



The
MARCH

of CRIME

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SoCalMWA Holiday Party!

Sunday, December 13, 6:30pm



**Old Friends
New Friends
Great Food
Great Ale and Wine
Good Fellowship**

...in a private speakeasy!

SoCalMWA Luncheon:
Dashiell Hammett & True
Stories of Ambition,
Frustration & Inspiration

**Sunday,
January 10, 2016
11:30am**

More information:
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Chloe's at Golden Road Brewery
(Door to the left of the bar)

5410 W San Fernando Road
(west of the tracks)
Los Angeles, 90039
213-542-6039

~ Free for you and your plus one ~

[Click here for more info and to RSVP](#)



The President's Rap Sheet

Craig Faustus Buck

I can't believe the end of the year is already upon us. It has been a very busy year for the chapter with eighteen events, including five luncheons, two events in Arizona, the California Crime Writers Conference, the LA Times Festival of Books, a joint luncheon with Sisters in Crime Orange County, the fabulous Homemade Gumbo and Home-brewed Ale party at the Fitzhugh's and the upcoming Holiday Party at Chloe's in the Golden Road Brewery.

Next year promises to be even better. Without the distraction of CCWC, the board will have more time and energy to devote to some fantastic programming. We're honored to be kicking off the new year with a luncheon at the Tam O'Shanter on January 10 with Dashiell Hammett's granddaughter, Hammett historian, executor of his literary legacy (and chapter member) Julie Rivett.

2015 has also been a busy year for the development of new membership benefits by MWA national. For example, the MWA Library Database, with contact information for hundreds of libraries interested in programs featuring mystery writers as speakers, is now available free to all members. So is the MWA Bookstore Database with hundreds of bookstores of interest to mystery writers.

A new national manuscript critique program offers members the opportunity to have 25 pages of manuscript critiqued by a professional writer in their genre. The critique will be about 1,000 words and cost only \$100 (all of which goes as an honorarium to the critiquer).

The MWA Mentorship Program provides a free matchmaking service between members who require help in a particular area and members who can provide expert advice on professional issues such as marketing, finding an agent, using social media, transitioning to self-publishing, surviving a book tour, or any other aspect of the business of writing that a member asks about.

And finally, our chapter will be celebrating a stellar year with a fabulous holiday party in the secret speakeasy (through the door to the left of the bar) at Golden Road Brewery. This party is, as usual, sponsored by SoCal MWA, so there is no cost to members and their plus ones. Details are on SoCalMWA.com. [Please RSVP early](#) so we can be sure to order enough food. There is street parking or valet parking is available in their lot.

The chapter is only as good as its members, and ours is the best because of you and your participation. Thank you all for a great year and may your New Year's resolutions include writing every day and caring enough to make it sing.

Craig Faustus Buck

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The EDITOR'S CORNER

Holly West

Many of you write me personal notes of thanks and good wishes when you send along your announcements for THE MARCH OF CRIME. This is doubly true when the holidays roll around and this month, I was particularly struck by how many nice comments I received. I don't always respond to each one individually but I wanted to let you all know how much I appreciate your kind words.

In his Prez Rap, Craig mentioned all of the great events we've had in 2015 and this month's issue highlights a few of our recent events. On a more somber note and in light of the terrorist attacks in Paris, Gregory Von Dare provides an informative article on the AK-47, the most popular gun in the world. Finally, freelance editor Elaine Ash contributes the third in her four-part series on self-editing for authors.

When I look back on 2015 I'm somewhat surprised by what I've managed to accomplish, both personally and professionally. I hope the same goes for you and that as we celebrate the end of a jam-packed and exciting year, you take a moment to celebrate your own accomplishments. As always, I'm inspired by you all.

Happy Holidays.

Holly

FRESH BLOOD

SoCalMWA welcomes its new and returning members:

Bonnie Heran Hill



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

Editor: [Holly West](#)

December Contributors:

Gregory Von Dare

Elaine Ash

Laurie Stevens

Jeri Westerson

Susan Goldstein

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:

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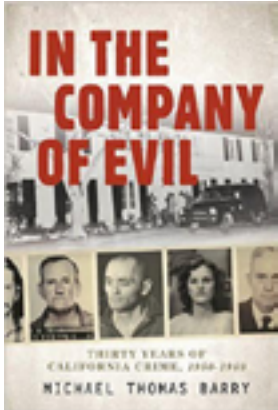
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OVER the TRANSOM

Member News

CBS just optioned the Tenzing Norbu mystery series, co-written by **Gay Hendricks** and **Tinker Lindsay**, for television. The are now [four full-length novels and one novella](#) in the series featuring Tenzing “Ten” Norbu, a Tibetan-Buddhist private detective in Los Angeles.

