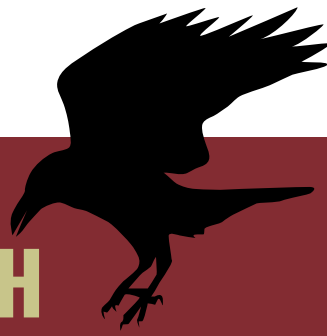


NOVEMBER 2025

THE MARCH OF CRIME

SoCalMWA's monthly newsletter.



Noir Authors



An Evening with NOIR AUTHORS



The reader lineup will be announced soon!

Thursday, Nov 20
7-8:30 p.m.
Crowdcast

Register Now

What's inside

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Japanese Sherlockians, Universal Themes



BY LESLIE S. KLINGER

I just returned from my first trip to Japan, where I spent two wonderful weeks. One of the highlights of the time was a dinner with a group of Japanese Sherlockians, four of whom are members of the Baker Street Irregulars, the international literary society. Japan has the largest Holmes group in the world, with over 600 members. The Irregulars, by contrast, has only about 300 members, and local “scion” societies in the U.S. typically number 50 to 100 members.

The Japanese people have imported many elements of Western culture, including hairstyles, dress, and pop music, adding their own customs and traditions to create a unique style. The same is true of Japanese crime fiction. The Holmes stories were popular inclusions in English readers published in Japan, beginning in 1924, and the first translation appeared in 1928, two years before Conan Doyle’s death. In the 1930s, the famed Japanese crime-fiction writer Tarō Hirai, better known by the pen name Edogawa Ranpo or Edogawa Rampo (yes, our own Edgar Allen Poe), made his own translations. Hirai, an important critic as well as writer, began his own series of detective stories and is properly regarded as the father of Japanese mystery fiction.

Today, there is a thriving coterie of Japanese crime writers, with many works translated into English and readily available here. There is a sister organization—the Mystery Writers of Japan, founded in 1947, two years after MWA, and also numbering about 600 members. They present their own annual award, the Edogawa Rampo award (first awarded in 1948), for the best work in any category of crime fiction or crime-related nonfiction. Our first Edgar® award was given out in 1947, for “Best First Novel”—the “Best Novel” award wasn’t presented until 1953.

In a brief outline of the modern Japanese mystery, Shimada Soji, a leading writer of Japanese fiction, explains that early in the 20th century the Western masters of the fair-play whodunit provided models for “honkaku” (“orthodox”), a form of the detective story “that is not only literature but also to a greater or lesser extent a game.”

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Happy to be Your New Editor



BY BONNIE HEARN HILL

In this, my first column, I want to thank Holly West, who has not only done an outstanding job for the past 15 years, but who has been extremely generous in helping me step into this role. Holly, you've gone above and beyond, and I'm thrilled you can finally devote your energy to your WIP.

I joined this group when my agent placed my first series in 2002, and doing so made me feel less alone. In my past life, I worked as an editor for a major daily newspaper and wrote some novels set in that world. I currently freelance as acquisitions editor for a thriller publisher. For the last 20-plus years, I've appeared on a popular Central California TV station's monthly book club, where I recommend new books to viewers. (If you'd like me to consider your book, let me know.)

Finally, I love everything about writing even when I hate it. That love has led me up some magnificent roads and down some dark alleys. Ultimately, it has enabled me to sit here at my desk, imagining myself anywhere, as anyone, doing anything.

I'd love to hear from you. What do you want to see in this newsletter? Would you like more information on publishing? Literary agents? Awards? If you have a book coming out, and you'd like to write about the process, please let me know.

Bonnie



The March of Crime

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

Editor: Bonnie Hearn Hill

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

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How to Weave Current Issues into Your Mystery Novel Without Losing Readers

BY ELLE JAUFFRET

Writers face a unique challenge: readers want escapism while craving relevance. Successfully integrating contemporary issues requires strategic storytelling, not heavy-handed commentary. Here's how to achieve this balance.

