



Mystery Press

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President's Message:

This is the eve of Freedom to Read Week, which is observed every year to remind us of the importance of the right to freedom of expression.

Freedom to read is part of freedom of expression. We have the right to make our own choices about what book to read and what movie to see. I am free to pass on a book or movie. I don't have the right to make the decision for anyone else, by trying to keep the book away from others. Of course, I've read some books and gone to movies that I didn't think I'd like; that is the price of admission to the discussion of the merits of the work.

Some authors say they aren't concerned about censorship since their work doesn't include bad words or sex. The problem with that theory is that there are many other reasons people challenge books. As Nat Hentoff said, "the lust to suppress can come from any direction."

There were calls to remove Robert Munsch's Thomas' Snowsuit, from libraries because Thomas is shown defying the authority of his principal. Beatrix Potter's Tale of Peter Rabbit was removed from school libraries because the story depicts only middle-class rabbits.

Books challenged in Canada have included Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale; John Ball's In the Heat of the Night; Margaret Laurence's The Diviners; John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men; and J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels.

The list goes on. Indeed, there is a list of burnings and bannings in history available at

http://www.freedomtoread.ca/links_and_resources/bannings_and_burnings.asp?print_view=true

The American Library Association provides a list of the 100 Most Challenged Books 1990-1999 at

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/bbwlinks/100mostfrequently.htm>

While Freedom to Read Week ended on Feb. 26, it is never too late to enjoy the right to freedom of expression. Read a banned or challenged book. And, of course, enjoy your right to write!

Anne Jayne

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Book Review:

Plot by Ansen Dibell (Writer's Digest Books)

I have to admit that as I read this book, I often had the feeling I was being scolded. Or at least reminded that I didn't want to be one of "those" writers who made whatever mistake we happened to be discussing on that page.

For example, at one point the author says quite emphatically that one should never change points of view mid scene. ("...however many viewpoints you're using – two or several – never never NEVER shift viewpoint in the middle of the scene.") This caused me to immediately flip to the publication date in the front of the book – 1988. I'd never thought of writing as being faddish, but I do now, since changing point of view within a scene and a chapter is now accepted when well done.

Don't get me wrong. Plot is a very good how-to book and covers all the bases, from point of view to grand openings, and gives many valid pointers on more than plot. I particularly liked the way the author showed what he was explaining by giving examples from well known movies and books, as well as his own fictional scenes. Personally, I find examples the easiest way to learn, so it was easy for me to grasp the structure of an intricate parallel plot line through his 'Star Wars' example, as well as the mirroring of characters through the movie 'Scrooge'.

Mr. Dibell is very front and forward in giving his opinions. For example, don't look to him to justify your usage of an epilogue which he refers to as a "soggy anticlimax." But he will condone and explain the difference between a circular (Gone with the Wind, The Wizard of Oz) ending and a linear (Maltese Falcon) one.

All in all, good stuff, well explained and easy to understand. I'm of the opinion that if I glean only one scrap or hint from a book or workshop, then it was worth reading/ attending. I picked up several in this "how-to".

Jude Wilner
February 2005

Websites worth a look:

Get convention-al at www.shawguides.com This site can be searched by date, a wonderful feature if you are limited to certain time periods.

The ClueLass website www.clueclass.com also has a listing of mystery conventions.

Plug in a fictitious birthdate and get a comparison of your character's age to the real-world events during their life. Great if you're creating a character much older or younger than you and need to place that character in chronological context.
<http://www.frontiernet.net/~cdm/age1.html>

The Ink website address is

www.mysterywritersink.com

Check there regularly for news, articles, and websites of interest to mystery writers

Field Trip: Medical Examiner's Office

Wednesday, March 23rd

Email Catherine at kelp_lostinla@yahoo.com

Golden rule for newcomers to the *real* world of publishing: Far, far better to spend money having your book properly edited than to spend it on fridge magnets and bookmarks and promotional bump for a book that could have benefited from being properly edited. You're only as good as your *next* book, but you'll be judged on the *last* one, too.

gordon aalborg.

