

Question and Answer with Rachel Amphlett, author of *Turn to Dust*

1. What can you tell us about *Turn to Dust*?

When the body of a naked man is found in the middle of a barren field, a rural community is left in shock – and fear.

Discovering that someone is offering money in return for information about the dead man and anyone connected to him, Detective Kay Hunter realises there is a dark side to the victim's past.

When a key witness disappears and a web of deceit and lies threatens to derail the investigation, she fears the worst.

Can Kay and her team of detectives find out who is behind the man's murder before another victim is targeted?

2. The book starts with a vivid scene in which crows lead two men to discover a body in an open field. How did you decide to begin the book with that particular scene?

I usually start off with an opening scene going around in my head, something that my subconscious throws out – it's completely unplanned. I get scenes popping into my head as if I'm remembering something I've seen on TV or in a film – all the detail is there.

I let it ferment over a few days and if I can't get it out of my head, it means I have to sit down and write about it.

With *Turn to Dust*, in my mind I walked across the barren field with the man who discovers the body. He's confused, trying to work out what he's looking at, and why it's there. At that point, I know as much as my detectives – absolutely nothing!

I returned to that scene as I learned more about the sort of injuries a body would incur if killed in the manner my victim was, but apart from that the opening scene is pretty much as it originally popped into my head.

3. How does *Turn to Dust* develop the Kay Hunter series as a whole?

Readers have seen the whole team grow together since book 1, *Scared to Death* was published in 2016 but, as in real life, people have their own ambitions and so there's a subtle shift in this story.

Anyone new to the series will be pleased to hear the story works well as a standalone murder mystery though!

4. *Turn to Dust* explores several issues, including human trafficking, the nature of cruelty, and the price of heroism. How did these things influence the progression of the story, and how did you weave them into it?

Once I started exploring why the victim was found in such a way and what his background was, I ended up down the research rabbit hole. The area where the series is set in the UK – Kent, in the south of England – has a tradition of seasonal casual labour that goes back to the early days of the railways. People would travel from London to help with the hop harvest every year at the turn of the twentieth century, for example.

With the UK leaving the EU and tighter visa controls, I wondered where agriculture might find cheap labour in future and that in turn led me to researching the problems associated with slavery here.

There are gangs taking advantage of desperate people all the time and certain industries, including agriculture, are affected by this.

As for the victim, although he meets a gruesome end, I didn't want him to die in vain – he had strong ideals and principles during his life, and he stood by those. I wanted my readers to empathise with him, as I did.