passage of the book and yesterday I’m dealing with doing radio with Derek Jacoby coming out of the Tardis and me going ‘Who are you?’ and again, it’s a completely different world. And I suppose that balance, I find very helpful, the fact that I know this is not the way it’s going to be forever, then I can divide my time into different sections of happily working as an actor and then actually clearing the decks and saying right, I’m going to just lock that door and build this fantasy world and live in that for a few months. It’s a great escape.

**Hugh:** Yes, indeed. To be able to do both is a great privilege. To be an actor in any way, to work as an actor, but I think to be able to do both as we do is a bonus on top of it.

**Robert:** Did you know early days, cause you were working, talking about the Poirot movies, your range of work as an actor, is huge but obviously this is a crime podcast, people may be interested in the Agatha Christie – did you know early days that it’s going to be successful? We both know Clive Exton was one of the great adaptors for television and he was on board from the off for the Poirot. And I’m right to say that Brian Easman was the producer of the very first one?

**Hugh:** The initial producing, yes.

**Robert:** So was there a chemistry – cause you and David must have been the first to be cast, I would have thought on this. So what was the feeling like in the early days on Poirot?

**Hugh:** It was positive. I think we felt it was going to be good, we had no idea it was going to be the success it was, as one never does until it actually goes out and people react and you get the audience figures, you have no idea. It could be a lead balloon.

**Robert:** A life is spent more in hope than expectation, is it not?

**Hugh:** Yes, exactly. I did sense early on, as soon as we started that David's incredible attention to detail, and his sheer professionalism and the way he addressed the character which was so incredibly thorough, every last mannerism, every last tick of the character, every last characteristic he had researched, and he had got it absolutely down. And I did feel encouraged by that, I thought I developed a respect for his performance immediately.

**Robert:** Something I was going to ask about actually is that I've read in a number of places that David Suchet's approach to Poirot was so meticulous to the point that even between scenes and through lunch or whatever, if he was in costume he'd stay in character. Is that true?

**Hugh:** Absolutely. Yes. There would be a moment in makeup, he'd come into makeup, good morning, good morning, how are you, what was on telly last night, and then he stood in the makeup chair and his makeup artist would put on his base makeup and all that and he'd be talking away and there would be a moment when the moustache was applied where he would suddenly be going from talking like that to 'Non, non, non, I think it is a little bit up on the left hand side; that is it, thank you so much.' And after makeup 'Goodbye, I will see you all on the set, au revoir! See you!' so there was a definite moment where he went into character and stayed there until he took the stuff off his face.

**Robert:** I heard a story and I don't know whether it was absolutely true, but David on the set had a leaning board which meant when he was a little tired, he didn't want to sit down and crease the perfect creases in his costume. Because he'd be in the costume for many, many hours and the chances to crease are of course immense, so he had a sort of a leaning board where he could lean back to take the pressure off his feet a little bit and repose. Is that true?

**Hugh:** I have to say I never saw a leaning board. I've also heard that story, other people who tell that story, there could be – excuse me, I'm sorry.

**Robert:** No, that's what we like, a little bit of drama.

**Adam:** Some background music.

**Robert:** If it's your agent, tell them they can wait.

**Hugh:** No, it's my proof-reader who's helping me do the final draft of the book. It's ok, I'll call her back. I never saw a leaning board, but I have heard that story from other people so it may have appeared in an episode that I wasn't in.

**Robert:** Sounds such a wonderful idea. I don't know about you but I've been on a set and I thought, when I heard that story years ago, I was standing around for hours and I thought oh, I'd love to have a Suchet leaning board at this moment in time, I really would.

**Hugh:** Glenn Close had a leaning board in 101 Dalmatians and I envied that too.

**Robert:** It's actually extraordinary, but it's a great responsibility I guess. I can remember working with the same team on Jeeves and Wooster. Clive and Brian and I can remember the early days of that and they actually said this is nerve-wracking cause there are millions of people out there who love this writer's work and we don't want to cock it up. So there must have been the same sense of responsibility on the shoulders of the early days of your team, and what a team it was! You had Paulie and Philip and Jack who was a great team and it gelled the chemistry amongst the actors. I said gelled straight from the beginning but also the chemistry of writer adapting these stories and realising, seeing that transformation to making a fictional character human, in human form.

**Hugh:** And I think Clive was a master of that. I think the big element in the success of that series was Clive Exton, actually Horowitz who took the characters that Christie had written and just gave them much more personality, particularly the supporting characters. Myself, Philip Jackson and Pauline Moran, our characters were definitely developed way beyond what Agatha Christie put on the page.

**Robert:** And how much that came from you as well? Because I think Clive was wonderful, and actually looking at the actors and say I see that, I'm going to use that. So you as an actor became infused with the character to make them whole.