"**THE SPECIALIST**" -- A Five Star Original Mystery Set in Tasmania and on Vancouver Island. ASK YOUR LIBRARY TO ORDER IT. Free excerpt download on

➤ www.gordonaalborg.com

Program Review: December

By Sandra Ruttan

A bottle of poison, a hangman's rope, a gun and a knife.

No, these weren't top contenders for our preferred methods of murder. They were the categories that members were divided into for the New Member's Orientation and Mini-workshop sessions at the INK meeting December 9.

Each group visited four workshops in 12-minute intervals. Other INK members hosted the workshops on different aspects of writing and publishing.

Alternative Mystery Markets

Jayne Barnard relayed her short story experience. Anthologies are hard to find out about and get published in. However Storyteller Magazine, a Canadian magazine, hosts an annual short story competition that helps new writers break into print.

Ellery Queen, is a magazine that specializes in the mystery genre, which publishes one first-time author per issue, showing their support for emerging talent. Ellery Queen publish more conventional mysteries that contain clues and a resolution of the case.

Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine leans towards horror. Stories don't need a resolution for the crime.

Donna Tunney reminded us that dinner theatres and small theatre companies are looking for innovative ideas and talented writers. Writers who are interested in trying their hand at scriptwriting can consider these venues. Writing for a theatre allows the writer the unique opportunity of observing and interacting with their audience.

Researching Mystery Fiction

Phil Elder and Sharon Wildwind provided information on helpful websites for on-line research: www.helenginger.com and <http://scholar.google.com>.

Sharon reminded us to approach research cautiously. Some writers advocate researching after you've written your first draft so that what research doesn't become an impediment to the development of the characters because too much emphasis is being placed on technical details. It is important to find a balance that works for you.

Networking for Mystery Writers

Lorna Schultz Nicholson and Sherry McEwan recommended Dorothy L, www.dorothy.com, a forum

where mystery writers from around the world can network.

BoucherCon, the largest mystery convention, is in Chicago on Labour Day weekend, 2005. Other conventions include Bloody Words, Malice Domestic and Left Coast Crime. Attending conventions is an excellent way to network with writers.

Some libraries will select a book for their reading group if the author will participate in a discussion with the group. This allows writers to connect with librarians as well as readers.

Lorna suggested keeping in touch with people you meet. Word of mouth is still effective and one connection with a person at a reading group or conference can result in dozens of referrals to your work in the future.

Authors may also want to join writers groups like Sisters in Crime or Crime Writers of Canada.

Sleuths and Villains

Anne Jayne discussed incorporating the elements of a myth into mystery writing. She provided handouts summarizing characteristics of the hero as well as the components of the shadow, which represents the energy of the dark side, usually in the form of a villain or other characters in the story.

The hero should experience growth during the story and they must take action, often at personal risk, in order to protect someone or solve the case.

They should also demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice something for an ideal or another person and have flaws that make the character real. The flaws often allow the character to show how they've matured.

Suzanne Stengl discussed goals, motivations and conflicts. The goal gives a sense of urgency, a focal point for the direction of the story and can be internal (a feeling) or external (a physical obstacle).

Motivations are usually seen as things 'larger than life' that can't be ignored. They prompt the character to take action.

Conflict refers to the impediment to the characters' goal. The character must resolve the conflict in order to achieve his goal.

Ice-breaker

The stage was set before that fateful Thursday when INK members received an email asking them to divulge a dark secret from their character's life. During the social time when members nibbled on goodies and chatted with others everyone had a chance to match each clue to the writer. This helped the newer faces match names to some of INK's longstanding members and gave everyone a chance to talk about their writing.

