



SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume X, Number 4 — July 2014

†Expert Testimony†

According to Sisters in Crime, writing is getting more complicated than ever. Writers who want to have a career must be good business people as well as good story-tellers. They must spend as much time on the business side--learning about how it works and who does what to whom and getting advice and learning about contract practices as they do on crafting their manuscripts. That is, if they don't want to be covering in the corner while the big kids in publishing and distribution fight over their profits--not yours. Those of us who are readers are being pretty much ignored in this brawl, except as targets of manipulation. The bestseller lists such as the *New York Times* are rigged. Amazon is amassing profiles on the world. Good Reads now has a corporate soul. Trusty independent book stores and libraries are more valuable than ever.

All this suggests that authors need to carefully consider their time allocations and skill sets. They need to consider who to hire to help them connect with their audience--the readers. Writers Beware is a group of investigators analogous to the Better Business Bureau. It is sponsored by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, The Mystery Writers of America, and The Horror Writers of America. It has the largest database of substantiated complaints of sleazy practices and scams in the publishing, editing, and agenting industry. Their website (www.sfw.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/) has up-to-the-minute advice on what writers can do to protect themselves. They also have an active Facebook forum and offer a free research

service for writers with questions about agents, publishers, and others. They are available at beware@sfw.org.

There seem to be three choices for an author to connect with an audience--do-it-yourself independent publishing, small press/ebook and print-on-demand publishing, or traditional publishing. Then there is Amazon with its own pluses and minuses, which need to be carefully considered. There are many commentaries about it from critics like Stephen Colbert to fans like J. A. Konrath and Hugh Howey. At this point, it seems to be every reader and writer for himself or herself.

--Jan Bray

Don't Miss It!
Tuesday, July 22nd, at 7 p.m.

First-time mystery author Laura Sanchez will tell us about her novel *Killer Miracle*, which is set in small town northern New Mexico and involves the murder of a *santero*, a carver of wooden religious icons. She has lived in New Mexico for most of her life, acquiring an education in art and art history along the way, as well as running an architectural design and drafting business and writing for regional publications. Sanchez is also the author of *Freaking Green* and, with Alex Sanchez, of *Adobe Houses for Today* and *Fallingwater in 3D Studio*.

Looking Forward to Our August and September Speakers:

On August 26th:

Our speaker will be Robert Hartley, Battalion III Commander of the Albuquerque Fire Department. He will talk about fighting fires in Albuquerque and may provide some insight on detecting and investigating arson.

And on September 23rd:

We are proud to welcome Albuquerque's own Pari Noskin Taichert, the first president of Croak and Dagger and author of three Sasha Solomon mysteries set in New Mexico. Pari's first two novels were Agatha Award finalists. Come and catch up on what she's up to now.

**Opportunity Knocks:
An Interactive Mystery Tea Party
at the St James Tearoom
320 Osuna Rd NE
(505) 242-3752**

**Murder Most Fowl:
Colonel Shanders Kicks the Bucket***

6:30 pm - 8:30 pm

(For this popular event, the Tearoom has scheduled five dates. In order to register, go to www.stjamestearoom.com. They fill up fast, so don't delay!)

[Tuesday, September 9](#)

[Friday, September 12](#)

[Tuesday, September 16](#)

[Thursday, September 18](#)

[Wednesday, September 24](#)

The year is 1867. The War Between the States has been over for two years and the south is desperately trying to regain its spirit. Men like the enterprising Colonel Shanders have worked tirelessly to give Kentuckians something to look forward to.

Colonel Shanders invites one and all to a gala event at his Lexington plantation to celebrate the inaugural running of The Flank Stakes, a race for 2-year-old thoroughbreds to be held at The Upsin Downs. His prize horse will be running in the race, and should he win, the Colonel promises a round of champagne for all! Gather with the Colonel's family, friends and neighbors for this festive event.

As you might predict, the evening is destined to go "afowl." We promise that you will make it home alive, but we can't promise that you won't be charged with murder!

All Inclusive Interactive Event Fee \$60
(full afternoon tea and glass of champagne or sparkling cider)

**Colonel Shanders Kicks the Bucket* is the fifth Murder Mystery Event
Written by Laura Bartolucci for The St. James Tearoom

All registrants to this event will be given an identity for the evening and are requested to present themselves in character. Character data will be emailed to each guest. Costumes are strongly encouraged and help make the event more fun for all.

Important information before registering:

Our staff photographer will be taking photos at the event. These photos will be available for you to access at flickr.com and may be used on our website, Facebook page, Twitter, etc. If you do not want your photo taken, make sure you tell the photographer in advance.

Please be aware that all our special events use community seating. That means your party will very likely be seated with another party or parties.

