



The
MARCH

of CRIME

Inside this issue

[President's Rap Sheet p. 2](#)

[Editor's Corner p. 3](#)

[Fresh Blood p. 3](#)

[Over the Transom p. 4](#)

[Member Appearances p. 6](#)

[LATFOB Photos p. 9](#)

[Hollow Points p. 12](#)

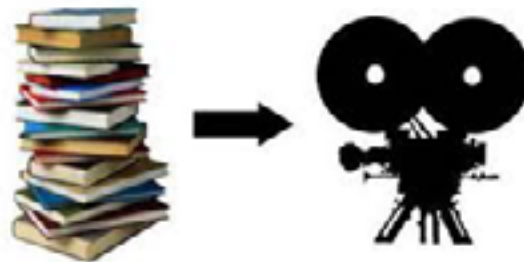
[Writing is Hard p.13](#)

[Crime Calendar p. 17](#)

[Last Word p.18](#)

SoCalMWA Luncheon Sunday, May 22

FROM PAGE TO SCREEN



With
Terrill Lee Lankford
Jordan Harper
Elissa Matsueda
Richard Lange

Moderated by Eric Beetner
([click here for speaker bios](#))

Join us for this discussion of the unique skills required and the pitfalls encountered as writers adapt novels or short stories for the screen, big and small.

Tam O'Shanter Restaurant
2980 Los Feliz Blvd, Los Angeles
Noon - 2:30pm
(Doors open at 11:30am)

Valet or street parking available

You'll place your food order at the Tam. No need to preorder. The menu choices will include their famous Prime Rib, plus vegetarian and gluten-free options.

[RESERVE YOUR PLACE AT THIS EVENT](#)

SoCalMWA Luncheon:
Saturday, June 11

**Cocktail Party at
Jim Ziskin's**

[More Info](#)



The President's Rap Sheet

Craig Faustus Buck

Last week I got to go to the Edgar Awards for the first time. I'll admit it; I was excited.

This was, indeed, my first rodeo. I once had a chance to go to the Academy Awards when a short film I wrote was nominated, but I passed up the invitation. It seemed like too much hassle to deal with the crowds and the traffic and the parking just to hobnob with a bunch of movie stars who make their living interpreting words written by others. But at the Edgars you get to hobnob with those others, the authors who create the magic, your fellow writers.

I went because I'd been asked to be a presenter. That's right. I got to make bad jokes, read the nominees for Best TV Episode, and say "And the Edgar goes to...." ("Gently with the Women," George Gently, teleplay by Peter Flannery).

This was an honor that entailed wearing a tux and, even worse, a bow tie. Most of you are probably familiar with my haberdashery habits, but for those who aren't, I tend toward shorts, T-shirts and sandals. When more formality is required, I trot out my shorts without cargo pockets. Closed-toed shoes are reserved for rainy weather and my extensive tie collection is maintained for the closet moths.

Thus it was with some petulance that I excavated my dad's old tux from the back of my closet. When he died more than two decades ago, I had it taken in. Two weeks ago, I had to have it let back out. The ordeal of getting it to New York unscathed on a red-eye that had cramped overhead storage and no hanging space was a suspense-thriller that bordered on horror.

The reason I'm telling you this is that, as I prepared to address the elite of the crime writing and publishing communities, my anguish over that tux became a handy tool of procrastination from the true target of my angst: writing the lame jokes I was going to make before the Edgar presentation. That tux anxiety allowed me to avoid my writing chore so long that I ended up having to wing it.

Even for only one or two lines, the blank page can be a daunting thing, a quicksand launching pad for all creative journeys. Which underscores why an Edgar Award is so much more meaningful than an Academy Award (writing Oscars excepted). Huge congrats to everyone who won or was nominated for an Edgar (including our own **Glen Erik Hamilton** and **Gordon McAlpine**), but even more kudos to all of you who heed the call to put your words and yourselves on the line, and between the lines, of that tabula rasa every day.

