

THE MARCH OF CRIME

MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA — SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER

Battle of the Bards:

Our Paperback Original Edgar Nominees Size Each Other Up

Mystery Writers of America announced the nominations for the 2007 Edgar Allan Poe Awards on January 19, the anniversary of Poe's death. Among the nominees for Best Paperback Original are two Southern California chapter members, Naomi Hirahara for "Snakeskin Shamisen" and Paul Levine for "The Deep Blue Alibi." They recently sat at their computers and had this online conversation.



NH: When I found out that we both had been nominated for an Edgar in the same category, I challenged you to a mud-wrestling competition to decide who would be representing Bantam Dell. But I heard nothing from you. What

gives? Were you afraid of my mud slinging prowess?

PL: *Just what do you mean by "mud wrestling?" Is this what they used to do in bikinis and thongs at*

the Hollywood Tropicana? If so, you should know that I am old enough to be your father, and if we tangle, I will be accused of being a dirty old man. You will likely be charged with

elder abuse. I do know a few wrestling holds, however. Are you familiar with the "crotch-and-a-half?"

NH: I ain't gonna touch that one, ol' man. On a slightly more serious note, you write humorous mysteries.

What is your observation about comedy and awards? Do we underestimate the power of comedy in our lives, especially during turbulent times?

PL: *I write comedy? The times are turbulent? Why wasn't I informed of this? By the way, do you intentionally use words in your titles that simple folks like me can't understand? I refer to "Bachi" and "Shamisen."*



NH: What about "gasa-gasa"? Do you mean that you got that title? Actually with words like "sudoku" and "manga" all over chain bookstores, I think my titles are a piece of cake.

PL: *Personally, I try to use titles*
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Important Notice: Unless you request a hard copy, you will only receive future issues as an emailed PDF. The PDF version has color, may have different (more) content than the hardcopy and has interactive web and email links.

The President's Rap Sheet

I'm very pleased to tell you about the energizing retreat held recently by the Chapter Board. Not only did almost all of our board members attend, we were honored to have past Chapter Presidents Jan Burke, Bob Levinson, and Nathan Walpow join us as well.

We discussed virtually every aspect of the Chapter, beginning with a reaffirmation of our mission: To support the mystery genre through education of the read-

ing public, recognition of published authors, fostering unpublished and newly-published authors, providing services to the community, and raising literacy. To those ends, we determined to make some of our programs open to the public, starting with the upcoming interview with our own T. Jefferson Parker. We also will continue to reach out to our members outside the Los Angeles/Orange County area.

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(Continued from page 1)

that will fool people into buying my books. "Solomon vs. Lord" was intended to seduce the biblical crowd. It worked, though I got several e-mails objecting to the kinky sex. "The Deep Blue Alibi" was a devious effort to sucker buyers into thinking it was a new edition of John D. MacDonald's "The Deep Blue Good-Bye." And "Kill All the Lawyers" played on a sentiment as American as apple pie and sushi.

NH: You've worked as a lawyer, journalist, television writer, and now mystery novelist...

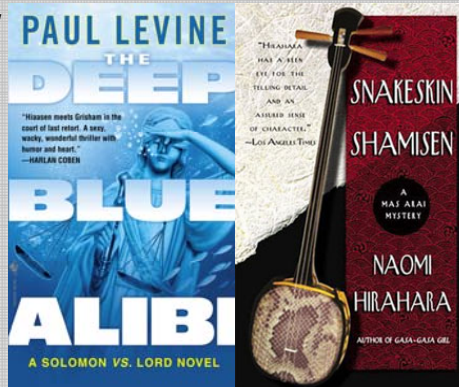
PL: (interrupting) Obviously, I've had great difficulty keeping a job.

N.H. What job most required you to fabricate the truth?

PL: Easy. Lawyering. Judges often accused me of writing fiction in my briefs. (These days, I write fiction in my boxers.) In a similar vein, you are multi-talented bi-lingual and ambitextroux...by which I mean you write fiction and non-fiction. Which do you prefer and is it difficult to go from one to the other?

NH: Hmm--'fiction in my boxers'--give me a moment to forever extricate that image from my mind! In terms of non-fiction and fiction, I love both forms. There's a real beauty in doing research for non-fiction; you are held to such a high standard. Fiction has different requirements. I can identify a few mystery authors, including Jacqueline Winspear, who really take their research for novels seriously, but many of us bend the facts to fit the story. I often pillage my non-fiction work for details to put in my novels. I figure that I put in time to dig out these gems, so it's free for the taking. Back to your television work, I've seen for myself that there are JAG groupies out there. How about Solomon and Lord groupies? Paul Levine groupies?

