



Join us for a two-day celebration of all things thriller, mystery, suspense, and crime, featuring **David Heska Wanbli Weiden, Tiffany Quay Tyson, Kristin Koval, Benjamin Whitmer**, and more. You'll practice plotting and stringing along suspense; hear from experts in the realm of genre publishing; and spy on some brilliant novelists confessing to their (writing) crimes—all while getting to know Denver's thriller, crime, and suspense community.

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SCHEDULE

	SATURDAY March 15	SUNDAY March 16
9:00 TO 11:00 AM	CRAFT SEMINARS see p. 2	CRAFT SEMINARS see p. 4
LUNCH BREAK		
12:00 TO 1:00 PM	POST-LUNCH PANEL On Violence	POST-LUNCH PANEL Publishing Isn't So Scary
1:30 TO 3:30 PM	AFTERNOON WORKSHOP What's the Worst That Can Happen?	AFTERNOON WORKSHOP Sizzling Scenes, Compelling Characters
HAPPY HOUR		
4:30 TO 6:00 PM	WHAT HAPPENS IN THE DARK with Christa Faust and Benjamin Whitmer	THE MYSTERIES OF PUBLISHING* A Game and Happy Hour

*This event is only open to passholders.



MORNING CRAFT SEMINARS

9:00 TO 11:00 AM

Member \$75 / Nonmember \$85

**SATURDAY,
MARCH 15**

Click the class
title to register.

Set Your Clocks:

Timelines and Characters as Scaffolding for Plot

with Kristin Koval

In this two-hour seminar, we'll focus on using both relational structures and timeline structures to help craft compelling plots, particularly for thrillers and mysteries. We'll explore how the relationships between characters can drive conflict and create emotional depth, and how establishing a clear timeline—whether it's the ticking clock of a murder investigation in the criminal justice system, the months passing following the loss of a loved one, or the hours in a single day—can help build your narrative. Writers will learn how to use these elements to build suspense, guide pacing, and set up key events that propel the story forward. By the end of the seminar, you'll have a toolkit to strategically structure your plot around both character dynamics and a well-defined timeline, creating layered, engaging narratives that captivate your readers.

You Can Always Go Darker: Atmosphere and Tone in Crime Fiction

with Benjamin Whitmer

Some of the best writers have worked in the crime fiction genre, including the likes of Daniel Woodrell, Denis Johnson, Megan Abbott, and William Faulkner.

Their attention to tone and mood drives stylistic choices that all writers can learn from. In this class we'll discuss the crime fiction genre, take a look at the differences and similarities between it and other genres, read examples, and do exercises aimed at honing atmosphere and tone.



