

# MARCH OF CRIME

MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA—SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER

## MWA SPONSORS LATFOB



Susan Arnout Smith and Les Klinger

The Los Angeles Times Festival of Books is always a great event. But this year, the Los Angeles chapter of Mystery Writers of America threw in our lot with the festival and became official sponsors of the mystery track. And with our logo and name appearing on all the pertinent banners, I would say that the word is out.

This year we also sold T-shirts and it was a big hit. You can still get your own when we get together for meeting and events. Ten bucks to proclaim your allegiance. Some of the best people can be seen with our shirts. Below on the left is Carol and Mary Higgins Clark. To the right is Dianne Emley and Joseph Wambaugh. Where's yours?



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## BASH AT MYSTERY BOOKSTORE



There's always a party before the bigger party, and this last weekend was no exception. Not only were authors gearing up for the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, but on April 24, the Los Angeles Times was presenting book awards. The best mystery/thriller award recipient was Michael Kortya, seen left pictured with LA Times book editor David Ulin and presenter Robert Crais. SoCalMWA member Nina Revoyr was also nominated for her novel,

*The Age of Dreaming.*

At the Mystery Bookstore in Westwood, it was wall to wall authors (on page 2 in the Prez Rap, Les Klinger gives a good run down on those in attendance.) Much thanks to the Mystery Bookstore for throwing the bash. More pictures on page 3.



## The President's Rap Sheet

Leslie S. Klinger



"My buttons were bursting," as my grandfather used to say. This past weekend I had the great pleasure of working at the MWA booth at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, and it seemed like all 140,000 people who attended the Festival stopped by to talk. The weekend kicked off with a great party at the Mystery Bookstore, which was literally overflowing with mystery writers from all over the country and passionate readers. Then I attended the L.A. Times Book Prizes and witnessed Robert Crais present this year's Prize in the Mystery/Thriller category to Michael Koryta, for *Envy the Night*. Michael hails from Bloomington, Indiana, but his prose is far from homespun.

I didn't get to any of the Festival's dozens of panels, but dozens of mystery "stars" visited our booth, including out-of-towners James Ellroy, Lisa Scottoline, Mary Higgins Clark,

Carol Higgins Clark, Stuart Wood, and NY Chapter President Chris Grabenstein; NorCal members Tim Maleeny, Steve Brewer, Kelli Stanley, Louise Ure, and Edgar nominee Lisa Lutz; and locals Jan Burke, Stephen J. Cannell, Bob Crais, Dianne Emley, Edgar nominees Christa Faust and David Fuller, the Goldberg boys (Tod and Lee), Denise Hamilton, Gar Haywood, Charlie Huston, Sue Ann Jaffarian, Harley Jane Kozak, Bob Levinson, Gary Phillips, Thomas Perry, Patty Smiley, Christopher Rice, John Morgan Wilson, Joseph Wambaugh, Jeri Westerson, and Don Winslow, just to name a few. Apologies to those I've forgotten—it was an embarrassment of riches!

This year, MWA stepped up to the role of Official Programming Sponsor of the Festival, and our logo was everywhere. Every mystery panel was conducted above a banner announcing our sponsorship, and the printed

schedule carried similar identification. The point of this sponsorship was to increase public awareness of the mystery genre and MWA in particular. At the suggestion of Board member Richard Brewer, we also created SoCalMWA T-shirts, which proved to be a powerful tool to lure visitors to our booth, where we plied them with information about the Chapter, our programming generally, and in particular the upcoming California Crime Writers Conference. Check out pictures of the shirts and prominent wearers in this newsletter and online! You'll certainly want one!

A big thanks to Richard, Naomi Hirahara and Bill Fitzhugh for organizing the t-shirts and the booth and to the many volunteers who staffed it. I hope they had as much fun as I did!

## Edgar Winners!



Our own Chapter Board member T. Jefferson Parker completed the first-ever Edgar hat trick last Thursday, adding a "Best Short Story" Edgar to his two previous "Best Novel"

Edgar. We believe that this makes Jeff unique in Edgar's history! Congratulations, Jeff! Other Chapter nominees, Christa Faust, Dave Fuller, and Tom Epperson attended the Edgar ceremonies but had to be content with the great honor of being in the company of an array of stellar nominees.

## DON'T GET BYTTEN

By Ben Malisow

### WITHOUT ENHANCEMENT

A friend of mine, an expert in the computer imaging field, has a pet peeve associated with a popular fictional device.

It's the use of the term "enhance."

In the context my friend abhors, the crime solver is sitting next to some computer geek, and they're looking at an image on the screen. The image is a clue of some sort, or includes a clue, or will lead to a clue. And nothing on the screen, nothing in the original image, appeared to contain any information of any use to anyone...much less leading to capturing the culprit or preventing a disaster.

And then the crimefighter points to a certain part of the screen, where something is blurred or obscured, and

says, "Can you enhance that area right there?"

We've come to understand that this means, "Make it bigger, and really clear, so we can see what it is." Sometimes, instead of "enhance," the character uses the term "zoom in" as a synonym.

Yeah....that doesn't work in the real world.

Graphics can be manipulated to an extraordinary degree with current technology. We all know this. It's great—the special effects in movies have increased in quality dramatically, and video games are approaching photo-realism, and you can use Photoshop to make really funny collages that you can e-mail to friends...

