



SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
 ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSELETTER

Volume II, Number 4—July 2006

†Expert Testimony†

From the Prez

This time last year, when we began looking ahead to the *current* year, I was dismayed to find that our wonderful board wouldn't be continuing on into eternity. Pari had decided not to run for reelection as president; our *Nooseletter* editors and our publicity chairman were ready to turn over the reins to someone else as well.

My initial reaction was “Oh, no! The sky is falling!!!” (Yes, several exclamation points there.)

Well, the sky didn't fall, and this year's board is just as capable and energetic as last year's. I'm proud of all we've accomplished together. But now we're facing turnover time again. Several of us have been on the board for two years now, and we don't want to run the risk of the board's becoming too set in its ways, or worse, too cliquey.

Croak and Dagger is *your* organization, and we want everyone to feel welcome to participate. We're sure there's lots of untapped talent and enthusiasm among our members, and we look forward to seeing new faces and ideas on the board.

The outgoing members plan to make the transition a smooth one. You'll find individual postings in this issue of the *Nooseletter*. If any of these positions appeal to you, or if you'd like to be on the nominating committee, please contact Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net, or Shirley Coe, shirleycoe@comcast.net. ✓

—Margaret Tessler

Don't Miss It!

Tuesday, July 25, 7:00 p.m.

Officer Jennifer Madrid-Otero, CPA Coordinator, will speak to us about the Albuquerque Citizen Police Academy. (Several of our members are graduates.)

—TRUE CRIMES—

Selected biographies of your Croak & Dagger board members.

Ira Rimson (treasurer) was into his third retirement when he was recruited to be Croak & Dagger's treasurer.

After graduation from college he had no idea what he wanted to be when he grew up, but he always had wanted to learn to fly. A Navy recruiter short of his quota convinced Ira that flying off aircraft carriers was a brainless endeavor, and lots of fun to boot. It wasn't until he was well into flight training in Pensacola that Ira discovered how small aircraft carriers looked from the air. Twenty-two years later he retired from the Navy, still unsure of what he wanted to do when he grew up.

He entered parallel incarnations as (1) an aviation safety consultant and (2) a forensic engineer, which eventually led to retirements two and three and to relocating to Albuquerque. Ira's principal writing endeavors have been devoted to nonfiction articles on safety and forensic science, and editing a professional journal. He currently contributes a thrice-yearly op-ed column to the *Journal of System Safety*, and he is mucking about in attempts at fiction writing.

And he still doesn't know what he wants to do when he grows up. ✓

Croak & Dagger Lineup

Officers

President: Margaret Tessler

tale_spinner@earthlink.net

Vice President: Sarah Schwartz

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Treasurer: Ira Rimson

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Secretary: Stephanie Hainsfurther

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Croak & Dagger Lineup *cont'd.*

Committee Chairs

Programs: Rob Kresge

rkresge77@comcast.net

PR/Publicity: Stephanie Hainsfurther

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Membership: Stephanie Hainsfurther

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The *Nooseletter*: Shirley Coe

shirleycoe@comcast.net

Hospitality: Fred Aiken

FAAiken@aol.com

Web Site Coordinator: Nancy Varian

thule21@att.net

El Tour de Libro

When I first decided to go on a book tour for *A Hunt for Justice: The True Story of a Woman Undercover Wildlife Agent*, I knew it wouldn't be glamorous and exciting. As a veteran traveler, I braced myself for the reality of little sleep and bad dinners, but in the end I came away satisfied that I'd done a good job in promoting and selling my book.

My tour consisted of Albuquerque, Minneapolis, Dallas, Denver, Anchorage, and Washington, D.C. The media events were similar throughout: TV appearances, radio interviews, newspaper coverage, conference speeches, and book signings. The differences were in the people who handled each event.

For example: at a Denver 5:30 a.m. T.V. appearance, the anchor gave me 20 minutes to study a list of questions she would ask. In Minneapolis, however, the anchor used a two-minute break to meet me. Her questions regarding gun control caught me off guard, and I used the *Pari Noskin Taichert* method of circumventing her question to get across points about my book. In most TV appearances there is no time for extensive prepping. You must be ready to walk on the set, say what you have to say, and be done.

Radio interviews varied too. The host for Minnesota MPR had read my book and paced the hour-long show beautifully. In Wisconsin, however, the host had only read the first chapter, and her questions focused on it. I had to work hard to gently give listeners an appreciation for the whole book.

Newspaper interviews are where there is least control. Say what you want, but the journalist will have his or her twist that will influence the outcome

of the article. To get around this, my publicist submitted a well-crafted press release in advance.

Most bookstore signings are difficult. I was blessed in Albuquerque to have the support of Croak and Dagger members who got me off to a roaring start at a Borders. Although I had as many as 30 people at some signings on my tour, attendance at others was low. Publicists insist on book signings because they get your book into the bookstore and generate free advertisement.

While on tour there are always little challenges that pop up. In Washington, D.C., at a conference of Women in Federal Law Enforcement, I was booked to speak behind David Balducci, *New York Times* best-selling fiction writer. While I felt overshadowed by him, I capitalized on what I was and what he wasn't—a woman in federal law enforcement. This carried the day and I survived.

Looking back, I would consider hiring a publicist for every city I toured. Local publicists know their own territory well and can generate more bookings as opposed to someone who is trying to promote you nationally.

My California publicist did a good job but missed some opportunities because he wasn't close enough to the local market.

The most bang for my PR bucks came with speaking engagements before large groups, such as large law enforcement and conservation organizations. These groups provided broad exposure and other PR opportunities, including the sale of an article to *Outdoor Life Magazine*.

So, when thinking about PR, consider any venue that might be remotely interested in your book and be there. Develop a message about your book, and use it consistently throughout your tour.

Most of all, relax and have a good time. ✓

—Lucinda Schroeder



Sisters in Crime was founded in 1986. **The purpose of Sisters in Crime shall be** “to combat discrimination against women in they mystery field, educate publishers and the general public as to the inequities in the treatment of female authors, raise the level of awareness of their contribution to the field, and promote the professional advancement of women who write mysteries.”