Thomas Perry’s twenty-third novel, a stand-alone book entitled FORTY THIEVES, will be published by The Mysterious Press/Grove Atlantic on January 5, 2016.

Michael Thomas Barry’s second true crime book and seventh overall book, IN THE COMPANY OF EVIL--THIRTY YEARS OF CALIFORNIA CRIME, 1950-1980 (Schiffer, March 2016), is now available for pre-order through [Amazon](#) and [Schiffer Publishing](#).



Laurie Stevens’ TODES SCHULD (THE DARK BEFORE DAWN German translation) was selected as Random House Editor’s Best Picks “Book of the Month.” Additionally, THE DARK BEFORE DAWN was honored in Library Journal’s Best of 2015 Self-E Awards.

Andrew Neiderman’s new novel, LOST IN HIS EYES (Severn House), a romantic thriller a la Hitchcock, will be out on December 1 in the United States.

Nancy Raven Smith’s debut mystery, LAND SHARKS - A SWINDLE IN SUMATRA, has been named an Amazon/Kindle Scout Program Selection and received an ebook publishing contract from Kindle Press. LAND SHARKS is scheduled to be available in December 2015 in both print and ebook.



Editor Terri Bischoff of Midnight Ink has purchased **Patricia Smiley’s** police procedural, PACIFIC HOMICIDE, which follows LAPD homicide detective Davie Richards as she investigates the murder of a Jane Doe whose body is found in LA’s sewer system. The novel is based on the author’s 15-year stint as a volunteer for the LAPD and is set for release sometime in the fall of 2016.

Laura Levine’s DEATH BY TIARA has been chosen as one of Suspense Magazine’s Best Cozy Mysteries of 2015.

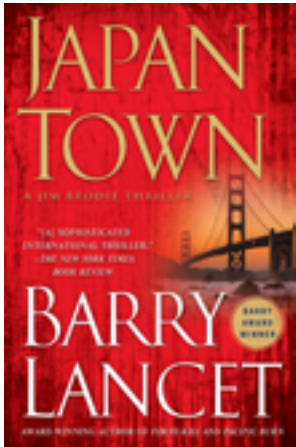
OVER the TRANSOM



Amnon Kabatchnik was one of the fifty “Men of Mystery” celebrated at the Irvine Marriott Hotel on November 14, 2015.

Jeri Westerson, writing as Haley Walsh, has released a novella in her Skyler Foxe Mystery series just in time for the holidays. A VERY MERRY FOXEMAS: Skyler Foxe and his friends take a break from solving crimes in this fluffy holiday treat. Four humorous and hot short stories make up this delectable holiday fare that is sure to warm hearts and sheets this cold winter season.

Craig Faustus Buck sold three short stories last month to Hooked 0_0. The stories, “The Gun,” “Infidelity Clause,” and “Mail-Order Bride” are written as text message epistolaries for a new phone app that delivers 1000-word short stories like a text message thread to subscribers. Also, on December 4, Craig will be featured on “[Friday Drinks with Reads](#)” on *Mystery Playground*, matching a drink to his novel GO DOWN HARD and photographing the two together. For the occasion, he created the Wry Tart Martini.



Barry Lancet’s JAPANTOWN, the first entry the international mystery-thriller that features Jim Brodie and includes TOKYO KILL and PACIFIC BURN (Feb 2016), has been nominated for the Sakura Medal in Japan for “Best Novel.” JAPANTOWN won the Barry Award for “Best First Novel” and was also selected by Suspense Magazine and Oline Cogdill as a “Best Debut Novel” in the same year.

Andrew Kaplan’s review of the Steven Spielberg spy film, BRIDGE OF SPIES, appears in the December 8th issue of *Variety* as part of their “Writers on Writers” series.