But you can't make a picture show what the camera couldn't see.

Continued on Page 4



# NEWS



It's the last two weekends for the play "The Caterer," starring LeVar Burton at the

Whitefire Theatre, 13500 Ventura Blvd., Thousand Oaks, CA [www.plays411.net](http://www.plays411.net)

Friday, June 19 will be Southern California Writers Night at The Epicenter - the home ballpark of the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes - a Class A Minor League team of the Angels:

<http://web.minorleaguebaseball.com/index.jsp?sid=t526>

Local writers will be introduced on the field, there will be events and games related to writing and reading, and there will be book sales and signing for the authors in attendance. It's a fireworks night at the ballpark and the crowd is likely to be somewhere between 3,500-6,000 people.

**John Morgan Wilson's** latest Benjamin Justice novel, *Spider Season*, is a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award for best gay men's mystery. The series has previously garnered six Lammy nominations, winning three times, along with an Edgar for best first novel.

Orange County area resident **Sam McCarver's**

comprehensive class and workshop, "Writing a Novel," will be held at the Dana Point Community Center. The classes are held Tuesday nights from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. for a period of six weeks with a City enrollment fee of \$80 plus \$25 paid in class for his writing-guide book, *Novel Writing for Wanna-be's* and for class handouts. Call the City of Dana Point at (949) 248-3530 for enrollment procedures and directions, or email Sam at [scm13725@cox.net](mailto:scm13725@cox.net). The next series of classes begins July 7.

Christopher Vogler, author of *The Writer's Journey*, builds on Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey and in turn relates it to the major arcana of the tarot. Austyn Wells ([www.austynwells.com](http://www.austynwells.com)) is planning a one-day class for writers, using the tarot to help

unlock ideas and increase creativity. For info contact **Sheila Lowe** at [Sheila@sheilalowe.com](mailto:Sheila@sheilalowe.com). The class will be 9-6, then a potluck dinner and further discussion on June 6 in Altadena.

## Corrections



In last month's issue, I erroneously attributed the wrong author's name to **A KING OF INFINITE SPACE**. The very fine author of this book is actually **Tyler Dilts**. My apologies.

## Mystery Bookstore Party Pics



Cara Black and Naomi Hirahara with Jim Pascoe in the background.



Wall to wall authors. Which way to the drink table? That's Dianne Emley in the foreground.



Lee Goldberg in conversation with Denise Hamilton.



Lee Goldberg and Victor Gischler



Two historical noirists: Jeri Westerson and Kelli Stanley.

**"BYTTEN" continued from Page 2**

"Zoom" and "enhancement," in reality, are limited by the detail and granularity of the capture device (often measured in "megapixels" or "dots per inch [dpi]"). Simply put, if the camera couldn't see it, no amount of fancy computer trickery is going to make it appear.

Look at it this way (so to speak): say you look at a sandbox, from the other side of a playground. You can maybe see a sand castle, and some toys, and the kids playing. You see that the sand is a dusty yellow but you can't see the individual grains. You *know* that there are individual grains, because you know what sand is, and you're not stupid, but no amount of squinting and focusing and staring will allow you to see grains of sand from that distance--the human eye is simply not capable of such a feat.

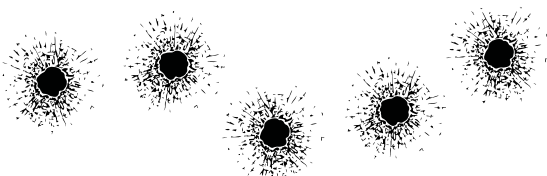
The same thing goes for images captured by cameras: unless they're being saved as digital files of a size FAR too large for most modern storage media, or they're specifically being focused on something rather small (to the exclusion of everything else around), the camera sees the picture, but not the details of the items included in the picture. You couldn't take a photo of a sandbox and expect to use a computer to "enhance" the photo to the point where you could inspect grains of sand.

So when you're crafting your mystery, and you've got an image as a clue, don't take the easy (and fanciful) route, and have some computer wizard "enhance" the thing so that some miniscule detail can suddenly be noticed and utilized. It's not only a trite storytelling device, it ranks right up there with voodoo as a nonsensical, deus ex machina-style method for solving a crime or catching a criminal.

Again, if there's any particular topic you'd like to see addressed in these pages, or if you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to contact me, via the information posted on my website: [www.benmalisow.com](http://www.benmalisow.com).

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*Ben's first book, **1,001 Things To Do If You Dare**, was published by Adams Media in 2007. His second, **Terrorism**, part of the *Criminal Investigations* series from Chelsea House, came out in September of 2008. Ben has provided computer and information security services to DARPA, the Department of Homeland Security, and the FBI, among other customers. He holds an MBA, a CISSP, and a CISM, among other alphabet-soup-flavored goodies.*



## The Case of the ESG Collection

**By Terri Nolan**

Inside the San Clemente Public Library sits an undistinguished lawyer's bookcase. It has four shelves, two of which are missing glass fronts. Its surface is nicked and dented and stained boring brown. The case and its contents get little notice or acclaim, even with the large designating plaque which reads: Erle Stanley Gardner, collection, donated by Mrs. Gardner, 1981.