The Cairn of Albertvs

Ars Medicae

*“Intra paucos dies,
nisi res in peius mutabitur,,,”*

“. . . Take two *spiraea** and call me in the morning if you don’t feel better.”

In Greco-Roman mythology, a centaur named Chiron taught the healing arts to several favorites. Since a centaur is half man/half horse, one wonders if he/it combined family practice with veterinary medicine? An intern, Machaon, is named in the *Iliad*:

“But when he saw the wound where the bitter arrow was driven,
Machaon sucked the blood and in skill
laid healing medicines on it,
which Chiron in friendship long ago had
given his father.”

For crime scene research, authors can consult a book by D. P. Lyle, MD, *Murder and Mayhem: A Doctor Answers Medical and Forensic Questions for Mystery Writers*, but what is available to writers of historical fiction? My protagonists in the Toby Crime series, “A Getorius and Arcadia Mystery,” are surgeons—that is, he is, and she slyly consents to marry him on condition that he teach her the medical arts. So what would Getorius know? My own “MD” training consists of a long-ago Boy Scout first aid merit badge and one CPR session, yet I don’t have to know any more than Getorius. (Writers are warned that author omniscience and author intrusion are among the no-no rules of fiction writing.) Where would Getorius get his training? In antiquity, Alexandria had the Harvard of medical schools, but Getorius was trained by a legion surgeon from a remote Rhineland province of the Empire. Upper-class physicians already belittled lower-down-the-social-scale surgeons as “arrow extractors,” something like a “sawbones” tag today. Getorius is frustrated by the Church’s ban on human dissection, but manages to get around this on one occasion.

As primary sources, several translations exist of ancient medical texts. There are also recent books such as *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* by John F. Nunn (1996) and *Roman Medicine* by Audrey Cruse (2004). Other physicians are known through fragmentary texts, but Hippocrates dominated medical techniques from the fourth century BCE until Galen in the second century of the Common Era. Another treatise is *Gynecology* by Soranus of Ephesus. So detailed is his work that it was required

medical school reading on into the early twentieth century.

The Hippocratic Oath has physicians swear that they will treat their teaches as family and abstain from what is harmful to patients: “I will give no deadly medicine to anyone if asked, nor suggest any such counsel; and in like manner I will not give to a woman a pessary to produce abortion.” The *medicus* also promises not to seduce females and males, or freeman and slaves. Must have been happening.

Most useful is Hippocrates’s descriptions of 42 illnesses, from first sniffle to recovery or death. The latter occurred in 25 cases; not too encouraging. A short example is a woman who suffered a miscarriage: “On the first day, tongue dry, thirst, nausea, insomnolency, belly disordered, with thin, copious, undigested dejections. Second day . . . acute fever; intestinal discharges copious; had no sleep. On the third, pains greater . . . delirious. On the seventh she died. Belly throughout loose . . . urine scanty, thin. Ardent fever.” A physician would attempt to balance the patient’s hot-cold, wet-dry elements and four body humors—blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile—through urine analysis, diuretic herbs, bloodletting, enemas, and diet. Valerian root, opium, and henbane (*Hyoscyamus*) were sedatives, henbane being a deadly poison if overdosed and of use to mystery writers since its symptoms mimic some illnesses.

Would Arcadia ever be a guest on *ER* or *Gray’s Anatomy*? A female *medica* would be unusually strong willed, given the stereotype of Roman women as Latin victims of a *kinder, kueche, kirchel*/children, kitchen, church male mentality, yet female practitioners existed, especially in the Eastern Empire during early Christian times.

**Spiraea* was the ancient equivalent of aspirin, whose salicylic acid base is found in birch bark.

Valere! Be in good health ’til the next
Nooseletter. ✓

—Albert Noyer

IN THE LOOP

If you haven’t joined already, all members are invited to join the *Croak & Dagger* community group, an online gathering place. Exchange information about mystery books, movies, and TV shows; share news about local and national mystery events; and participate in occasional online classes. Join in!

Contact Nancy Varian, thule21@att.net, for further instructions.

Croak and Dagger

Coming Events —

On Tuesday, August 22, hear Aimee and David Thurlo, New Mexico's premier writing couple.

Their latest novel is *Thief in Retreat*, which features a writer's conference in a fictional retreat in New Mexico. Aimee says of this work: "I wanted to capture the insecurity that's so inherent in our business as well as some of the competition between genres. But most of all David and I had a lot of fun writing this book." *Publishers Weekly* reviewed this, the second in their series featuring extern nun Sister Agatha. Suspects include the local sheriff and an assemblage of mystery writers, plus a resident ghost that haunts writers retreat's halls and even has Sister Agatha wondering about unrest in the afterlife.

Readers who already know the Thurlos' other two series, one featuring Navajo FBI Agent Ella Clah and the other featuring Navajo cop Lee Nez, will want to be on hand to hear how a couple writes three series and stays happily married. ✓

Classified Information

Are You Looking for a Critique Group? Why not advertise for like-minded writers in the *Nooseletter*?

Anybody can start the ball rolling. Just email your announcement to shirleycoe@comast.net.

BOOK REVIEW



Under Pressure

Kathy Brandt

Signet Mystery (Paper), June 2006.

New American Library, Penguin Group (USA), Inc., New York. ISBN 0-451-21878-7.

In *Under Pressure*, Brandt's protagonist Hannah Sampson takes on her fourth challenge as an underwater homicide investigator. In her first adventure, *Swimming with the Dead*, Hannah was the Dive and Recovery Team Leader for the Homicide Division of the Denver Police Department. During an unofficial investigative diving assignment to the British Virgin Islands (BVI), Hannah "...swore to never, ever dive into the icy black water [of Colorado's water holes] again."