Craig

Chapter Officers

President: Craig Faustus Buck
VP: Sue Ann Jaffarian
Treasurer: Eric Beetner
Secretary: Terri Nolan

Board of Directors

Shannon Baker
 Matt Coyle
 Jessica Kaye
 Elizabeth Little
 Paul D. Marks
 Travis Richardson
 James Ziskin

Mystery Writers of America
 Southern California Chapter
 3520 Overland Avenue, #A-82
 Los Angeles, CA 90034

Contact: info@socalmwa.com
 Website: <http://socalmwa.com>

[Like us on Facebook](#)
<https://facebook.com/groups/72570009680>

Join our SoCalMWA
 Yahoo! group
 for chapter news & info

Email SoCalMWA-subscribe@yahoo.com to join
 (members only)

NATIONAL OFFICE

Mystery Writers of America
 1140 Broadway #1507
 New York, NY 10001
 t. 212.888.8171
 f. 212.888.8107

mwa@mysterywriters.org
<http://mysterywriters.org>



The EDITOR'S CORNER

Holly West

Do you have a writing bucket list? This past week, I crossed a big item off of mine: I attended the Edgar Awards banquet in New York City and in addition to celebrating the nominations of two SoCalMWA members, **Glen Erik Hamilton** and **Gordon McAlpine**, I got to hangout with some of the most talented people in crime fiction. What an experience! If you ever have the chance to go, do it.

Now I'm home and it's back to business. This month's issue features [photos from the LA Times Festival of books](#), plus two great articles: In "[Hollow Points](#)," **Gregory Von Dare** discusses guns used by the CIA and in "[Breaking News: Writing is Hard](#)," **Dennis Palumbo** kindly explains why writers aren't, in fact, "all crazy." It just feels that way sometimes.



Here's the proof that Craig wore a tux.
Holly West and Craig Faustus Buck
2016 Edgar Awards

Holly

The March of Crime is the newsletter of the Southern California Chapter of the Mystery Writers of America.

Editor: [Holly West](#)

May Contributors:
Gregory Von Dare
Dennis Palumbo

Opinions expressed herein are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Mystery Writers of America Southern California Chapter.

Contact us at:
themarchofcrime@gmail.com

FRESH BLOOD

SoCalMWA welcomes its new and returning members:

Lisa LeCarre



Like us on Facebook

Join our **SoCalMWA**
Yahoo! group
for chapter news & info

Email
SoCalMWA-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
to join (members only)

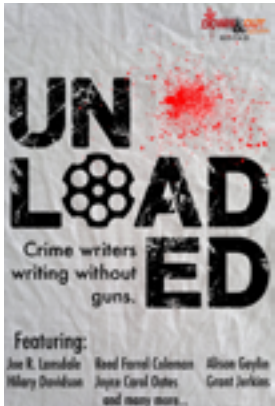
OVER the TRANSOM

Member News



DP Lyle launches his new Jake Longly comedic thriller series with DEEP SIX, to be released July 5th from Oceanview. Details: <http://www.dplylemd.com/books.html>.

Gay Tolt Kinman's new short stories from Mysterious Women on Kindle: In "Bowlful of Death," A husband buys his soup-loving wife a special bowl. When she dies, the police and Public Health Department come a-callin'. In "Permanently Deleted," a strange flash of light emanates from an apartment building. It wouldn't matter except six people have been reported missing in that area. Finally, in "Not One More Word," a bestselling English author and his wife are about to divorce. She has to sign the divorce agreement after he gets a hefty advance from the publisher.



Sarah M. Chen's short story, "Pig Boy," will be included in the Dead Guns Press anthology, HARDBOILED: DAMES & SIN with a tentative release date of May 16. Sarah's debut noir novella, CLEANING UP FINN, will be released by All Due Respect Books on May 15, 2016. It features womanizing restaurant manager Finn Roose who loses an underage girl on one of his infamous booze cruises, setting off a massive manhunt. Finn is an expert manipulator but his endless lies only tighten the screws on himself and his unsuspecting best friend. CLEANING UP FINN will be available as an e-book and POD.

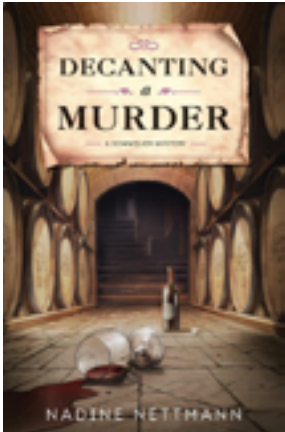
UNLOADED: CRIME WRITERS WRITING WITHOUT GUNS was released by Down & Out Books on April 18. Edited by **Eric Beetner** and featuring stories by **S.W. Lauden**, **Holly West** and many more, proceeds from this anthology benefit States United to Prevent Gun Violence (ceasefireusa.org).