**Hugh:** I think it was symbiotic. I think Clive would give us a springboard and hopefully we would use that springboard to do something which then he would pick up on and develop it. I think there was a two-way process, very much.

**Robert:** Certainly, realized from people watching it, devoted to it as I was. I mean, it was for 23 years, it ran and the standard was always immaculate. You know, it was quite an extraordinary achievement I think.

**Hugh:** Attributed to David to a large degree because as I mentioned before, he's incredibly professional. I never saw him drop a line in 23 years. He knew those summing up scenes at the end which were frequently 20-25 pages-long, he'd come on the set, have it absolutely perfect first time and he would know more about the cutting points than the director some of the time. And so that created kind of an atmosphere of professionalism. So we used the time that we had available which was not that much as you know with series television, you know it can be quite pushed. We used that time to its absolute full, very little time is wasted.

**Robert:** And do you mourn its passing as a series? Would you like to go back and do – which is always a possibility, never say never again is the phrase.

**Hugh:** Doing the last one where Poirot, don't want to give a spoiler, but where Poirot is responsible for something absolutely drastic and Hastings goes back as an older man, and they're both much older than in the original series. That was interesting because it did provide a kind of conclusion to it, I felt.

**Robert:** There's a melancholy, but true to life.

**Hugh:** Yes, absolutely. So I don't feel like I want to go back, really. Because I feel it came to its natural conclusion and came to a full stop.

**Robert:** Do you find that with your books? You're writing a series with the same central heroine, so at the end of every book you know that you're going to go back to her. How do you think – you don't know until you get there I guess, but how would you feel that one day you'll say goodbye to her, the last word will be written and you'll move on to other things?

**Hugh:** I really don't know. I'm just hoping I'll be able to write the next one as far.

**Robert:** But I suppose that's one of the powers that writers have, the simple fact is again, never say never again. The last full stop may not necessarily be the last full stop.

**Adam:** I think there's knowing when to put an end on it as well and knowing when the natural end is. Cause you know you can go on too far as well and we know many people who have. So I think it's more of a challenge than a privilege actually. That's what I found, when to say enough is enough.

**Robert:** The [33:31] approach to writing. Finish when you're on top and start again. Can we talk about your new book? How does this differ from the first two?

**Hugh:** It's more similar to the second one than to the first, in that it's one continuous timeline and it's also set in 1964; the second one was set in 1961, this is 3 years later in '64 and it's located mostly in London and Birmingham with a trip to Spain, fairly brief trip to Spain on the Costa del Crime towards the end of the book, and it's about villains competing with one another to try and take over rackets and territory and betrayal and girls getting kidnapped and all that.

**Robert:** It's an incredibly vivid and rich time which is why you've chosen the 60s, I guess. I don't know how you feel but when I'm writing, I like to write in the world that I'm comfortable with. The world that you write about is particularly uncomfortable, but as I say, very vivid. But it does demand research and as you say, you lived through the 60s so you have a first-hand knowledge of the feel and the atmosphere of those times. Other than that, how do you research?

**Hugh:** There are a lot of biographies for the 60's, particularly villains, criminal biographies. There are a lot of books about the [35:14] for example and they're very evocative, so I've read quite a few of those. And also, again, I kind of knew people who lived in this sort of

rather grey world at that time. It's a mixture of personal experience and research, as one would do with any period I suppose.

**Robert:** When you say grey times, that is not a colour that I would actually put on the books because they were coming out of grey times, and the thing in the 60's exploded but while they were exploding, they weren't necessarily colourful. I mean, we remember them as that but there was a transition and certainly a transition of power in regard to the criminal underworld, which is another area that you cover extraordinarily well. And do you see yourself continuing in that period or are you going to move forward to the 70's or are we going to follow Rena to the present day, should she survive? Which is part of the page turning we're talking about: will she survive this time?

**Hugh:** I can't really see beyond the hope to be able to do the next one to be honest, which I think will be in the mid 60's, probably 66-67, summer of love kind of period when the whole hippie thing really took off. So festivals and things like that, but beyond that I really don't know.

**Adam:** A hypothetical question for you, Hugh. Having worked on TV productions and film for years and now writing their own books, let's say everything comes full circle and your books end up TV or film, who do you anticipate playing Rena?

**Hugh:** That is one that I really don't know. I've thought about this and people have asked me this before and I just don't know, I'm afraid.

**Adam:** I'm glad I'm not the only writer who responds with that when asked.

**Robert:** One thing we do know is we know who's going to be doing the theme tune. Well, that's fascinating! Because it does come down to that, with television options and things there's a long history of writers suddenly being presented with an actor who's going to play their main protagonist and not all together being very happy with the choice.

