

Designed for 2018 *Murder by the Book*

Event at Jesup Memorial Library

From RLawtonSquared

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner.

Fourteen mystery authors are invited to spend the weekend with I. Reed Toomuch, reclusive billionaire and avid mystery fan, on his private island off the coast of Maine. Each guest has a negative reaction upon discovering one of the invited authors is none other than Royal Pane. The day after they arrive, someone puts Royal Pane out of their collective misery, but no one knows whodunit. Although the survivors are not especially distraught about the murder (*good riddance was a phrase repeated by many*), an envelope is discovered on the fireplace mantel that raises eyebrows. Neatly printed on the stationary inside is a single sentence. *I've only just begun.*

Each author was invited on the basis that he, or she, is reputed to be an excellent cook, as well as wine connoisseur. On Saturday afternoon, the guests help prepare dinner in the expansive, well-appointed, state of the art gourmet kitchen. Toomuch has selected a menu for a five-course meal, for which his staff previously procured all the necessary ingredients. The guests are divided into teams and each is responsible for one course. Dinner is a great success until one of the guests suddenly breaks out in a rash and gasps. Unable to breathe, Royal Pane collapses.

One of the guests calls 911, only to discover there is no cell phone service. Toomuch tries the landline but the line has been cut and the only router destroyed. The valet, Thomas Butler, is dispatched to get the boat ready for a quick trip to the mainland. He returns soon after to announce the boat has been sabotaged. Royal Pane continues to suffer. One of the authors remembers seeing an EpiPen in a bag Royal Pane was carrying over his shoulder. Perhaps he is having an allergic reaction? They find his bag but the EpiPen is no longer there. Royal Pane finally succumbs. No one is scheduled to return to the island until Monday morning. Until then, the authors will have to use their mystery writing skills to unmask the killer or risk that their own lifeless body will be bagged and transported to the mainland on Monday.

Cast of Characters:

I. Reed Toomuch

Wealthy billionaire and avid mystery fan. Two years ago, Royal Pane was the sole guest invited to spend a weekend on the island. At the time, Toomuch agreed to loan the author a large sum of money. In return, Royal Pane was to create a protagonist based on the billionaire in his next book. The novel has since been published and no such character adorned the pages. Yesterday evening, soon after Royal Pane arrived for a second visit, Toomuch confronted the author and demanded the loan be repaid immediately. True to his moniker, Royal Pane laughed and made the pithy reply, “Fat chance.” The billionaire became incensed.

Royal Pane

Mystery author who has managed to infuriate, disgrace, malign, plagiarize or otherwise victimize almost every person he’s ever met, including everyone on the island. He dies soon after consuming a gourmet meal. Royal Pane collapses in full sight of the guests, in the middle of the dining room, dropping his wine glass onto a priceless rug, thereby managing to make one final insult with his last dying gesture.

Evelyn Butler

Cook and housekeeper, Mrs. Butler is one of two caretakers who live on the island. After Royal Pane is poisoned, many of the guests accuse the cook because she procured all the ingredients for dinner. Evelyn quickly pointed out everyone ate the same food and drank the same beverages, it was only Royal Pane who died. The mystery authors are chagrined not to have made the same observation, and at a loss to account for it.

The last time Royal Pane visited, he seduced Mrs. Butler, promising to give her a life of luxury as his mistress. She never heard another word from the author after he departed. As the saying goes, “Hell hath no fury...”

Thomas Butler

Manservant and valet, Thomas is married to Evelyn and lives with her on the island. In the winter, the Butlers have the entire place to themselves. Since Thomas learned about his wife’s infidelity, the last two winters have been especially cold. Thoughts of revenge are the only way the cuckolded husband has been able to keep warm.

Bruce Casket

Former homicide detective turned mystery author. His first novel was a great success. Unfortunately, that was after Royal Pane stole the manuscript and published it under his own name. For the first time in his life, Bruce experienced the powerful grip of the same emotions that drove so many of his collars to commit their heinous crimes. He brought suit against Pane but lost in court, mostly because the defendant hired a better attorney than Bruce.

David Ross Enfelder

Author of a well known mystery series in which the lead detective often receives assistance from his canine companion, an overweight retriever named Wolf. At one time, David owned a German Shepherd that appeared in commercials for a famous dog food manufacturer. The shepherd's Hollywood career came to screeching halt when the hapless pet became the victim of a hit and run driver. Royal Pane was a person of interest when an eyewitness provided a partial license plate number. Pane was never prosecuted due to a lack of evidence.

Lynn Redmond

Trial attorney from New York who defended Royal Pane against charges of plagiarism, lodged by Bruce Casket. He was furious with Lynn after the suit against Pane was dismissed. Before the case came to court, she had decided to try her hand at writing her own mystery novel. During the course of the trial, her first draft disappeared from her office. One year after the lawsuit against Royal Pane was dismissed, Lynn saw her manuscript published under Royal Pane's name. Soon after, Lynn and Royal Pane were attending a writer's conference. In front of an audience, she accused Pane of pilfering her manuscript. Lynn nearly dies the next day when someone at the conference puts peanuts into her soup. She is convinced it was Royal Pane.

