



SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
 ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSELETTER

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†Expert Testimony

Here we are at the end of the year. OK, we actually have more than a month to go before that's literally true, but for all intents and purposes, 2015 is over. Croak & Dagger doesn't meet in the month of December, so keep that in mind. For me, the year went really fast. I've enjoyed being your president. It wasn't very long ago that I stood before you on that January night for the first meeting of my term and hoped nobody would throw fruit and vegetables at me if I goofed up. Of course I did, but you didn't, so all was well.

I think our new meeting space is good. I'm glad we made the move, and I hope everybody has settled in and gotten used to it. I know it is less convenient for some, but has so many more advantages for most of our members. I, for one, appreciate the well-lit parking area, as well as its large capacity. I appreciate the people on site who set up for us and offer us such wonderful amenities as the smart screen and podium when we ask for it. On the day that I'm writing this note for the *Nooseletter*, I verified that we have the room again next year, so 2016 is all set.

I'm still delighted with the response we had to our Mystery Roundup event last August. If you attended, I'm sure you could see how beautifully it all came together. Once again I thank all the wonderful members (and quite a few non-members) who volunteered (or were coerced into) helping with that conference. You are the best.

Our election of officers is coming up at the November 24 meeting and I encourage all of

you who can make it to attend that meeting. I know it's the week of Thanksgiving, and everybody is swamped with so many holiday chores. But we could really use your support on that night. I had hoped we could encourage multiple people to run for each office, but that didn't happen, so a slate of willing people (although some are bruised from being dragged onto the list) will be presented for your vote on that night. In the past, when we've not had multiple candidates for each office (or for one office) we've simply voted by acclamation to accept the slate presented by the nominating committee. Unless someone notifies me of their intent to stand for office on Tuesday, November 24, I will charge the nominating committee (in this case, Joan Saberhagen) to simply present the slate and request a motion to accept that slate of officers by acclamation. Maybe next year we can entice at least two people to run for each office. Wouldn't that be amazing and fantastic? Yes, it would!

Thank you for a wonderful year. Let's all look forward to what fantastic things we can do in 2016.

<p><i>Don't Miss It!</i> Tuesday, November 24, at 7 p.m.</p>
<p>Criminalist Cordelia Willis, from the county crime lab in San Jose, CA, is a Crime Scene Investigator who previously interned with the NCIS Cold Case Squad with 17 years' experience. Come hear her tell about <u>real</u> CSI.</p>

It's an Expanding Market for Short Stories

By Art Taylor, author of the recently published *On the Road with Del & Louise: A Novel in Stories*, which was reviewed in the latest issue of *Mystery Scene* magazine; this article reprinted from *The 3rd Degree*, monthly publication of the Mystery Writers of America

Compression is the word I turn to whenever anyone asks about the “secret” to writing short stories. But while the craft may be one of constant compression and tightening, the market for the short story these days seems fortunately to be in a process of continual growth and expansion. In 2016, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* will celebrate its 75th anniversary — the oldest continuously published crime fiction magazine on the planet. *EQMM* and its sister publication, *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, still stand as the best-known short story markets in the genre. They are the most successful too, with a full third of all Edgar® winners in the short story category having come from one of the two magazines. Because of that reputation, they're also the ones most actively courted by writers and as a result among the most exclusive. *EQMM*, for example, has received about 2000 stories annually since they began accepting electronic submissions in the summer of 2011, according to editor Janet Hutchings; from these, Hutchings selects 110-120 for publication each year. An acceptance rate hovering around five percent surely offers daunting odds for aspiring writers, but other perspectives here should be more encouraging — specifically the strength and superiority of storytelling among those submissions generally.