By now retired from her Colorado position and firmly established as lead diver/investigator of the BVI's constabulary, Hannah is on an offshore training outing with her novice assistant when an

inter-island commuter plane crashes a hundred feet away from the dive boat. Their immediate response manages to rescue half the plane's occupants. But five persons perish. Intertwining subplots make for a combination mystery and police procedural that holds the reader's attention from the first chapter to the final sentence. What is the significance of the senator's *not* accompanying his wife on the plane? Why was the Hollywood idol there, and what did his agent know about it? Is Simon, the ten-year-old who Hannah rescues from the plane's lavatory, a key to the plot, or just a ploy to engage the reader's sympathy? Brandt keeps her characters' cards close to their chests, and keeps the reader guessing—mostly wrong.

Brandt, an experienced sailor and diver, taught writing at the University of Colorado. In the off-seasons she sails and dives in the BVI. She brings intimate familiarity with, and respect for, undersea beauty to descriptions of the wonders, and hazards, of diving. Her portrayals of boating—whether by sail or stink—are likewise cut from the experience of having "been there, done that." Her most charming images are of the BV Islanders, their way of life, attitudes, and patois, which bring them to life as a different, yet complementary, culture to the ex-Denver cop.

As were her previous books, *Under Pressure* is a great summer read: fast paced and engaging. And yet... It's the fourth of Brandt's Hannah Sampson series that is written in first person. In his autobiographical *Lessons from a Lifetime of Writing: A Novelist Looks at His Craft*, David Morrell writes that he cannot last more than a few chapters in first person before he reverts kicking and screaming to third person. I've heard similar advice from other male writers, for example, Sean Murphy: "Avoid first person."

And yet...Kathy Brandt, Kathy Reichs, Sara Paretsky, Pari Noskin Taichert: four successful Sisters for whom first person has been a challenge well met.

Maybe it's a gender thing. ✓

—Reviewed by Ira J. Rimson

DON'T FORGET:

Tuesday, July 27, 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, August 22, 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, September 23, 1:00 p.m.

Croak & Dagger Authors' Books on Exhibit

The Croak & Dagger traveling book exhibit is making the rounds of area libraries.

Here's the 2006 schedule:

Traveling Book Exhibit — 2006		
May	Los Griegos Library	1000 Griegos NW
July	South Valley Library	3904 Isleta SW
August	North Valley Library	7704 2nd St. NW
October	Juan Tabo Library	3407 Juan Tabo NE
November	Lomas Tramway Library	908 Eastridge NE
December	Taylor Ranch Library	5700 Bogart NW

The schedule is yet to be determined for the following libraries:

Remaining Libraries	
Main Library	501 Copper NW (downtown)
South Broadway Library	1025 Broadway SE
Wyoming Library	8205 Apache NE

Some libraries have no secure area in which to accommodate displays, including the Alamosa Library, Cherry Hills Library, Erma Ferguson Library, Ernie Pyle Library, San Pedro Library, and Westgate Library. The Alamosa and Westgate Libraries *are* carrying our Croak & Dagger bookmarks.

We will also check out Corrales and Rio Rancho as possible library display sites.

Traveling Library Committee

If you would like to get in on the fun of setting up a traveling library display, contact Sarah Schwartz at schwartzse@comcast.net.

Calling All Croak & Dagger Authors

If you have written a mystery, thriller, or crime-related book, please notify Shirley Coe at shirleycoe@comcast.net. We would like to compile our very own Books in Print, and we want you to be part of it.

If you would like to add a copy of your book(s) to the Croak & Dagger traveling exhibit, contact Sarah Schwartz at schwartzse@comcast.net.

The following titles have been generously donated by authors/translators for the exhibit:

Current Exhibit Titles	
Badal, Joseph H.	<i>Terror Cell</i> <i>The Pythagorean Solution</i>
Dare, Cleo	<i>Melting Point</i>
Murray, Steven T., translator	<i>Betrayal</i> , by Karin Alvtegen
Noyer, Albert	<i>The Cybeline Conspiracy</i> <i>The Secundus Papyrus</i>
Rudolph, Penny	<i>Thicker Than Blood</i>
Schroeder, Lucinda Delaney	<i>A Hunt for Justice: The True Story of a Woman Undercover Wildlife Agent</i>
Slater, Susan	<i>The Pumpkin Seed Massacre</i>
Taichert, Pari Noskin	<i>The Belen Hitch</i> <i>The Clovis Incident</i>
Tessler, Margaret.	<i>Class Disunion</i> <i>Tangled Webs</i>

Calling All Croak & Dagger Expert Consultants

If you have consulted as an expert on a mystery, thriller, or crime-related book, please notify Shirley Coe at shirleycoe@comcast.net. We would like to include you in our Books in Print.

LINK TO THE CROAK & DAGGER WEB SITE

Do you have a mystery-related Web site? All Croak & Dagger members are invited to link their mystery-related Web site to our Croak & Dagger Web site. Contact our webmistress, Nancy Varian, at thule21@att.net. Let her know your URL, and she'll set you right up.

Taking a Master to Task: A Critique of *S Is for Silence*

S Is for Silence is the nineteenth novel in the Kinsey Millhone series written by master writer Sue Grafton. I have been her fan since I read *A Is for Alibi*, eagerly awaiting each alphabetic installment. For eighteen novels, Sue Grafton crafted an unwritten contract with devoted readers that we would journey hand-in-hand with Kinsey Millhone as she solves the crime. Kinsey is the viewpoint person in whose brain we reside, learning clues as she encounters them. I had high expectations of spending hours of delightful adventure with Kinsey until...

I read the opening chapter, twice, before throwing the book down. Where was Kinsey? Instead of Kinsey's folksy banter, some all-knowing stranger spoke about a young teenage girl admiring the nude body of a woman preparing herself for a night out.

For violating her unwritten contract, I must take Ms. Grafton to task. Unlike the first eighteen books, *S* is a slow read. It definitely is not plot driven and certainly not character driven. In order to begin where the action occurred in the story, the backstory had to come first. This created a problem in that the reader has more information than Kinsey, which created later story problems for both reader and Kinsey.

The transition between backstory and current-story was not good. Having established the third-person storytelling mode, the reader is pulled out of the story with the abrupt shift to the "I" of the first person. After spending several dull chapters to get Kinsey up to speed in current story, the reader is yanked into the backstory with another vignette. Again, much new information about the backstory was shared. Precious time was lost hooking the reader into the current-story. This cycle repeats constantly throughout the novel. When Kinsey finally solved the crime, it was an anticlimax.

