

# Episode Transcript

---

## Introduction

Hello, listeners! Welcome back to Luke's English Podcast. I hope you're doing well today and that you're ready for another dose of English listening practice. This time, it's another conversation episode, and my guest today is my friend Ian Moore. It's actually the third time he's been on the podcast. I wonder if you remember.

Some of you listening won't have heard those episodes because they happened a few years ago now. Some of you, if you're long-term listeners, will have heard those episodes, but there's a chance that you've forgotten about them because they happened before the COVID-19 pandemic arrived when, of course, our memories all got wiped. So you've probably forgotten.

Just to recap the basics about Ian Moore: He's from England and has spent most of his professional career as a stand-up comedian, doing gigs up and down the UK, comparing at The Comedy Store in London, hosting corporate events, and generally making audiences of people laugh out loud for a living for a few decades. Ian's onstage persona is quite dry; he's sarcastic, he's very conversational, and always very funny.

Some years ago, Ian and his wife decided to have a total change of scene and move from England to the Loire Valley in central France. This had always been a dream of Ian's wife, who is half English and half French, and she convinced Ian, without too much trouble, that he could live in rural French bliss while also commuting back to the UK every weekend to continue his stand-up career.

That's what they did, and that's what Ian has been doing for the last couple of decades: living with his family and various animals in the French countryside, running a B&B - that's a bed and breakfast, a sort of guest house for tourists. It's a place where you have your home and you open up part of it to guests who come in; it's like a sort of hotel, but not quite as formal. So that's a B&B, a bed and breakfast.

They've been living in the French countryside, running a B&B, while Ian has also been pursuing his other life of stand-up comedy in England. This juxtaposition of these two things—of Ian, who is normally quite an urban English guy, living out in the French countryside—has been very fruitful for his comedy and for his writing career as well.

In recent years, Ian has also transitioned to writing and has written quite a lot of books, both fiction and nonfiction, featuring the idea of an Englishman in the French countryside.

These days, the writing of books has taken over from the stand-up comedy as Ian's main vocation, and writing fictional murder mysteries is now his main professional preoccupation.

Ian writes two kinds of crime novels. The first is a series of what is called cozy crime fiction. Now, Ian talks about this during the episode, but basically, cozy crime fiction is a genre of crime story, crime fiction, or murder mystery. It's a genre of murder mystery which is not too dark; there's not a lot of violence and sex. Any sex or violence that happens in the story is never explicitly described. The detective in each story in the cozy crime genre is normally an amateur rather than a professional—just an amateur person who

ends up trying to solve some sort of murder mystery. They're normally quite light, quite funny, quite light-hearted, and generally the sort of thing that makes you feel good, even though they are about murder mysteries. So he's written three of these cosy murder mysteries: "Death and Croissants," "Death and Fromage," and "Death at the Chateau." Obviously, there's the French theme in there: the croissants, the fromage, the chateau. So that's the cosy murder mystery series.



But Ian also writes another type of crime story, and these ones are known as the Juge Lombard series—that's the main character in each story. These ones are darker in tone; they are more serious crime mystery books. He describes them as European Noir—that's the genre that he has kind of created himself. Those two books are "The Man Who Wouldn't Burn" and the new one, which is called "Dead Behind the Eyes."

As well as these works of fiction, Ian has written several funny memoirs about his family life in France. So he's gone from stand-up comedy as a career to writing crime stories as a career now. You can find out all about Ian's work on his website, [www.ianmoore.info](http://www.ianmoore.info).

Let's catch up with Ian. I want to ask him about life in the French countryside, running the B&B, his process for writing his books, and whatever else comes up during our rambling conversation. I hope that you find it interesting, especially the parts about writing, coming up with ideas, finding the discipline to write thousands of words every day, and how murder mystery stories are created.

By the way, this conversation is just totally natural—not graded for any particular language level, not really graded for a specific level of English. It's just a conversation that I would have with Ian, like I would have with him in the pub, regardless of whether we were being recorded for a podcast. This is a totally natural and ungraded conversation, which might make it difficult for you to follow. But if you have any trouble keeping up with this and you feel there are moments when you get lost and you don't quite understand what we're talking about, it might be because we're making a few specific references that you can't catch. For example, we start going off on a little tangent about the band The Monkees. I don't know if you've ever even heard of The Monkees, but they were a pop group from the 1960s. There's a bit about The Monkees and a few other little tangents. So it might be that we make little cultural references that you just aren't familiar with, or just generally because of the pace of the conversation and the fact that everything is being spoken with connected speech and all that stuff. It might make it hard to understand.

If you get lost at any point, check the page for this episode on my website because I'm going to publish a free transcript for this episode. You can read it all and check up on any bits that you feel you've missed. You can find the link for that in the description. So

check the page for this episode on my website to get a free transcript for the episode.

---

***Hello listeners, this is Luke from the future, with a different shirt and facial hair. I am interrupting this episode because I've decided that I should add some comprehension questions before the conversation.***

*Adding this is definitely going to extend the length of the episode. Sorry about that. I promise, I've been making a real effort recently to stop doing incredibly long introductions to my episodes, and here I am, doing it again. But I hope you forgive me because I do have good intentions - to help support your listening comprehension, because I think this conversation might be a bit difficult to follow.*

*Here are some questions to help you focus on the content of this conversation. As you listen, see if you can find answers to these things. You could consider this a listening test if you like, but really it's just supposed to be a way to help you and to, at the end, summarise some of the main points in the conversation, so you can check what you've understood.*

*You can find these questions on the PDF included in the transcript. I probably have too many questions here and you won't be able to remember them all, but it's ok. Just remember what you can and in any case these questions are a sort of road map of the conversation which will help you follow it all.*

## Comprehension Questions

1. How does Ian feel about the period between 2010 and 2023?
2. Why do I laugh when he says “Well, I needed the rest”?
3. How was Ian’s COVID lockdown period? How did it affect his life?
4. Why did Ian have to stop travelling to the UK to perform stand-up comedy every weekend?
5. Was Ian fed up with stand-up?
6. Has it been difficult for Ian to stop doing stand-up? Why/why not?
7. How did Ian feel about doing comedy gigs on Zoom during the COVID lockdown?
8. Ian did one particular corporate gig on Zoom during COVID. Did it go well, or badly? How did he know?
9. What did the ex-pat group of English people in France ask Ian to do by email? How did he feel about it?
10. What do the local French people think of Ian when he speaks French?
11. What does Ian tell people about his accent in French? What choice does he give them?
12. What happened to the three goats Ian talks about?

13. How does his wife feel about this?
14. What is the difference between being a stand-up comedian and the host of a B&B/guesthouse?
15. What did Ian say to the Dutch guy who wanted hot milk?
16. Was Ian a good host?
17. Why did Ian become a writer of “cosy” crime novels?
18. What does Ian find hard about writing novels?
19. Ian mentions two “schools of thought” about writing crime novels, the planners and the pantsers. What are they? Which approach does he take?
20. How is writing a book like waiting to go on stage to do stand-up?
21. When and where does Ian work best?
22. What does Ian say about sending himself emails?
23. What’s different about how Ian writes books and how he used to write stand-up?
24. How do we end up talking about The Monkees?
25. What is the connection between David Bowie and The Monkees?
26. Why does Ian mention the 1979 Renault Alpine?
27. Is writing a crime story just like solving a jigsaw puzzle? Why/why not?

**28. How is writing murder mysteries like a game?**

**29. What does Ian prefer about writing compared to stand-up?**

OK, those are the comprehension questions and I will give answers to those at the end of the conversation.

---

Okay, without any further ado, let's get into it and talk to Ian Moore once again on the podcast. Here we go.

## Interview

Luke: Hello, welcome back onto my podcast.