The collection contains 124 books: all first editions, many signed, most fragile and brittle, authored by Erle Stanley Gardner and A.A. Fair—a Gardner pseudonym. And they are in circulation. Many library patrons may not know the literary value or the legacy behind the rare and special treasure.

Erle Stanley Gardner (1889-1970) had two successful careers. In the arc that was his life, both careers would provide relevance to readers, mystery writers, and society at large. Gardner's first career was as a criminal lawyer. He set up practice in Oxnard at the age of twenty-one after he was admitted to the California Bar. Gardner became known as a defender to those deprived of their rights. He was so passionate about his responsibility that he often defended his clients with questionable tactics, causing conflicts with police and prosecutors.

His practice quickly grew and he moved it to the city of San Buenaventura (now commonly known as Ventura), which is also the county seat. The building that housed his office, on the corner of Main and California, is across the street from City Hall. A bronze plaque affixed to the building and lettering in a window of Gardner's old law office designates the historical point of interest.

While still in his twenties and practicing law fulltime, Gardner began writing detective stories. Like many of today's mystery writers, he was rejected hundreds of times before he finally began to sell stories. Thus began his second career, overlapping the first.

By 1931, when Gardner was in his early forties, he had published at least seventy-eight short stories and novelettes—with an average of 10,000 words each—in pulp magazines like *Black Mask*, *Argosy*, *Detective Fiction Weekly*, *Clues* and *Top Notch*. He also published a handful of non-fiction articles in periodicals such as *Sunset*, *Field & Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, and even one titled, "What Chance Has a New Writer?" in *Writer's Digest*, published in January of 1931. His writing alone brought in nearly \$20,000 a year. Good money for the Depression era.

After nearly twenty years of writing and a successful law career, Gardner finally turned his attention to novels at the urging of various editors. It was a bold move for a man who didn't like to write. Indeed, he did little actual writing or typing. He dictated. Gardner employed many secretaries simultaneously and one or more would often work evenings to type his manuscripts. He considered fiction merely a

*Continued on Page 7*

## YOUR EDITOR SPEAKS JERI WESTERSON



This was my first year signing at the LA Times Festival of Books. I'd attend each year and each year I'd look longingly at the signing booths and think, "Next year, next year."

Well, this was finally the year! And what a year. It's always nice to do signings

in bookstores or to give presentations, but it is especially nice to participate where many authors gather together. Why? Let's face it. Authors can be very solitary people. We sit alone in a room and clack away on our keyboards. But just because we work alone doesn't necessarily mean we are anti-social creatures (so what if you catch me swinging a sword at home? Oh. I guess I said *antisocial*, not *sociopathic*. But no matter!) When authors get the chance to swap stories and handshakes, it's cause for celebration. Even more cause for celebration when we see books being bought, and many were bought this last weekend. That's awfully good news for writers. See you at the next gathering.

[TheMarchofCrime@gmail.com](mailto:TheMarchofCrime@gmail.com)

## Save the Date

*Put these SoCal MWA dates and times on your calendar.*

**Sunday, May 17, 1 pm—Discoveries of the Black Dahlia** Steve Hodel, author of *Black Dahlia Avenger: The True Story* in conversation with author and forensics expert D. P. Lyle—a joint program with Sisters in Crime Orange County Irvine Ranch Water District, 15600 Sand Canyon Ave., Irvine. A light buffet will be served. Admission is *free* but reservations are required. Please contact Rob at [secretary@ocsistersincrime.org](mailto:secretary@ocsistersincrime.org)

**June 13-14—California Crime Writers Conference**  
Hilton Pasadena [www.socalmwa.com/ccwc.htm](http://www.socalmwa.com/ccwc.htm)  
Contact: Naomi Hirahara, [bachi@naomihirahara.com](mailto:bachi@naomihirahara.com)

**Saturday, August 15, 6pm—It's gumbo time!**  
Fitzhughs' Gumbo Party, San Fernando Valley  
Contact: Bill Fitzhugh, [bfitzhugh@socal.rr.com](mailto:bfitzhugh@socal.rr.com)

**Sunday, September 13, 2 PM, Salon at Gary Phillips' Pad**  
Contact: Gary Phillips, [gdogg855@aol.com](mailto:gdogg855@aol.com)

**Sunday, Oct 4, 10am – 6pm—West Hollywood Book Fair**  
<http://www.westhollywoodbookfair.org/>  
Contact: Bill Fitzhugh, [bfitzhugh@socal.rr.com](mailto:bfitzhugh@socal.rr.com)

**Sunday, October 25, 1:30pm**  
**Crime of Our Times: Financial Fraud with Brian E. Klein,**  
**Assistant U.S. Attorney**  
Beverly Hills Library 444 N. Rexford Dr. Beverly Hills  
It's free!  
Contact: Les Klingler, [mail@leslieklinger.com](mailto:mail@leslieklinger.com)

**Saturday, November 7, 11am—2pm**  
**Charlie Huston interviewed by the Mystery Bookstore's**  
**Bobby McCue**  
Location to be announced. Contact: Naomi Hirahara,  
[bachi@naomihirahara.com](mailto:bachi@naomihirahara.com)

