which tracks a specialist police unit operating in Frankfurt, Germany’s financial, business and crime centre. Maximilian Bolenius, sales manager for ZDF Enterprises, says that, while the “footrace between the good and the bad” is the main appeal of crime shows, these dramas also travel well because there are fewer cultural bridges to cross than in, for example, comedy. “A crime is a crime,” Bolenius adds, “especially when it comes to murder — and that doesn’t change with the territory.” Cop shows are also pulling in big ratings in China. One company to have profited from the Chinese’s love of crime is Beijing Jindun Xintong Film and Television Production, which specialises in police drama. The company is a joint venture between Jindun TV and Culture Center and the Ministry of Public Security of the People’s Republic of China.

Jindun Xintong’s latest dramas include I Am Not A Hero, Thrill and Rose Blossom. The 26-episode I Am Not A Hero tells the story of two friends, one whom becomes a detective and the other a successful businessman. So what’s the appeal? According the Jindun Xintong’s president Ma Ke, the drama is well made and has an outstanding cast, including Sun Honglei, who is currently one of the most popular actors in China. “It is a psychological thriller in which two good friends fall out with each other, but it also has a love triangle to strengthen the plot line.” Ma adds.

I Am Not A Hero was the third highest rated drama in China last year. “The series’ director Gu Jingyu and its scriptwriters Guan Shan and Xu Qing have all worked together on previous successful cop dramas,” Ma continues. “Chinese audiences like complicated, plot-driven series with a lot of action. I don’t know what it is Western audiences like about crime drama, but I want to find out.”
Crime drama also imbues cities and locations with a distinctive character. Rebus, for example, is the hard-nosed cop who solves crimes in the seamy underworld of Edinburgh. Following a recent deal with Minotaur International, BBC Prime will broadcast the series in some 60 territories across Africa and Asia, including Korea, Morocco, Kenya and South Africa.

Meanwhile, up in the frozen north, Varg Veum walks the dark side of the streets of Bergen, the Norwegian coastal town that butts up against the polar circle. The SF subsidiary SF Norway begins production in October on six films — four made for TV — starring the hard-bitten hero of the writer Gunnar Staalesen’s novels.

In Australia, Water Rats ran for seven seasons and continues to play well in several international markets, according to Southern Star’s chief executive, Cathy Payne. “The draw was water police and detectives busting crime on the panoramic Sydney Harbour,” Payne adds. “This is a location that is pretty hard to beat.”

Southern Star distributes a number of cop shows and currently has the franchise for the UK series Wire In The Blood, starring Robson Green. “No one writes for this genre as well as the British,” Payne says. “With Wire In The Blood, they have taken an established contemporary literary franchise, and housed this in a fast-paced production. It deals with some pretty tough crimes — and the audiences love it.” She adds that Southern Star has sold the ITV drama, series four of which will debut later this year, to a number of markets, including the US, France, Germany, Spain and, of course, Australia.

Meanwhile, the multicultural broadcaster SBS has created a stir in Australia with its ambitious new series Major Crime (6 x 60 mins), in which a young Muslim detective, Zane Malik, fights suspicion and prejudice in post-9/11, post-Bali Australia. Working alongside his Anglo-Australian partner in the Major Crime Squad, Malik is ambitious, driven, confident — and proud of being a devout Muslim. The series will be distributed internationally by Minotaur.

“No one writes for this genre as well as the British”

However, the setting of crime series can also limit a show’s ability to travel. The successful Dutch cop show Baantjer is now in its 12th year and in its last season, mainly because the 77-year-old star Piet Romer would like a break. The drama has consistently been one of the highest rated programmes in the Netherlands.

“Baantjer has been remarkably successful, particularly in its later years,” says Paul Romer, general manager of Endemol Netherlands, which produces the show. “But if you watch it, it has a typically Amsterdam flavour to it. It would be difficult to translate that feeling — to give it, for example, a typically Parisian feel. We are, however, talking to Russia to see if we might be able to make it work in Moscow.”

France fell prey to a TV crime wave in this first half of this year. In April, CSI: New York found its way into TF1’s Saturday-night schedule, after the reality show The Kingdom failed to deliver enough viewers. At the same time, CSI: Miami was bringing in solid audience shares in a Wednesday-night slot. Without A Trace, meanwhile, debuted on France 2 in March of this year to record audience shares.

Local crime fiction is also giving reality, among other genres, a run for its money. RSI Police Scientifique, an adaptation of an Italian forensic procedural drama, beat CSI in the French ratings during its run on TFI at the beginning of 2006. The show is now headed for a German reboots on Sat.1.

And after selling L&O across the globe, local language spin-offs appear to be the next step for executive producer Dick Wolfe and NBC Universal. Actor Vincent Perez will play the counterpart of Detective Robert Goren in the French-language version of L&O: Criminal Intent. Wolfe and NBC Universal have approval over the cast and scripts, while NBC will handle the international sales. Russian TV adaptations are now in the pipeline for L&O: Criminal Intent and L&O: Special Victims Unit.

Germany has always been able to churn out high-quality cop shows with international passports. ZDF is one of the top producers and distributors of crime drama in the territory, with such hit series as The Old Fox, Derrick, A Case For Two, Leipzig Homicide and Siska to its credit.

One of ZDF’s top selling dramas is the Danish International Emmy Award-winning cop series The Eagle, which follows the exploits of the charismatic detective Hallgrím Hallgrímsson and his Copenhagen-based team of high-tech crime-fighters. ZDF has already sold the series to France, Italy, Austria, Belgium and several Eastern European territories. At MIPCOM, ZDF is also showcasing The Specialists: Rhein Main Crime Squad.
which has been aired in 200 territories, is now in its seventh season, with the CSI: Miami and CSI: New York spin-offs in, respectively, their fifth and third seasons. "The characters are strong and compelling," says Ted Riley, Alliance Atlantis' executive managing director of international content distribution. "But at the end of the day, CSI is still a whodunit and its appeal lies in the fun of problem solving."

CSI is also sticky. "It engages you quickly," Riley says. "And in these days of zapping and channel surfing, that's saying something. It also has a strong narrative line - every episode has a beginning, a middle and an end." The crimes are often solved with the help of technological, scientific or medical techniques, as well as conventional police methods. "So it's not just a classic cop drama," Riley adds.

Prime Suspect has a very strong appeal to women, Hedges adds: "As a result, we are now exploring more fiction that stars a woman detective and has a more female skew."

From the days of Philip Marlow and Sam Spade, the detective has invariably been a flawed character. Even Poirot's eccentricities add a certain comic relief to Agatha Christie's timeless storylines.

There is now, however, a new generation of gumshoes whose personal quirks are truly bizarre — and none more so than Adrian Monk. But his fear of heights,

"At the end of the day, CSI is a whodunit and its appeal lies in the fun of problem solving"

arrogant but effective Inspector Morse, played by the late, great John Thaw, drinks too much and bullies his long-suffering sergeant Lewis. However, Lewis has finally managed to break away from his irascible boss — not only has he been given his very own show, but the eponymous pilot was ITV's highest rated drama last year, and has already aired on PBS.

Cracker, Inspector Frost and the Lewis pilot were all distributed by Granada International. Hedges believes that such idiosyncrasies are part of the appeal: "These detectives fight their own demons, but they are strong."