S.W. Lauden was recently interviewed by OmniMystery News about his debut novel, BAD CITIZEN CORPORATION. The Q&A will be posted December 3.

Sarah M. Chen’s flash fiction story “The Benevolent Man” has been accepted for publication by Spelk Fiction and will be live on their website December 21.



Member
APPEARANCES

Ellen Byron, Rochelle Staab, Linda O. Johnson, Connie Archer and Nancy Cole Silverman will be on a cozy mystery panel at the Studio City Library, 12511 Moorpark Street, on December from 6:30 to 7:45pm. Stop by for a lively discussion, as well as refreshments, raffles and giveaways.

Mike Befeler will be moderating a panel at Mystery on the Menu at the Cerritos Library 18025 Bloomfield Avenue, Cerritos, CA, on Saturday January 30, 2016 starting at 11 AM.

Andrew Kaplan will be leading a class on “Hooking Your Readers/Audience and Creating and Sustaining Suspense” at the Coachella Valley Rep Studio Writers Group at the Coachella Valley Repertory Theater at the Atrium, 69930 Highway 111, Rancho Mirage, CA on Saturday, December 12, 2015 at 10:00am.

S.W. Lauden will be a guest on The Crime Scene radio show with host Eryk Pruitt and special guests David Terrenoire and Mel Melton December 14 at 10am EST. Listen to their discussion about “Music in Crime Fiction live at wcomfm.org or podcast at erykpruitt.com or iTunes.

Sarah M. Chen will be reading at Noir at the Bar Seattle on December 9. She will be reading along with 6 other crime fiction writers at the Alibi Room on Pike Street. This is Noir at the Bar Seattle’s second event, organized and hosted by fellow hard-boiled crime fiction writer Michael Pool. She’ll also be participating, along with 7 other authors, on the Noir on the Air flash fiction throwdown on the Authors on the Air radio program. The live readings will take place December 2 at 6pm PST with crime fiction author Michael Pool guest hosting. [Listen to the program here.](#)

Jan Burke and **DP Lyle:** Upcoming shows for Crime & Science Radio

More details: <http://www.dplylemd.com>

12-5-15: Crime and Science Radio: Bones Tell the Tale: An Interview With Forensic Anthropologist and Best-selling Author Kathy Reichs

12-19-15: Men of Valor: An Interview with Author and Weapons Expert John F. Mullins, Major U.S. Army Special Forces (Ret.)



Mystery Writers of America

The MWA National Manuscript Critique Program is Ready

Not sure if Chapter 1 gets your novel off to a rip-roaring start? Wonder if you have too many characters crammed into your short story? Worried the opening to your true crime novel falls flat? Now you can have an expert answer your writing questions with MWA's new National Manuscript Critique Program.

A professional mystery writer will critique the first 25 pages of your writing. This includes mystery novels, novellas, nonfiction, short stories, or any work where crime is the central element. The critique will be about 1,000 words and cost \$100, a bargain for professional critiques. This benefit is for all members.

How the Manuscript Critique Program works:

(1) E-mail mwa@mysterywriters.org that you want a manuscript critique. Administrative director Margery Flax will e-mail you a list of MWA critiquers, with their biographies and specialties. E-mail Margery your top three choices.

(2) Send a check for \$100 made out to Mystery Writers of America to Margery Flax, Administrative Director, Mystery Writers of America, 1140 Broadway, Suite 1507, New York, NY 10001.

Margery has volunteered to administer this program, keep track of payments and who is assigned to whom. The entire \$100 fee will go to the critiquer upon completion and approval of the critique.

(3) Once MWA has received your payment, Margery will ask you to e-mail your 25-page manuscript to mwa@mysterywriters.org. You may mail less than 25 pages, but the fee is still \$100.

(4) Manuscript formatting: Please send the manuscripts by e-mail only, as a Microsoft Word attachment. The work should be Times New Roman, 14-point, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Indent each paragraph by using the MS Word paragraphing or formatting tools. Do not press the space bar repeatedly to indent.

Please note: Incorrectly formatted manuscripts will be returned.

(5) MWA will contact your top three critique choices. If these writers are not available, you may choose another three, or, if you prefer, your money will be refunded.

(6) The critiquer will have 30 days to read and write a 1,000 word critique of your manuscript.