Notice to Members of National Sisters in Crime

An invitation will be coming to you soon to log into www.sistersincrime.org and change your password in your membership profile. As you know, SinC was part of a data management company called Affiniscape. Over a year ago Affiniscape was sold to Your Membership. SinC is now in the process of a platform change. We did not have a choice in this matter. It is a long detailed process, but what it means to SinC members is that all passwords will be reset to a universal password (we will send this universal password with the invitation) and our members will need to log in (with their unique username) and change their password.

Your invitation will come after July 10, 2014. We appreciate your patience as we transition to the new company. Good news: The site will have updated images and functions.

The Changing World of Publishing and Reading

An Author's View of the Fast-Evolving Universe of the Written Word

Santa Fe, NM—Author and columnist James McGrath Morris will speak about the future of books and reading on August 1 at 7 p.m. in the Great Hall at St. John's College. Tickets are \$7.50 and are available through Tickets Santa Fe, the community box office at the Lensic Theater, 505-988-1234.

Morris will outline the seismic changes shaking up the world of book publishing and reading. "What is happening to books today is as important a moment in history as five centuries ago when Gutenberg created moveable type and launched the printing revolution," said Morris. "The changes now taking place are more than a matter of replacing type, ink and paper with pixels—a profound shift is taking place in the act of reading itself."

Combining his work experience in the publishing industry and his years as an author, Morris will explain why current changes are so significant and what lies ahead for readers. In a recent "TypeA" column, Morris noted, "The ominous tones from the lesson learned by the music industry when it underwent a similar digital transformation may forecast the future of writing."

Morris has worked as a journalist, book publisher, high school teacher, and independent writer. He began his professional career as a radio news broadcaster in New Mexico in 1978. He is the author of numerous books, among them *The Rose Man of Sing Sing*, which was selected as one of the best non-fiction books of 2004 by the *Washington Post* and optioned for a movie, and *Pulitzer*, which the *Wall Street Journal* deemed was one of the five best books on American moguls and one of the five best books on American newspaper publishers. *Booklist* placed on its 2010 list of the ten best biographies of the year.

In 2014 he published *Revolution by Murder: Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, and the Plot to Kill Henry Clay Frick*, a Kindle Single and his next book, *Eye on the Struggle: Ethel Payne, The First Lady of the Black Press* will be in stores in February. Currently, Morris is writing *The Ambulance Drivers: Hemingway and Dos Passos—Literary Lives in War and Peace*, slated for publication in 2017. He writes a regular column for *Pasatiempo*, called “TypeA,” that explores the changing world of publishing and reading. Additionally, Morris is the host each month of “Collected Words,” a radio show produced by the Collected Works Bookstore and Cafe that airs on KVSF FM in Santa Fe.

St. John’s College and the Friends of the Santa Fe Public Library are co-sponsors of this event as part of their respective anniversary celebrations.

Reviews

***The Silkworm* by J. K. Rowling, writing as Robert Galbraith**

Reviewed by Harlan Coben, excerpted from the June 23, 2014 *New York Times*

During a cocktail party in Robert Galbraith’s (a.k.a. J. K. Rowling’s) endlessly entertaining detective novel *The Silkworm*, publisher Daniel Chard gives a toast in which he observes that “publishing is currently undergoing a period of rapid changes and fresh challenges, but one thing remains as true today as it was a century ago: Content is king.”

Coming from an obscure, midlist, mystery author named Robert Galbraith such a statement might go unnoticed. But when the same passage is written by J. K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter series and one of the most successful authors of all time, the words cannot help having a far greater impact.

Therein lies the problem and the great joy of this book.

You want to judge *The Silkworm* on its own merit, author be damned. It is, in fact, this critic’s job to do so. But writing that type of blind review in this case, while a noble goal, is inauthentic if not downright disingenuous. If an author’s biography always casts some shadow on the work, here, the author is comparatively a total solar eclipse coupled with a supermassive black hole.

This is especially true because Rowling (let’s stop pretending) makes matters worse (or better) by taking on the world of publishing. Leonora Quine, the dowdy wife of the novelist Owen Quine, hires our hero, the British private detective Cormoran Strike (first seen last year in Rowling’s *The Cuckoo’s Calling*), to investigate the disappearance of her husband. Owen Quine has just written a nasty novel that reveals dark, life-ruining secrets of almost everyone he knows. Owen, his wife tells Strike, is probably at a writer’s retreat. Finding him should be a routine matter.

But, of course, nothing here is what it seems. When Owen Quine ends up gruesomely slaughtered—in a murder scene ripped from his new novel—Strike and his comely sidekick, Robin Ellacott enter the surprisingly seedy world of book publishing. They investigate those who were thinly disguised in Quine’s final manuscript, all of whom offer insights into the world of the writer.