Program Review: January

By Jayne Barnard

This program could have been called “Murder by Medicine”. Joan Hendrickson, a pharmacist at Rockyview Hospital for 27 years, has an encyclopedic knowledge of drugs and drug interactions. Although she admitted she’s not completely up on alkaloid poisons, she gave us so many other ideas for ‘accidental’ medication murder that merely crumbling foxglove into the salad seems rather tame and, worse, lacking in the subtlety necessary for a really juicy crime.

Joan’s information was delivered in such useful categories as Accessibility, Administering and Detectability. The two A’s are easiest when the victim is already taking a medication. Double-check that any medication supplied by the murderer is something that could be obtained without leaving a clear trail back to him. And it’s important that the drug be administered properly, whether orally, sublingually (absorbed under the tongue), transdermally (absorbed through the skin) or by injection. Some drugs, though fatal if injected in quantity, are harmless if swallowed, ie insulin.

If the victim can be manipulated into voluntarily taking the drug that kills them, so much the better from the murderer’s (and the writer’s) point of view. An even better wrinkle is to have them unwittingly take some other substance that alters the effect of the medication they’re already taking. Grapefruit, for example, enhances the absorbability of many drugs, and can be used to cause an overdose even though the dose taken doesn’t increase.

When deciding which poison suits your crime, Detectability is a key factor. If the drug is easily detected and takes a long time to work, there’s always the chance of the victim receiving medical help. The term to look for is half-life: the approximate amount of time needed for half the dose to be used by the body. Pathologists can calculate the size of the dose from the amount left in the tissues; writers can calculate how long the victim must go un-found to absorb a fatal dose.

As with all successful murders, research is a must. The Mystery Writers Ink website now lists several websites dedicated to toxic substances, so check there when knowledgeable Joan is not available. Here’s one to get you started:

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/cntc/> Canadian Centre for Toxicology (thanks to Sherry Wilson McEwen)

Ink Needs You!

Mystery Writers Ink exists, and runs, because members have volunteered to help with some part of the work.

In June, we elect the Board of Directors. The basic commitment is to participate in four Board meetings. The meeting dates and times are set by the whole Board, to take everyone’s schedule into account.

We also need some volunteers for non-board positions. Some positions as committee chairs can either be board positions, or not, depending on the preference of the volunteer.

Here are some of the positions we are looking to fill:

Secretary: This is a board position. The Secretary takes the minutes for all board meetings and the AGM.

Website: The committee that maintains the website must have at least two members. We need at least one new person who has the basic skills required for website maintenance, including familiarity with HTML.

Publicity: The Publicity Chair sends out information on Mystery Writers Ink to the media and other sources near the beginning of our year (September), and finds other ways to publicize MWI.

Facilities. The chair of the Facilities committee handles room bookings and ensures that the room is set up for the meeting, and then locked up afterwards.

If you’re interested in volunteering, but these assignments aren’t your cup of tea, please contact Anne, to let her know your interests. (Email anne@annejayne.com or call 283-2085.)

“When writing sours from too much writing,
a longish walk can sweeten it again.”

– from *The Right to Write* by Julia
Cameron

(submitted by Suzanne Stengl)

Question Corner:

(this set is taken by permission of the respondent from 'Short Mystery Fiction', an email list – it should be useful to anyone writing a book set in the USA)

If someone working for the FBI is called an agent, what is someone working for the CIA called? Agent? Operative?

FBI agents are called "Special Agents." CIA agents are called "Officers." If they are assigned to the Directorate of Operations they are called "Operations Officers."

Now there's Homeland Security, what are they called?

Homeland Security is not an agency. It is a cabinet department that encompasses a number of different agencies, most of which already existed prior to the creation of the DHS.

The formation of Homeland Security is somewhat analogous to the merging of the Department of War and the Department of the Navy into a combined Department of Defense in 1947. The Army remained the Army and the Navy remained the Navy, but they were now under the same umbrella organization. Similarly, most of the agencies under Homeland Security remained the same, but were now under the administration of a different cabinet department.