PL: Have I got groupies? Does chopped liver have fat? When I speak at my Mother's Hadassah luncheon in Ft. Lauderdale, I've got to beat them off with a stick. (Or maybe a shtick). Here are the two most-



asked questions, which come somewhere between the chicken soup and the cheesecake: "So, are you single?" And, "So, you making any money at this?" Now, let me turn the question around on you, Naomi. Groupies? Stalkers?

NH: Believe it or not, my protagonist, Mas Arai, a seventy-something gardener, has his own legion of fans, stretching from Cape Cod to Tokyo. Sujata Massey has even said that she'd like to marry Mas. So there's still hope for you yet, Levine! I remember when we first met at the L.A. Times Festival of Books last year, I shared with you the story of my California-born father being an atomic-bomb survivor--the inspiration behind my Mas character. You also had a remarkable World War II story about your own father.

PL: My father, 1st. Lt. Stanley Levine, flew a B-29 and was shot down over Yawata on August 8, 1945. He and his nine surviving crew members floated in the Sea of Japan for a week, were captured and were taken to Hiroshima Prison Camp Number One. En route, they learned of Hirohito's somewhat ambiguous announcement of the surrender. It took a couple more months for them to be liberated. I wrote about this for The Miami Herald just weeks before my father died. It's on my website, www.paul-levine.com At the top of the page, click on "More Writing." Then scroll down that page to "Hiroshima Personally." I sold a mini-series based on his crew's adventure to CBS, but they never shot it. I got the rights back and wrote it as a spec feature but never sold it. Naomi, if you have \$80 million or so handy, I think we can do this together.

NH: Well, who knows after the Edgars? Good luck to all and speaking for myself and Paul, it is indeed a wonderful honor to be nominated. Hope to see you Southern Californian MWAers in New York!

(The winners of the Edgar Awards will be announced at MWA's banquet on April 26 at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York City.)

Naomi's website is www.naomihirahara.com

AMS / PGW Bankruptcy:**Rags to Riches to Rags, What's It Mean for Authors and Small Publishers?**

Background: The humble start of Advanced Marketing Services, Inc. (AMS) follows one of those homespun, rags-to-riches storylines: its first shipment as a book wholesaler was a children's book, which was delivered to a Price Club from the back of a cofounder's station wagon in 1982. The company quickly grew — to being the primary book supplier to four Price Clubs, to securing deals with Price Club's successor, Costco, as well as Sam's Club and Pace Membership. Large distribution centers were opened in major cities; AMS became a publicly traded company; and international agreements were forged in Great Britain and Mexico. Among the flurry of acquisitions AMS initiated during the past decade was the purchase of Publishers Group West (PGW), the largest distributor of independent publishers in North America.

So why has this great behemoth of a company, which boasts \$900 million in sales, declared Chapter 11? Cracks began to show in the 2005 conviction of

three executives in a scheme to falsify earnings and defraud publishers of co-op advertising funds (*news release, Office of the U.S. Attorney, Southern District of California*). Leadership also went through a merry-go-round of changes.

Several book distribution companies—Perseus, NBN and its rumored Baker & Taylor — have applied to the bankruptcy court to take over distribution rights for PGW clients, many of them small presses whose survival greatly depends on recouping both the monies and inventory owed them for the last quarter of 2006, arguably the most profitable season for publishers

What trickle-down effect this will have on authors remains to be seen. But with hundreds of millions owed to publishers in tight economic times in the book trade, it's only a matter of time before the lowly mid-list author takes a hit.

Naomi Hirahara

The Latest: Perseus Steps In to Save the Day

On Friday, February 16, the Delaware bankruptcy court approved the proposal by Perseus Books Group to take over distribution for those PGW publishers who have signed with the company, which is expected to be most, if not all, of PGW's list. Perseus CEO David Steinberger said, "We are excited to move forward as quickly as possible to write checks to PGW clients and to provide some certainty for PGW employees." The deal will quickly swell the size of Perseus, which until now was comprised of just eight imprints.

