

Question and Answer with Rachel Amphlett, Author of *Will to Live*

1. How did the idea develop for *Will to Live*?

As a concept, *Will to Live* developed very quickly – the idea of a serial killer using a railway's reputation as a suicide spot to hide his own nefarious activities was too good to ignore!

2. The difficulties associated with suicide and depression is one of the main themes in your book. What drew you to these issues?

I wanted to draw attention to the fact that anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses are more prevalent in society than we fully appreciate.

I think we all know someone who suffers from anxiety or depression, for example but we don't always know how to deal with it, or what to say.

From that initial point of view, I was able to draw on my own experiences of listening to friends that have suffered from mental illness and develop the concept of a killer taking advantage of society's perceptions of depression.

3. What was the most challenging part of writing *Will to Live*?

I had to spend a lot of time speaking with people who have had first-hand experience of dealing with the aftermath of suicides on railways, and that took me to some very dark places, both real and imagined.

They were all very generous with their knowledge, and didn't hold anything back but although that meant I got my facts right, I also had to learn about some of the more upsetting aspects of railway deaths and, in turn, learn how to lock this knowledge away so it didn't cloud my mind on a day to day basis.

It was a challenge to find the right balance for setting the tone for *Will to Live* without being overly gruesome or shocking the reader beyond what the storyline required, but I think I've presented all I've learned in a way that means readers will still be entertained while empathising with the characters' lives.

4. The writing style of *Will to Live* is fast-paced and keeps the reader turning the pages. Can you describe your writing methods?

I'm very disciplined. Once I get that basic idea for a story, I'll start to build the outline of a novel.

I use a five Act structure, the same as screenwriting, and ensure there's what author Peter James calls a "gosh, wow" moment at the end of each of those Acts to drive the story forward and keeps a reader turning pages.

I'll have a couple of sentences jotted down about what happens in each of the scenes, and then I get stuck in – I rarely edit as I write the first draft.

I've learned to keep up momentum and punch out these drafts in 9-12 weeks, it's better if I just pepper them with notes to myself to review during the second draft, e.g. "Plot Note: when X does this, make sure he says X in Chapter 20" or something like that.