THRILLS & CHILLS FEST

Lighthouse Writers Workshop

**SATURDAY,
MARCH 15**

MORNING CRAFT SEMINARS

9:00 TO 11:00 AM

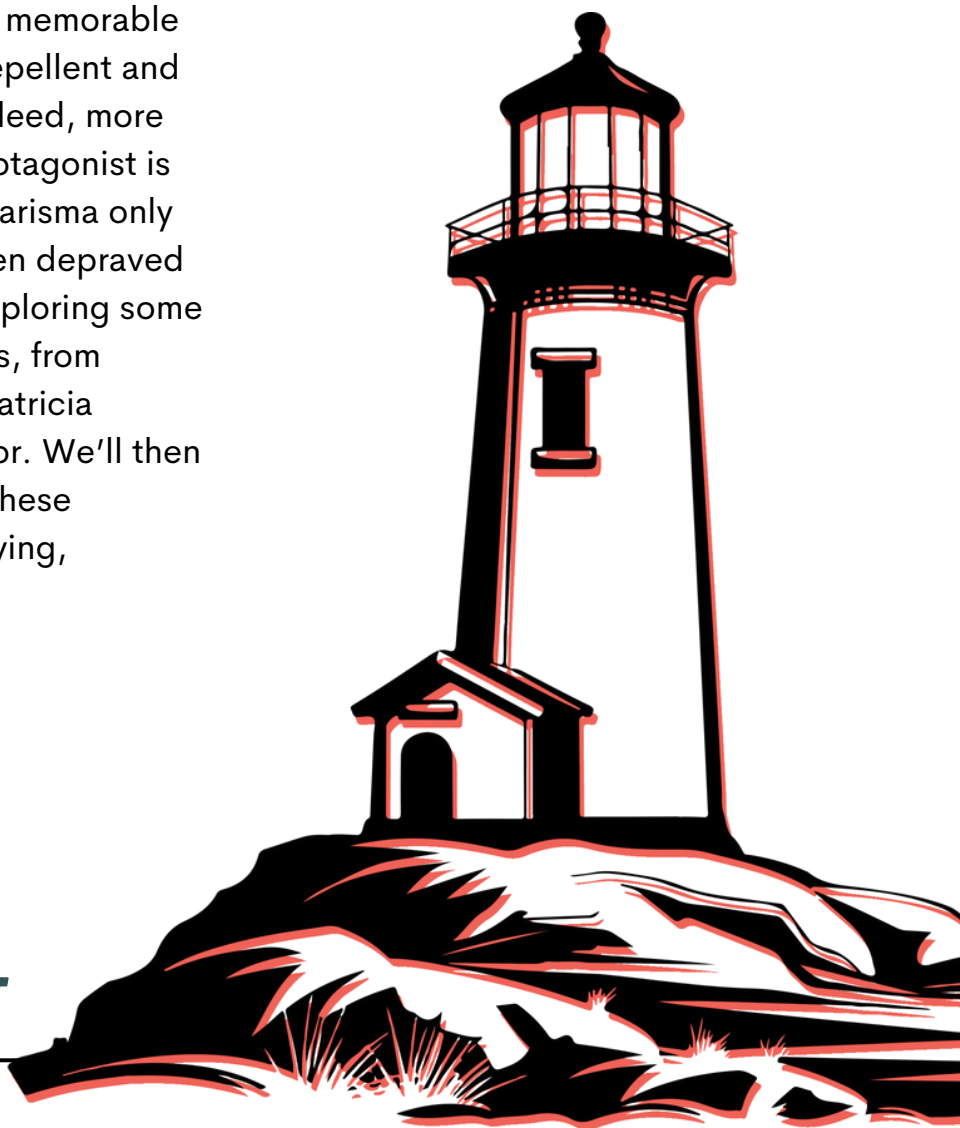
Click the class
title to register.

Member \$75 / Nonmember \$85

From Morally Gray to Black: Creating Flawed and Unscrupulous Protagonists

with Jon Bassoff

Bret Easton Ellis, author of *American Psycho*, claims: "The best way to create a memorable character is to make them both repellent and fascinating at the same time." Indeed, more crucial than the likeability of a protagonist is his/her charisma—even if that charisma only serves to hide complicated or even depraved psyches. In this class, we'll be exploring some morally questionable protagonists, from authors such as Jim Thompson, Patricia Highsmith, and Flannery O'Connor. We'll then try our hand at creating some of these fascinating, and sometimes terrifying, characters in our own work.



THRILLS & CHILLS FEST

MORNING CRAFT SEMINARS

9:00 TO 11:00 AM

Member \$75 / Nonmember \$85

SUNDAY,
MARCH 16

Click the class
title to register.

Writing a Killer Series

with Jenny Dandy

So many of our favorite thriller authors write series. Think Michael Connolly, Walter Mosely, Louise Penny, Jo Nesbø, Nick Petrie, James Byrne, Traci Clark. Readers love to follow a character through multiple mysteries; multiple books. So what can you learn from your favorite series as you approach your own? We'll explore the questions we should consider as we develop our series, discuss how our favorite authors answered those questions, and we'll do some exercises. Come prepared to analyze your favorite series and apply what we learn to your own. And hopefully you'll come away with a clearer understanding of the direction your writing is taking.

Violent Conversations: Using Dialogue to Ratchet the Tension

with Daniel Levine

We all know the intestinal twist when we sense a piece of unpleasant news about to drop from someone's lips: *I'm not who you think I am; I slept with someone; I don't love you anymore; your mother is dead; it was me, all along.* In real life, this gut-plunge is accompanied by a swarm of contextual factors that are often difficult to discern in the midst of stress. But in storytelling, we can skillfully craft these moments of conversational revelation to heighten the suspense, mystery, or trauma. In this seminar, we'll explore the art of ratcheting tension through dialogue, body language, and scenic mood—lessons that will be applicable to all styles and genres.