**December—Holiday Party**, More details to come.

## The Crime Calendar

**May 1-3:** Crimefest 2009, Bristol, England; [www.crimefest.com](http://www.crimefest.com)

**May 1-3:** Malice Domestic XXI, Arlington, VA,  
[www.malicedomestic.org](http://www.malicedomestic.org)

**May 14-17:** Crimefest 2009, Bristol, UK, [www.crimefest.com](http://www.crimefest.com)

**May 22-24:** Mayhem in the Midlands, Omaha, NE,  
[www.omaha.lib.ne.us/mayhem/](http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/mayhem/)

**June 5-6:** Mystery Florida, Sarasota FL <http://mysteryflorida.com/>

**June 5-6:** Murder in the Grove, Boise, ID  
[www.murderinthegrove.com/index.htm](http://www.murderinthegrove.com/index.htm)

**June 5-7:** Bloody Words VIII; Ottawa, Canada; [www.bloodywords.com](http://www.bloodywords.com)

**June 13-14:** California Crime Writers Conference,  
[www.sistersinrimela.com](http://www.sistersinrimela.com)

**June 19-20:** Hardboiled Heroes and Cozy Cats, Dallas, TX  
<http://mwasw.org/conf.html>

**June 27-28:** Deadly Ink, Parsippany, NJ, [www.deadlyink.com](http://www.deadlyink.com)

**July 8-11:** ThrillerFest 2009, New York, NY,  
[www.thrillerwriters.org/thrillerfest](http://www.thrillerwriters.org/thrillerfest)

**July 16-19:** Book Passages, Corte Madera, CA  
<http://www.bookpassage.com/>

**July 31-August 2:** PulpFest 2009, Columbus, OH,  
<http://www.pulpfest.com>

**August 14-16:** Killer Nashville 2009, Nashville, TN,  
[www.killerNashville.com](http://www.killerNashville.com)

**October 8 – 11:** Wordstock, Portland, OR  
[http://www.wordstockfestival.com/#/page\\_id=110/](http://www.wordstockfestival.com/#/page_id=110/)

**October 15-18:** Bouchercon 2009; [www.bouchercon2009.com](http://www.bouchercon2009.com)

**November 13-15:** New England Crimebake, Dedham, MA,  
GOH: Sue Grafton, [www.crimebake.org](http://www.crimebake.org)





The Hilton Pasadena  
 168 S. Los Robles Avenue  
 Pasadena, CA 91101



June 13-14, 2009

***For the New Writer and the Established Author!***

- Two days of workshops and breakout sessions
- Top-flight faculty, including best-selling authors, Robert Crais and Laurie R. King
- Literary agents, legal and forensic experts
- Sessions on PR and book marketing
- Manuscript critiques (*limited to first 30*)
- Agents cocktail party
- Book-seller and vendor room
- Goodie bags and giveaways
- Luxury hotel setting

**Registration Rates**

*(Registration fee must be received by cutoff date.)*

March 1 thru June 12	\$300
On-site registration	\$325
Manuscript critique	\$ 50
<i>(5-page submission)</i>	

*Cancellation policy: A full refund minus a \$30 fee until May 15th. No refunds after May 15th.*



Robert Crais



Laurie R. King

*For more information, visit [www.sistersinacrimela.com/ccwc.htm](http://www.sistersinacrimela.com/ccwc.htm) or [www.socalmwa.com/ccwc.htm](http://www.socalmwa.com/ccwc.htm)*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email address\* \_\_\_\_\_

**To register and pay by check:** Make check payable to "Sisters in Crime/LA" and mail with completed form to Sisters in Crime/LA, 1107 Fair Oaks Avenue, PMB 338, South Pasadena, CA 91030.

**To register online and pay via PayPal:** Visit [www.socalmwa.com/ccwc.htm](http://www.socalmwa.com/ccwc.htm)

- |                                                   |                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conference fee _____     | <input type="checkbox"/> MWA member  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript critique \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> SinC member |
| Total enclosed _____                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-member  |

\*Required to confirm registration.



Conference Presenters



**“ESG Collection” continued from Page 4**

means to an end—supplemental income to sustain a preferred lifestyle of travel and outdoor adventure. He especially liked the desert and nature of Baja and wrote many articles on the topic, including a book, *The Hidden Heart of Baja*.

Gardner may not have liked to write, but he was well read in subjects as diverse as criminology, forensic medicine, penology (prison management), and psychology. Undoubtedly his knowledge of these fields helped him craft story ideas into the well-plotted tales he was famous for.

His first novel, *The Case of the Velvet Claws*, was published in March of 1933. A first edition copy, published by Walter J. Black, NY, sits in the non-descript lawyer’s bookcase in the San Clemente Library. The full-color artwork on the paper cover depicts a gloved hand with sharpened nails. Also on the cover are the following words: “Perry Mason – criminal lawyer. Remember that name. You’ll meet him again. He’s going to be famous.”

The novel was an instant success and Gardner stopped practicing law to devote himself fulltime to fiction. The character of Perry Mason did indeed become famous, along with his creator. The titles started with “The Case of...” ...*the Lucky Loser*, ...*the Deadly Toy*, ...*the Shapely Shadow*, ... *the Shoplifter’s Shoe*, ...*the Borrowed Brunette*, etc... and were an average length of 50,000 words. From 1933 to 1973 there were eighty-five Perry

Mason novels and several compilations (the latest published posthumously).