**Adam:** Inspector Moss springs to mind.

**Robert:** But then Dexter apparently fell in love with [38:01] after he'd seen it.

**Adam:** And he started writing them the other way around in fact, cause he in his mind had Moss as younger and when it was cast the other way around, he came around to the idea and in the later books he wrote after the TV adaptation had started had them all the way around.

**Hugh:** The other thing is the age factor. Because in the first book she's 34 and 15, the two parallel stories, so that's difficult, whether you have two different actresses playing her or, you know, one actress who can age up or down is a difficult one.

**Robert:** That is a challenge, yes.

**Hugh:** With a series of books, you've got that age magic course with Bond, for example, they just don't worry about that, he's the same age in each one, apart from a few years'

discrepancy of course. It's very, very difficult. I thought of Melissa George for instance who I loved, I thought she was wonderful in that. And yet, she's – I won't say her age, but she's a little older and a little more mature than would be suitable to play Rena in the 60's for instance when she's 20-21. So it's a very tricky one.

**Robert:** And it's an area where really writers have some say, but no one knows as much as people think in my experience and the experience of friends who've had their work taken to television. Very often there can be major changes which they have very little control of. How would you feel about – I mean, obviously the joy of having a television adaptation of a series of your books and characters is a major plus for any author, certainly in the crime genre and the thriller genre. How would you feel about that and how much influence would you like to feel you could achieve?

**Hugh:** I think it's got to be a situation where you have to probably just accept that you're giving it over.

**Adam:** Take the money and run.

**Hugh:** It's a way of looking at it, yeah. Clearly there will be consultation, you'll go through readthroughs presumably and things like that, but I think you'd probably go crazy if you tried to keep control.

**Robert:** But sometimes you hear – Peter James tells a wonderful story of an attempt to bring his marvellous Roy Grace series to the screen some years ago, where he suddenly got a phone call from a producer saying we got the scripts and we needed to talk to you about some finer details. And he said 'Oh, I didn't even realize it had gotten that far'. Oh yes, it's well-ahead now. We just want to talk because of course, Roy Grace is a Brighton copper, but we've had this wonderful idea that in our adaptation he's Scottish and Brighton isn't Brighton anymore, it's actually Aberdeen. How do you feel about this? And you can imagine Peter's response. So you do hear some absolute horror stories. But then of course the successful ones like Moss and I guess Frost is another one and Bergerac and various other things that have worked very successfully. It would be a lovely bridge to cross when you get there, but you just have to give it away I guess.

**Hugh:** I suspect that's the only way to survive it.

**Robert:** Well, the writers traditionally in all mediums have actually always struggled to sort of control; in television for instance I suppose there's Tony Jordan in this country and Mr. Albert and what have you, managed to achieve that extraordinary thing that does happen in America more and more. You have the show runners and the writers who are actually producing and directing and writing as they go which is far more of a tradition in America than it is over here. Very often it's the writer who gives the word to the producer and the producer to the director and there's an absolute chain. What do you feel about that sort of way of working that the Americans have where the writers are literally there every day and directing and producing

their work? Are there any shows that you particularly like in America that you think benefit from that?

**Hugh:** Well, I think Breaking Bad was the classic example, isn't it? I'm enormously enjoying Nashville at the moment which is just music, it's such fun. I think the alter approach is great, but very often, I wouldn't think I have anywhere near the experience to take a role of that sort. Those people have been around for a long time and have done all kinds of different things: producing, directing, writing, as an individual skill. And individual contribution and then wrapped the whole thing together after a great deal of experience. And I would've thought, for a novice, you could get out of your depth quite quickly in this situation like that.

**Robert:** I read, with your first book, when I read it I thought oh god, this is like a movie. I could see this is a movie. And reading the second one, I can see it actually both of them working as potential movies which not all novels do because they're too parochial. But I can now see them working as potential TV series. I don't mean to emphasize so much about the television because obviously they're fantastic books and the whole point of this is people sit down and read them. But they do, I think, both the books I read so far, do lend themselves to the possibility of very happy perhaps position into another medium.

**Hugh:** Hope brings eternal I suppose.

**Robert:** Yes, the checks in the post.

**Adam:** And that's a good note to end on, I suppose. Hope brings eternal. Hugh, it's been absolutely fascinating talking to you. Thank you very much for taking the time out of your busy schedule. Where can listeners find you if they want to find out more about you and your books?

**Hugh:** Well, I'm on Twitter and Facebook. I don't have a website, I'm afraid, so it's basically Twitter and Facebook really.

**Adam:** And books are all available through all the usual outlets.

**Hugh:** Yes, they're on Amazon. Either as eBooks or paperbacks and they're also in Waterston's, Daunt, Smiths, all the bookshops basically.

**Robert:** There's no excuse for anyone actually not to rush out or sit down and order the two that are available now and the end of the third book, the trilogy.