Gary Phillips is chairing this year's committee for Sister's in Crime's Eleanor Taylor Bland Crime Fiction Writers of Color Award. It's an annual grant of \$1500 for an emerging writer of color in the mystery field. Applications are now being accepted until July 1. For details, visit <http://www.sistersincrime.org/page/EleanorTaylorBland>.

John Morgan Wilson's "Dial M for Marsha" is included in the special June issue of *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*, which is dedicated to MWA and was published to coincide with the Edgars. John, a former Edgar winner in the Best First category, deemed his latest EQMM story "a bit of a mind bender that definitely had my mind in twists as I wrote it."

Severn House has purchased the sixth novel in **Elizabeth Gunn's** Tucson series. Expected pub date, August 2016.

OVER the TRANSOM



DECANTING A MURDER, **Nadine Nettmann's** debut novel, will be published on May 8th. This is the first in a wine themed mystery series and every chapter is paired with wine.

Glen Erik Hamilton's PAST CRIMES has been nominated for Best First Novel at the 2016 Barry Awards.

Laurie Stevens' short story, "The Bag Lady," was featured in a review in [Mystery Scene Magazine](#).

Nancy Raven Smith's traditional mystery, LAND SHARKS -- A SWINDLE IN SUMATRA, was chosen as a finalist in the 2016 Beverly Hills Book Awards Competition in the Mystery Category.

Gregory Von Dare has placed a book with the relatively new [Amazon Scout program](#). This new program features an advance for books that are published and gives authors the advantage of promotion and distribution by Amazon.

Craig Faustus Buck's pre-Wall Berlin mystery-espionage short story "Blank Shot" will be published May 22 in Darkhouse Books' BLACK COFFEE anthology.



Do you have writing news to share with our chapter?
Email it to TheMarchofCrime@gmail.com
by May 20 for inclusion in the June issue.

Applications Now Being Accepted

Sisters in Crime's Eleanor Taylor Bland Crime Fiction Writers of Color Award is an annual grant of \$1,500 for an emerging writer of color in the mystery field. Applications are being accepted until July 1. For details visit <http://www.sistersincrime.org/page/EleanorTaylorBland>

Member APPEARANCES

Sarah M. Chen and **S.W. Lauden** will be signing and discussing their noir novels, *CLEANING UP FINN* and *CROSSWISE*, at Mysterious Galaxy in San Diego on Saturday, May 28 at 2pm.

Eric Beetner, **Holly West** and **S.W. Lauden** will appear at the West Coast launch of *UNLOADED: CRIME WRITERS WRITING WITHOUT GUNS*, at Pegasus Books in Berkeley (2349 Shattuck Avenue) on May 6 at 7:30pm. Authors Joe Clifford, Tom Pitts and Kelli Stanley will also participate.



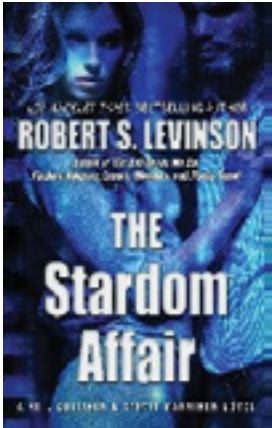
Eva Batonne

Eva Batonne will be presenting “Reading Outloud to a Crowd” on Saturday, May 21, 1-3pm in the Patio Room of the Faith Presbyterian Church, 5000 Colfax Avenue, North Hollywood. Learn how to captivate your audience from the beginning, starting with your name and a short bio. This will be a hands-on event, so bring a page or a paragraph from your work to learn how to do a knock-out live read in front of an audience. All writers can benefit from this workshop, especially if you have never worked in front of an audience before. And for those with a few novels under their belt, we can always use a refresher course. Your writing might be good—now learn to read it live, like a pro. Batonne is the author of *RESURRECTION DIVA* and *ANGEL INK*. “Not everyone is an award-winning performer but anyone can stand by their work and read it to an audience.” It is Batonne’s intention that you have a chance to do justice to your writing and develop the skills you need to attract readers and create interest in your work. This is a Sisters in Crime event. Members \$10, Non-members \$25. [Register here](#).

