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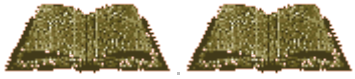
Book Reviews: Popular Books Section



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A VALUABLE BOOK FOR CRIME WRITERS

Scene of the Crime - A writer's guide to crime-scene investigations (THE HOWDUNIT SERIES) : *by* Anne Wingate, Ph.D.,
First edition, 1995, Writer's Digest Books, an imprint of F&W Publications, Inc., 1507 Dana Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45207. : 231 Pages: ISBN 0-89879-518-4 (pbk): Price $16.99 (Can $26.99)

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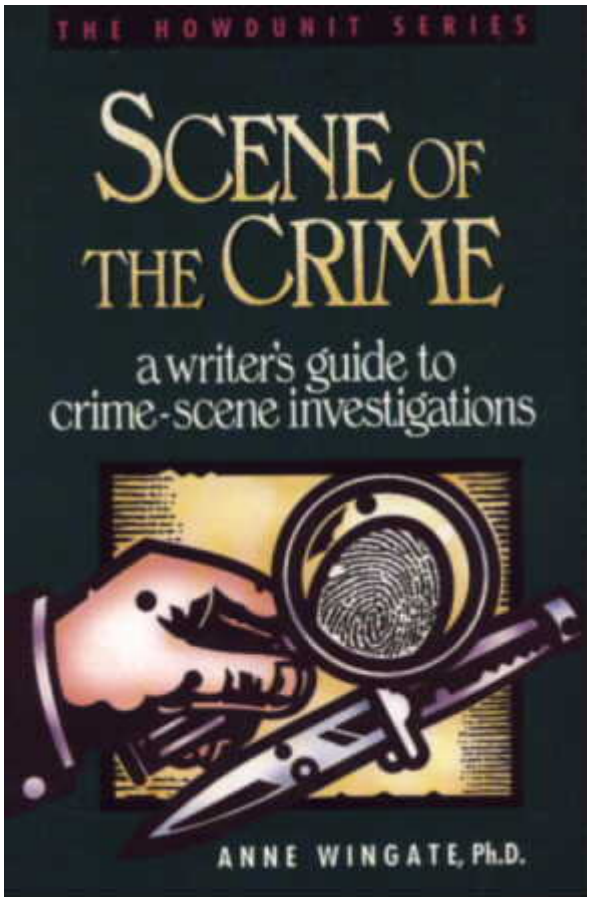

I have been investigating crime for more than twenty five years now. Many crime writers contact me through my web sites and ask me a number of questions related to their crime writing. Most often they have a little problem with the plot which they want to iron out. Most of them of course want to get in touch with me, because they want to inject credibility in their plots. They want the science behind their stories to be perfect.

Quite often the writers have asked me, what do we do at the scene of crime. This is because the police officers in their stories need to be authentic and credible. I try to help them out as much as I can, in the limited time that is available to me.

For those who are interested, when a murder is reported in an outfield, the police officers prefer to take us to the scene where the dead body is lying. The idea is to give first hand information to the police regarding the murder. There are many vital pieces of evidence which can get lost once the body is moved.

Consider the case of a man who has been shot down by a bullet and is lying on the field. Only a forensic pathologist can say by examining the dead body, as to which is the entrance wound and which one the exit wound. To a lay person, or a police officer, both the wounds of entrance and exit would appear the same. If forensic pathologist examines these wounds, he can reconstruct the line of fire, by joining these two points and say which direction the bullet came from. Once the body is moved, it would become impossible to reconstruct this 'line of fire' which can prove vital in later police investigations.

View this book on Amazon

Sometimes, when a dead body is moved from the actual place of murder to the mortuary, it might have to be dragged, dropped and dumped at various places in between. This produces artificial

abrasions after death. These are technically known as 'post-mortem abrasions' or simply as 'P.M. abrasions'. A doctor may wrongly think that these abrasions were produced during life and this may confuse the whole issue. So it is better to examine the body at the scent of crime itself.

Many times interesting clues can be recovered from the scene of crime, such as cigarette butts, hair, fiber fragments, blood stains, empty cartridges and so on. These clues also help us in several ways. But the main thing to be stressed here is to have a look at the body in a detailed manner and record its position most accurately. That single thing can work wonders for us several times.

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...I would recommend this book very highly to all crime writers. Even those persons who don't want to be writers but simply follow crime serials or crime movies more intelligently may find this little book interesting...

If you are a crime writer, now you have a very authentic series of books - The Howdunit series - from the Writer's Digest Books. We have reviewed two in the series before *Police Procedural - A writer's guide to the police and how they work* by Russell Bintliff and *Malicious Intent- A writer's guide to how murderers, robbers, rapists and other criminals think* by Sean Mactire both in Volume 2, Number 1, January-June 2001 issue of our journal. This time we chose to have a look at another wonderful book Scene of Crime - A writer's guide to crime-scene investigations by Anne Wingate.

Dr. Wingate has treated the subject matter like an expert. At the scene of crime, some of the most important tasks before a forensic pathologist are determination of the time of death, collection of clues, identifying human remains and so on. Dr. Wingate has devoted an entire chapter to each of these issues.

The truly remarkable thing about Dr. Wingate's book is that she has kept the technical jargon at a minimum. This will help crime writers to follow her book easily. Most crime writers are not necessarily forensic pathologists, and are not expected to know convoluted technical terms. For them this book comes as a boon.

So if you are stuck in your novel, as to how the forensic pathologist in your story is going to discover the time of death, now you don't need to contact forensic pathologists like me over the web (who may or may not always have time to answer your questions). All you have to do is to simply open this book, and find out the answer.

I read with interest chapters on Crime scene search, Firearms, identifying human remains and fingerprints. The author deals with fingerprints in remarkable detail. Even I learnt a thing or two from these chapters.

I would recommend this book very highly to all crime writers. Even those persons who don't want to be writers but simply follow crime serials or crime movies more intelligently may find this little book interesting.

Order *Scene of the Crime - A writer's guide to crime-scene investigations* by Clicking here

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