The suspect pool includes his editor, Jerry Waldegrave (“Writers are different. I’ve never met one who was any good who wasn’t screwy.”); his agent, Elizabeth Tassel (“Have you any idea how many people think they can write? You cannot imagine the crap I am sent.”); his publisher, Daniel Chard (“We need readers. . . . More readers. Fewer writers”); and the pompous literary novelist Michael Fancourt (“Like most writers, I tend to find out what I feel on a subject by writing about it. It is how we interpret the world, how we make sense of it.”).

As written by Rowling, *The Silkworm* takes “write what you know” and raises it to the 10th power. Is this crime fiction, a celebrity tell-all, juicy satire or all of the above? The blessing/curse here is that you turn the pages for the whodunit, but you never lose sight that these observations on the publishing world come from the very top. This makes complete escape, something mandatory for a crime novel, almost impossible—but then again, who cares? If you want a more complete escape, pick up another book. Reading Rowling on writing is delicious fun.

Even the title of the novel (and the English translation of the poisoned-pen manuscript) is *The Silkworm* because a silkworm’s life is “a metaphor for the writer, who has to go through agonies to get at the good stuff.” On envy: “If you want a lifetime of temporary alliances with peers who will glory in your every failure, write novels.” On Internet trolls: “With the invention of the Internet, any subliterate cretin can be Michiko Kakutani.” On a literary male writer’s inability to create realistic female characters: “His women are all temper . . . and tampons.” On a writer named Dorcus Pengelly (some of these names are straight out of Hogwarts): “She writes pornography dressed up as historical romance,” but our murder victim still would “have killed for her sales.”

There is even a debate on the merits of self-publishing when Quine’s mistress whines that she’s going the “indie” route because “traditional publishers wouldn’t know good books if they were hit over the head with them.”

Are these opinions shared by Rowling? Don’t know, don’t care. In the end, despite the window dressing, Rowling’s goal is to entertain and entertain she does. If we can’t forget that she is a celebrity, we’re also constantly reminded that she is a master storyteller. Push aside J. K. Rowling (a gender-neutral pseudonym Joanne Rowling took so that boys would read Harry Potter) and judge the book on the merits of Robert Galbraith (a full-fledged male pseudonym with no such neutrality), and *The Silkworm* is still a suspenseful, well-written and assured British detective novel.

Strike, who lost a leg to a land mine in Afghanistan, is described as a “limping prize fighter,” a man who looms so large, “the room seemed much smaller with his arrival.” Potter fans will want to make a connection between Cormoran Strike and Rubeus Hagrid, the beloved giant in the Harry Potter novels, but such comparisons feel forced. If J. K. Rowling never leaves our minds while reading *The Silkworm*, the world of Harry Potter, to Rowling/Galbraith’s credit, never enters it. We are squarely in the gritty, gloomy and glitzy real world of the Muggles, except maybe when she describes a noisy piece of furniture in Strike’s office as the “farting leather sofa.” For a moment, the reader can almost see the sofa coming to life in the halls of Slytherin House.

The Silkworm most often feels like a traditional British crime novel albeit set in the present day, complete with eccentric suspects, a girl Friday (Oh, when will they see that they are meant for each other?) and a close friend in the police department whose life Strike saved in the war. But Rowling gives some of the old saws a new spin. Robin, for example, isn't a longtime friend or ex-lover—she starts out as a young temp Strike first meets in *The Cuckoo's Calling*.

Strike himself may at first appear to be something we have seen too often—a brooding, damaged detective, with a life-altering war injury, financially on the brink, who's recently lost his longtime girlfriend—but there is an optimism to him that is refreshing and endearing. Even though he's hobbling down the street, often in great pain, “Strike was unique among the men not merely for his size but for the fact that he did not look as though life had pummeled him into a quiescent stupor.”

Strike also shares a trait with many great fictional detectives: He is darn good company.

There are musings on fame (Strike is the illegitimate son of the rock star Jonny Rokeby), the media (the book opens with a passing shot at the British phone hacking scandal that engulfed many celebrities, including Rowling), book marketing (Quine's wife on her husband's sluggish sales: “It's up to the publishers to give 'em a push. They wouldn't never get him on TV or anything like he needed”), not to mention e-books and the digital age of publishing.

But Rowling saves her most poignant observations for the disappointments of marriage and relationships. The likable Robin is engaged to a pill named Matthew and cannot see, as Strike and the reader can, that “the condition of being with Matthew was not to be herself.” When he thinks about his own sister's marriage and those like it, Strike wonders about the “endless parade of suburban conformity.” His private-eye job of catching straying spouses makes him lament “the tedious variations on betrayal and disillusionment that brought a never-ending stream of clients to his door.” He sees the “willfully blind allegiance” of long-suffering wives and the false “hero worship” of male writers by the women who supposedly love them. When his sister asks Strike if he puts up with his destructive ex-girlfriend “because she's beautiful,” Strike's honest answer is devastating: “It helps.”