The word crafting was of high caliber. Some of the best-written similes I have ever encountered appeared in the backstory. The backstory was the real story. In it lived lovably well-written characters, ones that readers care about. The seduction of Lisa is writing at its best. In comparison, the current story was flat and left a lot to be desired.

One glaring error occurred in the backstory. One integral plot point involved a top-of-the-line Chevrolet sedan that cost approximately \$2,400 (about right for 1953). The 4 percent commission that the salesman would have earned on the deal

would not have paid for two years of tuition and books at the university, as was claimed in the prose. The current story fared no better. The amount of furniture stuffed into a 10' x 10' room was unbelievable, unbelievable in the sense that people could actually move around the room with the greatest of ease.

I do recommend that people read the book, if for no other reason than to see how not to do things. My recommendation for Sue Grafton is to abandon this style of backstory/current story and return to the format of her first eighteen books and the unwritten contract with the reader. I eagerly await her "T" novel. ✓

—Fred A. Aiken, FAAiken@aol.com

Classified Information

Would You Like to Be in a Book Reading Club?

On a regular basis that doesn't conflict with monthly Sisters in Crime program meetings? Consider advertising for like-minded readers in the *Nooseletter*. Just email your announcement to shirleycoe@comcast.net and start the ball rolling.

Let's Hear It for Innovative Authors: A Review of Sue Grafton's *S Is for Silence*

After writing 18 mystery novels told in the first person by her series protagonist, Kinsey Millhone, Sue Grafton must have lifted her head from the keyboard, looked around, and said, "Oh, what the heck, let's have a little fun with this next one."

Kinsey is not exactly quiet in *S Is for Silence*—she does tell the linear story of her investigation as in the previous books—but for the first time since *A Is for Alibi* was published in 1982, we hear from other characters and get to observe them in real time (1987 by my count) and in flashback.

What they're talking about is the 34-year-old disappearance of small-town vamp Violet Sullivan on the Fourth of July. She has absconded with her violet-tinted Chevy Bel Air, her dog, and some serious cash, the amount of which varies depending on who is talking to Kinsey. We peer into the memories and thoughts of Violet's daughter, Daisy, now in her forties and desperate to know if her mother left her, or was abducted, or worse. She hires
(cont'd. on next page)

(Let's Hear It for Innovative Authors, cont'd.)

Kinsey to find out if her mother loved the dog more than she loved Daisy.

There are other female characters, like Liza, Daisy's former babysitter, and a mutual friend who introduces Kinsey to Daisy. But it is the male suspects with whom we are most concerned; it seems that Violet slept with every one of them. Kinsey tries to turn up the heat on this very cold case by investigating Violet's alcoholic and abusive husband, Foley, auto dealer Chet Cramer, and several other lovesick and otherwise greedy gents in Serena Station.

Dear reader, they lie through their teeth.

The third-person flashback technique is not just a stylistic romp for the author and for us—it adds an extra layer of suspense to the investigation. Because for the first time in this series, we know for sure when the suspects are not telling the truth to Kinsey.

That doesn't mean we know the whole truth. Grafton successfully conceals the circumstances of Violet's big bye-bye until the very end, when a certain person's identity is revealed and our thirst for whodunit is satisfied. But knowing when the other characters are lying liberates the reader from one of the more stultifying facts of strictly first-person mysteries: we can only know what the sleuth has seen, done, heard, or been told.

In a 1999 interview about *O Is for Outlaw*, Grafton remarked, "As I've said many times, I'm really not interested in writing the same book more than once. I probably put more energy and ingenuity into coming up with fresh storylines than I do any other aspect of the writing."

In this case, Grafton has written a fresh story that also satisfies our need (and presumably hers) for a different storytelling technique. ✓

—Stephanie Hainsfurther

ROB'S RANDOM SHOTS

Something a little different this month. You can find a review of a novel elsewhere in this issue. I found two books at The Writer's Store (www.writersstore.com) when I was visiting LA in early June that are the best I can recommend on how to write mysteries. So the following reviews are of how-to books. If you're only a reader and not an aspiring author, be not deterred. There are many nuggets of wisdom in these books that will help readers better appreciate the structure and intent of mysteries and thrillers.

July Case File Number One

The Weekend Novelist Writes a Mystery by Robert J. Ray and Jack Remick, Dell Trade Paperbacks, New York, 1998, 257 pp.

Relax. This is not a how-to that will lead you through writing a novel in a single weekend. The authors show you how to write a manuscript in a year if you can only devote weekends to writing. Most of us haven't given up our day jobs yet, so following this path can be a blessing for those of us with busy professional or family lives.

The authors rely on showing structure by example through a half dozen well-known mysteries. In rough order of space devoted to them, they use *Gorky Park* (Smith), *The Big Sleep* (Chandler), *The Maltese Falcon* (Hammett), "*F*" *Is for Fugitive* (Grafton), *The Body in the Library* (Christie), *The Silence of the Lambs* (Harris), and *All That Remains* (Cornwell). The authors also use ever more detailed parts of a hypothetical novel they could craft over a year of weekends, *Murder on Drake Island*. If you find this book, be forewarned: the references to the existing novels contain lots of spoilers (they assume you've read them), and the hypothetical novel is not a cozy—it's about a sexual serial killer.

