

Once upon a ~~time~~...
Crime...

It's a killer idea: a convention of female crime writers. As the plot thickens, Stephen A Russell investigates

'Writing crime makes you really chilled out because anyone who's pissed you off, you can dispatch ...'

The click of a cocked gun. The scrape of a steel blade. A scream muffled before it can escape. There's been a murder. Was it Miss Scarlett, in her vampish red dress? Miss White, in her maid's outfit, with a grudge to bear against the lady of the house? Or could it have been Professor Peacock, with her black-rimmed glasses and oversized magnifying glass? Is she here to solve the crime, or cover up her own nefarious deed?

Filling the whodunit roles in this life-size game of Cluedo are three of Melbourne's most deviously ingenious female crime writers: Angela Savage, Leigh Redhead and PD Martin.

All three will be guests of the 2011 SheKilda Australian Women Crime Writers' Convention, organised by the Sisters of Crime group. Held next month, SheKilda will bring together more than 50 Australian crime writers and their fans and forensic specialists – it's a killer line-up. Co-founder and crime writer Lindy Cameron says the ranks have swelled from 20 authors at the first SheKilda in 2001. "The sheer number of women crime writers has exploded."

Internationally, female crime writers such as Patricia Cornwell, Janet Evanovich and Lynda La Plante have stolen

the running from their male counterparts, with blockbuster bestsellers, TV series and films, but their Australian sisters are still plotting to dispose of the glass ceiling. Some note that several female crime writers, LA Larkin and PM Newton, for example, publish under their initials in an effort to keep their gender undercover and attract both male and female readers.

So should male crime writers be watching their backs down dark alleys? "No. At Sisters in Crime we call our blokes Brothers in Law," says Cameron. "They're always welcome because they get what it is we're celebrating."

Leigh Redhead, 39, Elsternwick

It's oft been mooted that men are more prone to violence, but perhaps it's more accurate to say that women are simply better at internalising.

That's certainly the case with Leigh Redhead. While table dancing at a gentlemen's club on King Street, she learned her boss had been accused of sexually abusing two of her friends.

"I wanted to kill him," says the stripper turned author.