Do these observations take on more weight when we know that the writer is a superstar female author rather than a semi-obscure male one? I think they do.

The book isn't perfect. It's a tad too long, and the suspect interrogations grow repetitive. Sometimes the reader feels Rowling may be trying too hard to move away from Hogwarts. The fair amount of swearing reminds one of a rebellious teenager set free.

Some will also argue that while Harry Potter altered the landscape in a way no children's novel ever has, here Rowling does the opposite: She plays to form. *The Silkworm* is a very well-written, wonderfully entertaining take on the traditional British crime novel, but it breaks no new ground, and Rowling seems to know that. Robert Galbraith may proudly join the ranks of English, Scottish and Irish crime writers such as Tana French, Ian Rankin, Val McDermid, John Connolly, Kate Atkinson and Peter Robinson, but she wouldn't overshadow them. Still, to put any author on that list is very high praise.

The upside of being as well known as Rowling is obvious—sales, money, attention. That's not what she's after here. The downside—and her reason for using the pseudonym—is that telling a story needs a little bit of anonymity. Rowling deserves that chance, even if she can't entirely have it. We can't unring that bell, but in a larger sense, we readers get more. We get the wry observations when we can't ignore the author's identity and we get the escapist mystery when we can. In the end, the fictional publisher

Daniel Chard got it right: "Content is king," and on that score, both J. K. Rowling and Robert Galbraith triumph.

Harlan Coben is the author, most recently, of *Missing You*. His new young adult novel, *Found*, will be published this fall.

Down Memory Lane for Mysteries by Fred A. Aiken

Several weeks ago, I found nothing good to watch on the networks and while I was channel surfing, I stumbled across Memorial Entertainment TV, Channel 33 (broadcast, not cable), which was showing the great programming of my youth and young adult life. I always wanted to watch these classic shows, so I was immediately hooked. There were a dozen or so shows in the mystery genre, including *The Rockford Files*, *Remington Steele*, *The Streets of San Francisco*, *Cannon*, *Kojak*, *Columbo*, *Perry Mason*, *Dragnet*, *Adam-12*, *The Fugitive*, *The Saint*, and *Peter Gunn*. I thought that some of you may appreciate seeing these classics again, as well as classic comedies and Westerns. MeTV is a great channel to watch.

Reviews

Rob's Random Shots

July Case File Number One

The Big Wink by Steve Brewer, published by the author, 2013, 363 pp, TP

This month's case files are both trips down memory lane, revisiting favorite authors. Steve Brewer, a long-time resident and former newspaperman of the Duke City, spent several years in Redding, California. And one thing you learn about Steve is that he's multitalented and anything he learns is grist for his mill. Besides the Bubba Mabry Albuquerque private eye and Drew Gavin sportswriter series, Steve has written a lot of impressive standalones--and *The Big Wink* is no exception. He excels at stories that revolve around different inept criminals--gangs that can't steal straight. He should trademark that phrase.

This book begins with a botched robbery at a medical marijuana clinic in Redding. One of the robbers robber shoots a customer, in this case, tall African-American banker Kwanzaa DuPont. Did I mention that Steve has a field day not only with off-beat characters but also with names? And romance? Don't even get me started.

In short order, the cast grows enormously from Ray Bunch and his inept robbers, their grandfatherly accomplice Greybeard, and their

wounded victim, to police detective Tim Holland and his short-tempered boss, a corrupt local lawyer, representatives of a Mexican drug cartel, drug thugs, a marijuana legalization advocate, his temporary bimbo, and other supporting players. In order to keep this cast manageable, Steve uses short chapters, changing point of view each time, 74 chapters in 361 pages (you can do the math). Short chapters make this a fast and easy read and is a trademark often used by thriller writers to keep up a breathless pace.

In many ways, *The Big Wink* is more thriller than mystery, since the reader knows who the perps are and the thrill comes from figuring out if these many competing characters can find or avoid justice. And along the way, we get to find out about competing interests in California debating legalizing marijuana, a subject in the news last year and this. Not only a fun read, but an informative one. Wink, wink.

--Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net,
www.robertkresge.com

Key:

PB=Paperback

TP=Trade Paperback

HC=Hardcover

July Case File Number Two

Thrones, Dominations by Dorothy L. Sayers and Jill Paton Walsh, 1999, I read the Kindle version

(Reviewer's Disclaimer) This is a peculiar novel to evaluate. The author, Dorothy Sayers, evidently worked on this novel near the end of her life, three books into the Lord Peter Wimsey series from the point at which he meets, then marries mystery writer Harriet Vane (long assumed by critics to be Ms. Sayers' effort to put a version of herself into the stories--*Strong Poison, Gaudy Night, and Busman's Honeymoon*). After several attempts to finish it, she turned to writing other works, including a definitive translation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. After she died, executors of her will chose Ms. Walsh to complete the manuscript and she has since written a handful of other Lord Peter and Harriet novels, which I have not yet read.