(7) The 1,000 word critique will be read and approved by at least three members of the critique committee: Dana Cameron, Dean James, Allison Brennan or Elaine Viets. MWA wants our writers to receive a critique that is helpful but not crushing. If the critique committee believes a critique is too harsh, it will be returned to the critiquer with a request to rephrase it.



Hollow Points

Gregory Von Dore

Call Me Kalash

Shortly after World War II, a wounded Russian soldier, a tank mechanic, had an idea for a simple, reliable rifle that would be lightweight, shoot single shots or full auto like a machine gun and require little training to use. It should also be cheap to manufacture, since the Soviets had a policy of discarding weapons in the field rather than repairing them. The soldier's name was Mikhail Kalashnikov and the gun he created so lovingly in 1946 came to be known as the AK-47, AK or simply 'Kalash.' Technically, the Kalashnikov was a descendant of the selective-fire Sturmgewehr 44, a German assault rifle the Soviets feared and envied in World War II.

If ever a gun deserved the title of World Weapon, the AK-47 does. Out of the roughly 500 million firearms in the world today, about 100 million are Kalashnikovs. A staggering statistic. Kalashnikovs have been manufactured in dozens of countries, both with and without a license. The list runs from Albania to Zimbabwe. In Africa, a working Kalashnikov is yours for a dozen chickens, a few head of cattle, or about fifty dollars in cash.



The standard AK-47 is the most popular gun on the planet.

Chinese-made Kalashnikovs used by the NVA (North Vietnam Army) decimated the young men of my generation in Vietnam and all around Southeast Asia. The more complex M-16s we sent to our troops didn't like the mud and humidity of Vietnam and often misfired. The M-16 was modified until it eventually achieved a degree of field reliability, but Charlie's AK simply fired on and on and on. To be fair, the M-16 had far better range and accuracy but jungle combat negated those advantages.

When many African countries cast off colonialism in the 1960s, the Kalashnikov was there to pave the way. The profile of an AK-47 is at the center of the Mozambique flag. Mercenaries, government troops and rebels often carried the same weapon into combat and if your gun was lost or damaged, you just picked up one of the enemy's and used it as your own. They were all Kalashnikovs anyway. American made M-16s were used by various CIA-backed tribes and factions, but usually not for long. Once you accepted the M-16 as your battle weapon, you were beholden to the whim of the CIA for a supply of parts and ammunition, whereas Kalashnikovs and their ammo were everywhere.

[Continued on page 14](#)

Be Your Own Development Editor

by Elaine Ash

Part Three

Development editors pay particular attention to the start of each chapter in a novel. For example, imagine the inside of a conference room where a sheriff has just delivered an announcement to a gathering of journalists. In a movie, the first glimpse would usually be called a wide shot or establishing shot. At first glance, the viewer would know the physical location of the sheriff in relation to the press people and the furnishings, and the appearance of the conference room.

But physical description isn't enough. *Mood or feeling* is just as important. Let's look at how the sheriff's scenario reads in **Alan Russell's** *SHAME*, published by Simon and Schuster, and excerpted with the author's permission:

Chapter 18

The press conference was held in the Ridgehaven sheriff's main conference room. The only thing missing from the sheriff's opening announcement was a lit fuse. Even from the press, where showing any surprise is considered bad taste, his revelation was met with gasps. Around the room one word was repeated: "Shame."

Notice how much information Russell conveys in four sentences. What is happening: a sheriff's presser. Where it's happening: the Ridgehaven sheriff's conference room. Who is in the scene: the sheriff and the press. The mood: like a "lit fuse." There are no physical descriptions but it's uncommonly easy to imagine a uniformed sheriff and some generic press people gathered inside a meeting room. The way they look isn't the focus anyhow; the way the sheriff's announcement has just been received is the focus—and after this opener, readers can't wait to read on and find out more about that bombshell announcement.

More Ways to Open

Let's go back to opening a film scene for a moment. Sometimes a cinematographer will focus on a close-up, a detail; let's imagine a beautiful woman's face filling the frame of the screen. "Make yourself at home," she says. The camera pulls back to show her in a flashy dress, standing at an open door. There's a man just outside, and as he steps in, the shot goes wider still, so we can see both of them. The man looks around at the tasteful furnishings inside the home.