Ian: It's very nice to be back, Luke. It's been... is it... I was trying to remember the other day how long it's been. Was it pre-COVID?

Luke: It was pre-COVID. It was 2019, I think.

Ian: Good Lord, the year before. I've completely lost track of years. I just... I've just... there's a whole period between 2010 and, I think, 2023, which just feels like I was in a coma. I just have a complete blank.

Luke: That's a long coma. 2010 to 2023?

Ian: Yeah, well, I needed the rest.

Luke: Yeah, okay. Most people, the coma is from 2020 onwards, you know, after COVID came along and sort of wiped everyone's memories. But you got in there early, you know?



Ian: Well, I think, to be honest, and maybe you're not supposed to say this, but I tend to say it quietly and wait for other people to tell me I shouldn't be saying it. But I actually think I had quite a good COVID. I know that that makes it sound like, you know, the summer of '69 or something like that, but it was life-changing, obviously, but for me, quite positively. I got away with it. You know, I was ill, obviously, and had long COVID for a bit, but in terms of the changes I had to make in my life because of COVID, if that hadn't come along, I'm not sure I'd have made those changes.

Luke: Because previously, you were commuting to the UK to do stand-up comedy. I was actually going to ask you about this anyway. Your lifestyle before was that you were there in the south, in the center of France-ish, in the Loire Valley, and then regularly going to England on the Eurostar to do stand-up every weekend. Every single weekend, off you go to England to do stand-up. You're traveling around the country and whatever on stage, and then COVID arrives, and you're not even allowed to leave the house. How did that affect you?

Ian: It was great.

Luke: Was it?

Ian: It was... well, it just... physically, I was unwell before COVID came along anyway. I was diagnosed just before then with rheumatoid arthritis, which meant that travel became harder and harder and more painful, and I was more and more tired and unable to cope with this travel comedy lifestyle that I'd got into. We had lived in France for 15 years by then, so it's 15 years every weekend, and it had really taken its toll physically and mentally. But

I couldn't let the stand-up go. I was too terrified to take that leap if you like. I knew I had to cut down or just concentrate on the corporates, which I have done. So if COVID hadn't come along and forced my hand on that, I probably wouldn't have had the nerve to say, "Right, I'm just stopping that part of my life."

Luke: Yeah, so was it primarily the health issues and stuff that made you decide to stop doing stand-up, or were you kind of fed up with it?

Ian: I wasn't really fed up with it. The time on stage was always fun, and also, if you're fairly chaotic mentally, which I can be, then the time on stage is actually one of those rare moments in your life where you actually have control. It sounds ridiculous to say, but stand-up was very relaxing. It was a very relaxing environment for me because I was completely in control of that environment, and I could rest. All I had to concentrate on was the performance and the crowd in front of me. All the other things that people have to think about all the time couldn't impinge on you, and if they did, you could rant and swear about it and get it off your chest in a funny way anyway. So it wasn't that I was fed up with stand-up at all. I was just so tired and really struggling to maintain the health to be able to do it every week.

Luke: A lot of people, when they learn that you're a stand-up comedian, they kind of don't understand how you can do it. They're like, "How do you do that?" They think it's crazy that you're able to go up in front of people. But perhaps what they don't understand is that it's an addiction or a compulsion. It's something that you kind of need to do. Has it been difficult to stop?

Ian: It's incredibly cathartic, really cathartic. Sorry, I interrupted you. Has it been difficult?

Luke: To stop I mean, yeah.

Ian: No, not at all. It's one of those things when they say if you want to give up smoking, you've really got to want to do it. You just reach that point where everything is just... it comes at the right time and the right apex of various things, and you're just able to stop. So with stand-up, I realized I'd done everything I could do with what I have. I'd achieved great things, I'd met great people, so that was fine. I had no issue with stepping back from that. And because I was writing—the first fiction book I wrote came out in 2021—it was almost seamless to then slip from one to another. During COVID, I would do gigs on Zoom. Although they're never the same, it was a different environment completely, but it could still be a fun environment. But also, my office was like 50 meters over there, so I didn't have to get a Eurostar. I had that as a kind of drip, drip, drip as I was going solely into writing, and now it's just solely writing with the odd corporate gig thrown in.

Luke: Okay, good. So you've made the transition. That's really nice. I hated doing Zoom gigs myself. Absolutely hated it.

Ian: Did you though? Why?

Luke: I don't know.

Ian: There was that thing... I compared a lot during my career, so it was a lot of interaction, and that obviously is more difficult on Zoom gigs. But you could do it in a way that, you know, people were in their front rooms, so you'd literally have more to work with.

You'd go, "What on Earth is that terracotta thing you've got on that shelf there? Is that your granny's ashes?" All those things, you could still work with them because you're at home. I found it actually quite enjoyable. Not always, though. There was one gig I did; it was a corporate gig. I can't remember—it was some kind of lawyer's thing. They had this new platform where the only thing I had was a table plan, and there were little figures on the table plan, like an aerial view of a table plan, but I had no visuals of the room itself. There was no camera on the room, and there was also no sound for any feedback. So it was literally a bloke shouting into the internet, which there is far much of, let's be honest about that. Yeah far much, far too much of people just shouting into the internet but that's all I was doing.

I was doing it for about 25 minutes, and eventually my time was up. The thing clicked, and the organizer came back on. I said, "I have no idea how that went at all. I have absolutely nothing." And he said, "Well, it wasn't very good."

Okay, all right. Thanks for that.

Luke: You still got paid, though, I suppose, right?

Ian: Yes, yes, I did. I did get paid.

Luke: Well, that's all right then, I guess. Now, I do want to talk to you about your writing because this is the main thing that you're doing these days. But I just wanted to chat with you about some other things as well. It's been about four years, I think, since the last time you were on the show. I was just wondering if you remember the general concept of my podcast and what this is all about. Do you remember?

Ian: It's about language learning, isn't it?

Luke: Yeah, it's about learning English specifically.

Ian: Yes, of course.

Luke: So, all my listeners...

Ian: What, is my accent not good enough?

Luke: No, I was just wondering because I thought that would be a way to get into it. You live in France, and do you spend much time speaking English to the local people or not? I mean, you're kind of in the sticks compared to me. I'm in Paris, and I find myself speaking a lot more English. And obviously, as an English teacher, I do as well. But out there in the countryside, do people speak English to you?

Ian: (There are) hardly any English people, really. It's only me. There have been a few other expats over the years, but they kind of went home or just didn't stay in contact with them. There was a group of expats who got in contact with me. We'd only been here a few months. No, we'd been here nearly a year, that was it. We moved in in January, and then I got an email from this local expat group in about November time saying, "We hear you travel back to the UK a lot. Here's our Christmas shopping list. If you can bring back, you know, four dozen crackers and an unsmoked gammon joint..." And I never met these people at all. This was my first contact with them. I just emailed them back and said, "I'm really... good luck to you and all that, but I did not move out to rural France to join in your

Christmas cracker parade. I'm just not... that's not me. Merry Christmas, don't ever talk to me again."

So there's nobody? I speak a lot of English because this is an English house, even though my wife's half French. My two youngest sons were both born over here, so everybody's fluent. My wife appallingly said that I'm fluent recently, which is just a terrifying notion. It means people test you out. But we speak English all the time. Apart from that, if I step out the front door, it's French.

Luke: So you never speak English to the local French people?

Ian: No. They don't understand it. I mean, my hairdresser, she's retired now, but she would occasionally... if we were having a conversation, she'd then go, "Oh, I know the English for that word." And that would be about it.

Luke: Okay. And when you speak French to French people, how do they react to that?