Ms. Walsh must have undertaken finishing this novel with mixed feelings. In her explanatory note at the end, she acknowledges the difficulty in doing so. My confidence in her work was undermined by her declaration that *Gaudy Night* was Sayers' masterpiece. I and millions beg to differ with her. Around the year 2000, readers of the *London Times* were asked this question: "If you knew you were going to be marooned on a desert island for a year and could only take along 36 inches of books, of which only one inch could be devoted to the mystery genre, what would you choose? The overwhelming favorite from all authors was Sayers' *The Nine Tailors* in which Wimsey solves the murder of a man buried in a churchyard, when neither his identity, his nationality, the manner of his death, or where or when he died is known.

I agree with those voters, although I might consider the author's *Clouds of Witness, Murder Must Advertise, and Five Red Herrings* to be equally worthy of that one inch.

Without impugning Ms. Walsh's credentials or abilities, I was disappointed in this first

outing and don't know how much of the fault lies with Sayers. Fully the first third of the book is taken up with society matters that introduce Peter's relatives and some people who will later be victim and suspects, but it goes on for more than 100 pages. Then the person we've met that we most like not to see murdered is killed. Finally, the staging of the crime seems so contrived (as are the deductions that lead to a solution) that I think most readers would not go into this series if this were their introduction.

Nevertheless, I pledge to give Ms. Walsh a further read in an independently written Lord Peter mystery

--Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net,
www.robertkresge.com

The Viognier Vendetta by Ellen Crosby, Scribner, 2010 251 pp HC

This is book five of the Wine Country mystery series set in modern-day Virginia. Lucie Montgomery owns and operates a vineyard established by her late parents. The vineyard is set in rural Virginia, but within driving distance of the nation's capital – complete opposites. When Lucie is contacted out of the blue by an old friend from college days, she agrees to meet Rebecca mostly out of curiosity. They have a short visit at the Lincoln Memorial, and Rebecca invites Lucie to attend a gala celebration. Rebecca's boss, famous philanthropist Sir Thomas Asher, is donating his valuable and historic book/map collection to the Library of Congress.

Then Rebecca disappears, and Lucie is pestered by a Ian, a journalist who wants to expose Rebecca's boss for perpetrating a Ponzi scheme. Ian seems like a crackpot at first, but when Lucie receives a mysterious postcard in the mail she begins to wonder if Rebecca's disappearance is related to Ian's allegations. Rebecca and Ian used to work together, now Lucie and Ian pool their knowledge to figure out Rebecca's clues.

The D.C. intrigue hits close to home when Lucie discovers most of her friends are financially crushed, and a longtime friend's marriage is at risk. Lucie realizes she's in

danger when she's followed on the road one night, and another murder occurs.

Along with mystery and suspense, the reader is treated to lavish descriptions of the many historic monuments and beautiful gardens of Washington, DC, as well as a short history lesson on the War of 1812.

This book was republished as *The Vintage Vendetta*. The next book in the series is *The Sauvignon Secret*.
--Susan Zates

To Darkness and to Death by Julia Spencer-Fleming, Minotaur Books 2005 320 pp, HB

This is the fourth book of the Clare Fergusson/Russ Alstyne mystery series set in the Adirondacks (upstate New York).

The primary plot is the disappearance of Millie Van der Hoeven on the eve of the transfer of her family estate to the Adirondack Conservancy Corporation (ACC). The many secondary plots illustrate how the "tree-hugger" takeover of the woodlands is about to destroy the economy of the town of Millers Kill and the lives of many of its inhabitants. Jobs will be lost, family-owned and -run businesses will be lost.

All the action takes place within one single day. Each chapter starts with the time of day. The subplots are so detailed, rich character studies, that it's easy to forget the missing Millie. Time of day serves as a reminder. It was perhaps meant to create suspense.

The impact of ACC taking over the local timber industry is most strongly felt by those losing their businesses and jobs. Chapters deal with these individuals and their reactions. Two men affected by the takeover are so profoundly changed they commit acts of cruelty and savage violence. The novel clearly intends to create sympathy for their actions by explaining step-by-step how and why the violent acts were committed. Not only do these disturbed men cross the line, but their loved ones do too, in efforts to protect them. I was not at all sympathetic to the violence, and dislike the novel itself for suggesting their actions were somehow excused by circumstances.

I listened to an audiobook version. It was jarring to hear Clare's voice with a Southern

drawl; didn't match the character I imagined from the earlier books in the series. It is amazing to see that the print version has only 320 pages; this rant against tree-huggers rambled on and on so long I had assumed it must be 500-600 pages in print.