That's how it would look in a movie. Here's how it reads in *SHAME's* chapter opener:

Chapter 14

"Make yourself at home," Lola said.

Caleb reluctantly stepped inside. He wasn't there for a night's shelter, so much as for what came with it: a promised disguise. Lola was willing to change his hair color.

Her Hillcrest bungalow wasn't what Caleb expected. He thought it would be as glitzy and showy as her dress, but instead he found it refined and homey.

Event Wrap-Up: Mystery Authors at Jewish Book Festival by Jeri Westerson

On Sunday, November 1st, five authors from SoCalMWA were asked to participate in the 17th Annual Jewish Book Festival in Glendale. Past SoCal president **Jeri Westerson** moderated a sterling panel consisting of **Ellen Byron**, **Laurie Stevens**, **Susan Goldstein**, and **James Ziskin**, representing a diverse spectrum of the kind of mysteries our members are writing.

Nearly forty festival-goers attended the afternoon event at Temple Sinai, where refreshments were available and books were offered for sale. The Jewish Federation's book festival, a Celebration of Jewish Book Month, spread out its many events from October 25th through December 5th. According to the Jewish Federation website, "the Book Festival was established in 1999 to bring together (LA's) diverse Jewish community based on the shared ideal of love of learning. Programming featured books by Jewish authors or books with Jewish content, in hopes of educating, entertaining and fostering community pride and development."

Usually scheduled over six weeks, many of the author events take place at and are co-hosted by local synagogues.



L - R: James Ziskin, Susan Goldstein, Jeri Westerson, Laurie Stevens, Ellen Byron

Event Wrap-Up: So You Wanna Be a Writer?

by Laurie Stevens

A good crowd showed up at the Santa Clarita Barnes and Noble on November 7 to hear five authors relate their “tales from the trenches.” Moderator **Paul D. Marks** discussed a wide range of topics with fellow soldiers **Matt Coyle**, **Connie Archer**, **Dianne Emley**, and **Laurie Stevens**.

It’s always best to start at the beginning, so Paul put the question to the panel of how to start a project. Should one make an outline? The answers were varied. Dianne brought up that fact that some editors require an outline, so an author may not have a choice. Matt and Laurie start with a “skeletal outline” and write from there. Paul chips away at each draft and advised the audience members to be “goal orientated” from page one. Connie uses colored Post-it notes as a guide; one row to indicate the main plot, other colors representing sub-plots.

Should authors write only what they know? Assuming we writers don’t know everything, research becomes a necessity. Matt isn’t too involved in research but he’s lucky to have a cop as a friend – a boon for any crime writer. Laurie incorporates forensics in her work and has a passion to learn about it. Paul cautioned that too much research could overload a book. Inserting enough factual information for authenticity is good enough. Connie writes cozies and found herself having to research soup recipes because her readers want them.

What about switching genres and getting away from “what you know?” Dianne wanted to try something fresh. She said that many first novels are somewhat autobiographical, that the author is bound to layer herself (or himself) within the character or plot. In a separate series, Dianne wrote about a character unlike herself. It’s a challenging thing to do, but worth it in order to have an expanded body of work.

Now that the masterpiece is written, how does a writer break in? (The BIG question). The panelists insisted that the masterpiece has got to be good. That’s really the most important step. Matt met an agent at a conference. Conferences, writers groups, and organizations such as MWA, the ITW, and Sisters in Crime offer many resources for aspiring and published authors. Connie suggested buying *Writer’s Market* or *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Getting Published*. Through a UCLA creative writer’s program, Dianne got referrals to agents. Laurie self-published and a promotion she held led to her getting signed with an agent.

Once the book is out, how do readers discover it? (The BIGGER question). There are so many avenues for promotion an author can become confused. Dianne mentioned book tours and networking among friends and fellow writers. Paul advised to attend writing conferences and conventions. Placing ads in local papers is a good idea. The need to create an “author brand” was brought up along with the suggestion to market to niche readers. Lest anyone forget about social media, Connie said she is an avid blogger and builds a following in this way. Website, Facebook, Twitter, Goodreads, Amazon—a writer should have a social media presence on at least one of them. Matt stressed the importance of doing what feels comfortable and sticking to it. For Paul, posting on Facebook is something that has helped his career, but he warned that followers of social media don’t want to be continually pitched to buy a writer’s latest book. Make the posts interesting!

