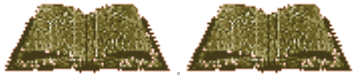
ANIL AGGRAWAL'S
Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology
The world's first online journal devoted entirely to forensic medicine and toxicology · Published 1 January and 1 July

VOL. 2, NO. 1
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Book Reviews: Popular Books Section



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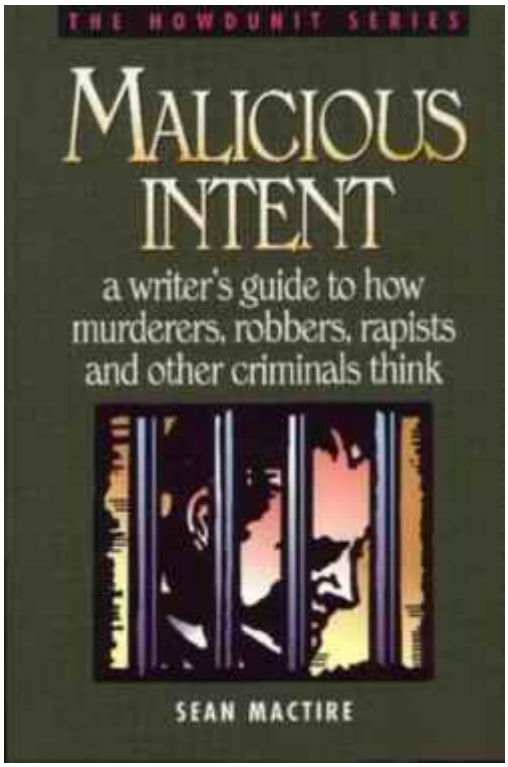
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AN INSIGHT INTO CRIMINALS' THOUGHTS

Malicious Intent- A writer's guide to how murderers, robbers, rapists and other criminals think (THE HOWDUNIT SERIES) : *by* Sean Mactire,
First edition, 1995, Writer's Digest Books, an imprint of F&W Publications, Inc., 1507 Dana Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45207. : 228 Pages: ISBN 0-89879-648-2 (pbk): Price $16.99 (Can $25.99)

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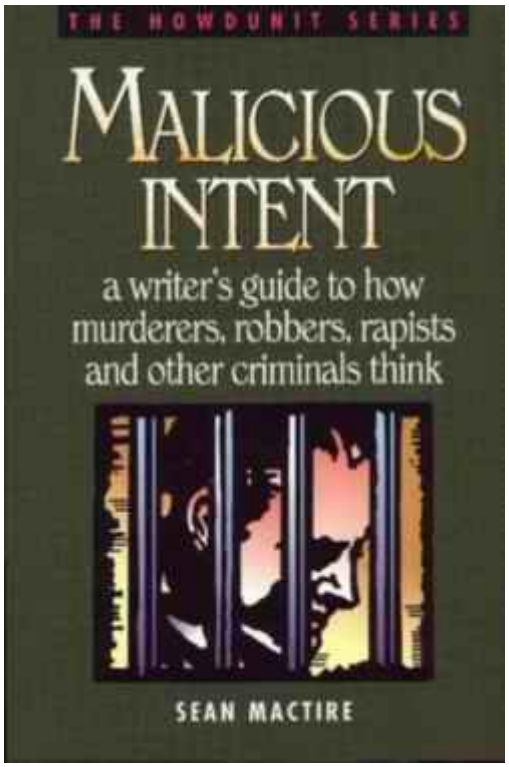
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This is the next book in the excellent series published by Writer's Digest for crime writers. This gives them important insights into how criminals think. This insight is necessary to write a successful crime book. Let me illustrate with an example.

Suppose you are a crime writer and are writing a book, in which a rape scene is necessary. If you do not know the psychology of the criminal (the rapist in this case), you might portray him as a sex-hungry maniac, who wants to "have a go" at the very next girl he sees. This is most frequently not the case. In chapter 7, entitled "Sexual predators", we are told that "the worst myth that has to be busted is that rape and sex crimes are about sex. They are only about power and anger". Now this is an important concept. If you show him as a sex-starved person, you might not be portraying the true picture of how rapists actually think. The fact is that when the rapist is sexually assaulting a woman, he is probably only expressing violent anger towards her (or someone dear to her).

The book is scattered with nuggets like this. But to set everything in proper perspective, the author first gives a very detailed history of violent crime (in the opening chapter). In this chapter we are taken back through time as far back as 2000 B.C. when the hordes of Assyrians brought their reign of terror down upon the Middle East. We are told about the scenario in Greece and Rome, when such things as *Crucifixion, Decimation, Flogging* and *The death of a thousand cuts* were common. The last sounded very interesting to me. It was a special method of execution in which one thousand small incisions were made, and the victim slowly bled to death through them.



... an extremely valuable book for crime writers and even for general readers on crime for the sheer amount of factual information given in it. Even students of forensic science might find this book useful. ...

In the next chapter entitled "Understanding Human Behavior", the author takes us on a psychological tour - with a minimum of technical jargon - and tells us the basis of our day to day behavior. For instance we are told about Abraham Maslow's theories that all human behavior can be explained by a hierarchy of needs. This hierarchy - starting from below upwards - comprise of hunger, security, belongingness and love, esteem and self-actualization. Concepts such as these are very important to portray a "real life like" criminal. For instance a criminal might act as he does simply because his need for belongingness and love has remained unfulfilled. This not only helps build a true character, but can give original ideas to author to build stories on.

Are you going to include a murder in your story? Okay, fine, but do you know how many types of murders are there? If not, then your portrayal may not be true to life. In the next chapter entitled "Profiling the Criminal", we are told - among many other things - about the murder types. For the curious, they are (i) felony murder, a homicide committed during the commission of a serious crime such as an armed robbery or hijacking (ii) Suspected felony murder (iii) Argument-motivated murder (iv) Other motive murder and (v) Unknown motive murder. If the writer knows about these types, he can chose exactly what type of murder he wants his characters to commit. We are further told about *Family Mass murder, Classic Mass murder, Spree killers, Serial killers* and so on. Important differences between mass murderers and serial killers are given. The book gives similar facts about many other categories of criminals. Some among these are *Cult-related murderers* (chapter 6), *Sexual predators* (Chapter 7), *Child molesters* and *child murderers* (Chapter 8), *The career criminal* (Chapter 10) and *Terrorists* (chapter 13). And if you are going to include a woman murderer in your book, do read about the woman murderer in chapter 14. If you don't have such a character in your book, you may want to create one based on the interesting characteristics given in this chapter. This might make your book that much more interesting.

In short, an extremely valuable book for crime writers and even for general readers on crime for the sheer amount of factual information given in it. Even students of forensic science might find this book useful.

Order *Malicious Intent* by Clicking here

For more books on *Criminal Psychology,* please the linked page (general subject 001.html#criminal psychology)

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