All that said, if you've been thinking about how to turn an idea into a novel, this is the guidebook for you. Some may call the planning, note cards, scene building, lists, and rewriting anal retentive. It is certainly exhaustive. But it starts you thinking about how to get from point A (idea) to point Z (finished, revised manuscript you can shop to agents and publishers). And it has all the steps laid out in logical manner—characters first (sleuth, victim, killer, sidekick), then plot, then creating scenes and organizing them into a book-length work (it took me three manuscripts and advice from Margaret Coel to learn to build by scenes and not chapter by chapter),

(cont'd. on next page)



CRACK & DAGGER
MEMBERSHIP LIST

The Albuquerque Chapter is
Daggers on the web!
http://www.sicrime.com
or
http://www.crackanddagger.com

2006 Meeting Dates:

January 24
February 28
March 21 (Sat)
April 23
May 23
June 24 (Sat)
July 23
August 27
September 23 (Sat)
October 24
November 24
December 23 (Sat)

TERMS: \$20.00 (US) / \$25.00 (CANADA)
Shipping: \$5.00
Subtotal: \$25.00
Total: \$30.00

307661, 307662, 307663, 307664
P.O. Box 10000
12700 Main Street, NE
07104 (back cover of *Harmony*)



www.sicrime.com

BOOKMARKS

Have you seen them? Bright yellow, with bloodred markings? Do you have one? Do you have a handful?

The new 2006 *Crack & Dagger* bookmarks are a great way to spread the word about our Sisters in Crime chapter. Hand plenty out, but keep one for yourself: they list all our meeting dates and times for 2006.

(Rob's Random Shots, cont'd.)

then first draft, second draft, and revision into polished manuscript.

The authors convey even more detail in the process than I'm used to, but I recommend this book as one of two to get you started. After all, a writer is nothing but a reader who says, "I want to do that, too."

July Case File Number Two

Writing and Selling Your Mystery Novel by Hallie Ephron, Writers Digest Books, Cincinnati, 2005, 248 pp. (trade paperback)

As useful as this book is, this is the hardest review I've ever written. The first 90 percent of the book is extremely useful to the beginning writer, and I found myself nodding my head and high-fiving. "Yes, I did it that way. Right on! That's in my book." But the last 10 percent of the book brought me crashing back to earth. If you, like me, have written several manuscripts and haven't sold one yet, then the last part on revising contains advice I wish I'd had five years ago when I started to revise my first manuscript.

Hallie Ephron writes psychological mysteries, so she knows whereof she writes. Her sister Nora is a noted screenwriter (*When Harry Met Sally* and many others), so ink runs in her family's veins.

This volume, laid out logically, begins with 80 pages on **planning**, a step that ought to take at least as long as the actual writing. As Ephron and the *Weekend Novelist* authors point out, those who plan ahead face fewer writing blocks and go down fewer dead ends that force them to throw away dozens of pages (even a hundred) of draft and start over. Planning shows you how to proceed logically from a premise (idea) to sleuth, crime, victim, villain, innocent suspects, supporting cast, setting (I might have placed this higher, next to premise), plot organization, and title selection. It may seem weird to put title last, but it can occur to you at any point and may change.

In this section and the others, Ephron shows you how certain aspects of novels or scenes flow from each other and give you space for practical exercises, either from the book you're working on or just something you think up on the spot.

The second section (more than 100 pages) concerns the actual writing and is broken down into manageable bites like:

- Writing a dramatic opening (the murder doesn't have to occur on page one)

- Introducing your protagonist and other characters
- Dramatizing scenes and arranging them into chapters
- Understanding the importance of choosing a point of view
- Writing dialogue
- Planting clues, red herrings, and misdirection
- Writing suspense, action, and introspection
- Layering in your backstory gradually (not too early or in too big a dose)
- Writing the "coda," a short final section that ties up all remaining loose ends.

Ephron spends only about 25 pages on revising, but her method of flying high to deal with the structure of your work before flying low to polish scenes and sentences would have helped me enormously. I'm a better drafter than I am a reviser and have been rightly accused of failing to see the forest for the trees.

The final ten-page section is on selling your novel—targeting agents and publishers and putting together a query packet. There are entire books on these topics, but Ephron does an admirable job of condensing the best recommendations into a few pages. This is a great book for those of you just starting out, those who are well underway, or—as I found to my chagrin—those of us who wish they could back up the tape to five years ago. ✓

—Rob Kresge, rkresge77@comcast.net

Dastardly Duels

Unpublished novelists are invited to submit to the *Publish Me! 2006 Contest*.

Previous publication of short stories, anthologies, or nonfiction are allowed. Accepted genres are crime, mystery, suspense, romantic suspense, and crossover novels where the primary storyline involves crime, mystery or suspense, but where the story is set in a fantasy or sci-fi world.

Wolfmont Publishing is offering a publishing package that includes custom cover design work, 50 copies of the published book, one year of distribution through Ingram's and Baker & Taylor, one year of being featured in Wolfmont Publishing's online store, promotional materials, and publicity by Wolfmont Publishing.

The entry fee is \$45. For complete details, go to www.wolfmont.com.

Great Literary Taunts

For authors in need of inspiration:

- “He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire.” —Winston Churchill
 - “He has never been known to use a word that might send a reader to the dictionary.”
—William Faulkner (about Ernest Hemingway)
 - “Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words?”
—Ernest Hemingway (about William Faulkner)
 - “Thank you for sending me a copy of your book; I’ll waste no time reading it.” —Moses Hadas
 - “He can compress the most words into the smallest idea of any man I know.”
—Abraham Lincoln
 - “He inherited some good instincts from his Quaker forebears, but by diligent hard work, he overcame them.”
—James Reston (about Richard Nixon)
 - “In order to avoid being called a flirt, she always yielded easily.” —Charles, Count Talleyrand
 - “I am enclosing two tickets to the first night of my new play, bring a friend . . . if you have one.”
—George Bernard Shaw (to Winston Churchill)
 - “Cannot possibly attend first night, will attend second . . . if there is one.”
—Winston Churchill (in reply to Shaw)
 - “A sheep in sheep’s clothing.”
—Winston Churchill (on Clement Atlee)
 - “He occasionally stumbled over the truth, but hastily picked himself up and hurried on as if nothing had happened.”
—Winston Churchill (on Stanley Baldwin)
- Ira Rimson

MAD MAGGIE’S MUTTERINGS

Oh, expletive! Not long ago, I was discussing with other mystery authors the irony of folks who read about people being stabbed, shot, poisoned, or otherwise *murdered* without batting an eyelash, yet blanch at the sight of an “f-word.” Go figure.

