



"Hey, bright boy—that mug just boosted your wallet."

## The Case of the New Writer

**PEN A NOVEL** ▶ He wanted to be anywhere but his office. Like on a beach, with a cold beer in one hand and a hot dame in the other. He thought, *I could write a detective novel.*

Yeah? First, listen to Robert B. Parker, author of the Spenser series (latest: *Back Story*), and Dennis Lehane, author of *Shutter Island*, who know a thing or two about stringing words together—and about getting the job done.

**DIVE IN.** "Just write the book for yourself. It won't matter then whether it gets published," Lehane says. "Write it for yourself, and then self-consciousness goes away."

**PREPARE TO STINK.** "You won't be coming out of the gate with the necessary skills," Lehane says. "You have to suck longer than you think. If you want to be rich or want to be known, there are so many easier ways."

**PACE YOURSELF.** Parker writes no more than five pages a day—his limit before becoming "bored or distracted." In 60 days, that's 300 pages. Lehane blocks out at least 2 hours a day—no phone, no e-mail, no getting up. "Don't get up when it hurts. And it'll hurt," he says.

**GO TO WORK.** "If you do this for a living, you can't wait for inspiration," Parker says. "Writing fiction is a matter of will and self-control. Talent isn't everything."

**CRIME-STOPPER TIPS:** For a crime or detective novel, concentrate on characters, not plot. "People are more interested in people than events," Parker says. Lehane says limit physical descriptions: "It lets the reader own the characters."