“There are many more good short stories being written than our magazines have space for,” Hutchings says. “There's lots of good material.” Fortunately, many opportunities exist to place that “good material” elsewhere in an increasingly wide market including online journals, magazines capitalizing on print-on-demand technologies, and a range of anthologies. The breadth of the short story

market nearly rivals the breadth of crime fiction's many subgenres — and even the briefest glance at the hard-edged corner of our genre, for example, reveals even more range in terms of story lengths, slants, and formats. Submissions to the online flashzine *Shotgun Honey* should be no more than 700 words. (Their tagline: “Crime. Hardboiled. Noir. Something like that.”)

At the other end of the short story's word limits, One Eye Press prints standalone novellas through its “Singles” series. In between those extremes, *ThugLit* narrows the scope to 3,000-6,000 words (billing itself as “the dirt under the fingernails of the genre”), and *Needle: A Magazine of Noir* publishes stories in a similar size/format, with this promise: “Nothing but hard hitting stories. In your face and busting up your kiss-maker. Kapow. Urg. Ooof. Grapple, grapple. Smash. Clatter. Boom.”

A question on many short story writers' minds: Are these publications MWA approved? In the case of the above, no; however, many have earned status in other ways: So far, for example, four of *Needle's* stories have been selected for the annual *Best American Mystery Stories* anthology, and three more have been finalists for those collections. Speaking of anthologies, book-length collections have long been successful in the mystery genre. For more than a decade, MWA itself has published regular anthologies centered on a specific theme and usually including both invited contributors and stories selected through blind submission; the latest of these, *Manhattan Mayhem*, was published earlier this summer. Both Bouchercon and Malice Domestic have recently hosted similarly structured anthologies, as have other writers' organizations over the years. And new series abound too; *Shotgun Honey* and *One Eye Press*, for example, have recently collaborated on the third of their *Both Barrels* anthologies.

To my mind, however, the biggest impact on the anthology market lately has been those collections prepared and published by various chapters of Sisters in Crime — a successful run of anthologies serving both veteran authors and newcomers and having earned Anthony,

Agatha, Macavity and Derringer Award nominations and wins.

In addition to fine venues for reaching readers, these anthologies also serve as training grounds of a sort for new authors, according to Martha Reed, chapter liaison for SinC. “This is a terrific opportunity to walk new authors through the publishing process from soup to nuts,” Reed said. “They submit their story to a panel of judges, and if the story is selected, they need to sign an author agreement, and then they work with an editor on revisions. Sometimes, they work with a graphic designer on cover art. They also plan the promotion and marketing efforts. Some create their own author webpages.”

I would never argue that the short story is an apprenticeship for writing a novel — ultimately, the two forms are distinctly different in their demands. But as Reed suggests, short story anthologies can not only offer writers an entrance into the market — often in distinguished company — but also a way to learn the business in microcosm. In such a limited space as this, it’s impossible to give a shout-out even to all the long-standing mystery magazines and anthology series, much less to all the newcomers to the field. So how should short story writers keep up with it all?

I’d personally recommend Sandra Seamans’ blog My Little Corner. Seamans is circumspect about vetting publications, quick to share word of questionable practices, and widely comprehensive about possible markets, leaning heavily but not exclusively on mystery ones; a sidebar boasts the longest list of links I’ve seen to potential publishers. A glance at Seamans’ latest blog posts on the day I’m writing this column reveals a new theme for The M.O. at the website criminalelement.com, a new chapbook series through Australia’s In Short Publishing Company, and anthology calls both for spooky short stories set in Salem, MA, and for “speculative fiction short stories with a feminist perspective that incorporates bicycling or bicycles in some way.” That last one comes with an asterisk of sorts — dependent on a successful Kickstarter campaign. Worth

knowing — and weighing before deciding whether to submit at all.

As Seaman’s blog proves, opportunities abound. In literary circles two years ago, the question arose whether short stories were enjoying a renaissance of sorts. In the article “Good Fit for Today’s Little Screens: Short Stories,” the New York Times declared: “Story collections, an often underappreciated literary cousin of novels, are experiencing a resurgence, driven by a proliferation of digital options that offer not only new creative opportunities but exposure and revenue as well.” A rebuttal in *Salon* was simply headlined “Sorry, The Short Story Boom Is Bogus.” To some degree, that debate may seem irrelevant in our genre. After all, it was a short story, Poe’s “Murders in the Rue Morgue,” that sparked the modern detective story in the first place. Otto Penzler frequently quotes (and generally agrees) with John Dickson Carr’s claim that short fiction is the natural form of the detective story.