Ian: How do they react? There's that moment, isn't there, when they look at you like a cockatoo (bird) looks at a mirror in its cage, and the head sort of cocks to one side. And you know you've lost them. You thought you were doing quite well, but it's like running when you're unfit. Your legs have gone too quick for your body, and you start falling over, and you lose all confidence. I'm pretty good in a situation that I know I have to prepare for, like with lawyers or accountants or things like that. But if I feel like I've lost my audience, like in stand-up, I'm desperate to try and get it back, and it gets worse. So, you know, I think people think I'm just a bit eccentric.

Luke: Yeah, okay. Well, that's all right.

Ian: There are worse things to be considered.

Luke: Yeah, that's true Plus, you're very well dressed, and I think that probably makes a huge difference.

Ian: Oh, yeah. For years, they could just kind of call me "Monsieur British." That was how they hailed me.

Luke: Perfect. When I speak French to people, they just instantly reply to me in English, and I'm not sure...

Ian: Well, that's Paris, though, isn't it? That is Paris. There's a sense that they're helping you. Whereas really, you just like to be rewarded with an actual French response to make it sound like you've actually got through to them.

Luke: I know the old stereotype is that people in Paris don't want to speak English, and everyone just responds to you in French and pretends not to understand your English. But this is not true anymore. People do speak English, and in fact, they refuse to speak to you in French unless your French is perfect. So it's almost like it's still rude, but it's the other way around.

Ian: It's a kind of helpful rude, isn't it? I remember having a not a row as such, but a lively conversation with a waiter in Paris. We were both so stubborn in our conversation in that he would only speak English, and I would only speak French. We were just both refusing to back down. Ridiculous situation.

Luke: It's bizarre, isn't it? It's a bizarre situation that happens to me quite a lot. Where you kind of have to force the conversation towards French, and they're desperate to do it in English because they've spent all this time at school being told that speaking English is so important and all that kind of thing.

Ian: Oh, definitely. But I mean, my accent also is really quite poor. When I've done stand-up in French, I will say at the top of the show, "Look, you can either have the words or the accent, but the chances of both occurring at the same time are fairly slim."

Luke: Yeah. So in the French countryside, you live in a... is it a farmhouse? Is that... is it actually a farmhouse?

Ian: No, well it would have been once. The actual property has two big barn conversions, and we have some livestock. Although that has diminished greatly over the last period. We did have three goats, and then one goat died on the 23rd of December. He'd been ill for some time.

Yeah, popcorn. He'd been ill for some time. And then on the 27th of December, his twin brother Chewbacca, he died as well. And then on the 29th of December, the other goat, Bambi, died. It's really strange with goats; they're such sociable animals amongst themselves. So when Popcorn died, his twin brother was so heartbroken and affected by it that he just decided to stop living. And then the third goat, when the other two had gone, made the same decision and just decided to stop living.

Utterly, you know? And in a way, my wife is absolutely heartbroken about this. But in a way, it's even more tragic knowing that that was the reason—that two of them just went, "I'm switching off."



What's the point?" And that they're able to do that. It was quite an astonishing thing to watch. The light goes out in the eyes.

Luke: Yeah, really. And just a matter of days.

Ian: All three in a week.

Luke: Wow, that's really strange.

Ian: Yeah, sorry to bring the mood down.

Luke: It's all right. Very dark moment there at Christmas time.

Ian: Well, it was, you know. But my three sons were here, so I didn't actually have to dig any graves. They decided that I'm too old and feeble with my arthritic joints. So they did all that, and I just directed.

Luke: Okay, good. So you used to run a B&B guest house there, but it's closed for business. Is this right?

Ian: It is. It is closed. In fact, like I said, the property has two big barn conversions. And the B&B, or the "chambre d'hôte" as they call it in France, which is quite different. It's actually quite a different thing between the "chambre d'hôte" and a B&B. I think in English, B&B has these connotations of quite private and quite austere places that you stay in. Whereas a "chambre d'hôte" in France is more of a convivial thing, and guests will meet each other and chat over breakfast and all that business. But it was horrendous.

Luke: You were the host running the guest house, and you would have people coming to stay, guests. And you've told me before that you absolutely hated it. Why?

Ian: I think part of the problem was, part of the problem was that it is an invasion. Once you open up your property to people, even though it's a separate building, it feels like an invasion. Even though it was my idea. We decided on this pre-COVID. It was going to help me reduce my travel; it would be part of the income. I would run this thing. But what you realize is that 20 years of being a stand-up comedian does not prepare you for a role in hospitality. Because you just tend to say the first thing that comes into your head. And if people behave badly, I'll tell them they behave badly. I made no attempt to try and water things down. Towards the end, it was decided that I should be retired from the whole meet-and-greet aspect of the business.

Luke: Really?

Ian: I served breakfast, and that was it.

Luke: They are quite opposite skill sets, really, aren't they? Doing stand-up and hosting a guest house.

Ian: Especially if you're quite... I'm not morose, or even deadpan, but I am sharp. I'm very dry and sarcastic. That's my instinct, and it was too ingrained to tread on that. I remember there was a Dutch bloke this summer with his family. I came in, and with breakfast, I'd just serve it before everybody got up and then flit in and out, and try not to make eye contact or anything like that. A lot of our reviews for the B&B complimented me on my discretion, which just meant I didn't want to see you. I just didn't want to be there. This

Dutch bloke said... I wandered into the salon and he said, "Do you serve hot milk?" And I just went, "Mate, there's the milk, there's the microwave, see what you can rustle up, Chef." He looked at me, and I knew then, this has to stop. I just didn't enjoy it at all.

Luke: In stand-up, you can be pretty direct and quite rude to people, really, because the situation allows it. You've got this big group of people, and you can kind of...

Ian: It's a dynamic, isn't it?

Luke: Yeah, you can say some very direct, rude things about one person on the front row, and the entire room loves it. They all laugh. But then, when you're hosting a guest house, you can't do that. It must have been an instinct for you when you were engaging with the public.

Ian: It was my survival instinct. You realize the big difference, like you said, is that the rest of the room is with you in a comedy show. But the rest of the room really isn't with you if you're a rude host at a B&B. It became something that almost was giving me sleepless nights; I just couldn't stand it. We opened it up with all the best intentions and stuff, and the idea would be that the guests who were staying at the B&B would share our swimming pool. We've got a swimming pool on this side of the property that the guests could share. But then they stopped leaving. The guests would just stay there all day rather than go out and see a chateau, and that really got on my nerves. So we eventually said, "Well, now there's a timetable. You can only use the pool during certain times," which was, in the end, reduced to about seven minutes around aperitif time.

Luke: Yeah, it's a B&B. That's bed and breakfast, not afternoon.

Ian: Absolutely. And it didn't matter how much I stalked about the place, tutting and being very kind of, you know, John Cleese about the whole thing, they just wouldn't take it in at all. We're selling that half of the property.

Luke: Oh, really?

Ian: Yes, as a separate house. I did briefly try to set it up as a writer's retreat, but in the end, you're still dealing with people.

Luke: Hell is other people, right?

Ian: Hell is other people, exactly. Was that Philip Larkin?

Luke: Isn't it Jean-Paul Sartre?

Ian: Oh, yes, I think you're right. And he was a pretty horrendous individual as he was.

Luke: Yeah, Jean-Paul Sartre came up with that, and Robert Crumb adapted it and said, "Hell is other people, but hell is yourself too," which is also true. You get stuck with yourself.

Luke: Yes, so let you mentioned the writer's retreat. Since the last time we spoke, you have transitioned to being a writer rather than a comedian. Tell me about the writing that you've done. You've written quite a few books over the last four or five years, or something like that. These days, you're an author. What kind of things do you write? Why did you start, well I think you've explained why you started to write rather than do stand up...