From MWA SoCal Members:* "I dodged a bullet. My old publisher, Carroll & Graf, was distributed by PGW, but I'm now with Pegasus and they're distributed by Consortium. I don't expect any personal fallout, except maybe my previous five hardcovers may become unobtainable.—John Shannon

"Both my books are published by Thunderbay, an imprint of AMS / PGW. I always griped because I was a writer for hire and got a lump fee. Now I'm fortunate. I'm not worrying about royalties." — Rosemary Lord

"I do oversized coffee table books on Marvel Comics and the publisher has gone through PGW. My editor told me that [the bankruptcy] was wreaking havoc and that he has spent far too much time lately conversing with lawyers. Even though this is a very small publisher, I haven't gotten the idea that their existence is threatened." — Michael Mallory

"As a publisher I can say it strengthens our resolve not to sign up with a distributor. We got bitten by iBooks. Better to control your own money even if it limits potential sales. The end of the Common Reader was also expensive for us, Rue Morgue and Felony & Mayhem. Small presses are especially vulnerable to cash flow problems that something like this can cause.... I often wonder how Random House has time to harass us over, say, \$5,000, when it let AMS run up a \$48.5 million tab. As a bookstore [owner] I find it really infuriating to see such a double standard. It does lead you to ask who makes the decisions about credit at big publishing and on what basis." — Barbara Peters

(*Prior to the Perseus approval.)

How to Rile Up a Ghost

Can a ghost commit murder? I sure felt like strangling my client Paul (*name changed to protect the not so innocent*) a few times while ghostwriting his crime novel. And periodically I wondered if the only part of the mystery worth solving was not who-did-it but who-wrote-it.

I've co-authored several autobiographies and written a biography, but ghostwriting fiction was foreign to me. Although, as a former tabloid journalist, sensationalizing stories with lurid language and breathless prose was stoking the fires for my own half-finished novel. Writing my first mystery on someone else's nickel – ten times the average advance – was a shot in the dark worth pursuing.

But Paul's premise about an investment scam was mundane. Let's throw in a few murders to spice it up, I suggested. Since I had so many methods of killing already explored for my own book I could afford to give a few away. This unleashed a bloodthirsty streak in him I'd never have imagined the elegant investment banker could harbor. Paul now wanted a murder in every other chapter. And dozens more characters including six spouses and three daughters so that his own real daughters would recognize themselves and feel proud. Gently, I explained the facts of writing a mystery as I understood them.

I created a female forensic accountant as our amateur detective. Barely capable of adding 2+2, I kept kicking myself for such an idiotic notion but figured my client would catch any financial bloopers. However, Belize beckoned and off he went, leaving me to research forensic accounting and its practitioners. Fortunately, Les Klinger came to my aid with a referral to an accountant friend.

Why did Paul hire a ghostwriter? Seems he'd always dreamed of his name on a book and that book would grace his intricately carved antique Chinese coffee table. Since he was too busy jetting off to Europe and South America with clients to have time to write, I was left in glorious control of good and evil, life and death, and most points in between. I stole murderers' names from my illustrious Scottish heritage, satisfied my curiosity on weaponry, and moved the Brooklyn-based Russian Mafia to Bel Air.

Once we had the outline clear and I rather sneakily created a series detective in the hope he'd hire me for more books, Paul left for Paris. Or maybe it was

Monte Carlo. Months went by with little contact. I plodded on, researching locales and characters. On his return we'd skim quickly over the chapters because, well, London was calling.

After completing the project Paul and I went over the manuscript line by line in order to ensure that he read and understood every word. Big mistake. Amid exclamations of "Wow! Does blood really do that?" and "Why's he wearing a kilt?" he decided he wanted to send one character to Turkey – did he have an Istanbul book signing in mind? – and said that one murder certainly was not sufficient. Rectifying this pathetic shortcoming on my part – what was I thinking, only one murder? – I extended the plotline to accommodate him.

Then, far too impatient to wait for agents and publishers to consider the manuscript, Paul instantly self-published and was pleased enough with the result to invite me to the book signing at Duttons, where I hovered behind him as he happily autographed copies of my, um, his, book.

Under our contract I share copyright and royalties, but burning in the back of my mind was finding the opportune moment to ask for co-authorship, thus qualifying for full rather than associate MWA membership. But then I realized self-publishing doesn't count at MWA anyway.

Aside from being introduced by Paul as "my writer" much like "my butler" or "my gardener," I am content with the thrill my client constantly expresses with having written the book, which now sits on his intricately carved antique Chinese coffee table.

Endnote: Since the book is ghostwritten, I feel compelled to protect my client by not revealing the title or author name, darn it.

Jill Amadio

Complete Range of Editorial Services

Professional editor and published author offers complete editorial workout to new and experienced mystery writers.