There is not much interaction between Clare and Russ until the end. Even then it's just a teaser of changes to come in following books. It's quite improbable that two first-responders after a long day culminating with a catastrophe would dance on the lawn in the moonlight afterward.

There is also a bishop's visit thrown in to make Clare's day more hectic (as an Episcopal priest, she should be in the church preparing for his visit instead of in the woods with the search and rescue team). She clashes with the bishop's right-hand man over her stance on a controversial social issue.

An extremely important (but short) chapter covers the fact that this day happens to be Russ's 50th birthday. His wife gives him an outstandingly perfect gift, revealing how much she knows about his tastes and preferences.

The secondary plots overwhelm the primary plot. Reader know more about Millie's whereabouts than her would-be rescuers throughout the book, but it isn't clear until the end why she went missing. The ending mimics real life in that it leaves loose ends and does not provide justice. I may continue with the series due to its setting and since I enjoyed earlier books, but I'm disappointed with this book.

(Editor's note: The manuscript of Ms. Spencer-Fleming's first novel, *In the Bleak Midwinter*, won the 2000 Malice Domestic prize for best unpublished first novel. Among the other entries was my manuscript of *Murder for Greenhorns*. Her book, when published the next year, went on to win every first novel prize given by mystery conferences and publications. I have read several of her books--not this one--and have found the series to be very satisfying.)

--Susan Zates

The Merlot Murders (Wine Country Mystery #1)
by Ellen Crosby, Pocket Books, 2007, PB

Lucy Montgomery means to keep her little piece of Virginia very much wine country. She is determined to restore the family vineyard to its earlier beauty and financial soundness. The small family vineyard is located just west of Washington, DC off Route 50 near the small town of Middleburg, an area steeped in Jeffersonian lore and Civil War history.

The book opens with Lucy in France recovering physically and emotionally from an auto accident that left her with a mangled, disfigured foot. She's called back to Virginia for the funeral of her father, whose bloody body was found in the family vineyard. A hunting accident? Shortly after the funeral, another body is found, this one in a wine vat at Lucy's vineyard. And someone is attempting to kill Lucy!

Lucy learns her materialistic, egocentric brother and his "Barbie doll" wife are in financial difficulty and want to sell the vineyard. Lucy's younger sister, a wild girl who never quite recovered from the death of their mother, is involved with Lucy's old flame Greg, a gorgeous cad and a womanizer. Jealous rages, anyone? Lucy's ambitious French cousin, Dominique, brought to the States to oversee the wild younger sister, is now in the restaurant business with an old and very dear family friend, Fritz. But Dominique may be too ambitious. The new winemaker, hired by Lucy's late father, comes with a mysterious background. He is very capable and very attractive in an earthy kind of way. He'd like to wrest all decision making from the "little lady". The romantic tension between the strong-willed Lucy and the winemaker is palpable.

All of the characters need money, giving all of them a motive for murder.

And as if this is not enough to keep you turning pages, there's a valuable hidden necklace to be found.

Crosby has created a strong yet vulnerable female protagonist in Lucy Montgomery. The setting is well drawn. The reader is kept guessing right up to the very active final scenes.

--Joan Spicci Saberhagen

Murder Will Travel by Emily Toll, Berkley, 2002, 262 pp, PB

This novel takes place in Sonoma County, California in and around a winery named Villa Belladuce. The main character, Lynne Montgomery, is a travel agent leading a fifteen-person weeklong tour of the Napa Valley vineyards with frequent side trips to pursue other tourist activities. Unfortunately, the former owner of the winery is murdered on the group's first evening.

Despite development of some very interesting characters, this story was not an exciting read. Ms. Toll did extensive research of the setting and dumped a lot of minutiae into the novel, much of it was not connected to the basic plot or the murder investigation.

Instead of showing the story through the eyes of Lynne Montgomery, the author chose to tell the story by jumping from one character's point of view to another, making it difficult to determine through whose viewpoint the story was being told. Further compounding this problem was that she reverted to third person omniscient POV on several occasions. Thus, Lynne Montgomery was reduced from a major character trying to solve the murder to a tour guide worried about how the murder would affect her future business.

Because of Ms Toll's writing style, there wasn't a character who was truly at risk. The murder was solved when the murderer revealed information to a spouse which was overheard by a tour group member. No other clues were shown to bring the murderer to the reader's attention to let the reader have a fair chance of identifying the murderer and at the end of the story, the motive for the murder was still a big unknown. I was highly disappointed in this tale and can only recommend that it be read to educate oneself on how *not* to write a mystery.