For us mystery writers, then, short stories are simply the genre’s foundation. What may seem a boom for outsiders — all these writers, all these publications — is really just us continuing to respect and build nicely on the form.

Art Taylor is the award-winning author of many short stories, as well as *On the Road with Del & Louise: A Novel in Stories*. He teaches at George Mason University and writes frequently on crime fiction for both the *Washington Post* and *Mystery Scene*

Forty-Fives Have Sights

By Brian Thiem, reprinted from the November issue of the MWA newsletter *The Third Degree*

Nooseletter editor’s note: There are many articles out there on how mystery writers sometimes get technical details wrong. This is a good lesson in checking supposed facts with experts.

There’s no quicker way for mystery writers, especially in the police procedural sub-genre, to

turn off their readers than by getting their gun facts wrong. I'm not saying guns are the most important aspect of crime novels, but the way guns are handled in a story is a good indicator of whether an author can be trusted to get the other "crime" parts of the story right.

I remember sitting in my former mother-in-law's living room (yes, like many other cops, I've been married more than once) about 25 years ago when she asked me if my forty-five came without sights or if I filed them off.

Trying not to overreact to the bizarre question, I calmly explained that all of my guns had sights.

"No they don't," she said, crossing her stubby arms across her chest. "Forty-fives are so inaccurate, you'd be lucky to hit the broad side of a barn with one, so sights are useless. All they do is catch on your clothes when you draw the gun from a holster, so if yours still has sights, you should file them off."

I had carried a Colt .45 pistol for four years as an Army military police officer before I joined the Oakland Police Department. I carried a .45 caliber Sig Sauer P220 on duty in my assignment as a homicide detective at that time, and as I sat there on the sofa, a compact .45 rested inside the waistband of my jeans concealed under an untucked polo shirt. Instead of waving my gun in her face to show her the sights (and giving her a heart attack), I asked her how she heard this. She pointed to several stacks of books on the shelf of her reading table featuring hard-boiled PIs such as Mike Hammer, Sam Spade, and Phillip Marlowe.

Today, I still find that many people acquire their gun knowledge from TV, movies, and novels, and too many of my fellow mystery writers perpetuate incorrect information about guns. I've read novels where a character loads a revolver by putting in a fresh clip (revolvers have cylinders that hold the cartridges, not clips—which are properly called magazines), or a detective flicks off the safety of a Glock before shooting (Glocks, the most common gun carried by police today, don't have manual safeties). I recently finished a wonderful novel set in the 1970s by a bestselling author, whose cops pulled back the hammers of their double-action revolvers, as if they were cowboys in the

Old West armed with century-old single-action revolvers. (Even my own Colt .45 Peacemaker replica has sights, and so does my derringer—ed.)

When I first came on the Oakland Police Department in 1980, they issued Smith & Wesson .357 magnum revolvers. Five years into my career, I transferred to the vice-narcotics unit. Because a police-issue revolver shouted "cop" to the bad guys and could easily blow our cover, we were allowed to carry semi autos when working undercover, and I carried one of two different .45s. After a year and a half of living in the world of drugs, prostitution and organized crime, I was promoted to sergeant and transferred to criminal investigations. I cut my hair, shaved, bought suits and ties, and carried a short-barreled .357 revolver as my duty weapon.