Benefit from years of editorial experience at major publishing houses. Honest evaluation, sensitive critique, plot/character development, line editing, rewrites.

Helga Schier, Ph.D.: 310-828-8421, withpenandpaper@verizon.net

Transom Notes

Publications, Signing & Events: *Phil Hawley's* debut medical thriller, *Stigma* (HarperCollins, paperback original), was scheduled for release on February 27. www.philiphawley.com. Former SoCal board member *Paul Guyot's* short story, *Barry of Hollywood*, is featured in the new anthology *Hollywood & Crime* (Pegasus Books), on sale March 1st. www.paulguyot.net. *Gayle Lynds's* *The Last Spymaster*, which *Library Journal* named one of the top 5 thrillers of the year, is due out in paperback on March 6. She's an author guest of honor at ITW's Brunch & Bullets on March 17 in Hollywood and at the Elk Grove Arts Festival in northern California on March 31. <http://gaylelynds.com>. *Poison Pen* (Capital Crime Press), the first in *Sheila Lowe's* new series featuring a forensic handwriting expert, is due for a mid-March release. Sheila will be signing on March 10th at The Mystery Bookstore in Westwood and on the 27th at Nona's Courtyard Café in Ventura. www.sheilalowe.com. *Jennifer Colt's* *The Vampire of Venice Beach* (Broadway Books) is due for release on March 27, and Jennifer will also be signing at the Mystery Bookstore in Westwood on March 10. And also on March 10th, *Sue Ann Jaffarian* will be signing *The Curse of the Holy Pail* at Mysterious Galaxy Books, in San Diego. On March 20th, Sue Ann will be featured at a book discussion at the Palms-Rancho Park Library in Los Angeles. www.sueannjaffarian.com. On March 24th, the Malibu Library will host a panel featuring *Denise Hamilton*, *Sue Ann Jaffarian*, *Harley Jane Kozak* and *Pamela Samuels-Young*, and moderated by *Bill Fitzhugh*. *Deborah J. Ledford* has a mystery short story in the anthology, *Map of Murder*, published by Red Coyote Press. djledford@cox.net. *Michael Mallory* reports that his signature character *Amelia Watson* will be returning in a new story titled "*The Singularity Society of London*" at amazonshorts.com. And for all those who have noticed his error in Britishism in his current *amazonshorts* story, "*The Curious Case of the Peacock Street Peculiar*," he can only cry *mea culpa*. www.michaelmallory.com.

Movies/Media: Florida Special Agent and crime writer *James O. Born* will be visiting Los Angeles March 3 through 7 to shoot a DVD workshop tentatively titled *Special Ops for Writers* with MWA members *Shannon and Sharlyn Harley* of T2G Productions. The DVD will be the fifth in the *Killer Fiction Workshop* series. Born will also be signing his new release *Field of Fire* at The Mystery Bookstore on March 6. shannonharley@yahoo.com. *Andrew Neiderman* is in full throttle development of his hit novel and film, *The Devil's Advocate*, as a theatrical production a la Broadway. He has written the libretto based on the novel and is working with *Sarif Tribou* of Stage Holding, a composer from Holland. www.neiderman.com.

Other Announcements: *Kathryn Cheng* (*Kathryn Lilley*), who is currently working on the second book in her new mystery series, is looking for a critique group in the South Bay area. She's even willing to start a new one. www.kathrynlilley.com. Detective Sergeant *Kevin Coffey* of the LAPD Juvenile Division is looking for writers to participate in a special project. He needs volunteers to write short short stories (500-750 words) that require the reader to solve a crime. Written from the detective's POV, these "You're the Detective" stories are designed to make students think, learn, and have fun. Kids enjoy solving quick and easy whodunits, and this is a great way to encourage them to read. Targeted age groups range from 11-20 years olds. For a sample copy of a story, contact Detective Coffey: 23476@lapd.lacity.org

Fresh Blood – New Members and Reinstatements: Affiliate— *Gwen Freeman* (Los Angeles,) *Gail Baugniet* (Honolulu,) *Dale McCann* (Las Vegas,) *Robert Hewes* (Lucerne Valley,) *Katharine A. Russell* (Palm Desert,) *Denny Braun* (San Diego,) *Don West* (Tucson.) **Associate**— *John Goodwin* (Hollywood.) **Active**— *Anthony A. Flacco* (Encino,) *Frederick Ramsay* (Surprise.) **Reinstatements, Active**— *Patricia Rumer* (Vail,) *Raelynn J. Hillhouse* (Hilo,) *Irene Turner* (Los Angeles.) **Associate**— *Helen E. Breitwieser* (Los Angeles.)