--Fred A. Aiken

Decoupage Can Be Deadly by Lois Winston, Published by the Author, 299 pages, \$12.99 TP

This is the fourth book in Lois Winston's crafts murder series. The wacky family led by Anastasia Pollack, craft editor for *American*

Woman magazine, continues to be an exciting part of the series. Anastasia is a widow slowly working her way out of the financial hole that her dead spouse left her from his gambling debts when he died at a blackjack table in Las Vegas (when he was supposedly on a business trip to Chicago). Anastasia has two teenage sons still in high school and supports her widowed mother who is a serial bride whose husband died within a month or two of the wedding, a mother-in-law who is the social secretary of the Daughters of the October Revolution, the mother-in-law's dog Mephisto, and an inherited parrot who quotes Shakespeare that was left her by a deceased aunt. Joining this eccentric cast is her brother-in-law, a half-brother to her deceased husband, and his three spoiled children.

The current book opens at a trade show where the editor of a newly launched magazine has usurped half the display area that was assigned to *American Woman*. This editor is a former rap star from Philadelphia who is the gold-digging girlfriend of the chairman of the board of the media corporation that owns *American Woman*. When the gold-digger's body is found in a shipping container that held the displays from the trade show, the chairman asks Anastasia to help find the murderer before the police arrest the chairman for the crime. Interspaced between the murder investigation scenes are scenes that show Anastasia dealing with various domestic problems facing her. After Anastasia solves the crime and has dealt with family problems, she learns that her half brother-in-law's wife's body had been found in a drainage ditch, thereby setting the stage for book five in the series. --Fred A. Aiken

The Last Heir by Chuck Greaves, Minotaur Books, New York, 2014, 261 pp HC

This is the fourth book by retired lawyer Chuck Greaves of Santa Fe. Chuck won the Southwest Writers' Storyteller award for his mystery *Hush Money* in 2010. His second novel, an historical, *Hard Twisted*, finished second in the 2010 Storyteller competition.

The Last Heir tells the story of Philippe Giroux, the patriarch of the Château Giroux wine empire, who has tragically lost a son. Or has he? Once confirmed by the court, Alain Giroux's death will pave the way for his brother Phil to inherit America's most storied winery. Or will it? Andy Clarkson, Alain's boyhood chum, covets the Château Giroux vineyard acreage for his neighboring golf resort. Or does he? Claudia Giroux, Philippe's hauntingly beautiful daughter, has proof that Alain's death may not have been all that it seems. Or does she?

As the members of a privileged California wine dynasty grapple for control of their family's legacy, attorney Jack MacTaggart is caught in a crossfire of estrangement, betrayal, and murder. To complicate matters, Jack is being shadowed by film star Ethan Scott, who hopes to spin the dross of a family's private travails into box office gold.

Philippe and his daughter Claudia hire MacTaggart to represent them in the motion to avoid declaring Alaine dead so that the older son, Philip, wouldn't be first in line for the vineyard when he turns 40 in a few months. MacTaggart does the best he can, but a scheme by Claudia to generate evidence that suggests Alain is alive backfired and the case is lost.

Claudia calls MacTaggart when she is arrested for the murder of Philip. Greaves gives enough background on the legal profession and the law to keep the reader informed of critical nuances without boring the reader. The book does present enough clues to allow the reader to solve the crime if they pay attention but does not spell out for the reader who the murderer was. There is a surprise twist in the next to the last chapter and the ending was so powerful that it brought tears to my eyes. --Fred A. Aiken

Sixth Grave on the Edge by Darynda Jones, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2014, 326 pp, HB (Caveat: Most of the following language in this review is that of the reviewer--Ed.)

This is the sixth book in her Charley Davidson paranormal romance series, a unique,

wonderful blend of fantasy, mystery and romance genres. This sixth installment appears to be a transitional book as it ties up several threads in the series to date and identifies new but interesting threads to be explored in subsequent books.

I was pleased Ms. Jones did not torture her viewpoint character to near death as usually happens in her books. I can share with you that Charley turns matchmaker in trying to get the romance between her assistant, Cookie, and her Uncle Bob to kindle into true love with disastrous results. In another plot thread, Charley finds herself the victim of a blackmail attempt by the police captain to whom Uncle Bob reports. Yet another plot thread involves a man who had lost his soul to a demon in an unsuccessful wager and who wants to hire Charley to get his soul back.

The book would not belong with the previous volumes series since it doesn't address the romance with Reyes, the dark and sultry son of evil, her boy toy, her love slave, her 24/7 booty call. During this book, Charley learns that owning an apartment building, given to her by Reyes in book five, carries responsibilities which she needs to learn.

Of course, no Charley Davidson book would be complete without ghosts. We start off with an naked 90-year-old ghost sitting in front passenger seat of Darynda's Jeep Misery with a large eternal erection. During this book, Mr. Wong, the floating ghost facing the corner of her living room, begins a transformation towards being an interesting character to appear in a future story. Angel, a key ghost in prior stories, resolves his relationship with his mother and helps Charley in the development of new powers that she didn't know she possessed. We also see how two of the living characters who had been the bane of Charley's existence change. Whether this change is for good or bad will be the subject of future books in the series.