**Hugh:** Third book, Malice, is out the 1<sup>st</sup> of June.

**Robert:** Great. It was lovely talking to you, Hugh. Thank you ever so much!

**Hugh:** You too, both of you. Thank you very much indeed for having me!

**Adam:** Well, Bob, that's another really interesting interview.

**Robert:** Certainly was.

**Adam:** And for me it's fascinating being able to find out more about Hugh, someone I've always been aware of, having watched all the Poirot episodes and so on, and having read his books, but it's somebody I've never really known that much about. He kind of tends to keep to himself a fair bit and so it's really interesting to find out about his work, working on Poirot with David Suchet and how he writes his books.

**Robert:** I mean, it's been mentioned before, he's a man of huge talents and many of them. And he's a delightful gentleman, I have to say; he's a lovely chap. And his career now going from acting to writing is one that I of course I sort of recognize myself. We speak regularly about the particularly challenges that dipping a toe into both of those worlds offer up. But he's a great man and as we said several times before, his books are well-worth reading, they really are. Fast thrillers with a great period feel to them so Hugh Fraser, Poirot, The Duke of Wellington and thriller writer; it's been a joy talking to him, wasn't it?

**Adam:** Absolutely, yeah. And it's also worth saying it's worth keeping an eye on any literary festival that Hugh's speaking at as well, cause I've had the pleasure of meeting him last year at Beacon Lit in Buckinghamshire here in the UK. We were both guest speakers there on the same day, I think he was just after me, saving the best for last and I had the pleasure of having a bit of a chat with him and watching his session as well.

**Robert:** He's fascinating, yeah.

**Adam:** He's a real raconteur as well. Fantastic stories, he knows how to hold an audience. It's well-worth going to any literary festival that has Hugh speaking at.

**Robert:** Well, I recommend one: it's Books on the Beach in Scarborough which is coming out this year. You're going to be there as well.

**Adam:** I'll be there, you'll be there.

**Robert:** I'll be there and I think we're doing a panel with Hugh and the lovely actor George Costigan who's now a historical novelist himself and myself, so that will be a lot of fun.

**Adam:** And I'll be in the pub.

**Robert:** And you'll be in the pub.

**Adam:** Which I normally am when I'm in Scarborough.

**Robert:** Buying us all a drink.

**Adam:** Now, don't forget: as a listener to Partners in Crime you are eligible for an exclusive 90% discount on your first eBook on Kobo. There's over 5 million titles to choose from, you can read with the free app for your mobile phone or tablet as well. So no need to go out and splash out on an e-reader. You can read with the very device that you're listening to this



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Bob, something I was talking to you about a couple of days ago is the fact that so many listeners have already been in touch. The first two episodes have been really successful actually. It does normally take a while to get a podcast off the ground and get a few episodes under your belt.

**Robert:** Does it? I don't know anything.

**Adam:** We really hit the ground running it seems, seems to have something here. And we have listeners in, according to our podcast stats, in the UK, the US, Australia, Canada, Germany, France, Ireland, Hungary and the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia.

**Robert:** Good gracious!

**Adam:** Now what's even more surprising about that is those are the stats that I pulled off after Episode 1.

**Robert:** Good lord, that's very nice!

**Adam:** So, Episode 1, before Episode 2 was even released, had spread that far.

**Robert:** Are we unable to walk the streets of the Balkans?

**Adam:** I know! Yeah, we won't be able to walk down the high street of the former Skopje.

**Robert:** Macedonia. I'll pay particular attention to their contribution to the Eurovision song contest this year. We wish all our listeners in Macedonia well, thanks very much for listening. And everywhere else!

**Adam:** Both of you, hello to both of you. There were two, according to the stats. Two people in Macedonia.

**Robert:** I have no relations in Macedonia that I know of.

**Adam:** No, but it's fantastic. I'm very pleased. On next week's show we've got another cracking guest: Roger Simonsz who is a director, cinematographer and all-round television genius, isn't he, Bob?

**Robert:** Yes, he's an extraordinary man. He's also made a big impression in theatre. He began theatre in Liverpool at the beginning of his career. He is Dutch, currently living in France and goes between France and London and he works on project throughout the world, really. But he'll be talking to us about his contribution as a cinematographer to the wonderful French series: Spiral or Engrenages.

**Adam:** You've never mentioned Spiral before on this show.

**Robert:** I never mentioned Spiral?

**Adam:** I never heard you talk about it.

**Robert:** I'm slightly obsessed with it. I have to say, I make no bones about it, probably being one of my all-time favourite crime show. But he worked on that so he'll be giving some interesting insights and also as a director of Death in Paradise. His insights into the making of that and what directing that means, and talking about the success of both shows. That's Roger Simonsz talking to us from Flaunteburg. Goodness me, not Flaunteburgh...

**Adam:** France.

**Robert:** France.

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