The US Secret Service, for example, a branch of the Treasury Department for most of its history, is now part of Homeland Security. Secret Service agents are called "Special Agents."

The Federal Protective Service, which provides local-type police service to US Government buildings, offices, etc, was first established in 1971 as the law enforcement arm of the General Services Administration, the Government's real estate manager. They are now also part of Homeland Security. Uniformed FPS officers are called "Police Officers." Plainclothes FPS criminal investigators are called "Special Agents." FPS employees in charge of things like alarms, video surveillance, entry control set-ups, etc., are called "Physical Security Specialists."

"The US Coast Guard, once part of the Treasury, later part of the Transportation Department, and a temporary subsidiary of the Defense Department in time of war, is also part of Homeland Security. Ranks in the Coast Guard, a branch of the US military though not part of the DoD in peacetime, correspond to rank nomenclature in the US Navy."

There are many other agencies that are now part of Homeland Security, and what the employees of these agencies are called depends on each individual agency.

A police officer for more than ten years, JIM DOHERTY has served at the local, state, and federal levels of American law enforcement. The author of many short stories, including a series of police procedurals featuring a cop named Dan Sullivan, Jim has also written a collection of true crime articles called JUST THE FACTS and a series of on-line lectures about Raymond Chandler collectively entitled RAYMOND CHANDLER - MASTER OF AMERICAN NOIR. His first novel, AN OBSCURE GRAVE, featuring Dan Sullivan, was a finalist in the CWA's Debut Dagger competition.

Editor's note: also check out this great website, to find out if your US-based character is breaking the law by tapping that phone conversation or putting up that hidden camera: <http://www.rcfp.org/taping/quick.html>

The Great Ink Booksale

The booksale will be held during the meeting on April 14. This is our big spring fund-raising event.

Please check your bookshelves, and see if you have any mysteries that you can donate to the sale. Bring your donated books to either the March 10 or April 14 meeting.

And then bring some spending money with you on April 10, when you'll be able to pick up some great books for prices even lower than what you'd pay in a second-hand bookstore.

Readings Opportunity:

Anne has asked me to organize member readings for upcoming INK meetings. Reading slots are open to all members, published or not. In the past we have had many types of fiction read by members: mystery novel excerpts, literary short stories etc... so there is no expectation or guideline regarding content. I am seeking 3 volunteers to read 5 minutes in either February, March and April. In June, there is no guest speaker scheduled, but we have slots for 6 members to read up to 10 minutes each. If you are interested in such a thing (and yes, I am hoping someone will volunteer for next week's meeting!) please email me.

Thanks, Fiona Pinnell
fiona@strongholdclimbing.com

Death in the Afternoon

by Sherry Wilson McEwen

The Chief Medical Examiner of Alberta's Calgary office offers the public an intriguing look at the science and technique of medical investigation into sudden or unexpected deaths. There are about 4,000 of these deaths in Alberta annually and 1,500 of them are treated as suspicious. On a frosty afternoon in January, a group of Ink members watched two videos and took part in a hands-on, interactive re-enactment of a typical investigation.

The videos acted out what happens when someone is found dead unexpectedly, and the police and autopsy proceedings that result. The constables on the scene secure the area and call in Homicide if the death looks suspicious. A Medical Investigator (MI) is sent to the scene. Comprehensive photos are critical as evidence in the event of criminal proceedings. The body can't be moved without the permission of the MI or the Medical Examiner (ME).

Once the MI has investigated the body and scene, the removal service takes the body to the ME's office for an autopsy (required in all cases of sudden death). The deceased's hands are bagged and toes tagged. The next of kin are notified and either a relative or a close acquaintance must make a positive ID. As the ME's mandate is to act in the best interests of the public, he or she may order an autopsy against the wishes of the next of kin. Or, the next of kin may request an autopsy (although it may not be granted).