Perry Mason was known as a crafty lawyer who used his skills to get witness stand confessions and a popular phrase known as “A Perry Mason Moment” was born. The Perry Mason character was so popular that there was a radio program, several Hollywood movies in the ‘30s and ‘40s, and a television series. In 1957, CBS aired the first Perry Mason episode starring Raymond Burr. It ran for nine seasons.

Perry Mason may have been famous, but society at large owes a huge debt to the man behind the character. In 1952, his book, *The Court of Last Resort* earned Gardner an Edgar Award in the Best Fact Crime category. It wasn’t just a book. It was a project that sought to review abuses by police and prosecutors, the misinterpretation of forensic evidence, and inadequate legal representation that together, or separately, led to the conviction of, sometimes, innocent defendants. The project set many legal precedents still in use today.

So how did the Erle Stanley Gardner collection end up in a public library instead of a museum? The librarian asked for it. A library patron knew that Gardner’s widow, Agnes Jean Bethell, who lived in Fallbrook, was interested in downsizing. Mrs. Gardner was happy to accept the request and donate a set of the books. The books were catalogued and covered to preserve the original paper covers. In June of 1982, the newly built library was dedicated and the Erle Stanley Gardner collection was unveiled. The rest is history.

## Bone by Bone, the Anatomy of a Short Story

By Jackie Houchin

At the Sisters in Crime Short Story Workshop held on March 21 at the Grace Lutheran Church in Pasadena, SoCalMWA member Gayle Bartos-Pool taught a group of eager “Murder in La-La Land” hopefuls the key components to a successful short story.

She surprised the attendees by first announcing a “pop quiz,” question. “What’s the difference between a short story and a novel?” Length and complexity were our answers.

Gayle illustrated the differences by comparing the exquisite taste of a fancy hors d’oeuvre to the variety and volume of a seven-course meal. Also, the places you’d visit on a day trip are far fewer than those you’d experience on a two-week European tour. Both writing formats have a destination, but in short stories the stops and side trips - as well as the passengers - are limited.

Using the human skeleton as an analogy, Gayle worked from skull to



Gayle Bartos-Pool, right, helps out a student.

tibia, teaching and giving examples on Idea, Plot, Direction/Goal, Characters, Atmosphere/Setting, Point of View, and Pacing. She also gave each student a comprehensive workbook full of illustrations, diagrams, and worksheets.

She encouraged us to begin with a strong 1-2 sentence logline so we would know where our story was going; set up the conflict at the beginning; include at least one story or character arc; and write dialogue as if we were sending a telegram and had to pay for every word.

Gayle used examples from her own writing and from the books and stories of many published SinC and MWA authors. She also brought visuals including a nearly life-sized skeleton replica, an electric model car, a toy teeter-totter, a suitcase and contents, and a stuffed skunk that illustrated “Chekov’s Gun.”

At the lunch break, Gayle met with students who had pre-submitted their first three pages for critique, giving advice and encouragement. She extended the critique offer to anyone in the class who had not sent in pages earlier.

A Q&A time followed the afternoon session and then Gayle concluded the workshop with a humorous list of “Stuff to Remember.”

A buzz of excitement ran through the group as attendees packed up their notebooks, pens, lunch bags and empty water bottles. “Fabulous!” “Challenging!” “I wasn’t going to write a short story, but now I am!”

Thanks go to the SinC-LA Board and Gayle Bartos-Pool for the workshop, the workbooks, the cookies and chilled bottle water, to Kathryn Hutson who arranged for the meeting place, and to Linda Bevins for bringing member books and several short story

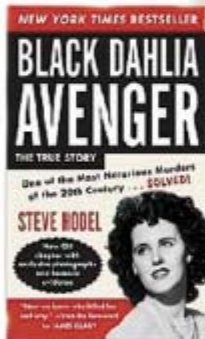
Orange County Sisters in Crime  
& SoCal Mystery Writers of America

Presents

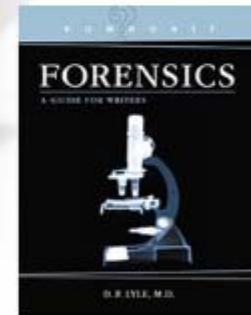
New Discoveries of the

# *Black Dahlia* Murder Investigation

Author **Steve Hodel** in Conversation  
with author and forensics expert,  
**D.P. Lyle, M.D.**



Join us for an exciting discussion on the latest evidence of the Black Dahlia murder case with author Steve Hodel, retired Los Angeles police detective and private investigator. D.P. Lyle, M.D., brings expert forensic opinion to the table in what is sure to be a lively forum. Who did it? Is the murderer as Hodel contends? Find out.



**Sunday, May 17, 1 pm**

A Light Buffet will be served

Admission is Free

Please make reservations with Rob at  
[secretary@ocsistersincrime.org](mailto:secretary@ocsistersincrime.org)

Meeting is at the Irvine Ranch Water District  
15600 Sand Canyon Ave., Irvine, CA 92618  
For further info visit [www.ocsistersincrime.org](http://www.ocsistersincrime.org)



# Grit, Wit, and It, Part II

By James Scott Bell

In the January-February issue we looked at *Grit* as one of three keys to a memorable Lead character. Now let's analyze the other two.

