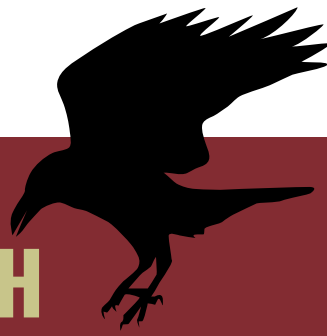


MAY 2026

# THE MARCH OF CRIME

SoCalMWA's monthly newsletter.



## Crime Scene, Los Angeles: from the Black Dahlia to the Hillside Strangler

Who really killed the Black Dahlia, and does that killer have ties to the Bay Area's infamous Zodiac killings that occurred a generation later? *Los Angeles Times* crime writer Christopher Goffard addressed these and other questions with Board member **Pat H. Broeske**, April 25, during "Crime Scene, Los Angeles," a [Crowdcast](#) event.

Broeske, a former staff writer who covered Hollywood for the *Los Angeles Times*, and Goffard, whose popular "Crimes of the Times" columns led to his current "Crimes of the Times" [podcast](#), discussed the murder of Elizabeth Short, aka the Black Dahlia, whose bisected body was found in an empty lot in South Los Angeles on January 15, 1947. Goffard also explored its possible ties to the 1960s Bay Area Zodiac killings.

Amateur sleuth Alex Baber allegedly broke the famed Z-13 cypher, a reference to a June 1970 letter, sent to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, by the Zodiac Killer. In doing so, Baber discovered the identity of a man who was a suspect in the 1947 Dahlia case. Then came the discovery of a sketch done by the suspect in the period leading up to his own death; it appears to be Elizabeth Short. Goffard stressed that, as a reporter, he presented the information without expressing an opinion.

He and Broeske also discussed the longest-running murder trial in America, the trial of Hillside Strangler Angelo Buono, which spanned 729 days! The killings by Buono and his cousin Kenneth Bianchi contributed to SoCal's reputation as a serial killer capital.

They also talked about the biggest sex-abuse case in American history. More than 300 counts of child molestation and conspiracy were filed in 1983 against seven defendants involved with the McMartin Preschool in Manhattan Beach, a case that ended with zero convictions. It was ultimately chalked up to "satanic panic" hysteria.

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## Celebrating Our Greats



BY LESLIE S. KLINGER

It was an amazing month for celebrating MWA and our genre! In mid-April, we had our usual presence at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books. First, there were the annual Book Prizes. In the Mystery category, the nominees were Megan Abbott, Lou Berney, Ace Atkins, and our own **Michael Connelly**--a stellar group, all true winners regardless of the outcome (Megan took home the actual prize, however). The following two days, we shared a booth with Debbie Mitsch of Mystery Ink. Over two dozen authors signed books at the booth and met enthusiastic readers. I was there both days, and many of us had a chance to meet old friends and new, writers and readers. We passed out a lot of pamphlets explaining our mission, and I hope we'll get some new members out of our proselytizing!

Last night (as I write this), I went to our biggest event of the year, the 80<sup>th</sup> annual Edgar® Awards ceremonies in Manhattan. This is a grand banquet attended by more than 300 people, including publishers, agents, editors, and of course writers. You can read all the details of the Awards themselves in our latest Third Degree, sent out on April 30 to all of our members. In addition to the Awards (and I got the thrill of presenting the Edgar® for Best Critical/Biographical), I was privileged to announce a new honor, the MWA Hall of Fame.

A word about the Hall: In 1955, we gave out the first Grand Master award, honoring the very best of the practitioners of crime fiction, to Agatha Christie. We instituted a rule, however, that only living persons would be eligible for this "lifetime achievement" recognition. There were, of course, many giants on whose shoulders we stand who either died before we could recognize them or whose lives ended long before MWA existed. The Board of Directors of MWA decided that we should begin to honor some of those individuals. We selected an initial "class" of ten to be inducted in our first year, with more to follow in succeeding years. It was not easy to select just ten, but the initial honorees are Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, Anna Katharine Green, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Dashiell Hammett, Dorothy Sayers, S. S. Van Dine, and Raymond Chandler—truly all giants.

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## Mystery Writers of America Southern California Chapter

c/o Leslie S. Klinger  
10866 Wilshire Blvd.  
Suite 1500  
Los Angeles, CA 90024

Contact: [info@socalmwa.com](mailto:info@socalmwa.com)  
Website: <http://socalmwa.com>  
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## AI's Not Going Away

BY BONNIE HEARN HILL

Tapestry...