At the ME's office, the pathologist does an external, visual examination of the body, looking for signs of the cause of death, rigidity of muscles, and any identifying scars, tattoos or bruising. In one video, the deceased had a laceration to the head which the pathologist measured. X-rays determined there was no skull fracture. In the second video, the pathologist noticed hemorrhages on the eyelids (often caused by asphyxia), and bruising and laceration to the tongue, which could be caused by a seizure.

An internal exam was conducted, including removing and weighing organs, and taking blood and fluid samples. **Warning: this tape is not for the squeamish!** If the cause of death cannot be determined from the autopsy, the disciplines of histology and toxicology are applied next. In our

video, the death was discovered to be caused by an epileptic seizure leading to suffocation when the victim collapsed face down on the floor.

We then played detective using a computer-based program that led us through the steps of an investigation into a suspicious death at a gym--from the Medical Investigator's on-scene analysis to the autopsy and toxicology reports. We poked and prodded the "deceased" (a life-like dummy) and noted details about the death scene and his personal belongings that we "found" in a gym locker. I won't give away the solution in case any of you have yet to take the tour.

The ME's Office web site is listed on the INK Links page. This visit was organized by Anne Jayne and suggested by Sandra Einarson. Afterwards the group went for dinner and a "post-mortem". Liver (and onions)--with sweetbread--anyone?

From the Crime Writers of Canada:

This year, we're reviving National Crime Writing Week, an initiative spearheaded and chaired by National VP RICK BLECHTA. **National Crime Writing Week will be the week of June 5, 2005**, and will include the Arthur Ellis Awards dinner (Thurs, June 9) and the CWC AGM/workshops (Fri, June 10), the Bloody Words mystery conference (June 10-12), and a brand new event – the read-a-thon – to kick off the week.

We're going after the Guinness record for "Reading Aloud – Marathon (team)" currently held by the Germans who read continuously for 81 hours. We're negotiating with a certain "venerable" Toronto landmark for our venue and are considering possible charities. Rick and his team are poring over the lengthy registration form, but we're going to need readers...lots and lots of readers. When Rick has more info, we'll let you know and you can volunteer.

If any of you have ideas for local initiatives for the week (and people who are willing to work on them) – after all, this is "National" Crime Writing Week – please send them to Rick at rick@rickblechta.com

And the Winner IS.....

Mystery Writers Ink's first Postcard Perps contest has closed. The winning 'solution' to the Christmas Crime scenario was written by **Susan Calder Arnold**. Her story, *The Question*, is printed below:

The Question

O Holy Night. Beth hummed the tune as she left the parking lot and drove up the hill. Instead of turning toward her home, she turned right into Mount Royal's curving streets. Multicoloured lights illuminated the stately houses and snow-laden pine trees.

The stars were brightly shining. At the Christmas concert, Beth had shivered through her granddaughter's solo. The girl aced the soaring tones. She had a solid head and, unlike Beth, wouldn't get pregnant in high school. She would go to university and have a bright career.

Beth steered onto Jamie's crescent. Over the past forty years, she had followed his progress from afar. He had gone from free spirit to millionaire, currently on his fifth wife. That part of him hadn't changed. When Beth, seventeen, had confessed to her best friend, Karen, she was pregnant by Jamie, Karen replied, "Me too. The two-timing sonovabitch."

Karen aborted her baby; Beth dropped out of school at Christmas to raise her daughter alone. Every year, Beth asked herself if she had made the right choice. Twenty times she had answered "yes", twenty "no."

She drove past a thirty foot spruce shimmering to its starred top and was suddenly blinded by even brighter yellows, whites and reds. Were Jamie's neighbours competing for the gaudiest décor?

"Hey," Beth said and braked. Those weren't Christmas lights.

Police, fire and emergency service vehicles were parked in front of Jamie's house, the only modern one on the block. Jamie and wife number five had torn down the stone cottage he had shared with her predecessor and built a tall, glass monstrosity. Beth parked and joined the spectators on the sidewalk. "What happened?" she asked.