## WIT

Robert B. Parker's *The Godwulf Manuscript* opens with Spenser listening to a college president going on and on in the latter's office.

*"Do you see my position, Mr. Spenser," he said, and swiveled back toward me . . .*

*"Yes, sir," I said. "We detectives know how to read people."*

*Forbes frowned and went on.*

*"It is a matter of the utmost delicacy, Mr. Spenser" – he was looking at himself in the glass again – "requiring restraint, sensitivity, circumspection, and a high degree of professionalism. I don't know the kind of people who usually employ you, but . . ."*

*I interrupted him.*

*"Look, Dr. Forbes, I went to college once, I don't wear my hat indoors. And if a clue comes along and bites me in the ankle, I grab it. I am a private detective. Is there something you'd like me to detect, or are you just polishing up your elocution for next year's commencement?"*

Spenser's been around a long time, in large part due to exchanges like the above. His wit is a quality readers love.

Wit is primarily a matter of voice and attitude. But only when it's natural, not forced. One easy way to get this vibe is by making the wit self-deprecating. If the character has the ability to laugh at himself, wit will come easily, as when Rhett Butler chides Scarlett O'Hara, "Why don't you say I'm a damned rascal and no gentleman?"

Wit can also make light of an overly sentimental situation. When Scarlett dances with Rhett for the first time, she teases him to say something "pretty" to her. Rhett replies:

*"Would it please you if I said your eyes were twin goldfish bowls filled to the brim with the clearest green water and that when the fish swim to the top, as they are doing now, you are devilishly charming?"*

Even a negative character can be rendered memorable with wit. Thomas Harris's flesh-eating antagonist in *The Silence of the Lambs*, Hannibal Lecter, is a perfect example. Who will forget Lecter's culinary account revolving around a census taker's liver and some fava beans and a nice Chianti?

Find an instance when your character can gently make fun of himself. Work that into a scene early in the book. This makes for a great first impression on the reader.

Look closely at your dialogue and tweak some lines to lightly deflate moments that might be too emotional. Lighten the moment with a fresh line. If you can come up with a killer *bon mot*, so much

*Continued on Page 10*

## Transom Notes

**Deborah Shlian**, co-author of the Award Winning Thriller *RABBIT IN THE MOON*, and **Linda Reid** have signed with Oceanview Publishing for the December 2009 release of the first book in the Sammy Greene Thriller series, *DEAD AIR*. The second book in the series, *DEVIL WIND*, is set in Los Angeles and slated for release in early 2011.

**Paul Levine's** *ILLEGAL*, was released in March.

**Robert S. Levinson** makes another appearance in *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* with "Between Sins" scheduled for the June issue.

**John Shannon's** 11th Jack Liffey book, *PALOS VERDES BLUE*, launched mid April. He'll be signing on **May 16, Saturday, 1 PM**, Mysteries to Die For, Thousand Oaks; **May 20, 7 PM**, Poisoned Pen, Scottsdale, AZ; **May 21, 4:30 PM**, Clues Unlimited, Tucson, AZ; **May 23, Saturday, 2 PM**, Well-Red Coyote, Sedona, AZ; **May 30, Saturday, 2-4 PM**, Williams Bookstore, reading, discussion as part of their centenary celebration, San Pedro.

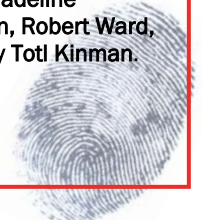
The eighth book in **Laura Levine's** Jane Austen mystery series is out this month (May) from Kensington Books.

**Elizabeth Gunn's** second Tucson procedural, *NEW RIVER BLUES*, is due for release **May 1**.

**Steven M. Thomas'** debut novel, *CRIMINAL PARADISE*, now available in paperback, has been selected as a finalist for BEST FIRST NOVEL by the International Thriller Writers. Steve will be a guest and panelist at Thrillerfest in New York City this summer, where the winning novel will be announced. Steve's second novel, *CRIMINAL KARMA*, which continues the exploits of SoCal career criminal Robert Rivers, will be published by Ballantine in July.

**Ben Malisow's** *BELEAGUERED* was featured on the Lit 103.3 broadcast/podcast; <http://lit1033.com/2008/02/21/lenny-in-love-by-steven-wander-and-beleaguered-by-ben-malisaw.aspx>.

**Jeri Westerson** will be signing her novel *VEIL OF LIES* at the following locations: **Saturday, May 16, 10:30 AM** at the Alta Vista Country Club, 777 Alta Vista St., Placentia, CA 92870, (714) 524-1591, Placentia Friends of the Library; **Tuesday, May 19, 2009–11:00 AM**, Valle Vista Library, 25757 Fairview Ave., Hemet, CA 92544, (951) 927-2611, **Sunday, June 7, 2009–Mystery Author Panel, 2:30-3:30 PM**. El Segundo Author Fair, El Segundo Public Library, 111 W. Mariposa Avenue, El Segundo, CA 90245, (310) 524-2729; **Saturday, June 13, 2009–2 PM**, Upland Library, 450 N Euclid Ave., Upland, CA 91786, (909) 931-4200, **Friday, June 19 - Baseball!** The Epicenter, Rancho Cucamonga Stadium, "Writer's Cafe" starting at 6:15 PM. Enjoy baseball and books! Signing along side authors **Eric Stone, Gary Phillips, Bob Fate, Alan Cook, Charles Fleming, Kent Braithwaite, Sheila Lowe, Madeline Gornell, Naomi Hirahara, Sue Ann Jaffarian, Robert Ward, Jack Maebay, Evan Gilgore, Jean Ardell, Gay Toti Kinman.**



**"Wit and It" Continued from Page 9**

the better.