Make Issues Personal, Not Political

Don't take stances, but show how issues affect individual characters. Instead of discussing a specific current issue, create a character whose condition causes conflicts with authorities. **Attica Locke's** *Bluebird, Bluebird* tackles racial tensions through Texas Ranger Darren Mathews' personal struggles with identity and loyalty, making social issues emerge organically.

Start with character impact: How does the issue personally affect your protagonist? What immediate consequences does it create?

Embed Issues in Character Motivations

Contemporary problems should drive plot organically. In **Tana French's** *Broken Harbor*, Ireland's economic crash and decaying "ghost estate" become the psychological foundation for the mystery, with economic anxiety directly motivating character actions. Let issues create obstacles and fears that serve your story.

Use Familiar Frameworks for Unfamiliar Anxieties

Connect modern issues to universal human experiences. Social media pressure is still about acceptance and belonging. **Liane Moriarty's** *Big Little Lies* uses online parent shaming and social media facades to explore classic themes of secrets, judgment, and belonging—making digital-age perfectionism an amplified version of timeless community gossip and social hierarchy.

Let Characters Disagree Naturally

Real people hold different views. In **Louise Penny's** *A Better Man*, climate change (spring flooding) affects each Three Pines character differently, creating natural tension without imposing a "correct" viewpoint. Create characters with varying perspectives based on their backgrounds, and let them debate through dialogue and actions.

Ground Issues in Specific Details

Abstract concepts lose readers; specific situations engage them. **Walter Mosley's** Easy Rawlins series explores racial inequities and social injustice in 1940s L.A. through concrete details, such as property ownership restrictions, service entrances, and differential police treatment. Research real examples, then fictionalize specific incidents your characters could realistically encounter.

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Current Issues

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Use Subplots to Explore Issues

Not every concern needs to drive your main mystery. My *Cosplayed to Death* weaves themes of identity and body modification through a cosplayer subplot that complements rather than overwhelms the central investigation. Create B-plots that explore different facets of modern life.

Show Consequences, Don't Preach Solutions

Your job isn't solving society's problems but showing how they affect people. **Michael Connelly's** *The Night Fire* examines homelessness in Los Angeles by showing how the system fails individuals, rather than proposing policies. End scenes focusing on how characters feel and react rather than how society should change.

Trust Your Genre's Strengths

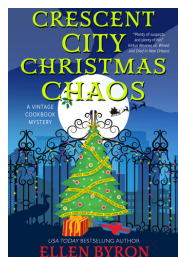
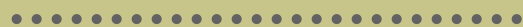
Mystery novels excel at revealing hidden truths and seeking justice, which is perfect for addressing contemporary issues. **Celeste Ng's** *Little Fires Everywhere* employs mystery structure to gradually uncover issues of class divide, transracial adoption ethics, and reproductive rights, making politically charged topics feel like natural revelations in a whodunit.

Test for Authenticity, Not Agenda

Ask yourself: Do these issues feel naturally integrated or like a lecture? **S.A. Cosby's** *Blacktop Wasteland* integrates racial and economic inequalities so completely that removing them would fundamentally alter the protagonist's motivations. Beta readers from diverse backgrounds can identify authentic integration versus dropped-in talking points.

The goal isn't writing social justice treatises disguised as mysteries, but creating compelling stories acknowledging the world readers live in. When contemporary issues arise naturally from character needs and drive the plot forward, when they serve the story, they enhance the reading experience. Your mystery can be both escapist entertainment and meaningful reflection.

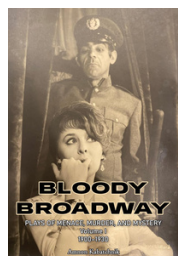
Elle Jauffret is the author of *Threads of Deception* and *Cosplayed to Death*. She is a PenCraft Award Winner and Agatha Award finalist.