I’m not advocating gratuitous or excessive profanity or obscenity. After a while, that gets bo-o-o-ring anyway. A case in point:

While camping out one weekend, Howard and I were enjoying the peaceful surroundings when a group of obnoxious loudmouths set up camp next to us. One guy in particular (who seemed angry at everything and everyone) appeared to know only one adjective. It started with “f”—and it wasn’t “felicitous.”

About 3:00 in the morning, as I lay bundled up in my sleeping bag, I pondered the idea of stomping over to his campsite and pretending I was a newcomer to the USA.

“I’m from Outer Mongolia,” I’d say, “and I’m trying to learn English. But I’m confused. Are you saying that your radio and your icebox and your boat are all having s-e-x?” (I suppose *ménage à trois* would be the proper euphemism here.) “Is this another strange custom peculiar to Americans?”

I digress. My point is that a few (very few) well-placed cuss words can reveal a great deal about a character. Let’s keep them to a minimum but not eliminate them altogether. ✓

—Margaret Tessler

Murder in *the Bosque* (Or, As They Call It in Idaho, *the Grove*)

Boise, Idaho’s annual Murder in the Grove conference is sponsored, in part, by the Boise Sisters in Crime chapter, Partners in Crime. The 2006 conference was held June 3, with a preconference workshop, “How to Write Killer Fiction,” conducted by Carolyn Wheat the previous day.

Murder in the Grove’s goal is to provide a venue for readers and writers and to inspire writers to write.

And who would not be inspired by Anne Perry? When the original headliner, Sara Paretsky, withdrew because of complications following an automobile accident, Perry stepped in as the keynote speaker.

The conference organizers scheduled three concurrent sessions throughout most of the one-day program: author panels targeting readers, workshops targeting writers, and forensics information for all.

The conference featured an impressive list of authors, including our own:

- Pari Noskin Taichert, author of two Agatha-nominated mysteries, *The Clovis Incident* and *The Belen Hitch*. www.thegreat-escape.com/parinoskintaichert/

Other authors you might want to check out:

- Aileen Baron, author of *The Torch of Tangier*, set in Tangier in 1942.
www.poisonedpenpress.com/Members/baron-aileen/baron-aileen/about-aileen-baron
- C. J. Box, author of the award-winning Joe Pickett series. *In Plain Sight* is his latest release.
www.cjbox.net/home.asp

(cont’d. on next page)

(Murder in the Bosque, cont'd.)

- Mary Buckham, author of *Invisible Recruit*, about a group of women who become undercover agents. www.marybuckham.com
- Deborah Donnelly, author of the Carnegie Kinkaid Wedding Planner mysteries. Her latest mystery is *You May Now Kill the Bride*. www.deborahdonnelly.org
- Sylvia Hubbard, author of *Stone's Revenge*, a romantic suspense thriller. sylviahubbard.homestead.com
- Kelly Jones, author of *The Seventh Unicorn*, about a young curator's search of a lost medieval tapestry. www.seventhunicorn.com
- Larry Karp, author of the Music Box Murder series. His latest mystery, *First, Do No Harm*, intertwines events from 1943 and 2003. www.larrykarp.com
- Con Lehane, author of *What Goes Around Comes Around*, which features a bartender on the Upper West Side. www.conlehane.com
- Catherine Mulvany, author of paranormal and romantic suspense. Her latest work is *Shadows All Around Her*. www.catherinemulvany.com
- Ann Parker, author of *Silver Lies* and, most recently, *Iron Ties*, set in Leadville, Colorado, in the late nineteenth century. www.annparker.net
- Joanne Pence, author of the Angie Amalfie mystery series combining mystery with humor, romance, and food. Her latest work is *Red Hot Murder*. members.ispwest.com/joanpence
- Twist Phelan, author of *Spurred Ambition* in the Pinnacle Peak series set in Arizona. www.twistphelan.com
- J. D. Rhoades, author of *Good Day in Hell*, the second in a series featuring bounty hunter Jack Keller. www.jdrhoades.com
- Kirk Russell, author of *Deadgame*, the latest in his Fish and Game Warden eco-thrillers. www.kirkussellbooks.com
- Michael W. Sherer, author of a mysteries series featuring a Chicago freelance writer. His latest book is *Death Is No Bargain*. www.michaelwscherer.com
- Denise Swanson, author of *Murder of a Smart Cookie*, which features a school psychologist. www.deniseswanson.com
- Robert Weibezahl, author of *The Wicked and the Dead*, which introduces a screenwriter cum amateur sleuth. www.robertweibezahl.com

- Pat White, author of a romantic comedy trilogy set in professional wrestling. Her latest book is *Ring Around My Heart*. www.patwhitebooks.com

Plan ahead and attend Murder in the Grove June 8 and 9, 2007. ✓

—Sarah Schwartz, schwartzse@comcast.net

MURDER BY THE RULES: Thoughts on Part 1 of Carolyn Wheat's *How to Write Killer Fiction*

Mystery writer S. S. Van Dine's article entitled "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories" first appeared in 1928. (See below.) His rules became the test of orthodoxy for detective fiction.

Carolyn Wheat, author of *How to Write Killer Fiction: The Funhouse of Mystery and the Roller Coaster of Suspense*, is a writer and instructor in the Van Dine mold.

"The central problem of the mystery is not 'who killed X,'" Wheat writes, "but who covered up the killing of X, and how did he succeed in creating the illusion that he did not kill X."

The mystery, according to Wheat, satisfies its readers by being logical, complete, and believable. For her, a mystery story is more about intellectual challenge than character development. Wheat does allow that contemporary readers "want more about the detective's inner struggles and outer realities. They expect to see growth and the effect past events had on the character's development to date." She describes the detective as "a person in control, unaffected by the powerful emotions around him," even if that person may be a "trifle more fallible" today.

Wheat suggests approaching the *central problem* by stepping into the killer's shoes. How does one cover up a murder? The killer wants either to give the illusion the victim has died from natural causes, by accident, or by suicide or to create a false reality that points the evil deed at someone else. Wheat says:

This is the funhouse part. Like the funhouse at the old-fashioned amusement park, we encounter mirrors that distort images, passageways that lead us down blind alleys, surprises that pop out at us from seemingly uninhabited places, and misdirection designed to keep us walking around in circles.