Make sure your character has an attitude all his own and *feel* it when you write. Let the voice come through hot in your first draft. You can always scale it back later.

IT

The novelist Elinor Glynn coined the term "It" for the Roaring '20s generation. By *It* Glynn meant personal magnetism—sex appeal as well as a quality that invites admiration (or envy) among others. Someone who walks into a room and draws all the attention has *It*.

We've all known people like that, but getting it on the page can be difficult.

One way is to have the *It* character described either by the author or other characters. Margaret Mitchell does the former in the opening line of *Gone With the Wind*:

*Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm, as the Tarleton twins were.*

Here we are told by the author that Scarlett has *It*. But then Mitchell wisely provides some action to back it up:

*But she smiled when she spoke, consciously deepening her dimple and fluttering her bristly black lashes as swiftly as butterflies' wings. The boys were enchanted, as she had intended them to be, and they hastened to apologize for boring her.*

Later, at the barbeque at Twelve Oaks, Scarlett sits on an ottoman under an oak tree, surrounded by men. The scene gives us more proof of Scarlett's sex appeal. And, of course, Rhett Butler, who could have any woman, is drawn to her as well.

To capture *It* you must, again, *feel* it in your characters. Here are some tips to help you get there:

Before you begin writing, hunt down a visual for your character. Go through magazines until you find a picture that seems to shout, *This is what she looks like!* Clip the picture and keep it for reference during your writing.

Imagine a party where several people are chatting, and your character walks into the room, dressed to the nines. How do the other characters react? What do they say about your character? Record these things for possible use in your novel.

Work into your novel an early scene where another character is drawn to your main character. This can be because of sex appeal, power or fascination. It can be subtle or overt. But this will set *It* in the minds of the readers.

*Grit*, *Wit* and *It*. Work them into your main character, and you'll be on your way to creating unforgettable fiction.

James Scott Bell ([www.jamescottbell.com](http://www.jamescottbell.com)) is the author of *Try Dying*, *Try Darkness* and the forthcoming *Try Fear* from Hachette/Center Street. He is also the author of Writers Digest Book's #1 bestseller, *Write Great Fiction: Plot & Structure*. This article is adapted from Bell's latest WD release, *Write Great Fiction: Revision & Self-Editing*. He has taught novel writing at Pepperdine University, the Santa Barbara Writers Conference and numerous conferences in the United States and London. He was the fiction columnist for Writers Digest magazine, following in the footsteps of his first influence, Lawrence Block. He grew up, lives and writes in LA.

## Editors to Give Advice on Rewriting, Creating Proposals, Building a Book Career at California Crime Writers Conference

By Naomi Hirahara

An acquisition editor of a mystery small press and a former executive editor at New York publishing house are among the literary professionals who will lead workshops, panels and manuscript consultations at the inaugural California Crime Writers Conference, co-sponsored by the SoCal MWA and Sisters in Crime L.A., on June 13-14 at the Hilton Pasadena.



Annette Rogers

Annette Rogers, the acquisitions editor of the Poisoned Pen Press in Phoenix, Arizona, will speak on "It's Been Done: Keeping Your Books Current," as well as serving on a panel on e-publishing and the writer's bottom line.

According to Rogers, she is always on the search for new, unpublished mystery writers. Recent successes include *Sweeping Up Glass* by Carolyn Wall, *Murder On Mykonos* by Jeffrey Siger and *Lone Star* by Edward Ifkovic.

Daniel Smetanka, a former executive editor at Ballantine/Random House, Inc., will lead a workshop on rewriting. He will also be providing manuscript consultations at the conference. At Random House, Smetanka acquired and published a number of award-winning debut books, including *The Ice Harvest* by Scott Phillips, *The Speed of Light* by Elizabeth Rosner, *Down to a Soundless Sea* by Thomas



Daniel Smetanka

*Continued on Page 11*

## Fresh Blood

### Active

Tom Epperson (Culver City, CA)  
David Fuller (Santa Monica, CA)  
(Both our Active members were nominated for the Best First Novel Edgar for 2009.)

### Affiliate

R. B. Ripley (Los Angeles, CA)  
Steven B. Stevens (Los Angeles, CA)  
Julie M. Hill (Riverside, CA)  
John Madinger (Honolulu, HI)  
Gina Micale (Sierra Madre, CA)



**"Editors Advice" Continued...**

Steinbeck, *Color* by Victoria Finlay and *Among the Missing* by Dan Chaon, which was a 2001 finalist for the National Book Award.



Marci Baun

Other publishers/editors include Marci Baun, the electronic publisher of both Wild Child Publishing and Freya's Bower. She will be on the e-publishing workshop with Rogers, author Marilyn Meredith, and moderator Gary Phillips.