Vaughn Heartacher

A marine veteran who writes thrillers. Royal Pane published a novel in which he stole a character Vaughn had already created. Vaughn's attorney, Lessnoch B. Toohasty, counseled his client a suit would probably be unsuccessful. Since then, Vaughn has taken to polishing his favorite hunting rifle while looking at a photograph of Royal Pane. The gun is so shiny at this point that Vaughn can no longer take it outside on a sunny day.

Jim Ziskopff

Jim is a mystery writer whose chief protagonist is a woman named Audrey who works at the United Nations, in the sixties, as a translator. In his first novel, Audrey overhears two delegates talking about a murder, in their native language—convinced no one else in the UN cafeteria could possibly be familiar with the obscure dialect they are using. This translates into trouble for Audrey (pun intended). Jim cries fowl in several different languages when Royal Pane creates a female detective named Auburn who gave up her job as a UN translator to solve mysteries using her linguistic skills.

Brenda Buckminster

Brenda is a reporter turned lawyer turned mystery author. Her ancestors were once wealthy landowners in England but by the time her parents emigrate to the US, the only inheritance they had left was their accent. Brenda doesn't even get that. Her debut mystery novel was well received and nominated for Best First Novel at the Bouchercon world mystery conference, years ago. When Royal Pane won the honors, there was talk he may have bribed his way to first place, but nothing was ever proved. Winning would have immediately vaulted Brenda to fame and fortune. To this day, she harbors ill will toward Royal Pane, which means she is part of a very large club.

Dottie Kennel

Mystery author from the UK who moved to the U.S. as a young woman. Her first novel was set in a sprawling English manor, soon after the Great War. Her protagonist is a young woman who advances from simple house cleaning to head housekeeper and amateur sleuth, nimbly dispatching criminals while managing the week's menu and making sure the silver is accounted for and polished. She was also a finalist for Best First Novel, along with Brenda and Royal Pane. Same as Brenda, if Royal Pane ever took a long walk on a short pier, instead of finding a life preserver, she'd happily throw him a boat anchor.

June Flemmagardner

Mystery writer who publishes under a pen name for obvious reasons. June was nominated for Best First Novel the same year as Brenda and Dottie. They now have an annual luncheon date, in Portland, during which the three ladies burn a small, stuffed doll made to resemble Royal Pane. Restaurants tend to frown on this sort of behavior, so they generally have to choose a different spot for lunch each year, being careful to always choose an establishment with a readily visible sprinkler system.

Janine Sloviniski

Janine is a former lawyer who became fascinated with psychology after defending a serial killer in her home country of Tazmaniastan. She came to the US to study psychology and, after earning her degree, decided her twin degrees would be a great platform for writing mysteries. Her first novel features a sociopathic mystery writer who takes advantage of fellow authors until he becomes a murder victim. This is a little too close to home for Royal Pane, who threatens to sue Janine for defamation of character. When a group of mystery writers decide to give Janine an award for Most Well Deserved Treatment of a Character, Royal Pane becomes even more angry and follows through on his threat.

Ricky "Blues" Castelloni

Rick is a former mobster who decided to write a murder mystery, inspired by events from his own life story, after being paroled from a federal penitentiary for good behavior. Rick's nickname is based on his well known love of jazz music. His first mystery novel features a protagonist who is a jazz musician. During a mystery writer's conference in NYC, Royal Pane happens to see Castelloni in a bar, keeping company with a known mobster. Knowing that would be a violation of parole, Pane uses the information to coerce Castelloni into collaborating on a novel. Ever since, Rick has been contemplating a second violation of his parole that would certainly ruin his record of good behavior.

Jim Haymaker

Jim is a former New York advertising man who moved to Portland, Maine to pursue his dream of becoming a best selling novelist. Unlike the other authors invited to Toomuch's private island retreat, he has no grudge against Royal Pane. However, his favorite author is Agatha Christie and his favorite mystery is, "And Then There Were None". He loves this mystery so much he often hosts parties in which each of his guests pretend to be murdered until only one remains. After Royal Pane expires in the dining room, the remaining authors can't help but wonder whether Jim has taken his obsession to the next level.

Nikki Seelbach

Nikki is a Bar Harbor resident who just published her first mystery novel, about a 911 dispatcher, Mary, who learns of a call claiming a murder has been committed at her home address. The problem is Mary lives alone and was at work at the time of the call. The police investigate but everything is in order. A week later, it happens again. And the week after that. Each time, the calls originate from a different burner phone. Someone is crying wolf, but who? And why? Everyone loves the novel except Royal Pane, who goes out of his way to pan the book as part of his blog. Nikki is furious with Pane and when they meet at Toomuch's party, she explains the correct spelling for his last name should be P-I-T-A. After one of the other authors explains the acronym, Royal Pane becomes royally pissed.

Stephanie Gamby

The protagonist behind Stephanie's mysteries is Detective Finnegan, a man who loves board games so much he recently won the Scrabble® title for the state of Massachusetts. In Stephanie's latest novel, the villain leaves behind a Scrabble® tile at each of his crime scenes to taunt Finnegan. He catches the killer after using the tiles to come up with the last name of the next victim. The villain receives five years on top of his life sentence for using a proper name in a Scrabble® competition. Stephanie is also very competitive and recently lost a high stakes game of Catan® in which Royal Pane was accused of cheating.