THRILLS & CHILLS FEST

Lighthouse Writers Workshop

**SUNDAY,
MARCH 16**

MORNING CRAFT SEMINARS

9:00 TO 11:00 AM

Click the class
title to register.

Member \$75 / Nonmember \$85

The Butler Did It on a Dark and Stormy Night: Embracing Tropes and Avoiding Cliché

with L. Alison Heller

Readers revel in the familiar patterns, and there are tools that our predecessors used that we should absolutely borrow. But no one should ever start a book with "It was a dark and stormy night" again. The best books of thriller and suspense manage to use the tropes of the genre without slipping into clichés, and in this course, we'll use some reading and discussion, and some practice and sharing, to discover how.

ALL MORNING CRAFT SEMINARS

Saturday, March 15

Clocks and Characters

with Kristin Koval

You Can Always Go Darker

with Benjamin Whitmer

From Morally Gray to Black

with Jon Bassoff

Sunday, March 16

Writing a Killer Series

with Jenny Dandy

Violent Conversations

with Daniel Levine

The Butler Did It on a Dark and Stormy Night

with L. Alison Heller



POST-LUNCH PANELS

12:00 TO 1:00 PM

Member \$25

Nonmember \$35

Click the title to register.

ON VIOLENCE

Saturday, March 15

Panelists: Christa Faust, Kristin Koval, Benjamin Whitmer, and more

Almost all thrillers, mysteries, and crime novels require violence, or at least the threat of violence, to propel them. So as writers in these genres, how do we approach writing about violence? Should we show it all to acknowledge its terror; should we show it "off screen" to avoid trauma? How do we handle moments when violence feels gratifying or pleasurable, and how do we keep from glorifying it? Join this panel of writers to think through these troubling questions and more.

PUBLISHING ISN'T SO SCARY

Sunday, March 16

Panelists: David Heska Wanbli Weiden, Carter Wilson, and more

Do you want your book to get picked up by one of the big five, who publish thrillers among many other kinds of books, or is it better to come out from a smaller indie press that focuses entirely on the genre? Do suspense books sell better with provocative covers and in paperback? Should you write everything in a series to increase sales? This panel of writers and industry experts will discuss as many approaches to genre publishing as they can, and will be there for you to interrogate too!



THRILLS & CHILLS FEST

Lighthouse Writers Workshop

AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS

Member \$75

Nonmember \$85

1:30 TO 3:30 PM

Click the title to register.

SATURDAY, MARCH 15

WHAT'S THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN?

The Power of Negative Thinking to Create Suspense

with Tiffany Quay Tyson

In Benjamin Percy's essay "Designing Suspense" from *Thrill Me: Essays on Fiction*, he writes about the power of imagining the worst-case scenario for your story. Not a bad scenario, but the worst scenario. Why? Because you cannot write a truly suspenseful, thrilling story until you've identified this scenario. Every choice your protagonist makes, every twist your plot takes, must move your story toward this truly awful, seemingly impossible situation. We'll look at effective examples of worst-case scenarios from books and movies, and we'll do a series of exercises to identify the worst-case scenario for your characters and your story. Then, we'll explore strategies to use this worst-case scenario as a tool for escalating tension and sustaining suspense from the first page to the last. Writers should come prepared to write.

SIZZLING SCENES, COMPELLING CHARACTERS

with David Heska Wanbli Weiden

In this fiction seminar, we'll examine and analyze techniques for writing compelling scenes and creating strong characters. We'll look at scene openings and endings, tension and suspense, and using interiority. We'll also discuss creating compelling protagonists and antagonists, and ways to bring your characters to life. We'll consider examples from various writers, and, time permitting, conclude with a writing exercise, followed by a dialogue and discussion.

SUNDAY, MARCH 16

THRILLS & CHILLS FEST

Lighthouse Writers Workshop



EVENING EVENTS

4:30 TO 6:00 PM

Click the title to learn more.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE DARK

An On-Stage Conversation with Christa Faust and Benjamin Whitmer

Saturday, March 15

Member \$20 / Nonmember \$30

Ever wanted to peer into the twisted mind of your favorite thriller writer? To know what motivates someone to write something so dark, so well? Join Christa Faust and Benjamin Whitmer as they read short excerpts from their recent works, followed by an onstage conversation between the two old friends. Preceded by a casual happy hour, and followed by an audience Q&A and book signing, this event will keep us all on the edges of our seats.