Ian: There were a number of reasons. I do various things. I first wrote a couple of books in 2012 and 2013, and they were about living in France but being on the road as a comedian as well. So they were quite specific to me and our family situation. I always said that I wouldn't do that Peter Mayle thing. But within a few years, I was hawking my family around like a show business troupe. So I wrote those books. When I opened the B&B, like I said, I found it really beyond my capabilities. I started to think, well, I really do need to write. If I'm going to step back from stand-up, I need to have some kind of outlet for my skills, for my observations and what have you. The memoir books were great, and they did pretty well, but it wasn't something that you can keep doing. So I wanted to turn to genre writing, and I really like crime. I really like crime writing and crime novels and crime TV and stuff. So I started writing what's called cosy crime. It's bigger and bigger around the world, but people aren't necessarily aware there's so many different genres within crime itself. I was asked to do a kind of presentation at a French book festival, where I had to explain to the French audience what... What cosy crime was.

Essentially there are certain rules with cosy crime that you never see any blood. All the violence, or what have you, is off-camera, as it were. There will always be a resolution, there will generally be amateur detectives, and it's light. It's what it is—it's cosy. It doesn't send you to bed with nightmares.

Ian: And the French audience kind of looked at me, going, "Well, you know, that's just crime writing, isn't it?" And I said, "Also, there's no sex in it." The whole audience just went, "Oh, so it's really English then."

So that was what I started writing. I had this idea for a cozy crime because the main setting for my cozy crime series is, and forgive me if it looks like I've done pitifully little research here, but the main character in the cozy crime series is a guy called Richard who runs a B&B in central France in the Loire Valley.

Yeah.

And it became doubly cathartic. It wasn't just that I was writing sort of as me in a way, but also that I could kill off the guests in a B&B through fiction without actually killing the guests that were in my "chambre d'hôte."

Luke: It's a better way.

Ian: It is, and it's much better for your TripAdvisor rating, apparently. So that's what I did. I wrote it and called it "Death and Croissants," the first one. That became a big seller. That was four years ago this summer, and it's still—I looked... pathetically I looked before we started doing this—and it's still number 73 in the top 100 Kindle, which is fantastic. For whatever reason, I got very lucky with my timing because it came out just around the time that Richard Osman's first one came out. So suddenly cozy crime was this big thing that everybody was talking about. I was very lucky in that respect. The fifth one of those comes out this summer. So I do one of those a year.

And then the publisher of that one basically said, "Have you got anything else?"

I'd written this more serious crime novel, also set in France, about an investigating magistrate. The French legal system is very

different from the British legal system, in that a French investigating magistrate will control the police investigation from an independent legal point of view. It's not left up to the police who then present the case to the CPS, as it would be in the UK.

I'd written this book and tried to sell it, self-publish it, and try to do it that way, which was really hard. I realized very early on just how hard self-publishing is because you have to work harder on the marketing than you do on the writing. I just didn't have the time for that, so I withdrew that. But the publisher that published the cozy crime series said, "Well, let's have a look at it." So they published it and then contracted me for four books. Really, two books a year I write.

Luke: Right, so that is very productive, very prolific. People always say that writing a novel is extremely hard. Is it as hard as people say?

Ian: Sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't. It's literally, you know, you have a bad day at work, you have a good day at work. If you've got the idea and a certain amount of discipline, then that's fine. It depends also on what you think is hard. I don't have any problem yet in coming up with the ideas or writing the dialogue for instance, because the two series are quite separate. What I do find hard sometimes is if, for instance, I'm supposed to do a chapter tomorrow—chapter 20 in the book—and it's all mapped out on my whiteboard behind me. I feel slightly less motivated to write that now because it almost feels like just joining the dots, just coloring in, because it needs to be that heavily plotted, that chapter, because there's so much in it, but you feel like you've done the work almost. So that I find quite hard. But I don't find the loneliness of it hard at all, because stand-up has always been like that for me

anyway, and traveling on my own. So I'm used to all of that. It's just about self-motivation. If it's your job, you've got to do it, you know?

Luke: Yeah, yeah. Murder mysteries?

Ian: Yep.

Luke: Cozy crime.

Ian: It's really difficult. Cozy crime is one series—that's the Loire Valley series. That's "Death and Croissants," "Death and Fromage," "Death at the Chateau," "Death in The Jardin," and then "Death and Boule" comes out this summer. There's a thread—you may notice a thread through those.

Luke: Yeah, a bit of death.

Ian: A bit of death.

Luke: What's the fifth one again?

Ian: "Death in Boule."

Luke: Like the game, boule?

Ian: Pétanque, yeah.

Luke: Okay. Quite a lot of death in that.



Ian: There is. And then the other one is, there's also death but no jokes. So the cozy one is the jokey one, and the other one I don't know what genre it would fit. It's kind of European Noir. I have no idea what that means.

Luke: That sounds good.

Ian: It does sound good.

Luke: It's a bit like the Nordic ones, but set in France.

Ian: Not quite as dark as the Scandinavians can get. I kind of describe it as a sort of "Inspector Morse on tour."

Luke: Inspector Morse on holiday?—no,

Ian: Yeah, yeah—well, it's in Tour as well. So they set in Tour, which is my local big city. It's that kind of investigating magistrate. He's not grumpy as such, but he's had a bad time, but he's kind of rebuilding his personality after some bad events in his life. He's actually quite playful, and he's half English and half French. In the first book, which is called "The Man Who Didn't Burn," there's an English expat who is found crucified on the hill. It's really jolly. He's found crucified on the hill, but because he's investigating this, being half English and half French, the French don't trust him because he's half English, and the English don't trust him because he's half French. It's very much looking at his own identity, which I found really interesting. Not necessarily for me, because I'm very English really, but my eldest son—when we moved to France, it was on his fourth birthday. We moved into our house on his fourth birthday, and so he's always struggled, to a certain extent, with his identity. Is he English or is he French? It's been a real... not a

massive problem at times, but it's been really interesting to watch. That's what I wanted to get across in this book—that roots are really important. If you don't know what your roots are or your roots are questioned by other people, then it does affect you. It does affect your personality.

Luke: Yes, absolutely. These sorts of stories are often very tightly plotted, right? There's a lot of twists and turns, and the way the storyline is set up to surprise the reader. I always find it amazing that people write that kind of thing. What is your process? Do you have a particular process to first of all getting all the work done, but secondly dealing with the twists and turns of a plot, and then actually filling all the... joining the dots, as you say?

Ian: It's really interesting because there tend to be two schools of thinking in terms of crime writers. There's one school, which are the plotters, and the other school, which are the pantsers. They're called the pantsers, which means basically just flying on the seat of your pants—you have no idea what's happening or where it's going. I tend to be a bit of both because, obviously, I want to know the story beforehand. I want to know pretty much the story arc. I don't always know who did it right at the start, but I want to know why someone was killed. As for intricate little plot details and twists and turns, I don't know how you can plot everything in advance. Sometimes you can be typing away and you've got two characters having a conversation, and suddenly something will come to you and you go, "That would be a great twist there." But you can't just... say you're on, I don't know, word count 45,000 out of 75,000, but you can't just come up with that at word count 45,000, and not have any hint of it in the first 45,000. So you're writing that there, and then you're making notes. You've still got the whole plot in your head up to that point, so you have to go back and

remember to change little things and put little clues in. So it looks... when you're reading something like that, you're thinking, "Well, how on earth did you come up with that?" A lot of it is done, not in hindsight, but retroactively or retrospectively.

One of my favorite books is a book called "Aunts Aren't Gentlemen," which is a P.G. Wodehouse. It was the last Jeeves and Wooster book.

Luke: "Aunts Aren't Gentlemen"?

Ian: "Aunts Aren't Gentlemen" Yeah. He wrote that as just an ordinary prose book, got to the end of the story, and then went back and put all the jokes in.

Luke: Oh, okay.

Ian: Sometimes even as an author, you forget that. You think, "Oh God, what am I going to do there?" You can go back and change what you've done. It's not like reading it. It's not set in stone, so I can go back and do all of that.