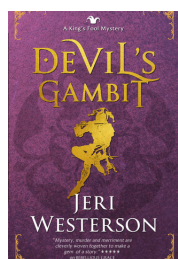
'*Crescent City Christmas Chaos*, the fourth book in **Ellen Byron's** award-winning Vintage Cookbook Mysteries, launches November 4.



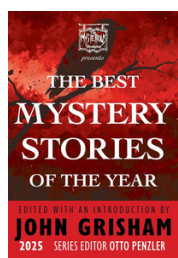
The Mystery at the Horse Auction by **Gay Toltl Kinman** is the fifth in the Sables Mystery series. The three 11-year-olds investigate a claim by a man who says his daughter was kidnapped. She was to be married, a man chosen by her father. Did she escape, or was she really kidnapped?



Amnon Kabatchnik's new book is *Bloody Broadway: Plays of Menace, Murder, and Mystery, volume 1, 1900-1930*. The manuscript analyses plays by the era's melodramatists, who whipped up various four-act plays featuring flamboyant villains, brawny heroes, and damsels in distress



Jeri Westerson's upcoming January 1 release of her Tudor mystery series The King's Fool Mysteries #4 *Devil's Gambit* is available for pre-order on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com). Reviewers can post to [Netgalley](https://www.netgalley.com).



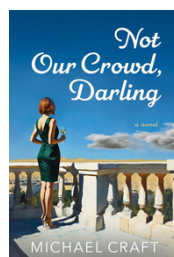
Craig Faustus Buck's short story "Home Game," which was selected for Otto Penzler and John Grisham's anthology *The Best Mystery Stories of the Year (2025)*, has won the Macavity Award for Best Short Story, awarded by Mystery Readers International.



Deborah J Ledford's latest release is *At the Threshold*, contains original short stories featuring mystery, thriller, literary and a touch of magical realism, transporting readers to Costa Rica, Thailand the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, Arizona and many more U.S. settings. The collection includes three Pushcart Prize Nominees.



Havoc (Thomas & Mercer) another novel by **Deborah J Ledford**, is a New Mexico Book Award Finalist in the Best Crime Fiction and Multicultural categories.



Michael Craft announces the publication of his 21st novel, *Not Our Crowd, Darling* (Questover Press, November 10). *BookLife Reviews* named it an Editor's Pick, describing it as "a surprising and stylish novel of a heartland society widow, a tower, and a secret."



Susan Cummins Miller's historical mystery, *My Bonney Lies Under* (Artemesia Publishing), has won the 2025 New Mexico Book Award-Mystery/Thriller category.



With the publication of *Birdland Island* by V.C. Andrews on October 28, 2025 **Andrew Neiderman** ended one aspect of his long writing career, ghostwriting. Neiderman has written 100 V.C. Andrews titles over 37 years bringing the franchise from 22 million to 107 million books worldwide.