Julie McCarron, a ghost writer who worked as an editor for many years for Beverly Hills-

based New Millennium Press, will be talking about the nonfiction book proposal with agent Claire Gerus and Sisters in Crime L.A. president Diana James.



Julie McCarron

Other workshop leaders and panelists are Jan Burke, Robin Burcell, Barbara DeMarco-Barrett, Kim Dower, Dianne Emley, Jerrilyn Farmer, Bill Fitzhugh, J. Corey Friedman, Kenny "Kenji" Gallo, Lee Goldberg, Carolyn Howard-Johnson, Melodie Johnson Howe, TJ Johnston, Leslie S. Klinger, Kathryn Lilley, representatives of the Los Angeles Police Department, D.P. Lyle, Gayle Lynds, Matthew Randazzo V, Christopher Rice, Maureen Serra, Montrose Search and Rescue Team, representatives of the Pasadena Police Department, Patricia Smiley, Eric Stone, James Lincoln Warren and John Morgan Wilson.

Participating agents are Claire Gerus, Jill Marsal of Marsal Lyon Agency, David Hale Smith of DHS Literary, Timothy Wager of David Wager Agency, Irene Webb, and Sandra Zane of Global Literary Management. Additional literary representatives who plan to attend the agents reception on Saturday evening include Betsy Amster, Paula Allen and Constance Baldwin of Screenland Literary Associates, Ken Sherman, Paul S. Levine, Angela Rinaldi, Patricia Teal, Frank R. Scatoni of Venture Literary and Scott Mortenson of Secret Agent Man.

There are still some openings for manuscript consultations with agents, editors and published authors.

Registration is \$300 until June 12; manuscript critiques of five pages are an additional \$50.

For more information, see [www.socalmwa.com/ccwc.htm](http://www.socalmwa.com/ccwc.htm) or [www.sistersincrimela.com/ccwc.htm](http://www.sistersincrimela.com/ccwc.htm).

**Wear SoCal MWA Pride!**

Thanks to the work of board member Richard Brewer, the Southern California chapter of Mystery Writers of America finally has its own T-shirt! Our original logo was merged with our web site logo, designed by former SoCal MWA president James Lincoln Warren. The T-shirt, available in sizes small to XXX large, is being sold for

\$10 and will be available for purchase at our various events. The back of the T-shirt features the Raymond Chandler quote, "Trouble is my business."

**House Without a Key Performed in Hawaii**

By Hal Glatzer



Here are two production stills from Earl Derr Biggers' 1925 Charlie Chan mystery, "The House Without A Key."

It was performed the first week of March, on the Big Island of Hawaii, first for three nights in Hilo, after which we took the show on the road, across the island, and performed it on the opening night of Left Coast Crime, in Waikoloa, Saturday Mar. 8. This was the first time "The House Without A Key" has ever been mounted on stage, and—with one silent film exception—the

first time Chan has ever been portrayed by an Asian-American actor. The first photo is Ron Serrao as Chan, as he is being informed of the murder on Waikiki Beach.

I adapted the novel into a one-act play, and took the role of Dan Winterslip. The other performers were members of various local theater groups: the Hilo Community Players, the Kilauea Drama and Entertainment Network, and students and faculty in the Performing Arts department of the University of Hawaii at Hilo.



The second photo is from the denouement, when Chan gathers all the suspects together and names the killer: l-r: Ron Serrao (Charles Chan, HPD); Laura Caswell (Minerva Winterslip); Soraya Perez (Barbara Winterslip); Steve Peyton (Timothy Brade); Kalani

Spain (Harry Jennison); John Evans (Joseph Barclay); Israel Wilson (Beachcomber); and Phillip Taylor (Capt. Hallett, HPD).



## MARCH OF CRIME



MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA  
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Editor: Jeri Westerson

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To advertise in TMOC, visit our website at [www.SoCalMWA.com](http://www.SoCalMWA.com) for information.

Any opinions expressed herein are those of each author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Mystery Writers of America or the local chapter.

### Next Meeting:

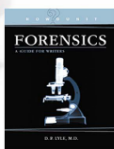
Orange County Sisters in Crime  
& SoCal Mystery Writers of America  
Presents

## New Discoveries of the *Black Dahlia* Murder Investigation

Author **Steve Hodel** in Conversation  
with author and forensics expert,  
**D.P. Lyle, M.D.**



Join us for an exciting discussion on the latest evidence of the Black Dahlia murder case with author Steve Hodel, retired Los Angeles police detective and private investigator. D.P. Lyle, M.D., brings expert forensic opinion to the table in what is sure to be a lively forum. Who did it? Is the murderer as Hodel contends? Find out.



**Sunday, May 17, 1 pm**  
A Light Buffet will be served  
Admission is Free

Please make reservations with Rob at  
[secretary@ocsistersincrime.org](mailto:secretary@ocsistersincrime.org)

Meeting is at the Irvine Ranch Water District  
15600 Sand Canyon Ave., Irvine, CA 92618  
For further info visit [www.ocsistersincrime.org](http://www.ocsistersincrime.org)

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## LAST WORD



The picture shows the last SoCalMWA meeting on March 22 in Little Tokyo, where we heard a reading from noir author Christa Faust and an interview with book reviewer Dick Lochte and author and Chandler aficionado Judith Freeman.