By 1990, police across the country were noticeably outgunned by the criminals who were now carrying semi-autos that held two or three times as many rounds as six-shot revolvers. Oakland transitioned to semiautomatic pistols, and within a few years, all officers were issued Smith & Wesson .40 caliber pistols. The department later switched to Glocks, which are still issued today. Having carried a badge and gun for a living for thirty years, I have an advantage over many other authors when writing about police procedures, guns, and crime. However, with a little research, conversations with the right sources, and a shooting course or two, any writer can become knowledgeable enough about guns that they won't allow their detectives to file the sights off their 45s.

Brian Thiem's debut novel, *Red Line: A Detective Matt Sinclair Mystery*, was published in August 2015. Thiem has been a commander of a Homicide Section and a Lt. Colonel in the Army. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing and currently lives in South Carolina.

Great Mystery Writing Advice, as disclosed in *Don't Murder Your Mystery* by Chris Roerden

By Lori L. Lake on January 2, 2007 (Reprinted from the Midwest Book Review: January 2007 Issue)

(Full disclosure: I bought a first edition of this book. Lori Lake does a better job of explaining why you should own a copy, too. This is the best of the many mystery "how-to" books I own—Rob)

From the beginning of this immensely insightful writing manual, Chris Roerden focuses on what it takes to write novels that will survive both an agent's and a publisher's screening process. I spent a couple of years in the early 1990s reading the slush pile at two nearby publishing houses, and I can affirm Roerden's statement that the vast majority of manuscripts submitted to agents and presses are rejected because the writers fail to submit a solid, well-written, and entertaining product.

In the dog-eat-dog world of publishing, Roerden tells us publishers pick very few new writers - and only those who look like winners - and they "ignore the rest whose work reveals evidence of average writing, aka 'amateur.'" She goes on to tell us: "The publishing industry cannot afford to gamble on writers who are still developing their potential, who show little evidence of having studied the craft of the profession they aspire to, or who fail to reflect the preferences that publishers and agents state in their submission guidelines" (p. 12).

The book setup is clever. In ten parts, she delineates 24 specific fiction-writing areas to focus upon in revisions. To start out, in Part I: DEAD ON ARRIVAL, she lays out all the reasons why writers simply must write, revise, edit, and format their novels or else they won't be published. In that section, Roerden tells us

about THE JUDGES: Screener-outers - and what they look for; THE PLAINTIFFS: Writers - and what you hope for; THE DEFENDANTS: Agents and publishers - and why they do what they do; and CORRECTIONS FACILITIES: Self-editors - and how to do what you need to.

Each of the subsequent nine parts features one of the 24 fiction-writing techniques, which Roerden, tongue in cheek, labels CLUES. For instance, in Part III: FIRST OFFENDERS, she's got:

CLUE #1: HOBBLER HOOKS - Replace with high-tensile lines that stretch your holding power;

CLUE #2: PERILOUS PROLOGUES - Beware: May lead to low-tension, post-prologue, backstory ache;

CLUE #3: BLOODY BACKSTORY - To remove the evidence, slice, dice, and splice.

The advice to "slice, dice, and splice" is quite simply wonderful, and with her terrific explanations, it's easy to remember what she means and apply it to work on a manuscript. In concise language steeped in good humor and fabulous examples, Roerden reveals each of the 24 CLUES (including FATAL FLASHBACKS, TOXIC TRANSCRIPTS, DECEPTIVE DREAMS, DASTARDLY DESCRIPTION, DYING DIALOGUE, KILLED BY CLICHÉ, GESTURED TO DEATH, and many more). She systematically provides tips and techniques for avoiding these pitfalls. The 24 "Clues," when properly understood and applied, will make any author's well-told tale a winner.

She rounds out this well-written guide with an index and four "Exhibits," including: instructions for standard manuscript formatting; a bibliography of the multitude of books she cited throughout the text; a list of popular Internet crime writing sites; and recommended nonfiction in the areas of general writing, mystery, editing, character building, marketing, etc.

All too often How-To guides warn you about basic no-no's, but I've never before seen a guide that does such a great job detailing HOW TO AVOID those no-no's. Using clear-headed explanations, Roerden creates outstanding examples of poor form and uses shining examples of good form from 150 published novels, all of which provides through and easy-to-understand instruction.