APPEARANCES & EVENTS



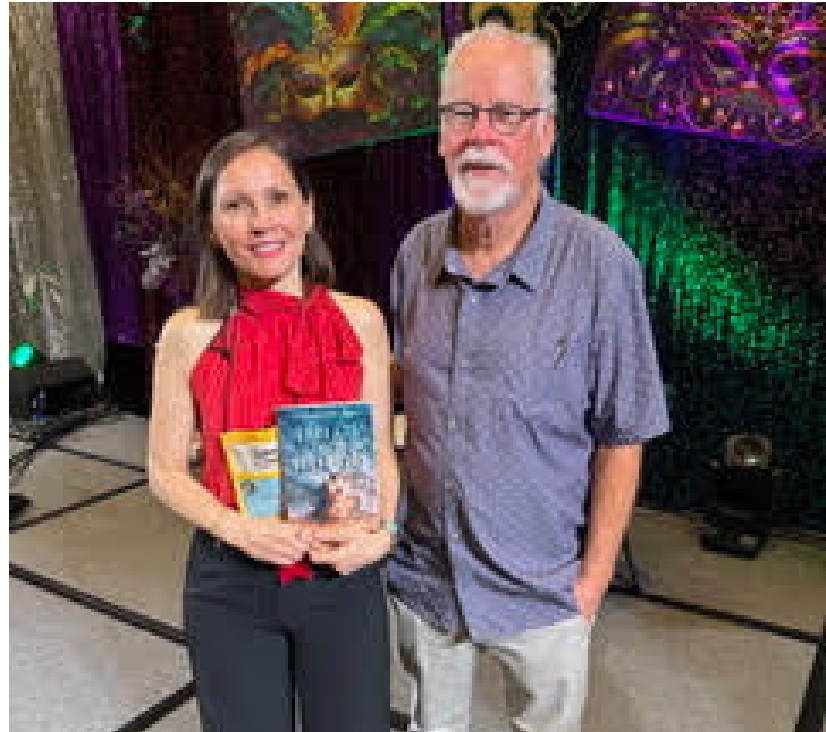
Patricia Smiley is scheduled to appear at the following events to discuss the first novel in her new cozy series, *A Dark September Night*: OC Book Fair, an independent book fair centered in the heart of Old Town Tustin
Location: El Camino Real between Main Street and Second Street, Saturday, November 15, 2025, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m

Mystery Ink with **Ellen Byron**
Studio 14, Old World Village
7561 Center Avenue
Huntington Beach, CA 92647
Saturday, November 22, 10:00 a.m.



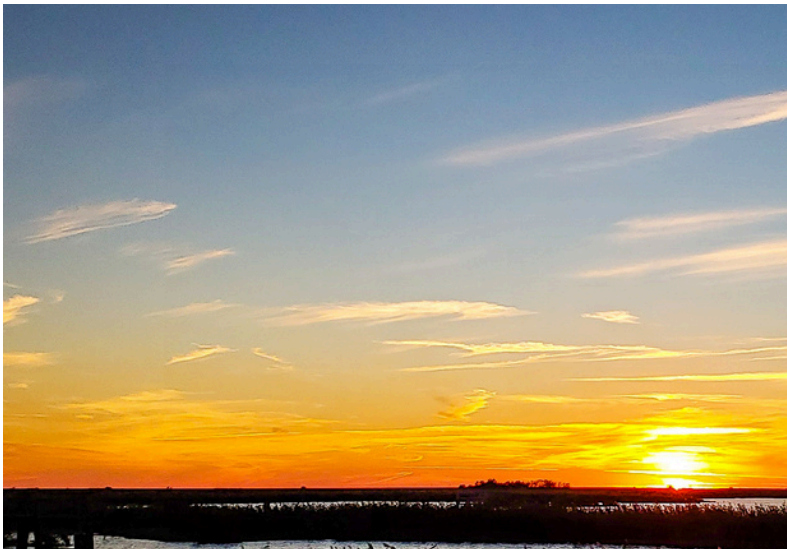
Sisters in Crime Orange County Book Carnival, 348 S Tustin St, Orange, CA 92866
Sunday, November 23, 3:00 p.m.
Patty will share the stage with screenwriter **Andrew Rubin** to discuss: *A Dark September Night* and *Hell or High Winter*. For more information, visit www.patriciasmiley.com and hellorhighwinter.com

Ellen Byron will join authors Jacqueline Snowe and Karen Schaler at a holiday-themed event hosted by the Poisoned Pen Bookstore in Scottsdale, AZ on November 9 at 2 p.m



Winner of the PenCraft Award for Best Mystery (Spring/Sleuth) and nominated for the Agatha Award for Best Debut Novel, **Elle Jauffret** was one of the featured authors introduced by **Michael Connelly** at the recent Bouchercon Debut Breakfast. She will be one of the featured authors at the Burbank Book Festival on November 8. *Cosplayed To Death* (book 2 of her Suddenly French Mysteries series) comes out on November 11.