THE MYSTERIES OF PUBLISHING*

A Game and Happy Hour

Sunday, March 16

It's a dark and stormy night at Lighthouse, and there's a literary killer on the loose! Put on your detective hat and trench coat, grab your trusty notebook, and don't forget your manuscript. We've got a mystery to solve: how to put your best foot forward in the publishing world.

We've made pitching your novel, generating comps titles, and drafting your query letter into a fun and social game based on the classic whodunit *Clue*. You'll move from room to room, each staffed with publishing experts to help you with one of the business aspects of writing, gathering clues to solve our literary mystery along the way. Think murder mystery party meets business luncheon, but more fun and with prizes.

****THIS EVENT IS ONLY OPEN TO PASSHOLDERS.***



THRILLS & CHILLS FEST

Lighthouse Writers Workshop

A LA CARTE PRICING

	<i>MEMBERS</i>	<i>NONMEMBERS</i>
<i>MORNING CRAFT SEMINARS</i>	\$75	\$85
<i>POST-LUNCH PANELS</i>	\$25	\$35
<i>AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS</i>	\$75	\$85
<i>EVENING EVENT</i> What Happens in the Dark	\$25	\$30

NOTE: The Mysteries of Publishing: A Game and Happy Hour is only open to passholders.



WEEKEND PASSES

Want the full Thrills and Chills Fest experience? Save on seminars, panels, and events with our weekend passes.

GOLD PASS



Member \$380 / Nonmember \$450

The **Gold Pass** includes all activities of the Fest: your choice of morning craft seminars each day; both post-lunch panels; both afternoon workshops; both happy hours; and both evening events.

SILVER PASS



Member \$245 / Nonmember \$300

For folks who aren't morning people, the **Silver Pass** gets you into all afternoon activities of the Fest, including both post-lunch panels; both afternoon workshops; both happy hours; and both evening events.

BRONZE PASS



For those who can't spare a whole weekend, the **Bronze Pass** gets you access to one full day of the Fest.

SATURDAY BRONZE PASS

Member \$180 / Nonmember \$215

- Your choice of **morning craft seminar**
- **Post-Lunch Panel:** On Violence
- **Afternoon Workshop:** What's the Worst That Can Happen? with Tiffany Quay Tyson
- **Evening Event:** What Happens in the Dark—An Onstage Conversation with Benjamin Whitmer and Christa Faust

SUNDAY BRONZE PASS

Member \$205 / Nonmember \$240

- Your choice of **morning craft seminar**
- **Post-Lunch Panel:** Publishing isn't So Scary
- **Afternoon Workshop:** Sizzling Scenes, Compelling Characters with David Heska Wanbli Weiden
- **Evening Event:** The Mysteries of Publishing—A Game and Happy Hour



THRILLS & CHILLS FEST

Lighthouse Writers Workshop

FACULTY



Jon Basso is the author of ten novels, including his latest, *The Memory Ward* (Blackstone Publishing). His mountain gothic novel, *Corrosion*, has been translated in French and German and was nominated for the Grand Prix de Litterature Policiere, France's biggest crime fiction award. His novel *The Drive-Thru Crematorium* has been adapted for the big screen with a filming date set for summer 2025. He also wrote the screenplay for *Bizarre Love Triangle*, which was named semi-finalist at the New York Cinematography Awards and a finalist at the Seattle Film Festival for best short film. For his day job, Basso teaches high school English, where he is known by students and faculty alike as the deranged writer guy. He is a connoisseur of tequila, hot sauces, psychobilly music, and fleabag motels.

Jenny Dandy took her first class at Lighthouse Writers Workshop in the fall of 2015. In 2020 she graduated from the Book Project and in 2023 she signed a three-book contract with Level Best Books. Her first book, *The Brownstone on E. 83rd* (April 2024) came out of the Book Project, and the second in her *Houses of Crime* series, *The Penthouse on Park Avenue*, releases at the end of April 2025. She graduated from Smith College with a BA in English Literature and had the great pleasure of taking a seminar with Richard Wilbur when he was the poet in residence. She takes classes at Lighthouse whenever she can.



