

Using the Weather

An old standby that I think works pretty well, if not overdone, is to use the weather to reflect the situation and the mood of the characters in a novel. It can set the tone for what they feel and create a backdrop for the action. And people are after all, to some extent, influenced by the weather.

As I am something of a slave to reality, I wanted to see if I could incorporate the actual Boston weather into the Boston section of the book I am currently writing. So I consulted the Internet. It turns out the real Boston weather on Tuesday, September 25th, 1984 was warmer than normal. My main characters in *Empty Luck* flew back to the city that day after spending time in Las Vegas. When they landed, the weather was 67 degrees and clear. That seemed to fit well with the optimism they were then feeling. But the very next day, the temperature dropped twenty degrees. And their previously warm, cheery moods correspondingly dropped as well.

The following week, an evil Mafia boss flew in to town, seeking some sort of unspecified, but violent, justice from my endangered characters. As it happened, the day of his arrival, there was a cold, heavy rain falling in Boston. Ominous. And interestingly, when our hero's girlfriend arrived the next day, the rain had cleared and the weather had begun to warm again. That was a good sign for him and his potential relationship with her.

I certainly don't want to overdo the "dark and stormy night" cliché, but I do like the idea of the weather quietly assisting in painting the mood. And I loved that the actual weather seemed to do this for me in several cases... fortunate since I had written the scenes and dates first, without consulting the historical record. Sometimes you get lucky.