Tammy Kaehler will continue to promote her new release, *RED FLAGS*, with a signing May 1, 2 p.m., at Book Carnival in Orange (with **S.K. Rizzolo**) and with participation in CozyCon at The Poisoned Pen bookstore in Phoenix on May 7, 1-5 p.m. After that, she’ll read at the SinCLA meeting May 15 and speak at OC SinC’s meeting May 22, before traveling to Indianapolis for the Indy500, where she’ll also speak at a high school and have a signing at IndyReads Bookstore in Indianapolis on May 28 at 3 p.m.

Pamela Asbury-Smith will present a slide presentation to Sisters-in-Crime: Kaho`olawe Island Remediation and Restoration, Saturday May 21, 10am, Viscount Suites Hotel, Tucson AZ. Pamela worked for UXB (Unexploded Bombs) on the island as a HAZWOPR certified QA archaeologist. She will describe the efforts made to clear the island of fifty years of accumulated ordnance, the environmental concerns associated with long-term bombing, quality assurance oversight of recording of archaeological sites that may have suffered damage, and restoration of native vegetation. The Project has since been completed, the island has been deemed clear, and returned to the Hawaiians for continued restoration and ceremonial use.

Member APPEARANCES



Robert S. Levinson launches *THE STARDOM AFFAIR* with a reception, reading and Q&A about Hollywood on Tuesday, May 10, 7:30 p.m., at Skylight Books, 1818 N. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles 90027, phone: 323.660.1175. Among other appearances set for the month: Saturday, May 14, 1 p.m., Book Carnival, 348 S. Tustin Street, Orange, CA 92866, phone: 714.538.3210; and Saturday, May 21, 1 p.m., Mysterious Galaxy, 5943 Balboa Ave., Ste. #100, San Diego, CA 92111, phone: 858.268.4747. *THE STARDOM AFFAIR*, his thirteenth crime novel, reunites L.A. newspaper columnist Neil Gulliver with his ex-wife, “Sex Queen of the Soaps” Stevie Marriner.

Sony and TCM are bringing back to local theaters the classic movie, “ON THE WATERFRONT,” winner of eight Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor and Best Screenplay. **Andrew Kaplan**, whose first literary agent was Ad Schulberg and who was a friend of Budd Schulberg’s, who wrote the Oscar-winning screenplay, will present the incredible inside story of how Elia Kazan, Arthur Miller, Budd Schulberg, Harry Cohn, head of Columbia Pictures and producer Sam Spiegel (whom Schulberg wanted to kill during the writing) were all involved in the creation of this landmark movie, which almost didn’t get made. Desert Screenwriters Group on April 26 at the La Quinta Country Club.

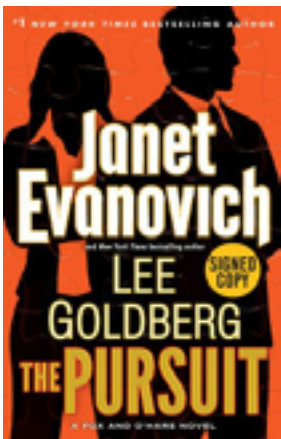
On April 10, a beautiful Sunday, **David E. Knop** launched his new thriller, *ANIMAL PARTS*, in Coronado, California. The cowboy band, The Silver Spurs, energized the event with a little Merle, Hank and Johnny. About 85 fans heard David E. Knop read a selection from his latest southwestern thriller and answer questions about his main character, Peter Romero. Of particular interest was Romero’s belief in his ancestors’ religion and the concept of animal spiritual guides. A great start for an exciting book.



Do you have an upcoming appearance you’d like to share?
Email it to TheMarchofCrime@gmail.com
by May 20 for inclusion in the June issue.

Member APPEARANCES

On May 28th, **Sheila Lowe** will be traveling to the Central Coast Sisters in Crime to speak about how her character, Claudia Rose, uses handwriting analysis to understand the people she deals with in the forensic handwriting mysteries.



Lee Goldberg and former MWA president Janet Evanovich will be at Mysterious Galaxy at 6 pm on June 21st, and at Vroman's in Pasadena at 6 pm on June 22nd, signing their fifth Fox & O'Hare novel, *THE PURSUIT*.