Despite the title of this book, this How-To manual is not only for mystery writers. I would recommend it for anyone who is attempting to create a finished draft for publication. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

Lori L. Lake is the author of the "Gun" Series, *Different Dress*, *Ricochet in Time*, *Snow Moon Rising*, *Stepping Out: Short Stories*, and editor of *Romance for LIFE!* and the Lambda Literary Award anthology finalist, *The Milk of Human Kindness*

Reviews

Rob's Random Shots

November Case File Number One

Mrs. Jeffries and the One Who Got Away, Series No. 33, 2015, I read the Kindle edition

Well, my best intentions to try to read this series in order obviously went astray. But that's not a bad thing. I found out I don't have to do it that way and that means you too can focus on the easier to find volumes and not have to worry about how literally you tackle a long series like this.

I first read volumes in the Mrs Jeffries series more than a year ago when I was preparing to moderate a panel on historical mysteries at Bouchercon in Long Beach, CA. I was intrigued by the "McGuffin" in this series. The entire household of Inspector Gerald Witherspoon of Scotland Yard conspires to help the man solve crimes (murders, missing persons, etc) without his knowledge. The large household staff—cook, maids, butler/valet,

gardener gathers information, sometimes far afield, during the workdays when the inspector is himself working on a case. These unofficial Baker Street Irregulars, if you will, can talk to people of all stations in life, and bring their findings to Mrs. Jeffries.

She in turn provides a sympathetic ear to the inspector at the end of each day when he unburdens himself to her of his frustrations—blind alleys, lying witnesses, hard to find suspects—and as she consoles him, she drops hints about possibly different avenues of approach to get over some hurdles. Neither she nor any others of the household staff let on what they're doing. The inspector enjoys the highest case solving rate at the Yard.

In this volume, a woman is found strangled in a cemetery. Her nearby boarding house contains clues that she was not whom she appeared to be, but rather a murderess from one of the inspector's earlier cases who had eluded capture. I haven't yet been able to trace which novel she previously appeared in, but that lets me demonstrate that readers don't have to read these cases in order, but rather can jump into them whenever you need a cozy refresher from all the serial killer novels that seem most popular in the mystery market.

Oh, and I should mention that Ms. Britewell has written these 33 mysteries in just 23 years. Makes me feel like a slacker of the first order. -
-Robert Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

November Case File Number Two

Misplaced by S.L. (Sylvia) Hulen, Buena Suerte Productions, 2015, 429 pp, \$16.99, PB

This is a quasi-historical thriller. Or maybe fantasy-adventure. I sat next to the author at the New Mexico Library Association annual convention at the Marriott Pyramid last month and we exchanged books. This is her first novel (she is also her own publisher and is looking for more authors interested in publishing through her). In trade, she got a copy of my historical thriller *Saving Lincoln*.

Misplaced takes place almost entirely in contemporary El Paso and, late in the book, southern New Mexico. What makes this a fantasy thriller is that one of her two main

characters is Egyptian princess Khara, whose father the pharaoh is murdered by Khara's twin sister Menefra in 2181 BC. Khara's dying bodyguard pushes her through a time portal and she shows up in 2010 in northern Mexico, just short of the US border. Naked, mistaken for an abandoned border crosser, she's taken to the offices of Victoria Barron, a young lawyer who specializes in defending illegal immigrants. What makes it possible for the two women to communicate is an interesting plot device. Khara's gold cuff (really an ankle bracelet) enables her to understand any language spoken to her and make her replies understood by others. She even understands the thoughts of cats and, later, the braying of horses.

In short order, Khara and Victoria bond, as she lets the young lawyer use the cuff for a few minutes to prove her claim. Together, the two research Egyptian history in an El Paso museum and find a blank in the record after Khara's father's name. Victoria helps her visitor understand life four millennia after her own time. In order to finance Khara's quest for a way home, they begin to sell some of the three arm bracelets the princess brought with her. This draws the attention of a sleazy criminal who begins to murder some of Victoria's friends and family, trying to track the valuable bracelets to their source.