Christa Faust grew up in New York City, in the Bronx and Hell's Kitchen. She's been making stuff up her whole life, and spent most of her teen years on endless subway rides, cutting school and scribbling stories. She sold her first short story when she moved to Los Angeles in the early 90s. She's an avid reader and collector of vintage paperbacks, a Film Noir enthusiast and a Tattooed Lady. She writes primarily Hardboiled crime fiction, but also does work-for-hire media tie in novels. She doesn't plan to stop any time soon.



L. Alison Heller is the author of *The Neighbor's Secret*, *The Never Never Sisters*, and *The Love Wars*. In a former life, she was an attorney in New York City. She now lives in Colorado with her family.

Kristin Koval is a former lawyer who always wanted to be a writer but initially wandered down other paths. She's an alumna of not only Lit Fest, but Sewanee Writers' Conference and Aspen Summer Words, and her short story *Inheritance* was named a finalist in the Salamander 2022 Fiction Contest. She attended Phillips Exeter Academy, Georgetown University, and Columbia Law School. She lives in Boulder, Colorado, and Park City, Utah, with her husband, two sons, and two great danes. Her debut novel, *Penitence*, was released in January 2025.



FACULTY



Tiffany Quay Tyson is the author of two novels, *The Past is Never* and *Three Rivers*. *The Past is Never* is the recipient of the Willie Morris Award for Southern Fiction, the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize, the 2019 Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Award for Fiction, and the 2019 Mississippi Library Association's Mississippi Author Award for Adult Fiction. She worked for a brief stint as a newspaper reporter in the Mississippi Delta, where she received the Frank Allen Award for Journalism. She is the recipient of two Heartland Emmy Awards including one for writing for a children's public television program. She was born and raised in Mississippi and much of her fiction is set in the south. She lives in Denver.

Daniel Levine is the author of the novel *Hyde*, a *New York Times* Editor's Choice and one of *Washington Post's* 5 Best Thrillers of 2014. He studied English Literature and Creative Writing at Brown University and received his MFA in Fiction from the University of Florida. He has taught composition and creative writing at high schools and universities, including the University of Florida, Montclair State University, and University of Colorado Boulder. Originally from New Jersey, he now lives in Boulder.





David Heska Wanbli Weiden, an enrolled citizen of the Sicangu Lakota Nation, is the author of the novel *Winter Counts* (Ecco, 2020), nominated for the Edgar Award, Anthony Award, Barry Award, Thriller Award, Macavity Award, Shamus Award, Reading the West Award, VCU Cabell First Novel Award, High Plains Book Award, Colorado Book Award, and the Hammett Prize. The book was the winner of the Lefty Award for Best Debut Mystery Novel, the Spur Award for Best Contemporary Novel, and the Tillie Olsen Award. The novel was a *New York Times* Editors' Choice, main selection of the Book of the Month Club, an Indie Next pick, and named a Best Book of 2020 by NPR, Publishers Weekly, Library Journal, and other

magazines. His short fiction and essays have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Shenandoah*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, and other magazines. He has short stories appearing or forthcoming in the anthologies *Denver Noir*, *Midnight Hour*, and *This Time for Sure*. Weiden is the recipient of a MacDowell Fellowship, a Ragdale Foundation residency, the PEN America Writing for Justice Fellowship, and was a Tin House Scholar. He lives in Denver, Colorado, with his family.

Benjamin Whitmer was born and raised on back-to-the-land communes and counterculture enclaves ranging from Southern Ohio to Upstate New York. One of his earliest and happiest memories is of standing by the side of a country road with his mother, hitchhiking to parts unknown. Since then, he's been a factory grunt, a vacuum salesman, a convalescent, a high-school dropout, a graduate student, a semi-truck loader, an activist, a kitchen-table gunsmith, a squatter, a college professor, a dishwasher, a technical writer, and a petty thief. He lives with his two children in Colorado, where he spends most of his free time trolling local histories and haunting the bookshops, tobacconists, and firing ranges of ungentrified Denver.

His first novel, *Pike*, was published in the US in 2010 by PM Press, and in France in 2012 by Éditions Gallmeister. *Satan is Real: The Ballad of the Louvin Brothers*, a memoir co-written with Charlie Louvin, was released by Igniter Books in 2012. His latest novel, *Cry Father*, was published to great critical acclaim.



CONTACT INFO

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PARKING MAP

