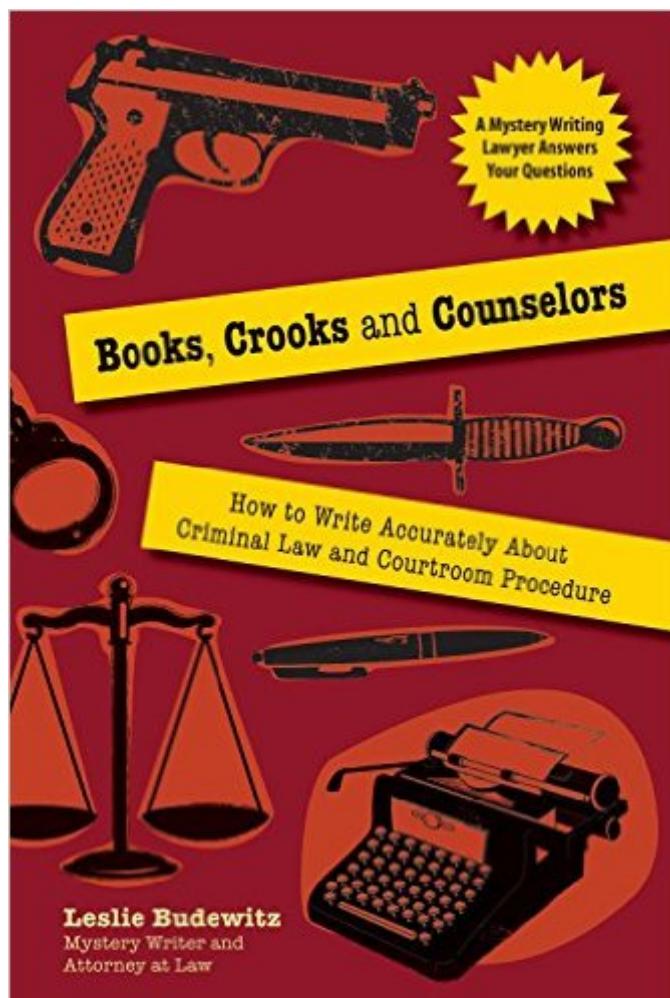


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Books, Crooks, And Counselors: How To Write Accurately About Criminal Law And Courtroom Procedure



Synopsis

Addressing the misunderstood and misrepresented aspects of the law in today's writing, this reliable guidebook demonstrates how to use legal concepts, terminology, and procedure to create fiction that is true to life and crackling with real-world tension. Examples from actual cases are provided along with excerpts of authentic courtroom dialogue. Topics covered include criminal and civil law; differences between federal, state, and Native American jurisdiction; police and private investigation; wills and inheritances; and the written and unwritten codes that govern the public and private conduct of lawyers and judges. Providing a quick and simple legal reference, this handbook is the key to creating innovative plots, strong conflicts, authentic characters, and gritty realism.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

One of the challenges that confronts anyone attempting to write crime fiction is the daunting task of trying to get the legal details right. Whether writing about a criminal trial or attempting to portray correctly the legalities of investigation and arrest procedures, a writer's job is made enormously more complicated by the myriad of overlapping and sometimes conflicting national, state and local legal jurisdictions, laws and practices. Given that, Leslie Budewitz has done a great service to writers--and to crime fiction readers who would like to better understand these complex issues--with her new book, Books, Crooks and Counselors: How to Write Accurately About Criminal Law and Courtroom Procedure. Budewitz, who is herself a published mystery writer as well as a practicing attorney, carefully walks the reader through the basics of the judicial system in the U.S. and then describes what occurs before a criminal trial. Using a variety of examples to demonstrate the points

she makes, she discusses the rules of evidence, the role of witnesses, the required burden of proof and the appeals process. She moves on to treat a number of legal issues that arise during the course of a criminal investigation, lays out the distinctions between various levels of crime and discusses the various punishments a court might mete out, including the death penalty. Budewitz then discusses the role of the civil courts and advises writers on the matters of thinking like a lawyer and like a judge. Given that the law and judicial procedures are constantly evolving, she closes with a very useful chapter on research and references.

Some writers depress with their brilliance, making an aspiring writer feel they've sucked up all the great ideas and left nothing for the rest of us. Leslie Budewitz provides a great antidote to this problem. Her legal reference, "Books, Crooks and Counselors," teems with ideas for writers based on the realm of criminal law and courtroom procedure. She inspires with abundance of detail -- it becomes clear that all the writers in the world couldn't use up the infinite material coming out of court cases. Budewitz provides evocative examples of putting legal knowledge to use in fiction -- for example, the relentless plot line of "Winter's Bone" is driven by a teenager's desperation to find her missing father before his bail is forfeited. She draws us to an appreciation of the use of both famous and obscure cases in developing new story lines and provides cautionary notes that almost anticipate a writer's potential blunder. This is by no means a dry reference manual, although law students would doubtless become more engaged in learning if it became a standard text. Budewitz lets us in on some of the seriously funny things that happen to lawyers, the real you can't make this up stuff. She tells a hilarious story about the person she was deposing becoming so irate with her tactics that he lunged across the table at her, causing the court reporter to knock over her machine. And then Well I'll let you read "Books, Crooks" to find out for yourself. I could have really used Budewitz's explanation of the discovery process the year I represented myself when my small claims suit got appealed to district court. The judge didn't rule me in contempt for my bumbling but I know he was stifling a big chuckle as he tried to keep me straight regarding the rules of evidence.

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