On November 16, drop by The Last Bookstore, Studio City (4437 Lankershim Avenue) for **Ellen Byron's** Book Boutique Party from 4-6 p.m., celebrating the release of *Crescent City Christmas Chaos*. There will be treats, swag, and raffle prizes.





Legal Aspects of Writing True Crime

President Leslie S. Klinger served as moderator for an informative October 26 panel, “Legal Aspects of Writing True Crime,” a Crowdcast event with panel members intellectual property attorney Jonathan Kirsch and New York Times best-selling author and investigative journalist Caitlin Rother. Klinger presented a hypothetical crime, which Rother and Kirsch used as a jumping-off point for what true-crime authors can expect to encounter. The panel discussed copyrights, rights to life stories, what’s really meant by “off the record,” and when to say it. They also discussed the answer to the question subjects frequently ask, “Are you going to pay me?” (Answer, “No.”) This outstanding presentation was a mini-workshop that would benefit anyone currently writing true crime or considering it. [Watch the replay here.](#)

LEGAL ASPECTS OF WRITING TRUE CRIME

A discussion about permissions, copyrights, life story rights, disclaimers, releases, and the like—the tools of the trade of the contemporary writer of true-crime. Sample documents will be provided.

Jonathan Kirsch
Author-Attorney

Caitlin Rother
True Crime Author

Leslie S. Klinger
Moderator

Japanese Sherlockians

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Quoting Golden Age mystery writer S.S. Van Dine, he adds that it invites the reader to employ “a high degree of logical reasoning.” By the 1950s, a more psychological approach to crime fiction held sway. Its leading voice, Matsumoto Seichi, declared that “the most important elements of the detective novel were the motive that led to the crime and the depiction of the psychology of the criminal.” The “orthodox” approach was consequently disparaged and relatively ignored—until the appearance in 1981 of Shimada’s own highly-regarded *The Tokyo Zodiac Murders*, which he called “shin-honkaku” (“new orthodox”).

Shimada’s success led to younger Japanese writers inventing new twists on traditional murder tropes: the closed circle of suspects, the isolated chalet or island from which there is no escape, the fair presentation of clues. The Kyoto University Mystery Club was founded in 1974, further encouraging study of classic mysteries as well as providing a venue for its members to play various “whodunit” games. From this club emerged a number of important new writers, among them Yukio Ayatsuji, who published *The Decagon House Murders* in 1987 to great acclaim.

My Sherlockian dinner was a great joy, sharing a bond with a large group of new friends. It was also a reminder that crime writing addresses universal fears and pains and expresses a universal hope that reason and justice can prevail.

Les



CRIME CALENDAR



2025

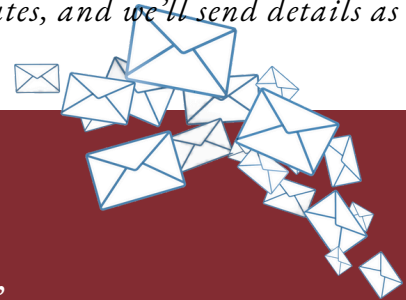
November 15: OC Book Fair, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

November 20: Author Readings—Noir, Crowdcast

November 23: Sisters in Crime Orange County Book Carnival

December 15: SoCalMWA/SinCLA Holiday Party, Studio City

For events without links, save the dates, and we'll send details as soon as they're available.



If you know of an event that belongs on the Crime Calendar, email themarchofcrime@gmail.com with the info.

Call For Authors

Jeri Westerson is looking for authors to guest post on her [blog](#) for November. Do you have a Thanksgiving cozy? Or a November story not so cozy? Or just released something? Contact [Jeri](#).

THE LAST WORD



“Identity wasn’t just who you were, but also who you weren’t anymore. “

Cosplayed to Death

by Elle Jauffret