"Murder," a man said. "They arrested his wife when she came home from shopping."

Smoke billowed from an upstairs window. The rest of the house was bathed in light. Behind the curtainless windows, people in coveralls bustled up and down the stairs past a lighted Christmas tree. They snapped photographs and wrote notes.

Beth shivered. Jamie's wife had murdered him. It was easy to guess her motive: she had caught him sleeping with prospective wife number six.

A woman standing close to the tape turned sideways. Her profile, lit by a reindeer in Jamie's yard, looked like Karen's.

It couldn't be her, Beth thought. Karen lived across the city. Beth had last run into her three years ago, while Christmas shopping. Karen burred about her happy marriage and her fabulous legal career. Beth reported her layoff from a clerical job. That Christmas, Beth had answered 'no' to the question.

She tapped the woman's shoulder.

Karen whirled around. "Beth? What are you doing here? You don't live in Mount Royal."

"Neither do you."

Karen dug her hands in her ski jacket pockets. "Jamie's dead. He and his wife were fighting and she pummeled him with Christmas candles. She must have been in a rage."

"I bet the anger was building in her for years and she snapped," a woman beside them said. "My husband saw the smoke and called the police. When the wife showed up, she denied she did it. But who else could it be?"

Beth looked at Karen.

Editor's Note: Because of problems with the electronic voting for this contest, and because the votes that did manage to get cast were running very close, we will be printing the other finalist entry in the next issue.

Congratulations to **Lyle Lackmuth** for a most entertaining take on the game of 'Clue'.

And, Last and Best: The GOOD NEWS!

[right where you'll see it every time you check the schedule]

Eileen Coughlan's second book, 'Grizzly Lies' is being released in May 2005 by Sumach Press of Toronto. The launch party will be Friday, May 27th at Pages Books in Kensington.

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**Lorna Schultz Nicholson's fall promotional efforts have paid off. Despite being released late in the year (in September), 'See Fox Run' made the McNally-Robinson bestseller list for 2004**

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Deborah Nicholson's second book 'Evening the Score,' from Severn House, should be out by the time you receive this newsletter.

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**Sandra Einarson has a story in the finals at: [www.cynicmag.com](http://www.cynicmag.com). It can be viewed directly at: <http://www.cynicmag.com/holidaycheer.asp?articleid=382>**

**Good news for newsletter contributors now & in future:** now that we have an ISSN for this newsletter, and are going to be registering as a publisher affiliate with Access Copyright, YOU will be eligible for eventual payouts (IF you register as an author affiliate with Access Copyright).

Just go to the website:  
[www.accesscopyright.ca/rightsholders.asp?a=23](http://www.accesscopyright.ca/rightsholders.asp?a=23)  
Download the form, sign it, and mail it in. It costs nothing, but if you do it before Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>, you're eligible to share the unclaimed pool of money from 2005 on.

**Meeting Schedule:****Third Thursdays, Old Y**

**7:00 to 9:00 p.m.** (except where noted)

**March 10, 2005**

Topic: Novel Settings

Presenter: Eileen Coughlan

**April 14, 2005**

Topic: Writing

Presenter: Cecilia Frey

**May 12, 2005**

**GUN CLUB FIELD TRIP**

Note: this is NOT at the OLD Y.

There will be NO business meeting that night.

**June 9, 2005**

Members' Readings

See Fiona to sign up, or email her at the address in her blurb on Page 5.

There will be no member meetings in July or August. The first meeting after the summer will take place on September 8, 2005.

## Mystery Writers Ink Society

223 – 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW, Calgary Alberta T2R 0G9

**Mission Statement:** *Mystery Writers Ink shall support writers of mystery fiction by providing networking opportunities and by educating and informing writers about writing techniques, publishing, and marketing.*