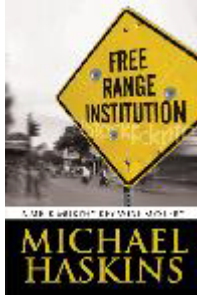


International Thriller Writers

February Newsletter

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Title Free Range Institution by Michael Haskins



By [Leighton Gage](#)

Good news! Mick Murphy is back.

I was introduced to Mick back in 2008, (that was in *Chasin' the Wind*) and I've been chasin' a sequel ever since.

Now, finally, in February of 2011, author [Michael Haskins](#), is giving us one.

It's called *Free Range Institution*.

Mick, for those of you who haven't met either one of them, bears a striking physical resemblance to his creator.

They both smoke cigars. They both drink Jameson Irish Whiskey. They both have beards – Haskins' is salt-and-pepper, Murphy's is red. They both wear Boston Red Sox caps.

Michael is a colorful and interesting character to write about, but he lives in Key West most of the time. And, unlike Mick, he never disappears for three years in succession. So, even though Key West may be off the beaten track for many, it's still a heck of a lot easier to catch up with Michael than it is to catch up with Mick.

Let me then hold forth, in the first instance, about Mick. Who, I hope, isn't going to keep us waiting quite so long before he relates his next adventure.

Yeah, that's right. Mick tells his own stories.

The books are written from the point-of-view of Liam (nicknamed "Mad Mick," or simply "Mick") Murphy, a journalist and a sailor.

Hey! Michael Haskins is also a journalist and a sailor. But I'm talking about Mick. Or am I? Sometimes I get confused.

You would, too, if you had the experience I had a few months ago.

It was like this: I was in the 'States for a short visit. A friend of mine and I decided to drop down to Key West for a day and, while there, visited Michael. He'd just received some ARCs of *Free Range Institution* – and was kind enough to gift me with one. (Actually, he didn't have much of a choice. Remember I mentioned Michael is a sailor? Right. Well, as such, he has considerable upper-body strength. But there were two of us, and my friend held him down while I twisted his arm.)
But I digress.

I didn't get a chance to crack open *Free Range Institution* while I was in Key West, because even more important things, like drinking, got in the way. But, as we made the rounds of the bars, Michael kept introducing me to his friends, of which he has many. I confess that I remember some of the faces better than others. The ones I met earlier in the evening being the ones less-blurred, but I can still recall most of the names.



And guess what? They're all right there, in *Free Range Institution*. Bill, Karen, the lot. They are all right *there*.

I always wondered how Michael Haskins was able to write with such verisimilitude about Key West and the people who live there. But that was back when I thought he was inventing all of those characters.

Now I know different.

Michael Haskins' secret is that almost all of those people really exist. They're friends of his, neighbors of his, people he knows, people he likes, even people he *doesn't* like. All he does is string the words together to describe them. (Note to people who aren't authors: Stringing words together is something you might not find as easy as I make it sound.) Oh, yeah, every now and then Michael takes some artistic license with his character development (like with a certain priest in *Free Range Institution* whose persona will haunt you – and I use the word *haunt* quite judiciously). But he reserves his major firepower for his plots.

And the word *firepower* is also used judiciously.

Free Range Institution is chockablock with action on the land and on the sea. Colombian drug lords, crooked DEA agents, evil politicians, undercover cops, they're all there – and all shooting it out with each other.

I doubt there has been more blood spilled in that little town since the days of Commodore David Porter, who back in the early 1820s, ran his anti-pirate squadron out of Key West. (Footnote: Porter, like Michael and Mick, was born in Massachusetts. Isn't that bizarre?)

Ever heard of the dangerous and highly-addictive drug *paco*? I hadn't. You will, if (did I say *if*? I meant *when*) you read *Free Range Institution*. It's the illicit importation of that *paco* upon which Michael hangs his engaging plot.

The title? Oh, yeah, that's from a song written by Scott Kirby. Michael reproduces these lyrics at the beginning of the book:

*I'm living in a free-range institution
It's a three-ring circus with twelve-step programs to choose from
An open-air asylum at its best
Your shrink says you need a little sun and rest
Baby, check yourself right in to Key West*

Rest? Fat chance! You're going to get precious little of that in *Michael Haskins'* Key West. *Free Range Institution* is non-stop action – and guaranteed to keep you up all night.

Leighton Gage is the author of the Chief Inspector Mario Silva Investigation series set in Brazil. His fourth in the series, Every Bitter Thing, came out late last year. Gage has his home in Santana do Parnaiba, Brazil, and also travels frequently to the Netherlands and Florid.