Luke: It's not a linear thing—you can keep going back to different points and kind of add things in as you come up with ideas halfway through, you can go back and add those things in. Yeah, but I still find that very complicated. Do you get a rough idea then of what you do? Do you work out the basic story and then reverse-engineer it so that the events unfold?

Ian: I work out the story and then start. I tend to do it in blocks. For me, what it's normally been is about 80,000 words. So generally, say, 40 chapters, 2,000 words each. You can start writing. You've

got this story in your head, and I've got notes hanging up everywhere and loads of notes all over the place. Every now and then, I'll start a new line of notes of stuff that I've missed from the other line of notes, and it just gets very complicated. But it's all there. When I get to the end of the book, I tick off and go through, "Did I put that in? No, I've got to put that in," so I've got to go back to that. So that'll be chapter 13; I'll go do that there.

It really does get to a point. Like, my next deadline is the end of February, and we're recording this on the 13th of Jan. I've done 33,000 words, so I start prevaricating and going, "So that's what, 4,000 a week?" I'm working out word counts rather than the plot, thinking, "How do I get to this on time?"

It does get to a point where you're writing, and you think, "I really wish I had plotted this in advance so I know what the hell I'm doing." It's a bit like waiting to go on stage as a stand-up. You have that thing that goes through your head where you go, "Why am I doing this? Why am I putting myself through this? I just want to run away."

There's an element of that with the writing as well, and it just makes it... I can't say I thrive on that pressure. That's just how it is. I couldn't do it any other way. I couldn't plot it so finely in advance. I know a lot of writers do, but I found it interesting. I did quite a few literature festivals last year, and many authors say, "I've got to do this in advance because I'm spending a year writing this book. So, therefore, I have to have all of that in my head and all of that research."

I'm thinking, I get five months per book. I've got to research, write it, plot it, publicize the other one that's coming out at the same

time. I don't get that time, so I have to just sit down and go, "This is vaguely where I want to be in this chapter," write it, and see what happens. And you can always tell. You can always tell if you're just writing to chase a word count. You know when you're just extemporizing and thinking, and you get to the point where you go, "I'm not actually saying anything here. This is just salad; this is nothing." So then you stop and plot a chunk.

Luke: You're quite productive though. If you are doing what some people take a year to do in just five months, do you find that you don't struggle to just come out with stuff? Or do you have to engineer the situation so that you are productive?

Ian: No, I mean, I'm fairly, I'm pretty disciplined. I know when I work well, and that is in the morning. But I also, because I spent so many years traveling, became really good at writing on trains. I find the rhythm of writing on trains very helpful. I can just create this bubble. Last Thursday, I'd reached an impasse in the book that I'm writing now, and I got on a train. I went to Tour, and then I walked around the area that I'm writing about, and I did a thousand words on the train there. I did my research, and then I did a thousand words in the pub in Tour, went to get the train home again. If you can do that and be productive, it's actually a really nice way to do it rather than being stuck in my office as I am now.

Luke: Different times of the day, different locations.

Ian: Absolutely. Just change it up. Like, Tuesday mornings, what I like doing is my wife will get up early and go to work. As long as she hasn't disturbed the dogs, I can stay in bed and I'll write in bed until about 11 o'clock. Again, it's just a change of environment, and

it tends to work a lot. I do quite a lot at my desk here, but it's not the only place. And it can't be, you know, it just can't be.

Luke: I have to do quite a lot of writing for my podcast as well in various ways, and I find that if I go to a cafe, I'm so much more productive because...

Ian: Yeah! Because there's far more distraction at home, isn't there? Because it's your home. I've got my DVDs, my kettle, my bag of chocolate éclairs. I'll be writing and think, "Well, you know what? I really fancy a chocolate éclair," whereas there isn't a chocolate éclair option if you're on a train unless you brought them with you. So there's far more distraction at home than there is if you can get out.

Luke: Do you have a different approach to writing your books to writing stand-up? Do the ideas come differently? Do you write them down differently?

Ian: No, I'm still an aggressive note-taker. I make notes constantly and I'll send myself emails. If I'm out walking the dogs, I'll get lots of ideas doing that, and I'll send myself an email. It's a pathetic sight of this middle-aged man walking his dogs, tapping into his phone. Then I put the phone in my pocket, and my phone will beep. I'll pick it up and think, "It must be an email," and it is because I've just sent myself a bloody email. I go through this every single time. I might send myself four emails on a dog walk, so I look like Jacques Tati wandering around the fields of rural France.

But the biggest difference between writing stand-up and writing books is that I sit down to write books. I used to stand up when I

wrote stand up. This is not very visual, but I have a triangle-gabled office. My old office was the same style, and I had blackboards painted onto the walls. I would walk up and down my office and make notes about stand-up, trying to get the rhythm without having to sit down and put it into prose, then rehearse it. It would come out almost fully formed. But with books, I sit down. Apparently, Hemingway stood up with his typewriter. He stood up and typed standing up.

Luke: Really?

Ian: While fighting off bulls and stuff.

Luke: Eating pigeons and whatever. He had a very particular style, didn't he? Very direct, quite short, brief sentences. Something to do with what happens when you stand up. You're like, "I can't write a full sentence.

Ian: Constant pain in his back, just wanted to get it done.

Yes, it's weird how people do different things. But that's the beauty of having a laptop—you can just go anywhere. With a typewriter, it would have been quite tricky standing up. I can stand up with a laptop in my arm like something out of Star Trek, but you can't do that with a typewriter.

Luke: You could try, but you're going to drop it on your foot, and then you're going to have to sit down.

Ian: A lot of Tipp-Ex. A lot of Tipp-Ex is going to get used.

Luke: Tipp-Ex. No one uses Tipp-Ex anymore, do they?

Ian: Do you know who invented Tipp-Ex?

Luke: Mr. Tip-Ex? Dave Tipp-Ex?

Ian: No, Mike Nesmith's mum. Mike Nesmith of The Monkees—his mum invented Tipp-Ex.

Luke: Wow, that's a great fact. Mike Nesmith, listeners, I don't know if you... I mean, I know exactly. This is one of the guys in The Monkees, that band that were created after The Beatles.

Ian: Sort of the first artificial boy band. They were supposed to be the American answer to The Beatles, and he was the lead singer. He also went on to become a solo artist in the early '70s and made some really good folk-rock albums.

Luke: Yeah, The Monkees are interesting because they were actually kind of artists in their own right who, I think, answered an advertisement for a boy band. These were people who were already on the scene, and they were brought together to create this band.

Ian: But Peter (Davey) Jones was English, and he was in Coronation Street. He had no musical ability at all, but he looked quite cute. That was it. That's all he had.

Luke: Well, they were all right, you know. The Monkees, I quite like a lot of their stuff—not that they actually recorded the instruments in the studio, I think.



Ian: Well, they did because Peter Tork was a very talented musician. He was a really talented musician. Mickey Dolenz, I'm not sure. I think he did play the drums, and Nesmith played guitar. But Davy Jones just shoved maracas around.

Apart from being in The Monkees, probably his other greatest claim to fame, apart from being in Coronation Street, was that he... David Bowie had to change his name because of Davy Jones. David Bowie's real name is David Jones, but there was a Davy Jones in The Monkees, so David Jones had to change his name to David Bowie.

That got very confusing halfway through that. I'm not sure it made any sense.

Luke: My listeners will be thinking "Hang on a minute, I thought we were talking about books. Who's David Jones, and what's going on?"

I've got a couple of questions from a friend of mine called Fabio, who does a podcast called "Stolaroid Stories" and he's very interested in writing. He does a lot of stuff about writing. A couple of questions from him: One is, what have you learned from the process of writing a book? Have you learned anything about yourself or about the world?