How to Write Killer Fiction provides comprehensive information on setting up the funhouse

(cont'd. on next page)

(Murder by the Rules, cont'd.)

illusion. The serious mystery reader—as well as the writer—will find the work insightful as well as entertaining.

But I ask: Who but a nostalgia buff would pay good money to enter an old-fashioned funhouse? I generally want much more than an elaborate puzzle solved by a fairly put-together detective using solely her brain power. The 2006 Edgar Award winner for best first novel, *Officer Down* by Theresa Schwegel, features a Chicago police officer, Samantha Mack, who is more than a trifle fallible and breaks a lot of mystery genre rules. Mack is so *now*.

We could argue about the rules for mystery fiction from evening until the police officers show up at the substation for their morning briefing. How many rotating barrels and leering clowns can one remove before the funhouse becomes some other show on the midway?

What are your unyielding rules?

Here are S. S. Van Dine's rules, in abridged form. For the full article (from *American Magazine*, September 1928), go to Gaslight at <http://gaslight.mtroyal.ab.ca/vandine.htm>. ✓

—Sarah Schwartz, schwartzse@comcast.net

Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories

1. The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery.
2. No willful tricks or deceptions may be placed on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself.
3. There must be no love interest.
4. The detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit.
5. The culprit must be determined by logical deductions—not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession.
6. The detective novel must have a detective in it; and a detective is not a detective unless he detects.
7. There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel and the deader the corpse the better. No lesser crime than murder will suffice.
8. The problem of the crime must be solved by strictly naturalistic means. Such methods for learning the truth as slate-writing, Ouija-boards, mind-reading, spiritualistic séances, crystal-gazing, and the like are taboo.
9. There must be but one detective—that is, but one protagonist of deduction.

10. The culprit must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story.
11. A servant must not be chosen by the author as the culprit. . . . The culprit must be a decidedly worth-while person—one that wouldn't ordinarily come under suspicion.
12. There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. The culprit may, of course, have a minor helper or co-plotter; but the entire onus must rest on one pair of shoulders.
13. Secret societies, camorras, mafias, *et al.*, have no place in a detective story. A fascinating and truly beautiful murder is irremediably spoiled by any such wholesale culpability. To be sure, the murderer in a detective novel should be given a sporting chance; but it is going too far to grant him a secret society to fall back on. No high-class, self-respecting murderer would want such odds.
14. The method of murder, and the means of detecting it, must be rational and scientific.
15. The truth of the problem must at all times be apparent—provided the reader is shrewd enough to see it.
16. A detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no *atmospheric* preoccupations.
17. A professional criminal must never be shouldered with the guilt of a crime in a detective story.
18. A crime in a detective story must never turn out to be an accident or a suicide.
19. The motives for all crimes in detective stories should be personal. International plottings and war politics belong in a different category of fiction.
20. And (to give my Credo an even score of items) I herewith list a few of the devices which no self-respecting detective story writer will now avail himself of. They have been employed too often, and are familiar to all true lovers of literary crime. To use them is a confession of the author's ineptitude and lack of originality. (a) Determining the identity of the culprit by comparing the butt of a cigarette left at the scene of the crime with the brand smoked by a suspect. (b) The bogus spiritualistic séance to frighten the culprit into giving himself away. (c) Forged fingerprints. (d) The dummy-figure alibi. (e) The dog that does not bark and thereby reveals the fact that the intruder is familiar. (f) The final pinning of the crime on a twin, or a relative who looks exactly like the suspected, but innocent, person. (g) The hypodermic syringe and the knockout drops. (h) The commission of the murder in a locked room after the police have actually broken in. (i) The word association test for guilt. (j) The cipher, or code letter, which is eventually unraveled by the sleuth.

Using the Mystery to Confront Social Issues

When I first learned that “Using the Mystery to Confront Social Issues” was the topic of my assigned panel at Malice Domestic, I thought back to a humorous discussion of my first book with a fan (?) who’d come to my book signing.

“It’s a fast-paced mystery on the surface,” I explained, “but there are several layers underneath.”

“Don’t tell me about ‘underneath,’” she screeched, banishing the layers with a determined wave of her hands. “I just want to be entertained!”

I can relate to this. After all, when I pick up a mystery, I’m not looking to explore deep social issues either. But then I recalled all the mysteries I’d read that enlightened me all the while I thought I was being entertained.

Although I hadn’t analyzed it before, I began to realize the *power* we writers have to give voice to the powerless.

In keeping with the goals of Sisters in Crime, I’ll highlight a few women authors who’ve addressed women’s issues in their mystery novels, and whose stories affected me deeply.

In *The Shadow of Venus*, Judith Van Gieson explores the haunting world of homeless women through the eyes of her protagonist, Claire Reynier.

Judith’s personal encounters with these women add depth and compassion to her novel.

Lisa Miscione’s novel *When Darkness Falls* confronts the trafficking of women and girls into sexual slavery. In her research, Lisa discovered that this is “a very real situation that occurs daily around the globe.”

In *Desert Wives*, Betty Webb brings to light the jarring truth of the polygamous cults that line the isolated border between Arizona and Utah. Unlike the fictional glamour portrayed on one television show, the real life of women—and young girls—on these compounds is anything but glitzy. Betty has made extensive notes at the end of her story documenting her research.

The subject of Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s novel *Desert Blood* is the epidemic of murdered women that still plagues the El Paso/Juárez border. Like the other authors mentioned here, Alicia focuses on people, not merely issues, which makes the events all the more disturbing.

Grim topics, but these skillful authors have managed to balance their stories with wit and lighter moments, ultimately proving that mysteries can go beyond escapist fluff.

I’ve touched on only a few mysteries that address social issues. We hope you’ll send your own list of favorites to *The Nooseletter*. ✓

—Margaret Tessler

Help Wanted: Croak & Dagger Needs You!