Dianne Emley will be a panelist in the "Publishing Paths" workshop presented by the Coastal Dunes Branch of the California Writers Club on May 21 at the Nipomo Library Community Room, 918 West Tefft Street, Nipomo, CA. Which path to publication is right for you: Traditional? Small/Independent? Self-Publishing? Prices for the workshop: \$35 for CWC members; \$40 for non-members by May 1st, \$45 thereafter. Limited to 30 attendees. Contact: info@coastaldunesCWC.com.

Join **Jan Burke** and **DP Lyle** for Crime & Science Radio. Upcoming schedule:

5-7-16: Crime and Science Radio: Personal Violence: Sex and Domestic Crimes: An Interview with Former Federal Prosecutor and Author Allison Leotta

6-4-16: Forensic Science Then and Now: an Interview with Forensic Scientist Jay Jarvis

Details: <http://www.dplylemd.com/crime--science-radio.html>

MYSTERY AUTHORS OF HAWAII ISLAND

Those of us who live on what's popularly called "the Big Island" of Hawaii, have formed a collegial group called Mystery Authors of Hawaii Island (MAHI). We meet on the third Wednesday of each month to discuss our published and in-process works, and share ideas about promotions and publicity. We write in several mystery genres, but we all have in common our connections to Hawaii – where we set many of our stories – and our geographical distance from colleagues in the regional chapters of MWA and Sisters in Crime.

For more information, [email hal@halglatzer.com](mailto:hal@halglatzer.com).

You Oughta Be in Pictures

LA Times Festival of Books



Craig Faustus Buck and Tammy Kaehler



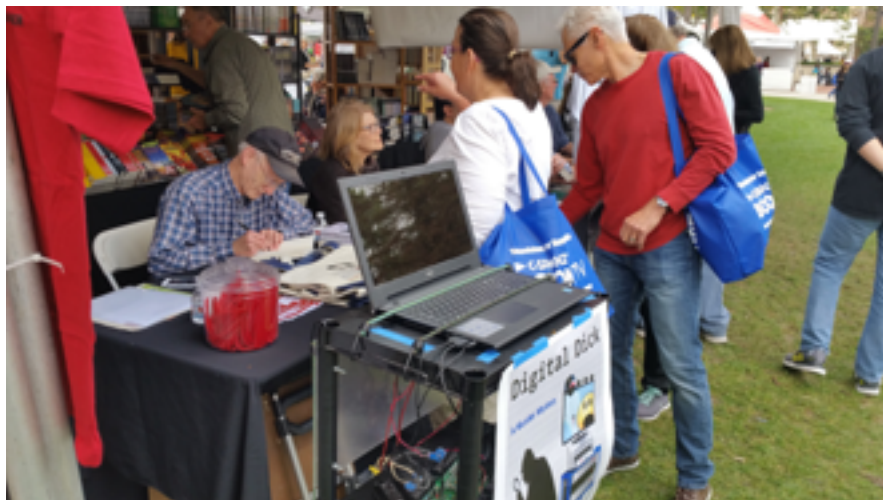
Rochelle Staab



Glen Erik Hamilton



L - R: Tammy Kaehler, Michael Connelly, David Putnam, Matt Coyle and Carlene O'Neil



John Mullen with his robot, signing a copy of DIGITAL DICK

You Oughta Be in Pictures

LA Times Festival of Books



L - R: James Ziskin, Mike Befeler, S.W. Lauden and Stephen J. Schwartz



L - R: Terri Nolan, Eric Beetner and Tinker Lindsay



John Mullen and Sherri Leigh James



Nancy Raven Smith and Lawrence H. Levy



Nathan Walpow and Mysterious Galaxy's Maryelizabeth Yturralde



L - R: Lee Goldberg, Mystery Ink's Debbie Mitsch and T. Jefferson Parker

You Oughta Be in Pictures

LA Times Festival of Books



L - R: B & N Events coordinator Lita Weissman, Marcia Clark, Lee Goldberg and Michael Connolly



L - R: Marcia Clark, T. Jefferson Parker and Lee Goldberg



L - R: Barry Eisler, Lee Goldberg, Greg Hurwitz and James Rollins



Craig Faustus Buck



Gregory Von Dare



Hollow Points

Gregory Von Dore

If You Desire Peace

There are some problems in writing about weapons used by the CIA. First, you can't really believe what you hear or read. Second, the CIA has used virtually every type of armament available on the world market at some time or other. Third, there's nothing very exotic in the kind of firearms chosen by the "Company" for general use. But that's not the whole story.