Ian: It's really interesting, you know, because the two series that I do, like I said, one's very light and one is darker—not completely dark, but darker. I am a very different person when I'm writing the different books. I am lighter as a human being when I'm writing the cozies because they're quite breezy and fun, and I'm constantly in my head working on comedic situations. Whereas the darker, the

European Noir stuff—I'm going to call it that from now on—is much more introspective. I've spent a lot of time reading psychology books and philosophical books as well because I wanted to get the character of Juge Lombard absolutely right. He is inquisitive about life now, having been surrounded by death for so long. I wanted to make sure that I knew that. But what that inevitably means is that I am researching pretty heavy topics most of the time when I'm writing a Lombard. On many an occasion, my wife has just gone, "You haven't heard a word I've said, have you? You've got your Lombard face on. I can tell you're in a different world." Whereas that doesn't happen with the cozies.

So yeah, I've learned not just a lot about myself, but just a lot because, especially with crime genre writing of any kind, you really can't be lazy because people really will pick you up if you have the slightest thing wrong. In "Death and Fromage," I wrote about a 1979 Renault Alpine being disabled by just removing something from the engine. Now, I know nothing about cars—absolutely nothing about cars—but I did the research, and I asked a couple of mechanic friends as well. Then I was out promoting the book after that, and this bloke came to this book event in Yorkshire. He said, "You know that distributor thing where you disabled the 1979 Renault Alpine? Who told you that?" I said, "Well, I did the research. I got it from a mechanic." He went, "No, no, no, mate. See, this is what would happen." He went through the whole process of how he thought it would have happened, as if I was going to go back to the mechanic that I'd asked the original question for and say, "Look, you've completely ballsed this up."

You do learn an awful lot, but you learn an awful lot about yourself being on your own. You learn an awful lot about yourself being a stand-up as well. If you spend that much time on your own and

you're having to create all the time, you are constantly looking within yourself for the next idea.

Always. That's like so many jobs. Teaching, my wife was saying this the other day, exactly the same. There's no opportunity to switch off at all. You are constantly on, seven days, 24 hours. I knew this morning when I got up and knew that I was supposed to be writing chapter 20. I was awake from about 3:00 a.m., going, "Well, that should happen. That should go there. This description..." I really like this line. I wrote this down. There's a 3:00 a.m. Post-it note: "No decorations, a sure sign that it took itself too seriously." I have no idea what that means, but it will come back to me at some point. So I'll put it on my little clothesline of notes.

Luke: It's quite a messy process, but you kind of put it all down and eventually start to get all these disparate elements and bring them together to make the whole thing consistent.

Ian: You hope. You go through that period where you go, "I don't know what this is. I have no idea what I'm doing here." I was watching "Murder, She Wrote," and Jessica Fletcher, at the end of it, said, "Well, you know, solving a crime is just like doing a jigsaw puzzle. Everything comes together in the end." But it's not, because when you're doing a jigsaw puzzle, you have a picture of the puzzle in front of you that's completed. When I'm actually making a jigsaw puzzle, I have no idea what it looks like in the end. So there are those moments where you go, "I have no idea how to link that with that. What do I have to do with this?" You're constantly walking around with it in your head all the time.

Luke: You have to have that kind of overall vision and keep that in mind. That's what helps you kind of clear up all the details.

Ian: Yes, and like I said, I go through a list at the end. When I've done the first draft, I'll read it through again and make another list. Then I've got all these lists of things that have to be included in the book to give it the right frame and to give the reader a chance at getting the answer before it actually comes.

Luke: Is that something in your mind then as you're writing? Are you thinking, "I'm going to give the reader clues to help them work out what's happened"?

Ian: Yes, definitely. You've got to. Agatha Christie was always accused of putting in characters in the last two or three chapters that hadn't been there before. I think that's actually very unfair. I've never found that with Christie, but that's the kind of reputation that she got. You have to play fair. You have to give people a chance. I worry constantly. This is the thing. Once I know, and I know fairly early on in the writing process who the murderer is and why, I'm constantly battling myself through the book, going, "Well, isn't this obvious? Haven't I made this too obvious?" That person—because I know who did it—it now screams at me. Everything that person does is now so obvious. I have to try and temper that.

Luke: So it is a game, then, because whenever I read crime stories, I read a lot of Sherlock Holmes. It's my favorite stuff.

Ian: Yeah, me too. All that is Sherlock Holmes stuff behind me there. That shelf there—that is a collection of Sherlock Holmes pastiche, and then all the original Conan Doyle ones are there. I love Sherlock Holmes.

Luke: Me too.

Ian: Sorry, I interrupted you there.

Luke: That's okay. I was just saying that when I read Sherlock Holmes, I just enjoy the world of Sherlock Holmes. But in terms of actually being able to work out what's happened before it's explained to me, I never ever can do that. But it is a game, then, from the point of view of the writer. You are playing a game with the reader where you're perhaps allowing them to predict or guess what's happened.

Ian: Yes, but you're also laying false clues as well. In your group of suspects, there has to be a possibility that 90% of them could be considered to be the murderer. They will have means, motive, and opportunity until it's disproved that they're not. Almost at the end, it should be like a rabbit out of a hat, who the perpetrator is. If you went back and read the book, you'd go, "Ah, right, I see now."

Luke: Interesting. Which one is better, writing books or doing stand-up? And if you had to choose to just do one forever now, what would it be? I think I know the answer.

Ian: I think it would be books. It's got to be books because the thing about stand-up, although I loved it and I did very well out of it, it's so ethereal, ephemeral. I get them mixed up. (Luke: ephemeral) It's just... it's gone. The minute you've done it, it's gone. That moment isn't there. Whereas, I get not just enormous pride, but I get a really psychological boost out of seeing my books in a shop. That is such a massive thing, and knowing that they're all over the world. The first series, the cozy series, the first one "Death and Croissants," that was chosen by the Samaritans in the UK as part of their monthly book club thing because it cheers

people up. That is an enormous boost. Not just a confidence boost, but incredibly gratifying and very proud of that. If some people find that it's a help, then that means so much. You get that at stand-up as well, but you don't know that necessarily. Like I say, the moment's gone, and most of the time they don't even know your name.

Luke: With stand-up, you can have a fantastic half an hour or something where you're in the room and everyone's laughing. But then when you finish, you leave the venue, and you're just walking down the street going to a hotel. Then you're in a hotel room on your own. It might as well not have happened.

Ian: No, and I found that increasingly hard to deal with—the downtime after the gigs. Like I say, because it is so ephemeral that people don't really know you. Whether it's good or bad, sometimes you can feel like you're on top of the world. But I did a corporate event around this time last year, and it was just horrendous. It was horrendous. It was all blokes, and they didn't want to— they couldn't be bothered. Quickly, I couldn't be bothered either. But it's one of those things where you don't run away, you front it out. So I went to the bar after I'd done the gig, and I'm standing at the bar waiting to order. This bloke turns around to me and says, "That comic was shit, wasn't he?"

Luke: He didn't realize it was you.

Ian: No, he had no idea that it was me! I'm standing there going, "Yeah, awful, awful." So it really doesn't mean that much. Whereas books really have this physical quality.

Luke: They're so much more permanent. Which can be... It's great. Yeah, I totally understand. Again, it's a similar thing being a teacher. You can spend lots of time in the classroom in front of people who are your students for a few weeks, because, you know, I'm not a school teacher, but as a language teacher teaching adults, people come and spend a few weeks with you, and then they're just off. You never see them again. So that's very ephemeral as well.

I don't write books, but doing a podcast is a bit more permanent because at least I've got my list of episodes that are always there.

Ian: It really is. It's something that you can literally point to. That's the thing. You can't just point to a place. Well, I do often point to places that I gigged at and bore my kids relentlessly. If we're wandering around London or something like that, where I've played in hundreds of venues, and just go, "Yeah, I did a gig there."

