

Surfing for Mystery Writers — The Noose, issue of December 2007

Bad news is easy to find. But then again, so is good news.

Here's one of the greatest things about the web: if you're a mystery writer, you don't have to classify websurfing as procrastination. Not at all. See, you're doing *research* – valuable, essential research. You're learning about human nature, police procedures, guns, criminality and all sorts of vital stuff.

The websites I list below are all easily navigated and frequently updated, with news content that might have a special appeal for crimewriters. While not hip, new or obscure, these bookmarks represent my personal culling down of the vast, chaotic universe called the information superhighway, the Vortex of Lost Hours.

BBC.com (go to: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/default.stm>)

The Brits have given us the great detective, the spy novel and the teacosy. Let's face it, by jingo, they invented the whole damn thing. On top of which, they produce a consistently interesting, well-written and up-to-the-minute news venue. All paid for by the British taxpayer, so there's rather little advertising. Anglophiles will prefer the UK version to the international. Intelligent and eclectic.

NyPost.com

Flagship of the Post, NY's own. Content-wise, the same lurid goop that appears in the newspaper. Are you going to miss the nasty ink that gets all over your fingers? I think not.

Newsftheweird.com – (click on “News” header”)

A weekly compendium of wacky clippings from newspapers of the world. Living proof that nothing you’d be likely to concoct as a writer would be odder than the actions perpetrated by real live people. Hilarious, aggravating, often deeply disturbing. One particular point in case is the week of 11/25/07. Go there.

CourtTV.com – (click on News header)

The online component of Court TV. Here, you’ll find excellent trial coverage and a wide variety of US crime news. People who fought the law (and the law won). There are features on TV shows such as Murder by the Book, a series about true crimes that inspired the world’s most popular mystery writers, including prominent MWA members like Harlan Coben and Lisa Scottoline. Well worth visiting, and often.

You can also find **TheSmokingGun.com** with its archives of celebrity legal affidavits and mug shots, and **Red.com**, for those who enjoy car chases and cop footage.

<http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/arttheft.htm>

Just one of many subjects you’ll find at **fbi.gov**, federal efforts to catch art thieves and fraud can be intriguing. Or go straight to the main site, where you’ll find out about the Ten Most Wanted and the numerous past criminals who’ve simply dropped off the charts. A word of warning, the crimes committed by the Top Ten are heinous, no joke. You could attempt make your fictional villains as despicable as the real ones, but you would almost certainly lose.

Unlike the mystery book world, many of these plots never get solved.

To sum up, I've presented a micro-slice of what's available at the end of your mouse.

The web is one big TV set, with 5 billion channels. Let's not even mention blogs and the energy suck of [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com), with its hilarious TV news bloopers and videos of old bands you loved, propaganda films, and other good garbage. Unless you're somehow getting paid to surf, you may want to switch off.

After all, shouldn't mystery writers be plotting how to bump off fictional victims instead of merely killing time?

Next month: We cover the websites of professional groups that focus on mystery authors.

Peter Watson writes advertising and has just finished his first crime novel, *All the Wrong People*, for which he's seeking representation as we speak.