

CRIMINAL INTENT

Featuring: Karen Blake-Hall

Interviewed by: Janet Costello



[Karen Blake-Hall](#) is the author of three short stories, including one published in the Sisters in Crime anthology *The Whole She-Bang*. She has also produced the *Nefarious North* anthology. Much more writing is in the making. She has been our Sister in Crime for five years.

Q: When did your writing career begin?

A: I always wanted to write, but I'm dyslexic. One day I saw an ad in a newspaper to learn how to write romance. To my friend PK, I said, "Finally, I know what I want to do when I grow up!" She said "I'll take any course with you and I'll edit you." She stepped up to the plate and backed me one hundred per cent. I couldn't have done it without her.

Q: Your brand is "where sensuous romance and thrilling suspense collide". What are the advantages of having a brand?

A: It's called a tagline. When people do a web search for romance or suspense it will catch that. And you have to tell them why they want to read your books. You have to define yourself. I struggled with it. I write romantic suspense, but I also write sensuous romance. Light romance stops at the bedroom door. With sensuous romance, there's a real sexual relationship.

Q: Romance writing is not known for its series, yet you are working on a romance suspense trilogy. What device are you using to connect the books?

A: How the series came about is that the character and the story grew bigger than just one book. I'm an organic writer. The characters just tell me what to do. Some want the bigger arc and some are suited to the short story format. I realized I can go into another book with these characters. They are real to me. I couldn't write them if they weren't.

Q: In the last year, you've published stories in *The Whole She-Bang* and *Nefarious North*. What works for you about writing short stories?

A: Short story writing is such an interesting medium. The arcing has to be shorter, tighter. Characters have to be ones you relate to. They are harder to write. They have to be precise. But this ability will carry over to novel writing. You'll see things you didn't see before. It makes you more aware of the craft of storytelling. After I wrote the one for *The Whole She-Bang*, I realized I just love it. It's hard, very fun, but hard.

Q: You orchestrated the publication of the *Nefarious North* anthology. What are the various steps involved

in this achievement?

A: I did it backwards, but I write out of order too. First I lined up some authors, then an editor, then I lined up more stories. I sent them to the editor. He edited and sent them back to me. The approved stories (some were not accepted) were sent on for formatting. Then I had it proofed by another editor. Finally I sent it to the lady who uploaded it for Amazon, Smashwords.com, and the print format.

Q: Not since reading an Isaac Asimov collection have I seen so many twist endings. How has this surprising collection been received?

A: Very well! I pride myself on the twist ending. When I sent it out to my beta readers, if they see it coming, I change the ending. I guess, to get my approval, they all had to have that ending. *Nefarious North* hit number one on the Amazon crime anthology list in the first 24 hours of its release. The soft cover has sold well at both of our launches, too.

Q: What are the key elements to marketing an anthology?

A: One of the authors, **Cindy Carroll**, is a social media guru. She was kind enough to teach us how to use the medium. She set up the book's own Facebook page and encouraged the blogging. When you have sixteen authors promoting the book, it just blossomed. We promote each other's stories. Our giveaway has generated attention and lots of "likes". Anthologies are being so well-received right now. We're in the right place at the right time and we're enjoying the ride.

Q: What role does blogging play for a mystery or romance writer?

A: Blogging is one of the most effective tools for marketing a book. I was surprised how important it is. For a short story writer, it's just like writing a really short piece. It's an opportunity to show your voice. It's a personal conversation. I feel everybody should be blogging once a week. It's hard to get out of the character you are writing for your fiction, but a professional writer has to do it.

Q: You're a member of the Romance Writers, internationally and locally. What are the benefits of membership there?

A: [Romance Writers of America](#) (RWA) has enough clout that when a publisher isn't paying royalties, or putting in a contract clause that is harmful to writers, they can get those things changed. Also, they hold conferences similar

to [Bouchercon](#), where you can meet agents and writers and stay connected in the industry. You share laughs, information and make friends. The bond of the writing and reading is so strong. There you can sit back and enjoy the community as a whole.

Q: How has being a Sister in Crime affected you?

A: Being a Sister is the best thing that has ever happened to me. [Toronto Romance Writers](#) are writers. Sisters in

Crime includes readers, who are enthusiastic. Friendships have been made here. It's a different feel from RWA. I've gone to movies with Sisters. I can discuss the elements of story. We share our private bios. Sisters in Crime keeps the writing life balanced.

For more information about Karen Blake-Hall, visit her website: <http://karenblake-hall.com/>

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