Compiled by *Sheila Lowe*

A Note about Transom Notes: *Items must be about MWA SoCal members or of clear interest / use to members. References to reviews will be deleted, unless there are extraordinary circumstances (eg. a featured review—not even Marilyn Stasio's column—in the Sunday NY or LA Times Book Review or something similar.) Notices of signings will be included on a first come—first served basis, but will have low priority if the column needs to be cut for space considerations.*

(Continued from page 1)

We've begun planning the Marlowe Awards banquet, under the leadership of Dianne Emley, and we're hoping to make it part of an expanded program. We decided to add some informal gatherings to our already-extensive slate of Chapter meetings, starting with a gathering at the venerable Musso & Frank's in Hollywood (at the bar, of course!) at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 28. If this goes well, we plan to make this a monthly institution! We're also organizing an informal summer get-together, in June or July.

A number of electronic innovations will be in place shortly on our revamped Chapter website, www.socalmwa.com. Thanks to the hard work of Jim Warren, our Chapter webmaster, the site has a dramatic new front page. We've added a telephone number (it's on the masthead above!) for the Chapter, for you to reach us and for us to provide basic information about upcoming events. We're in the process of creating electronic registration for Chapter programs (using Paypal) to simplify your signups. We're adding a Members Only section to the website which will have back issues of the Chapter newsletter as well as digital recordings of Chapter programs, so that members who miss one can catch up there!

Probably most important is what most of you are looking at right now: a new electronic version of our Chapter newsletter. Not only will this save the Chapter considerable money, it will permit greatly expanded content, pictures, and links to relevant items, including online program registration. Print copies will remain available to those who desire them.



L-R: Randy Hicks, Jan Burke, Eric Stone, Patty Smiley, Linda O. Johnston, Nathan Walpow, Lynette Brasfield, Diane Emley, Bob Levinson, Naomi Hirahara, Jim Warren, Les Klinger.

Your new Chapter officers and committee chairs are:

- Vice-President/Programs Chair: [Patty Smiley](#)
- Treasurer/Marlowe Banquet Chair: [Dianne Emley](#)
- Newsletter Chair/Editor: [Eric Stone](#)
- Publicity Chair: [Randy Hicks](#)
- Internet Committee Chair: [Jim Warren](#)
- Speakers' Bureau Chair: [Naomi Hirahara](#)
- LA Times Festival of Books Chair: [Linda O Johnston.](#)

I'd love to hear from our members about additional ideas. There are plentiful opportunities to volunteer, so jump on in! And watch this space for further news!

[Les Klinger](#)

Chapter President

Note: In the PDF version of the newsletter, words and names in blue are linked to either email or a website.

Sleuthiness: You threw away all those old magazines. Now what?

Browsing through magazines and newspapers for ideas might be something you'd like to do, but you don't have stacks of them dating back to the last ice age, and you don't want to spend hours in the library.

Here's a solution -- <http://keepmedia.net>. This site stores

thousands of articles, both current and archived, from publications around the world; you can view them by publication or sort them by subject.

Some of the titles included are *Psychology Today*, *Haaretz* (Israeli), *Black Enterprise*, *Newsweek*, *Multi-National Monitor*,

Middle East Policy, the *London Times*, and a number of large and small newspapers from across America.

Some articles are free, though most require a subscription -- for a whopping \$4.95 a month. Gosh! One stop at Starbucks!

Patti Shinnars

March Luncheon:

Jacqueline Winspear Talks With Jim Warren

Jacqueline’s acclaimed four novels, *Maisie Dobbs* (2003), *Birds of a Feather* (2004), *Pardonable Lies* (2005), and *Messenger of Truth* (2006), are set in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and are informed by the horrific human consequences of World War I.

Explaining the genesis of the first in the series, Jacqueline wrote, “The war and its aftermath provide fertile ground for a mystery. Such great social upheaval allows for the strange and unusual to emerge and a time of intense emotions can, to the writer of fiction, provide ample fodder for a compelling story, especially one concerning criminal acts and issues of guilt and innocence. After all, a generation is said to have lost its innocence in The Great War. The mystery genre provides a wonderful vehicle for exploring such a time.”