From the intense note-taking going on in the audience, we are fairly certain there will more writers joining our ranks soon. Welcome to the trenches!

[continued on page 12](#)

So You Wanna Be a Writer? [continued from page 11](#)



L - R: Laurie Stevens, Dianne Emley, Paul D. Marks, Connie Archer, Matt Coyle. All photos by Amy Marks.



L - R: Laurie Stevens, Paul D. Marks, Dianne Emley, Matt Coyle, Connie Archer.



Event Wrap-Up: Writers Talk Truths at the Last Bookstore

by Susan Goldstein

Downtown locals turned out at The Last Bookstore on Thursday, November 19th to hear four great writers tell some fascinating and revealing truths about themselves and their work. A lively discussion covering a wide range of topics took place among **Harley Jane Kozak, Phoef Sutton, Lisa Brackmann** and **Steph Cha**, moderated by **Susan Goldstein**. One shared truth of the night was the answer to what is feared by these intrepid authors of murder, mayhem and evil. Topping the list: fear of rejection, fear of not being liked and fear of rodents!



L - R: Phoef Sutton, Harley Jane Kozak,
Susan Goldstein, Lisa Brackmann, Steph Cha



Hollow Points - [continued from pg 8](#)

The next battle ground was Central and South America. The USA supplied various government regular troops with expensive M-16s and they didn't fare well in the rain-forests against insurgents and *contras* carrying Russian-donated AK-47s. American advisors, CIA agents and mercenaries in South America all came to honor the Kalashnikov as the ultimate field weapon. As a side bonus, you could never tell who had fired on you by examining their leftover brass--the spent cartridges all looked the same.

When the Russians disastrously invaded Afghanistan, they had the latest models of the Kalashnikov as their primary weapons. But local Mujahedeen, carrying AKs some twenty years older, outfought the Russian troops in almost every encounter. Since the ammunition hasn't changed in all this time, an older AK and a brand new one are pretty much interchangeable.



Mikhail Kalashnikov is now a General of the Red Army.

Since the beginning, every Kalashnikov has used a gas-powered action. The distinctive metal tube above the barrel receives some of the expanding gas from the gunpowder charge and uses its force to kick-back the bolt, eject the spent cartridge and load a new round, which is then pushed into place by a recoil spring, relocking the rotating bolt. Since 1959, all versions of the AK-47 have used a rear pistol grip and a curved magazine--sometimes called a 'banana clip.' The standard Kalashnikov fires a 7.62 x 39 mm mid-power rifle cartridge from a thirty round, metal magazine. The AK is made in a "sloppy" manner out of cheap stamped steel parts with loose tolerances and generous clearances in the action. This is why it fires under adverse conditions. It is not an accurate weapon, but on full-automatic at close range it doesn't need to be.

A typical AK-47 weighs about eight pounds, bare, and close to ten pounds with a fully-loaded steel magazine. It is thirty-five inches long with the wooden stock in place and about twenty-five inches with the stock folded. It has a sixteen and a half inch barrel with four rifling grooves in a right-hand (clockwise) twist. Sights consist of a crude front post and rear notch, with an adjustment for range. A large lever on the right hand side of the receiver selects safety, single shot or automatic fire.

The newest version, the AK-103, is an all-black assault rifle meant to compete with the FN-90, SA-80 and the Israeli TAR-21. However, the traditional AK-47 is still manufactured in the Russian city of Izhevsk by the machine-tool company IZHMAASH (today known as Kalashnikov Concern). The plant is staffed mostly by women because it's thought that women have a better temperament for detailed, precision work.

With one-hundred-million AK-47s in service around the world, this deadly workhorse is still made in large numbers today, and shows no sign of being replaced by something better. While the Russians have new guns on the drawing board, they also realize that the AK-47 isn't broke, so they needn't fix it.

Next time, we'll gear-up to go on safari.

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.