Historically, the CIA made use of two kinds of weapons, under the very broad umbrella of firearms. There were normal, store-bought pistols and rifles and a parallel top-secret class of unique, hand-crafted, covert firearms built into pens, cigarette lighters and canes (among other things) which could fire one or more rounds of ammunition and were used mostly for assassinations. We'll cover the standard issue firearms this time and delve into the hush-hush world of covert firearms next time.



The 9mm Luger or Parabellum bullet is made and used all over the world.

One proviso is that the choice of firearms outside the USA is always linked to the availability of ammunition, with the 9mm Parabellum* (9 x 19mm) round favored in many situations since it is so commonplace internationally. Because the CIA operates worldwide, their selection of firearms for field agents was in large part influenced by the ultimate destination. A 9mm Parabellum round is very close to our own .38 Special, but not interchangeable.

You can divide CIA operatives into three separate, functional groups: analysts, field-agents and paramilitary MSP (Military Special Projects) and SOG (Special Operations Groups), the hard guys. Analysts are basically number crunchers and data miners. They sift through books, newspapers, phone calls and so on, looking for patterns, links, tells and bits of exposed, actionable intelligence. They lead boring lives, despite their employer. Most of them work out of Foggy Bottom, Virginia, the CIA Headquarters. It is very rare for an analyst to be armed under any circumstance, although not unknown.

Traditionally, spies don't do the spying themselves. Field agents are expected to "turn" members of foreign governments into spies for the USA. This is not so hard in Brazil, but much more difficult in Iran or North Korea. Foreigners do not work directly for the CIA, but are under the control of their American handler or spymaster. As these CIA handlers are indeed spies, they are armed for self-defense. In the cold-war days, this would probably mean a FN-Browning HP-35, in 9mm Parabellum. Today, a spy working directly for or in American Embassies would probably use a government issued pistol such as a Glock G19 in 9mm or a SIG Sauer P229DAK also in 9mm.

Breaking News: Writing is Hard

Guest Spotlight by **Dennis Palumbo**

This article originally appeared in [Psychology Today](#).

As a psychotherapist who specializes in working with creative people, I'm often asked to speak at writing conferences. At one such recent event, an audience member stood up and asked a question.

"When I write," he said, "I feel like I don't always know what I'm doing. I go over stuff, then I cross stuff out, then I try something else...I feel like I'm losing it sometimes. What does that mean?"

I shrugged. "It means you're a writer."

"But I spend a lot of time worrying, never sure whether or not the damned thing is working.."

"Sounds like writing to me."

This did not erase the perplexed look on his face.

"I don't know about that." He glanced around the crowded room. "I mean, I heard the other day on the radio that we're all crazy."

"Who's crazy?"

"Us. Writers. Artists in general. This shrink was on some talk show on NPR, and he said it's been proven that we're all bipolar."

"I'm confused. Do you mean that because you're a writer you're bipolar, or does being bipolar cause you to be a writer?"

"He said it could be one or the other, but it could be both. What do you think?"

"I think I'm gonna skip the next NPR pledge drive."

Apparently, it's in fashion again: the notion that the creative impulse, with its occasional emotional difficulties, is merely the product of a psychological disorder. It must be, the argument goes, given how much emotional turmoil, stress and disordered mood is often associated with it.

The current favorite diagnosis for artists, particularly writers, is bipolar disorder---what used to be called manic-depression.

In fact, there's a movie currently in release---based on Kay Jamison's influential book, TOUCHED WITH FIRE---that reinforces this very concept. But the idea that writers are of a single and highly neurotic type goes all the way back to---who else?---Freud. Later, in the 1950's, a fellow named Edmund Bergler (credited, by the way, with inventing the term "writer's block") wrote a number of books on the subject. His explanation for the reason that writers write? "Psychic masochism."