Ian: Yeah, they're like, "Some brothel in Bethnal Green."

Luke: All right, great. So what's coming up in 2025 then? Finally.

Ian: Three books, three this year. I've got five books coming out this year. How it works is the first book that will come out in March will be the paperback of "Death in the Jardin," which was the hardback that came out last summer. Then I've got two books coming out in June—the hardback of "Death and Boule," firstly. But then also, remember those memoirs I said I wrote years ago? They've been re-released. The second one has been re-released this June as well. I can't even remember what it's called.

Yeah, but they've changed the title.

"A la Mod" became "Vive la Chaos". "C'est la Vie," I think it's called now. I don't know. I did a book tour last summer when "Viva la Chaos" came out. So I did this tour, and I was asked lots of questions about things that happened in the book. I'd written this book like 13 years ago, and I'm standing at these book events going, "I have no idea. No idea what you're talking about. My son did that, did he?"

And then the book I'm writing now, which word count is 34,000, comes out in October. That's called "The Cry of the Immortals."

Luke: That's a serious one.

Ian: That's a serious one. And then the paperback of "Dead Behind the Eyes," which is the second in the Lombard series, comes out, I think, in November. It's all go, all go.

Luke: A lot of writing to do. Well, great. I'm glad that the books are being well received and that new ones keep arriving. You keep coming up with ideas. This is great. Well done. Keep it going.

Ian: It's really exciting though. I mean, I'm incredibly privileged to be able to do that. Just sit here in my triangular garret in the Loire Valley and just bang out books. It's what I always wanted.

Luke: Yeah, you're living the dream.

Ian: I am. I am living the dream. I'll remind myself of that when I can't think of a plot point tomorrow.

Luke: Just remember you're living the dream.



All right, well great. Thanks so much for talking to me and my audience again. All the best for the writing, and fantastic. Just keep writing books. It's brilliant.

Ian: Yeah, and hopefully, you know, the cozy series—the TV rights have been bought for that, so hopefully something concrete with that will come out in the next few months.

Luke: A TV series based on the cozy crime stories?

Ian: Yeah, yeah.

Luke: Right, is that British TV, French TV?

Ian: Well, the producer is the same people who put "Agatha Raisin" out on Sky TV in the UK, but he's looking for a French TV partner, which would make sense.

Luke: Yeah, totally.

Ian: That's the plan with that.

Luke: All right, brilliant. Okay, well, excellent. Have a lovely afternoon. I don't know if you're going to get some more work done now. It's the afternoon... You write in the morning.

Ian: Yeah, probably not. I mean, the snooker's on.

Luke: Cup of tea and watch some snooker. Sounds perfect.

Ian: Yeah, that's what I'll do.

Luke: Okay, all right, mate. Nice one. Thanks very much.

Ian: Thanks, Luke. Thanks very much indeed.

Luke: Cheers.

---

Right! Thank you again to Ian for being a guest on the podcast for the third time. Before I do my usual ending ramble bit, I need to give you answers to the comprehension questions which I set at the beginning of this episode. Remember them?

So this is where you can check what you understood from earlier.

Let's go through the questions and answers then.

## Questions & Answers

### **1. How does Ian feel about the period between 2010 and 2023?**

He can't remember it. He's lost track of years. He feels like he was in a coma. He has a complete blank.

### **2. Why do I laugh when he says "well, I needed the rest?"**

Because he said he felt like he was in a coma. I said, "That's a long coma" and he joked "Well, I needed the rest."

**3. How was Ian's COVID lockdown period? How did it affect his life?**

He feels a bit guilty admitting it but he had quite a good time. He did catch COVID and long COVID so that wasn't good, but it gave him a chance to make certain changes in his life.

**4. Why did Ian have to stop travelling to the UK to perform stand-up comedy every weekend?**

Before COVID he was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, so travelling and staying in hotels became too painful. He couldn't cope with the lifestyle any more.

**5. Was Ian fed up with stand-up?**

No, he wasn't. He loved the time on stage because it was, strangely enough, a peaceful moment for him when he could be alone with his thoughts and had total control of the situation. He found it cathartic because he could express his emotions and frustrations.

**6. Has it been difficult for Ian to stop doing stand-up? Why/why not?**

No it hasn't. He felt it was time to stop and he wanted to stop, so it's been easy. He feels he has achieved everything he could achieve with stand-up so it's ok to do something else now.

**7. How did Ian feel about doing comedy gigs on Zoom during the COVID lockdown?**

He thought it was not the same as on stage, but you could still have fun. You could make fun of people's living rooms. He liked not having to travel to gigs - it was in his home.

**8. Ian did one particular corporate gig on Zoom during COVID. Did it go well, or badly? How did he know?**

He didn't know during the show because all he could see was a table plan. Everyone had their cameras and microphones switched off. He just "ranted" into the computer and when it was finished he told the organiser he had no idea how it went and the guy said "It wasn't very good".

**9. What did the ex-pat group of English people in France ask Ian to do? How did he feel about it?**

As soon as he joined the group they emailed him to ask him to buy some things from England when he went there. They gave him a shopping list of things they wanted, including Christmas dinner ingredients and Christmas crackers. Ian refused and told them he didn't want to be part of it. "good luck to you and all that, but I did not move out to rural France to join in your Christmas cracker parade. I'm just not... that's not me. Merry Christmas, don't ever talk to me again."

**10. What do the local French people think of Ian when he speaks French?**

They look at him weirdly (like a bird looking in a mirror)

and he knows he has lost them and his confidence drops.

**11. What does Ian tell people about his accent in French? What choice does he give them?**

He says they can have the words or the accent but not both.

**12. What happened to the three goats Ian talks about?**

They died one after the other. The first one died because it was sick. The second one (twin brother of the first) died because it was heartbroken by the death of his brother. The third one decided not to live any more because she was alone. Weirdly these goats just gave up on life and died.

**13. How does his wife feel about this?**

She's heartbroken.

**14. What is the difference between being a stand-up comedian and the host of a B&B/guesthouse?**

Being a comedian you can be quite rude, making jokes about people in the room, saying exactly what you think and breaking the normal social rules. As the host of a guesthouse you have to be very polite, all the time.

**15. What did Ian say to the Dutch guy who wanted hot milk?**

He told him “there's the milk, there's the microwave, see what you can rustle up, chef”. To rustle something up means to prepare something with limited resources, like

cooking a dinner with limited ingredients. “I’ll see what I can rustle up”. He was being sarcastic, or ironic. I think the dutch guy didn’t get it and found it rude, of course. Ian was basically saying, “do it yourself”.

**16. Was Ian a good host?**

No. He said having guests in the house felt like an invasion.

**17. Why did Ian become a writer of “cosy” crime novels?**

He wrote a couple of books before, which were about his life in France. Then, when the guesthouse business didn’t really work he realised he had to write because he was going to stop doing stand-up.

Specifically about cosy crime - he likes the genre of crime writing, and cosy crime is getting bigger in terms of popularity in the world. Also, it was cathartic because he set the novels in a guesthouse so he was able to kill off the guests in his stories (which he wanted to do in real life).

**18. What does Ian find hard about writing novels?**

He finds it hard to do the actual writing, when he has already thought of the ideas. He enjoys coming up with the ideas and the creative side, but the more mechanical side of “joining up the dots” and being very meticulous is difficult.

**19. Ian mentions two “schools of thought” about writing crime novels, the planners and the pantsers. What are they? Which approach does he take?**

Planners plan everything in advance. Pantsers “fly by the seat of their pants” which means they make it up as they go along. Ian is a combination of the two. I think he seems to be more of a “pantser” and enjoys that side more than the necessary planning and organisational work of putting a book together.