This book has a great surprise ending that impacts Charley Davison's life in a big way and that turn of events is related with her romance with Reyes. It is a great hook for Book Seven, scheduled for publication in October. While the book transitions between the first part

of the series to a second part yet to be written, it is a great story to be enjoyed on its own merits.

--Fred A. Aiken

Dorothy L. Sayers on Detective Stories

This is an excerpt from the collaborative novel *Thrones, Dominations* by Sayers and Jill Paton Walsh. It is not clear which author's ideas are reflected in this. Probably both. Lord Peter Wimsey and his wife, mystery novelist Harriet Vane are discussing whether such stories should be considered frivolous entertainment rather than serious literature:

"But aren't they frivolous," asked Harriet. "Compared to the real thing?"

"You seem not to appreciate the importance of your special form. Detective stories contain a dream of justice. They project a vision of a world in which wrongs are righted and villains are betrayed by clues they did not know they were leaving. A world in which murderers are caught and hanged, innocent victims are avenged, and future murder is deterred."

"But that is just a vision, Peter. The world we live in is not like that."

"It sometimes is. Besides, hasn't it occurred to you that to be beneficent, a vision does not have to be true?"

"What benefits could be conferred by falsehood?"

"Not falsehood, Harriet; idealism. Detective stories keep alive a view of the world which ought to be true. Of course people read them for fun, for diversion, as they do crossword puzzles. But underneath they feed a hunger for justice, and heaven help us if ordinary people cease to feel that."

"You mean perhaps they work as fairy tales work, to caution stepmothers against being wicked, and to comfort Cinderellas everywhere?"

"If you like. Or as belief in ghosts ought to work. If you thought you might be haunted by grandfather's ghost unless you carried out his last will and testament; or if you thought the ghosts of murdered men walked the night howling for vengeance."

"You have a rather exalted view of it, Peter."

"I suppose very clever people can get their visions of justice from Dostoyevsky, but there aren't enough of them (those readers-ed.) to make a climate of opinion. Ordinary people in large numbers read what you write."

"But not for enlightenment. They are at their slackest. They only want a good story with a few thrills and reversals along the way."

"You get under their guard," he said. "If they thought they were being preached at, they would stop their ears. If they thought you were bent on improving their minds, they would probably never pick up the book. But you offer to divert them, and you show them by stealth the orderly world in which we should all try to be living."

--Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

†**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, but short items are also welcome.

Deadlines: Publication is every other month, starting in January. Submission deadlines are the 15th of the month prior to publication: Feb 15, April 15, June 15, Aug 15, Oct 15, and Dec 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 e-mail to Rob Kresge at rkresge777@comcast.net, with "Nooseletter" in the subject line.

The *Nooseletter* is distributed to all members electronically. ♦ —Rob

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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. ♦

Upcoming Meetings

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

Tuesday, August 26, 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, September 23, 7 p.m.

Meetings are free to the public.

Unless otherwise noted, meetings are held every fourth Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m., at the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Police Substation, 12700 Montgomery Blvd. NE, one block east of Tramway.

(If the substation lot is full, there is more parking available just below the substation, accessed via a driveway below the substation on the right.)

Check our Web site, www.croak-and-dagger.com, for schedule changes and upcoming programs.

Summary of the Board Meeting Minutes of Sisters in Crime Croak and Dagger Chapter, ABQ, NM, July 14, 2014

Board members present: President Jan Bray, Vice President Joan Saberhagen, Secretary Olin Bray, Program Chair Rita Herther, *Nooseletter* Editor Rob Kresge, Web Master Susan Zates, Membership Chair Pat Wood

President Jan Bray called the meeting to order at 7:20. Minutes from the May 19 meeting were approved.

There was no Treasurer's report since Fred was at another meeting. However, as of the May 19 board meeting our checking account balance was \$2,729.25 and our paid up membership was now 43.

There was no updated membership report

The next four programs (July, August, September, and October) will be Laura Sanchez (*Killer Miracle*), Robert Hartley (a battalion commander with the Albuquerque Fire Department), Pari Noskin Taichert, and for October something appropriate for Halloween.

Announcements: None

Old business: There was more discussion about a wine tasting event and potential liability problems. The following motion was proposed by Susan Zates, seconded by Rob Kresge, and passed unanimously. "For liability reasons, Croak and Dagger will not sponsor any alcohol related event. We may announce events others are sponsoring as information for our members."

New business: We seem to have a lot of books in the book exchange that are not moving. We decided to start donating those books various libraries. The book exchange will continue, we just want to focus on those books our members are interested in and are reading.

We also need to start finding candidates for our election coming up in November.

The next board meeting will be at 7:00 at Jan's home on September 15, 2014.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40.

--Olin Bray, Secretary



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 our membership chair, at contact@croak-and-dagger.com.