Delve...

Not only...but also...

I judged entries in a writing contest last week, and as you might guess, many of them displayed that faux-human, all-too-familiar sameness of AI. Hachette's recent, well-publicized yanking of a novel that had raised suspicions of AI use was, on one hand, shocking, and, on the other, not surprising. It won't be the last.

Yet, AI isn't going anywhere. Job boards post high rates for those willing to train it to sound more human. I don't know anyone who's actually applied for or been hired for such a job, and I wouldn't consider it, even if I were not part of the Anthropic class-action lawsuit.

Gotham Ghostwriters recently published AI Guidelines for Ghostwriting. Their recommendations for AI use include transcribing audio interviews, checking spelling and grammar, cleaning up formatting or citations, and assessing reading level. "Writers' core principles of integrity must remain, regardless of AI use," the guidelines state. "No matter how they generate content, writers and their clients are jointly responsible for ethical processes that protect the originality, accuracy, and legality of the work."

It's a beginning, and many publishers are already changing their contracts to specify that work be original. Still, what's original? And are guidelines or even threats going to stop authors or editors who are looking for shortcuts?

I replied to a potential editing client recently that his novel was so full of AI tics that I couldn't fix it and wouldn't be able to take the job. He replied to me with a message that contained this line: "Tell her that you want to keep AI because it improves your voice."

Now, that's scary.

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](mailto:themarchofcrime@gmail.com)

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(members only)

NATIONAL OFFICE  
Mystery Writers of America  
1140 Broadway #1507  
New York, NY 10001  
t. 212.888.8171  
[mwa@mysterywriters.org](mailto:mwa@mysterywriters.org)  
<http://mysterywriters.org>

# OVER THE TRANSOM, MEMBER NEWS



**Karen Odden's** new book, *An Artful Dodge*, will publish June 2. Set in 1879 London, it features Kit Jameson, a member of an all-women thieving gang operating out of Elephant and Castle, a seedy quarter of London. *Publishers Weekly* gave it a starred review, calling it, "A brilliant historical mystery."



Contributors of the newly released *The Savage Waves of Spring* anthology, including **Curtis Ippolito**, read from their stories and answered questions at Artifact Books in Encinitas on April 11. Other readers were Jim Ruland, Michael Scott Moore, and Nik Xandir Wolf.



**Sheila Lowe's** new novel, *Lies Between the Lines*, will be published in June. On May 31, Sheila, **Judith Mathison**, and Fiona Manning will be guests at the Ojai Art Center, on a panel moderated by publicist Kathleen Kaiser.

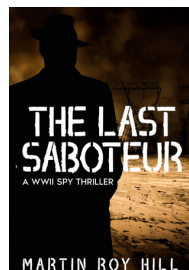
**Laurie Stevens** discussed her books May 5, at Cassiopeia Books in Great Falls, MT. She'll appear at 5:30 p.m., May 15, in the Hemingway Suite at the Sun Valley Lodge in Idaho. More information is available on her [website](#).

**Sheila Hansberger's** latest suspense, *Runaway Artist*, recently received Literary Titan's prestigious Gold Book Award.

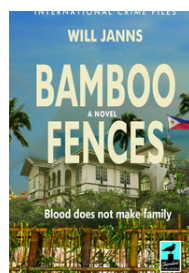
*The Moaning Lisa*, Rosemary and Larry Mild's fourth Paco and Molly Mystery, won an Independent Press Award 2026 Distinguished Favorite.

The National League of American Pen Women Biennial Competition awarded **Rosemary Mild** third prize for her short story "Two Overheated Engines."

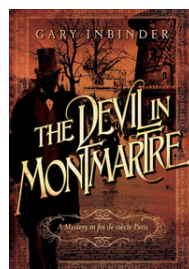
**Jennifer J. Chow** was in conversation with Camille Cabrera at LitFest in the Dena on May 2 at the Pasadena Presbyterian Church. Their session was "Mystery 101: The Art of Asking Why."



**Martin Roy Hill's** WWII spy thriller, *The Last Saboteur*, was released by 32-32 North last month. It's 1944. As America races to build the ultimate weapon, Germany sends one man to stop it. His orders: infiltrate the Manhattan Project and destroy it from within. His target? J. Robert Oppenheimer.



**Will Zeilinger and Janet Elizabeth Lynn**, writing as **Will Janns**, have released *Bamboo Fences*, the third book in their International Crime Files series. This one is set in the Philippines in 1962.