We have several executive committee positions opening up for 2007. If any of these opportunities appeal to you, or if you’d like to be on the nominating committee, please contact Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net, or Shirley Coe, shirleycoe@comcast.net.

The president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer are elected members of the executive committee, serving one-year terms. (Elections are at the general meeting in November.) They are expected to belong to the both the national Sisters in Crime organization and the local chapter.

Chairs of standing committees may volunteer for their positions; the president makes the final appointment. Committee chairs must belong to the local chapter.

The officers and committee chairs serve on the executive committee, which generally meets once a month.

Officer Vacancies

President. The president presides at all membership meetings and calls and presides at all executive committee meetings. The president sets goals and assigns responsibilities, serves as ad hoc member of committees, polls members on major decisions, keeps members informed, serves as group spokesperson, and performs such other duties as the executive committee may from time to time determine.

Vice President. The vice president assists or substitutes for the president as required.

Secretary. The secretary maintains a mailing list in Microsoft Outlook of all current board members. The secretary also takes minutes at monthly board meetings, keeping them and any attachments in a looseleaf notebook, and distributes the minutes to board members for approval within a reasonable time (before the next board meeting). The secretary sends out

notices of board meetings when needed and directions, prepares and distributes a board meeting agenda when directed by the president, and keeps members on track as to what matters have been decided, so redundancies do not occur.

Treasurer. The treasurer receives chapter funds, deposits them in the chapter's bank account, and makes disbursements as authorized by the executive committee. The treasurer keeps financial accounts (currently in Microsoft Excel), maintains a checking account, and prepares and submits financial statements monthly to the executive committee and at the annual meeting.

Committee Chair Vacancies

Membership Chair.

- Maintains membership applications. Maintains a membership spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel to track current and renewal memberships. Each month, sends renewal notices twice: one month and then two weeks before a membership expiration date. Checks with the treasurer to see which members have renewed. In the case of nonrenewals, sends a survey notice to ask why the member has not renewed.
- Maintains a members' mailing list and a separate mailing list of nonmembers in Microsoft Outlook for members-only and for general announcements, such as program reminders and group news. Sends other appropriate mailings as determined by the executive committee, such as the *Nooseletter*.
- Responds to correspondence from members and nonmembers, and/or refers them to the proper committee chair or executive committee member.
- Plans and organizes membership-drive events to sign up new members, such as the upcoming Halloween wine tasting in October 2006 and Susan Wittig Albert's appearance in April 2007. Works with the program chair and a committee on these events.

Program Chair.

- Purchases bookmarks to give to our speakers as honoraria. Takes them to the trophy store on Central and Monte Vista, to be engraved with "SinC ABQ Croak&Dagger" on the back. Picks them up a week later. Turns in receipts to the treasurer for reimbursement.
- Uses chapter resources (member ideas, volunteers, and so on) to come up with speaker ideas.
- Phones or emails speakers to ask if they'd be willing to speak on specific dates; generally lines up speakers for two or three months at a time.
- After acceptances, sends email messages to the publicity chair, *Nooseletter* editor, and membership chair to inform members and the larger community of mystery readers in Albuquerque.
- Is prepared to introduce the speaker at the meeting if requested by the chapter president. Brings the gift bookmark to that meeting.
- Follows up in a week or two with a written thank-you note to the speaker.

Publicity Chair.

- Obtains program/speaker and/or other event information from the program chair at least three weeks prior to an event.
- Writes a press release, and sends the press release to a mailing list at least three weeks in advance of each event.
- Maintains a mailing list of publications, reporters, and editors.

Webmaster/Webmistress.

- Maintains the chapter's Web site, renewing contracts with the site host, homestead.com; uploading announcements when directed by the board, and expanding the links page with links related to our genre.
- Maintains the chapter's Yahoo group. (Known among members as "the Yahoo loop.")
- Is prepared to train a successor if training is necessary.



2006 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, January 24, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, February 28, 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, March 25, 1:00 p.m.
Tuesday, April 25, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, May 23, 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, June 24, 1:00 p.m.
Tuesday, July 25, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, August 22, 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, September 23, 1:00 p.m.
Tuesday, October 24, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, November 28, 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, December 16, 1:00 p.m.

Free to the public in the briefing room at the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Police Substation, 12700 Montgomery Blvd. NE, one block east of Tramway.

For more information, call Rob Kresge, program chair, at 797-1874.

†*Nooseletter* Submissions†

Croak & Dagger friends are encouraged to contribute articles, reviews, and essays on aspects of mystery writing *and* reading for publication consideration. Information on relevant conferences or events is also welcome. Especially let us know if you have published a new book or story, or have an upcoming local author event. (Unbridled enthusiasm for your own mystery book is encouraged here.)

Length: Articles should average 500 words.

Deadlines: Publication is every other month, starting in January. Submission deadlines are the 15th of the month prior to publication: February 15, April 15, June 15, August 15, October 15, and December 15.

The Living and the Dead: As a general policy, articles and information should focus on living authors rather than dead ones, but that's not set in concrete shoes. Articles about specific historical development of the crime-mystery writing genre, for example, would be welcome.

Submissions: Please submit via email to shirleycoe@comcast.net, with "*Nooseletter*" in the subject line.

The *Nooseletter* is distributed to all members electronically. ✓

—Shirley Coe

Summary of Findings

The *Nooseletter* is the internal organ of the Croak & Dagger chapter, Albuquerque, of Sisters in Crime (SinC). Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and editors.



Still not a member of Sisters in Crime?

\$20/year brings mystery to your life! The Albuquerque *Croak & Dagger* chapter welcomes mystery fans who want to enjoy felonious fun, absolutely criminal companionship, and sensational speakers.

Benefits of membership in the *Croak & Dagger* chapter include a subscription to our *Nooseletter*, close contact with local mystery writers, and fun events with other mystery fans.

You do *not* have to be a member of the national organization to join us. Come hear our next program speaker and meet the gang. We promise to bring mayhem and murder into your life.

Contact Stephanie Hainsfurther, membership chair, at 505-298-2155 or words13@osogrande.com.