The series’ protagonist, *Maisie Dobbs*, whose business cards identify her as a “Psychologist and Detective,” is very much a woman of her generation. She has come of age at a time when women took on the toil of men and claimed independence that was difficult to relinquish. It was a time when many women remained unmarried, simply because a generation of men had gone to war and not come home. The series has earned Jacqueline an Edgar nomina-



tion for Best Novel, two Agathas (one each for Best First Novel and Best Novel), the Macavity/Sue Feder Best Historical Mystery Award, the American Library Association’s Alex Award, the Southern California Booksellers Association Book Award for Best Mystery—not to mention several nominations for these and other awards, a plethora of prestigious “Top Ten” lists, and a veritable clamor of praise from critics.

Embarked upon a life-long dream to be a writer. Jacqueline was born in Kent, England. Following higher education at the University of London’s Institute of Education, she worked in both general and academic publishing, in higher education and in marketing communications in the UK. She emigrated to the United States in 1990, and while working in business and as a personal/professional coach, embarked upon a life-long dream to be a writer.

A regular contributor to journals covering international education, Jacqueline has published articles in women's magazines and has also recorded her essays for KQED radio in San Francisco. She currently divides her time between Ojai and the San Francisco Bay Area. Jacqueline is also a regular visitor to the United Kingdom and Europe.

RESERVATION FORM: Sunday, March 25, 2007 / Taix Restaurant

1911 Sunset Blvd, Los Angeles 90026 (parking on premises: \$2.50)

Reception from 11 am / Luncheon 11:45 am sharp / Program from 12:30 pm

Advance reservations \$20 (member or guest); **Payment at the door: \$25**

Make Checks Payable to: MWA-SoCal; Remit to: MWA-SoCal / 12021 Wilshire Blvd. #506, Los Angeles, CA 90025

Or, reserve and pay (with PayPal) online at www.socalmwa.com

Member & Guest(s) Names _____

Phone _____ or E-mail _____

Please specify entrée for each attendee:

	MEMBER	GUEST
Chilled Salmon Salad		
Chicken Diablo		
Penne Pasta Monagasque (vegetarian)		

All meals include choice of soup, salad, sourdough bread, coffee, tea, sherbet.

THE MARCH OF CRIME

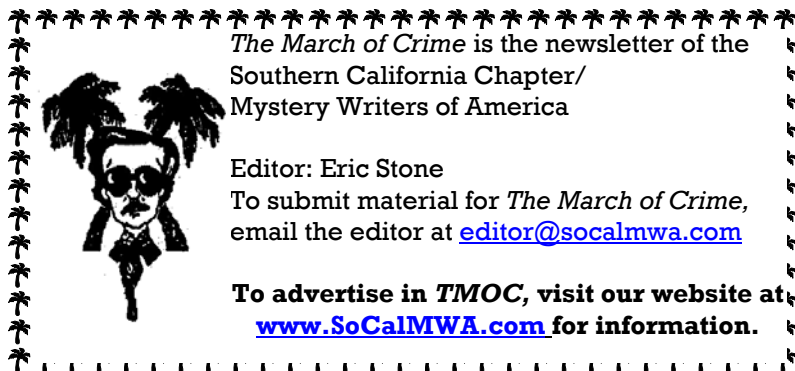


MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA

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

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To submit material for *The March of Crime*, email the editor at editor@socalmwa.com

To advertise in *TMOC*, visit our website at www.SoCalMWA.com for information.

The Crime Calendar

High Desert Crimes Book Fair—March 24, Sierra Vista, AZ, www.clik.to/sistersincrime

Sleuthfest—April 19-22, Miami Beach, FL www.mwa-florida.org/sleuthfest.htm

Edgars Symposium & Banquet—Apr. 25-26, New York, NY, www.mysterywriters.org

L.A. Times Festival of Books—Apr. 28-29, Los Angeles, CA, www.latimes.com/extras/festivalofbooks/

Malice Domestic - May 4-6, Arlington, VA, www.malicedomestic.org

Mayhem in the Midlands—May 24-27, Omaha, NE, www.omahapubliclibrary.org/mayhem/

Murder in the Grove— June 8-9, Boise, ID, www.murderinthegrove.com

No Crime Unpublished—June 10, Los Angeles, CA www.sistersincrimela.com

Hardboiled Heroes & Cozy Cats—June 15-16, Dallas, TX, www.mwasw.org/conf.html

Bloody Words—June 15-17, Victoria, British Columbia, bloodywords.com

Book Passage Mystery Writers Conf.—June 21-24, Corte Madera, CA www.bookpassage.com

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