**20. How is writing a book like waiting to go on stage to do stand-up?**

You think to yourself, “Why am I putting myself through this?” especially when he’s in the middle of writing a book and everything has become quite messy.

**21. When and where does Ian work best?**

In the morning, on trains and on Tuesday mornings when his wife goes out early and he can write in bed (as long as the dogs have not been disturbed).

**22. What does Ian say about sending himself emails?**

When he is out walking the dogs, if he gets an idea, he writes it in an email to himself and then forgets and his phone pings and he checks the email. If someone saw him they’d think he was a pathetic sight.

**23. What’s different about how Ian writes books and how he used to write stand-up?**

He sits down to write books but stands up to write stand-up comedy.

**24. How do we end up talking about The Monkees?**

Ian mentions Tip-Ex which is a white correctional fluid you use to correct mistakes when you are writing on paper or using an old typewriter. He then tells me that the person who invented Tip-Ex was the mother of a member of the group The Monkees (Mike Nesmith).

**25. What is the connection between David Bowie and The Monkees?**

Davey Jones was a member of The Monkees. David Bowie's original name is David Jones and he had to change it when he started his career in music, because there was another David Jones already on the scene (the one from The Monkees).

**26. Why does Ian mention the 1979 Renault Alpine?**

It's an example of how you have to get specific details exactly right in books, because people will notice and correct you on technical mistakes you make, like some detail about an obscure car.

**27. Is writing a crime story just like solving a jigsaw puzzle? Why/why not?**

No it isn't. When you're solving a jigsaw you have the complete picture in front of you. When you're writing or solving a crime, you don't.



**28. How is writing murder mysteries like a game?**

You leave clues for the reader to give them a chance to guess who committed the murder.

**29. What does Ian prefer about writing compared to stand-up?**

He prefers the fact that the work is more permanent. Stand-up comedy is quite ephemeral. It doesn't last. When the show is over, it's gone. It doesn't really matter. Writing is more permanent.

OK, I hope that helped! Remember you can read all of this on the episode transcript. Link in the show notes.

So now let's go back a few weeks to when I had recently shaved, the sun was shining outside my window and was wearing a different shirt and when I did the ending to this episode, so let's do that now!

---

## Ending

Okay, ladies and gentlemen, that was my guest Ian Moore, back on the podcast for the third time. If you'd like to listen to the other episodes, and they're actually very funny because Ian talks about his struggles with learning English and his struggles with learning French. There's a particularly funny story that he tells about the French citizenship test and what it was like doing the language test for that. That's in episode 648. Also, before that, he was in episode number 332, in which he talked about mod culture, which is something we didn't touch upon in this conversation. But another

thing is that Ian is a mod. A mod is a kind of UK subculture, a British subculture, which really first started in the 1960s in England, but has continued since then. These days, it's considered to be the kind of classic British style. Mod relates to an approach to clothing, a style of clothing, but it's also a general culture which includes things like music and a certain attitude. But anyway, Ian is a mod, and that means dressing in a very specific way—a very smart, very stylish way. We talked about mod culture, which I think is a big part of British culture, especially British clothing. We talked about that in episode 382 a few years ago, and then other stuff including stories of Ian's life in the countryside and how his children got threatened by a farmer with a shotgun and other tales. So that's episode 382, 383, and also 648 from my episode archive, [www.teacherluke.co.uk/episodes](http://www.teacherluke.co.uk/episodes).

But that's the end of the conversation. I hope you enjoyed it and that you were able to follow it all.

For me personally, I thought it was fascinating to hear Ian talking about his process for writing books. Because for me, as I said in the conversation, I love reading these murder mystery stories, especially Sherlock Holmes stories, but there are so many others like Agatha Christie and all sorts of other writers. I'm always amazed at how someone can just come up with that stuff from scratch, how you can come up with a mystery story from nothing. I've always wondered what it takes to actually do that.

It seems that in Ian's case, initially, he has the idea, he has his first idea, and then it's a case of fleshing it out, writing thousands of words every day. You probably come up with ideas and then you have to go back to things you've already written and change those things. For me, writing an episode of this podcast, which could be

how many thousands of words per episode, well, definitely a lot shorter than a book, but that can become really complicated for me. If I change one thing later on in the episode, I've got to go back, and it's very hard to keep track of the entire project. So it's amazing really to get any insight into how writers actually write their books and the sort of discipline that's involved in doing it.

I thought it was interesting the way that Ian talked about how changing his location for working and working at different times of the day helps him to be productive, like writing on a train or writing in his bed. Anyway, you can leave your comments. I hope that you found that interesting too. Leave your comments on the page for this episode on my website or on YouTube or wherever you're listening to this.

A reminder that you can get all of Ian's books from most good bookshops. If you're in the UK, you can find them in all of the street bookshops and stuff, but you can get them online as well. Maybe the best place to go is simply Ian's website, which is [www.ianmoore.info](http://www.ianmoore.info). That's where you can find out about all of his books and all the other work he does, and you can get yourself copies of them. I think the cozy crime mysteries would be the right kind of thing to read in English if you want to find some enjoyable, funny mystery stories to practice your English. That could be a good thing to buy.

ianmoore.info, "Death and Croissants." I don't know—how do you say "croissant" in your language? A croissant is a kind of pastry. It's a French pastry that's sort of in a crescent shape. It's basically made of butter and butter as far as I can tell. Kate Billington explained how a croissant was made on this podcast at some point, but it's pastry and butter with a bit of extra butter baked in

the oven. Absolutely delicious. So that's a French thing. "Death and Croissants," that's the first book in the series, the cozy crime series. What do you call a croissant in your language? Or at least, how do you say "croissant" in your language? In England, people call them "crossants." Really. But in French, they're pronounced "croissants." So "Death and Croissants," "Death and Fromage," which means "Death and Cheese," and "Death at the Chateau," which is like "Death at the Castle" kind of thing.

So check out [ianmoore.info](http://ianmoore.info) for info about Ian Moore, surprisingly, but also his books and his other work. He also wanted me to say that the B&B that he talked about is for sale. Not his entire home, but the half of the building that he used as the B&B—that is available for purchase. One of those buildings and the garden—they're both up for sale. If you're interested in buying a B&B in the Loire Valley, then get in touch.

As well as that, he also wanted me to let you know that he has a full-size antique snooker table. Do you know snooker? It's a kind of UK parlor game. Is it English? Is it just English? I know it's very popular in China, but snooker is like billiards. It's a game where you have a big table covered in a green fabric and there are pockets in the corners and on the sides of the table, and balls on the table. You have these long wooden cues, and you hit the balls with the cue and you have to put the balls in the pockets. It's a bit like pool in America, although everywhere now as well, pool. But the tables are much bigger and the rules are a bit more complicated. So anyway, Ian has got an antique snooker table which he's trying to get rid of. He can't get rid of it. In fact, he's not just selling it; I think he's willing to just give it away. So again, if you are in the Loire Valley and you want a big antique snooker table,

full-size, then get in touch because Ian has got one and he's trying to get rid of it.

Okay, all right then. Don't forget you can get a transcript for this episode by checking my website. Check the page for this episode on my website and you'll find a PDF transcript there. If there are things that you'd like to check up on, you can go through the transcript and have a look and think, "What did he say then? What was that? What was that word? I didn't catch that. What was that anecdote? I didn't get that. What's going on? What is going on?" You can check the PDF and see the stuff in writing and maybe check those things in the usual online dictionaries or whatever. That could be useful.

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed this particular episode as your chance to do some more authentic listening in English. Get in touch with your comments. If you want a snooker table or indeed the entire building and the garden, then get in touch as well. We'll do some sort of deal. We'll work something out. I'll speak to you again in the next episode, but for now, it's just time for me to say goodbye bye bye.