Keeping track of time
by Wen Spencer

Someone at the Forward Motion Writers forum asked, "How do you keep track of the time in your novels?"

One of the reasons that my Ukiah novels have the date as chapter headings was they cover a short amount of time with an insane amount of things happening. Bitter Waters is only seven days. I think Dog Warrior is actually even shorter.

Usually what I do is get a calander of the time period overed (all four books are during 2004 -- June, August, late September, early October) and start marking in what happens when. This helps when the characters are trying to talk about events. Was that yesterday or the day before yesterday that the shooting occurred? Was that Monday or Tuesday that they did the other thing? Will they be getting together on Friday?

Because I cram so much into one day, occassionally I have to figure out how many hours would have taken each event. If the heroes want food now and its in the middle of the night, they better find a 24 hour restaurant. In TAINTED TRAIL, I found out that the library wasn't open during the time I first sent the characters there to do research -- and wrote it into the book of them arriving and finding it closed.

Another thing I also try to mark is moon cycles. I love throwing references in about the moon at night descriptions, but when you're covering two weeks, it can't be full moon at the first chapter and the last chapter.

A calander also helps keep in mind what is in season food wise (blackberries for example), flowers, leaves (although I cheated a little on the descriptions of fall in the northeast, bumping up the leaves change by saying it had been a very cold august/september. I had set book two around the mid-september round up in Pendleton, and then wanted to start book three immediately after the hero got home, but wanted lots of fall visuals.)

The drawback to this was I spent most of last summer thinking it was early october.

TINKER isn't as tightly scheduled through out and covers almost three months in time. The first few chapters are tight, and it matters which day is which, but then we jump a month in one lump paragraph.