



**Q & A**

# Sisters in crime share their secrets

CRIME writers Angela Makholwa (*Black Widow Society*), CM Elliot (*Sibanda and the Rainbird*) and Amanda Coetzee (*Redemption Song*) will be at the Kingsmead Book Fair at Kingsmead College in Johannesburg next month.

**Do you identify with your murderers or with your detectives?**

**Angela Makholwa:**

The one character I feel an affinity towards is the hit man in the *Black Widow Society*, Mzakhe Khuzwayo, because at the core of his tough exterior lies a tender and compassionate heart.



**CElliot:** I identify with my detective Jabulani Sibanda. He's well-read (my library is eclectic), urbane (I can, if obliged, eat olives and elegantly flaunt a champagne glass), has a short fuse (mine is surprisingly long) and lives for the African bush.

**Amanda Coetzee:** I identify with characteristics rather than characters, but I measure myself against my detectives and how they navigate the moral complexity of life.

**What is the role of truth in your fiction?**



**AM:** In essence, fiction writing is truth in that it is a reflection of what happens in our society. The tools a writer uses in fiction allow for the freedom to express ideas without fear of tarnishing or denting anyone's image or integrity.

**CE:** Fiction writing is the art of patchworking the truth. We cut and shape a timeline, manipulate the environment, pin the detail, embroider characters from cobbled together characteristics, and quilt unrelated incidents in one big bedspread of reality. Our readership expects no less. Imagination is an exploration of the possibilities of the observed.



**AC:** In fiction — and in life — the truth is non-negotiable. Of course, the characters can lie, but the actual writing never should.

**Best crime novel you've read this year?**

**AM:** *The Strangler's Honeymoon* by Swedish author Hakan Nesser.

**CE:** *The Luminaries* by Eleanor Catton (does that count?). I don't read many crime novels.

**AC:** Jo Nesbo's *The Snowman*. — Jackie May

● *The Kingsmead Book Fair is on May 24. See [kingsmead.co.za/bookfair](http://kingsmead.co.za/bookfair)*