[Continued on page 15](#)

Hollow Points - [continued from pg 12](#)

These guns are world-class firearms and are used by a large number of American federal agencies. They both have advanced modern designs, have a double-action trigger for quick response, are meant for concealed carry. They are light-weight for easy use by agents of both sexes, fit left or right-handers and can hold up to seventeen rounds.

Field agents under deep cover, the James Bonds of today, would probably lean toward the Sig P290RS, a tiny 9mm handgun only 5 inches long and 3 inches high, weighing a scant 20.5 ounces, and with a magazine capacity of six shots. The P290RS NL model has a built-in laser sight and is probably the most dangerous pocket gun in use today. Like other Sig pistols (and Glockes), the P290 is a DAO (double-action only) gun and can be carried without engaging a safety.

Double-action means that the gun fires every time you pull the trigger (until empty). No cocking of a hammer is necessary. DAO guns have a slightly longer, heavier trigger pull, but that is not much of an issue in modern handguns.

In contrast, older designs like the Colt 1911 A1 .45 semi-auto handgun are single-action and need to be manually cocked before they can fire. Every shot re-cocks the gun for single-action firing. The advantage is that you have a shorter, faster, lighter trigger pull but the disadvantage is that you either have to cock the gun under duress or disengage the safety of an already cocked gun before it will fire. Most modern revolvers are single/double-action. They can fire from a trigger pull or from a cocked hammer. A revolver is always more reliable and often lighter than a semi-automatic but is more limited in the shots you get, with the usual number being five or six.



Ideal for hidden use, the SIG 290RS uses 9mm ammunition.

SOG teams are essentially military outfits, but under direct control of the CIA. They are the ones who helicopter into a foreign country, perform a military action or rescue and extract in the same way. Which is not to say that everything always goes according to plan, but that's the gist of it. Mostly, they use the same weapons as other special ops units. On the American side, that would be the Colt M4A1 assault carbine in 5.57mm but these troops are trained to use any weapon available, especially the Kalashnikov AK-47, if only to confuse the locals.

Next month, we'll delve into the hidden world of custom weapons, where every compass, cigar and library book may be a deadly firearm. Is that a pen in your pocket or...?

**The 9mm Parabellum cartridge is named after a famous Roman saying by Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus from about 300AD: Si vis pacem, para bellum. If you desire peace, prepare for war.*

Gregory Von Dare comes from Chicago and was raised on crime, corruption and clout in the big city. He has written non-fiction books, magazine articles and radio scripts, as well as stories, plays and screenplays. He once worked as a pyro detonator and talent manager for Universal Studios Hollywood.

Breaking News: Writing is Hard - [continued from page 13](#)

Of course, the idea that the artistic impulse is inevitably the product of a psychological condition is not new. History is filled with examples of the tormented artist stricken with melancholy, going on drunken binges, cutting off an ear, and generally behaving--as we therapists like to say--inappropriately. But to infer that some kind of "craziness" underlies creative endeavor, or, even worse, that the impulse to create is itself an indicator of some clinical condition is just plain wrong.

First, to whatever extent a therapist believes in the validity of diagnostic labels like "bipolar," one thing is clear: Labels exist for the convenience of the labeler. How helpful they are to the artistic person is debatable.

Second, claiming that the creative impulse comes from any one source--whether mania, psychosis or the moon--is both ludicrous and potentially harmful. Ludicrous because it's oversimplified and inconsistent with the lived experience of countless artists. Potentially harmful because it undervalues the mysterious, indefinable aspects of the creative act.

I'm reminded of a quote by H.L. Mencken, who said, "There is always an easy solution to every human problem--neat, plausible and wrong." The tendency to see a writer's creative struggles solely in terms of evidencing a psychological problem betrays a profound narrowness in scope, imagination, and appreciation for the hidden ways of the artistic heart.

The point is, yes, perhaps Van Gogh did suffer from symptoms that we might label bipolar. But what is also true--and certainly more important--is that he was supremely talented. Both facts can co-exist, without one necessarily causing the other.

Which brings me back to that worried audience member. Because the truth is, he's not alone in his concern about what his creative struggles mean. Many writer patients in my therapy practice wonder about the same thing, given the level of anxiety, self-doubt and fear of shameful self-exposure that accompanies the writing of most scripts, plays, essays or novels.