Be Your Own Development Editor - [continued from pg 9](#)

The first line of dialogue, “Make yourself at home,” is the close-up. The reader knows Lola must be talking to someone, but who is it? Then we meet Caleb and learn why he’s there, and what he hopes to gain. Note how much Russell conveys in five sentences; it’s a lot more than the movie version, which would need dialogue added to get all this across. We know who is in the scene, the motivation of Caleb, who also holds the point-of-view for this chapter, meaning we’ll see everything (for now) through Caleb’s eyes. We know what he thinks of the dress Lola wears, plus his impression of Lola’s home. The text tells us these two don’t know each other very well, and Caleb needs some kind of disguise—but what? That’s a lot of information.

A novel has the ability to intertwine the thoughts of Caleb and Lola with descriptions of the bungalow and the flashy dress, nicely balancing plot with imagery.

Switch to the Unexpected

Look what happens when the expected order of a chapter-opening wide shot is switched:

Chapter 5

Once more into the breach thought Elizabeth. She felt like Daniel going into the lions’ den, but without his faith. As the detectives entered the room she reminded herself to smile, though she figured that tactic worked about as well on cops as it did on lions.

The Sheriff’s Department homicide detail was located in a building several blocks away from the administrators in Ridgehaven. Everyone seemed to like the arrangement.

The chapter starts off with how Elizabeth feels. Then the view is pulled back, like a camera, to include detectives entering the room. The shot widens still further to reveal what the room is (Sheriff’s Department homicide detail) and where it’s located. Again, five sentences get all that information across in a parade of emotion, motivation, and visual imagery.

Does chapter five’s second paragraph seem a more logical place to start, by informing us that the building is a homicide detail located several blocks away? It seems more logical but it wouldn’t be as effective. Why? Because the author has chosen to lead with Elizabeth’s emotion and motivation, which capture readers more strongly than the visual of a building, even though it’s still important. Once we know how Elizabeth feels about being in that room, we care more about what and where it is. Let me repeat that because it’s important: *Once we know how Elizabeth feels about being in that room, we care more about what and where it is.*

A Word from Alan Russell

“I like to “mix it up” when I open chapters,” Alan says. “Often I like to use the P.O.V. of the main character in that chapter opening, offering up his or her thoughts and impressions. However, I don’t do this with every chapter opening. That’s one of the joys of writing. You can be poetic.”

Exactly. You can be your own development editor by going through your manuscript and checking the opening paragraphs of each chapter. Have you written who, what and where so readers will read on to discover why? Revisit just your chapter openings, reading them separately from the rest of the story. This will give you an idea if the establishing sentences are as strong and succinct as they need to be.



Elaine Ash is a [freelance book editor](#) and author of the [Hard Bite crime series](#) under the pen name “Anonymous-9.” Her books have won two Readers’ Choice Awards from the House of Crime and Mystery; in 2009 she won Best Short Story on the Web from Spinetangler Mag.

Crime CALENDAR

SoCalMWA Luncheon

Sunday, January 10, 2016 at 11:30am

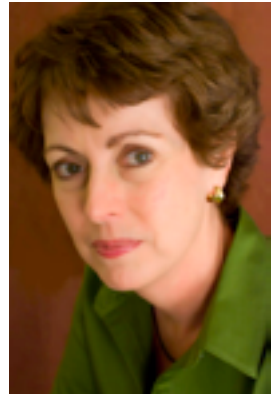
Dashiell Hammett:

True Stories of Ambition, Frustration and Inspiration

Featuring

Hammett's Granddaughter and advocate

Julie M. Rivett



The conversation will be, to quote Hammett, “as real as a dime.”

The personal meets the professional when Julie M. Rivett shares her perspective on her grandfather's life and legacy. Hear about the forces that shaped his fiction, explore the diamond facets in his work and learn about his public and private struggles as a writer, a father and an activist. Discover the cautionary, complex saga that has shaped the afterlife of one of America's most influential writers.

Tam O'Shanter Restaurant
2980 Los Feliz Blvd, LA

[Click here for more info and to reserve your spot](#)

More Criminal Happenings in 2015

December 13 - [SoCalMWA Holiday Party, Los Angeles, CA](#)

The LAST WORD

“I don't think the world is ever something you can understand, even when it seems ordinary.
So all you can do is try to figure out what you've been put here to do. And then do it.”

--Gordon McAlpine, WOMAN WITH A BLUE PENCIL