The San Diego Art Museum's The Art of Reading Book Club will discuss **Gary Inbinder's** novel, *The Devil in Montmartre*, at 10:15 a.m., May 9, in the SDMA boardroom. Coffee and light snacks will be served. A docent-led tour of artworks featured in the book will follow.



Back row, Marie Couste and **Laurie Stevens**. Front row, **Gregory Urbach, Dennis Palumbo, Lee Goldberg, Elisa Fortise Christensen**.

These authors appeared April 18 at the San Fernando Community Helpers annual Authors Luncheon; 180 readers attended.



## Crime Scene LA

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

The intersection of Hollywood and crime was the “Twilight Zone” tragedy, a helicopter accident which resulted in the deaths of actor Vic Morrow and two child actors, ages 6 and 7.

What happened in the early morning hours of July 23, 1983, led to John Landis being the first Hollywood director to face criminal charges for a death on the set.

## President’s Rap Sheet

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

While it’s important to honor our past, it’s equally important to celebrate the vitality of the genre. There was an impressive group of nominees in the “Best First Novel” category, and a good deal of “new blood” was evident in the audience as well!

I hope that many of you will choose to attend the 81<sup>st</sup> celebration on May 7, 2027. It’s a great party, a wonderful time to catch up with friends, and always a great “recharging” of our batteries as writers!  
Les

## Edgar® Awards Winners: Robert Crais Wins For Best Novel

The 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Edgar® Awards were celebrated on April 29, 2026 at the Marriott Marquis Times Square Hotel. Congratulations to SoCal MWA member **Robert Crais**.

### BEST NOVEL

*The Big Empty* by **Robert Crais** (Penguin Random House – G.P. Putnam’s Sons)

### BEST FIRST NOVEL BY AN AMERICAN AUTHOR

*Dead Money* by Jakob Kerr (Penguin Random House – Bantam Books)

### BEST PAPERBACK ORIGINAL

*The Backwater* by Vikki Wakefield (Sourcebooks – Poisoned Pen Press)

### BEST FACT CRIME

*Murderland: Crime and Bloodlust in the Time of Serial Killers* by Caroline Fraser (Penguin Random House – Penguin Press)

### BEST CRITICAL/BIOGRAPHICAL

*Edgar Allan Poe: A Life* by Richard Kopley (University of Virginia Press)

### BEST SHORT STORY

“Julius Katz Draws a Straight Flush,” *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine* – September-October 2025 by Dave Zeltserman (Must Read Books Publishing)

### BEST JUVENILE

*Blood in the Water* by Tiffany D. Jackson (Scholastic)

### BEST YOUNG ADULT

*Under the Same Stars* by Libba Bray (Macmillan Publishers – Farrar, Straus and Giroux BFYR)

### BEST TELEVISION EPISODE TELEPLAY

“Pilot” – Paradise, Written by Dan Fogelman (Hulu)

ROBERT L. FISH MEMORIAL AWARD – Endowed by the family of Robert L. Fish.

“How It Happened,” *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*, July-August 2025 by Billie Kay Fern (Must Read Books Publishing)

THE SIMON & SCHUSTER MARY HIGGINS CLARK AWARD – Presented on behalf of Simon & Schuster.

*All This Could Be Yours* by Hank Phillippi Ryan (Macmillan Publishers – Minotaur Books)

THE G.P. PUTNAM’S SONS SUE GRAFTON MEMORIAL AWARD – Presented on behalf of G.P. Putnam’s Sons.

*Gone in the Night* by Joanna Schaffhausen (Macmillan Publishers – Minotaur Books)

THE LILIAN JACKSON BRAUN MEMORIAL AWARD

– Endowed by the estate of Lilian Jackson Braun. *A Senior Citizen’s Guide to Life on the Run* by Gwen Florio (Severn House)

THE PRESIDENT’S AWARD

Margery Flax, MWA Executive Director

GRAND MASTER

Donna Andrews, Lee Child

RAVEN AWARD

Book Passage, Corte Madera CA

ELLERY QUEEN AWARD

John Scognamiglio, Kensington Books

# CRIME CALENDAR



## 2026

May 17, 2 p.m. Researching L.A. An in-person panel conversation about ... research and Los Angeles. At The Book Jewel in Westchester. Details are on our [website](#).

*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](mailto:themarchofcrime@gmail.com) with the info.



# THE LAST WORD



“Sadie Given woke from a troubled sleep, the stupid phone babbling like an angry turkey, gobble-gobble, gobble-gobble.”

*The Big Empty*

by **Robert Crais**