

# eBooks: Just a Fad or the Future of Fiction? An Exclusive Interview with Crime Writer Leigh Russell

by Sonia Kilvington

You can rarely pass through an airport these days without finding someone completely engrossed in a novel on an eReader. These gadgets are everywhere and used by readers of all ages. I recently had a pensioner explain to me, how to use one, while sailing on a Mediterranean cruise. It seems that, even being out at sea doesn't prevent you from buying a new book as long as you have the right type of account! There is now little need for desperate holiday makers to buy faded copies of old thrillers in pricey holiday resorts. But is it all good news for the readers; or is there a down side to the new technology which seems to be revolutionising our reading habits? We asked bestselling crime writer Leigh Russell for her insight into the eBook phenomenon.



Leigh Russell became an instant success after her first crime novel, *Cut Short* was published in 2010. The novel was shortlisted for a CWA Dagger Award for Best First Novel. Leigh is an ardent supporter of independent bookshops and she appears at many literary events and readings, including The Harrogate Crime Writing Festival. After critical acclaim for her bestselling, second novel, *Road Closed*, Leigh has now published her third novel in The Geraldine Steel series called *Dead End*.

The novel begins with the apparently motiveless murder of school headmistress Abigail Kirby. Her body is found in a local park, and it has been horribly mutilated. The attack seems personal and as Detective Inspector Geraldine Steel investigates, it becomes clear that Abigail was far from popular at the school where she worked. Her family life was also unhappy; her husband was involved in a long running affair and her children neglected of attention. Suspicion falls upon her errant husband, but when a potential witness is viciously murdered, the plot takes a very sinister turn. When Abigail's troubled daughter befriends the mysterious Zoe on the internet, events begin to spiral out of control.

**As a well-known supporter of independent book shops, did you have any misgivings about releasing your novels, *Dead End*, *Cut Short* and *Road Closed* in eBook format?**

As a very active supporter all kinds of printed book suppliers, I spend a lot of my free time at literary festivals, bookshops and libraries, but I think there is a place for eBooks as well. Although I don't have an eReader myself, I understand their appeal, especially to people who travel a lot or who have limited storage space. What concerns me is not the

advent of eReaders, but the fact that so many young people nowadays don't acquire a reading habit at all.

**Do you think that eBooks and eReaders are an electronic fad or do you suspect that they are the future of fiction?**

There is no doubt that eReaders are more than a passing fad, but everything in our world is changing so fast I have no idea what the future holds. Technology has wonderful applications with audio books making literature accessible to the partially sighted and the illiterate. We should view technology as a tool and think carefully about how we use it. Unfortunately, innovations tend to be promoted for their novelty rather than their intrinsic value, because everything today is driven by commercial considerations.

**The retail price of an eBook is very low compared to a traditional paperback; does this make it more difficult for writers to earn a living as novelists?**

This is no longer always the case, with most printed books now sold on 3for2 offers, half price bargains or less, or even given away with newspapers. On World Book Night one million books were given away completely free. With the comparatively low overheads of eBooks, I'm not sure it always makes that much difference to profit margins if books are printed or available to download.

**In your new novel *Dead End*, we see a more vulnerable side to D. I. Geraldine Steel as she faces up to questions concerning her adoption. Was it important to allow Geraldine's character room to develop in this novel?**

In *Cut Short* readers find out very little about Geraldine Steel. Her personal story is introduced in *Road Closed*, and



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- 1 Leigh Russell interviewed on BBC Radio York
- 2 A Darlek buys the book!
- 3 Leigh Russell with Intergalactic Fans



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develops in *Dead End* where the reader finds out more about her through her relationships with other characters. Many of my fans have been asking to know more about Geraldine, so developing her character has been a natural progression, and there is still a lot more to learn about her in future books. My publisher wants to publish the series "forever" and I envisage the series running to about twenty novels, but as I said in answer to an earlier question, I've no idea what the future holds.

**Lucy Kirby, the daughter of murdered headmistress, Abigail, is a troubled girl whose story exposes some of the dangers of modern society. Did any real life cases influence your story?**

Although I researched the issues surrounding technology, as I research every aspect of my books, the plotline wasn't based on one particular real life case but was influenced by several true stories. I like to think that raising issues in fiction encourages people to think more carefully about the risks we face in contemporary society. I hope stories like Lucy's exert an influence on real life, rather than the other way round.



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**The novel begins with a very intriguing first chapter from the viewpoint of the victim, head teacher, Abigail Kirby. Was it difficult to write the murder scene?**

No, I can't say that I ever find writing difficult; I'm hooked, totally addicted. What can be difficult is having a scene in my head and not having time to write it down as I'm so busy these days.

**At the closure of *Dead End* there is a feeling of lives moving on; with characters leaving tragedy and disappointments firmly in the past. Geraldine has been considering a transfer - but will she really leave Kent to pursue her career?**

I'm glad you felt a sense of closure at the end of the *Dead End*; it deals with some desperately sad characters who need to move on so readers believe they will cope with life after the story ends. In the book that follows, out in 2012, you can be sure that Geraldine will be involved in another challenging murder investigation and she will certainly be facing new challenges in her personal life. But you'll have to wait for the next book in the series to find out what these challenges are, and how Geraldine copes with them!



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**Cut Short, Road Closed & Dead End by Leigh Russell Available in paperback and kindle format from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)**

For more information on Leigh visit [www.leighrussell.blogspot.com](http://www.leighrussell.blogspot.com)



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- 5 Leigh Russell at CWA Award Ceremony
- 6 At the Harrogate Crime Writing Festival with Mark Billingham, Leigh Russell and Ian Rankin (we used this one last year)
- 7 Cut Short and Road Closed Top the Bestsellers Chart in 2010