"If I'm plagued with anxiety," he or she says, "doesn't that say something about the quality of what I'm writing? Let's face it: if I was any good, I wouldn't be going through this agony. If this story really worked, I wouldn't be bumping up against so many technical problems, narrative glitches, inconsistencies in some of the characters. Right?"

Wrong. You're bumping up against technical problems, narrative glitches and issues with some of your characters for a very simple reason. **WRITING IS HARD.**

This isn't to say that writing isn't often accompanied by anxiety, manifesting in a dozen different ways, from sleepless nights to procrastination to substance abuse. And these psychological aspects ought to be addressed. But these symptoms--and the self-recriminating meanings we give them--are not the reason that writing is difficult. Because whether or not a writer suffers from these symptoms, in small measure or to a crippling extent, the reality is that telling a good story with intelligence, emotional truth and narrative complexity is hard. Really, really hard.

Let me put it another way: what I sometimes tell my writer patients, and what I'm trying to stress here, is that an artist's job is to create. When you create anything--whether a script or a novel, whether painting a landscape or writing a song--you're bound to run into problems. Problems inherent in the doing of the task. So your real, pragmatic, fundamental job is to work on these problems. Solve the difficulties. Answer the nagging questions.

Breaking News: Writing is Hard - [continued from page 15](#)

In other words, I believe you should, as a creative person, work the problem, instead of making yourself the problem. You and your psychological issues aside, problems with your work are inherent in doing that work.

Case in point: one of my friends is a Buddhist monk, whose composure and equilibrium is, in my experience of him, a model of psychological well-being. He's also a poet. The last time I spoke with him, he complained about this long poem he was laboring over. "Man," he said, "writing poetry's a bitch."

Note that he didn't say anything self-recriminating about his talent, his character, his work ethic, or his puny place in the pantheon of poets. He didn't see his struggles and artistic frustration as evidence of a failure in himself. Or a reflection of his neurotic insecurity. He merely stated that writing poetry is hard.

So, once again: when you come up against some difficulty in your writing, work the problem---don't make yourself the problem. You may have issues to be addressed, but the difficulties of writing are inherent in the task, not a reflection of your failings as either a person or a writer.

Remember, writing is hard. Writing anything is hard. Especially if you're trying your best.

Which reminds me of an old Hollywood story. Years ago, back in the days of the studio system, a roomful of contract writers were going crazy trying to solve an Act Two problem in a script they were doing. After a week of teeth-gnashing and garment-rending, a new young writer was brought into the room. In a matter of minutes, he hit upon the solution. To which one of the exhausted old veterans mumbled, "Sure he solved it. He didn't know how hard it was."



Dennis Palumbo is a former Hollywood screenwriter (*My Favorite Year*; *Welcome Back, Kotter*) turned licensed psychotherapist and author of the Daniel Rinaldi mystery series. More info at www.dennispalumbo.com.

Pitch Your Ideas

TMOC is looking for informative articles written by our members. Email us at themarchofcrime@gmail.com with your pitches.

Crime CALENDAR

SoCalMWA Event Cocktail Party at Jim Ziskin's



Author James Ziskin graciously opens his home in the Hollywood Hills for a Chapter-hosted cocktail party.

Come on by and shoot the breeze with your fellow writers.
Plus ones are welcome.

Saturday, June 11
at 4pm
(Address provided with RSVP)

[RSVP ONLINE](#)

Criminal Happenings in 2016

May 22 - [SoCalMWA Luncheon: Adapting Novels Into Screenplays](#)
June 11 - [SoCalMWA Cocktail Party at James Ziskin's](#)
July 5 - 9 - [Thrillerfest XI, New York, NY](#)
July 28 - 31 - [Book Passage Mystery Writers Conference, Corte Madera, CA](#)
August 28 - [SoCalMWA & SinC OC Joint Meeting, Irvine, CA](#) (details forthcoming)
September 15 - 18 - [Bouchercon, New Orleans, LA](#)
October 1 - [Homemade Gumbo & Home-brewed Ale Party, Woodland Hills, CA](#)
December 17- [SoCalMWA Holiday Party, Los Angeles, CA](#)

The
LAST WORD

“Like I said, times is tough. So when I got the offer, who was I to refuse?”

--Eric Beetner, “The Business of Death”

UNLOADED: CRIME WRITERS WRITING WITHOUT GUNS