Most of the plot involves Victoria taking Khara to visit some of her relatives, first in Texas, then in southern New Mexico. They do not learn Khara's true identity. Eventually, the pair come upon information that the Mescalero Apache have a legend that the last of the Anasazi disappeared near Urracca Mesa, New Mexico. I'd never heard of the place and had to look it up in my copy of *New Mexico Place Names*. Turns out to be located northwest of Springer, a long way from Anasazi dwellings in northwestern New Mexico and the Four Corners region, near the Cimarron Scout Ranch. Anyway, Victoria and Khara manage to subdue the murderer chasing them and Khara steps through a time portal at the mesa just as a total eclipse opens it temporarily.

Back in El Paso afterwards, Victoria and her uncle look again at the record of pharaohs in

the museum and find that Khara's name now appears in it. However, the author has a surprise for us at the end. Included in the jewels adorning the newly found mummy of a female pharaoh in the Valley of the Kings is a Christian cross that Victoria's uncle had given Khara. Egyptologists thus believe the tomb of the woman was a fake, salted with more modern items.

This is a long book, but it was easy to get lost in the troubles of the two young women and root for them as they journeyed to Khara's appointment with destiny. Reading fiction demands the willing suspension of disbelief. I could do that and enjoyed this author's debut work. I look forward to her next work. --Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

November Case File Number Three

The Monogram Murders (Hercule Poirot No. 43) by Nancy Bush, 2014, Kindle Edition

I cannot say the same for another book I hoped to enjoy. British author Sophie Hannah got permission from the Agatha Christie estate to write a new Hercule Poirot novel. I struggled to get through it. Poirot is at times petty, vindictive, and condescending to the Scotland Yard detective working the case. A man and two women are found poisoned in a locked room in a London hotel. Poirot is on hand at a nearby coffee shop and is enlisted to help the rather junior detective assigned to the case.

As happens frequently in real Poirot mysteries, the eventual solution of the crime, which is actually an impossible convoluted and carried out murder plot, involves the past of all three victims in a small town. But instead of Poirot going to that town, the young detective follows that lead and then is treated uncharacteristically snidely by Poirot upon his return with information. A surprising and unsatisfying final murder occurs in Poirot's presence after he has explained how the murders were staged and the killer left the room by an open window and climbed down a tree, a detail presented way too early for my taste.

I am unfamiliar with the work of Sophie Hannah that must have landed her this plum

assignment. It's too bad she wasn't up to the task. –Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

November Case File Number Four

Phone Kitten by Marika Christian, 2014, available on Kindle only

OK, OK, I was sort of titillated by the cover and by the premise that a phone sex worker would stumble across a murder. Slightly overweight and plain, Emily has just had her newspaper stories plagiarized by her more attractive colleague. Finding herself in a financial bind, too, she takes a part-time job as a phone sex operator in Tampa. She figures it won't be as difficult as most people would think: But it takes some adjustment. She'd die if she had to talk dirty face-to-face—especially to her hot cop boyfriend. But it turned out to not be as bad as most people would think. No pantyhose or pantsuits, no regular hours, you're your own boss, and lots of people to talk to. Guys, that is. But here's the odd thing—lots of them want to talk about more than Emily's imagined attributes; they start to think of her as the best friend they'll never have to meet. Next thing you know, one of her customers gets killed. What's a phone kitten to do? Solve the murder herself, of course!

And Emily has to juggle the boyfriend she has with the boyfriend she'd like to have, who turns out to be a customer. She knows about him, but he doesn't know about her. In short order, a rich Tampa businessman is murdered and Emily believes the killer could be another of her customers. She has to tiptoe around the police detective she's attracted to and in order to get some of her friends to help her, she has to let them know how she knows what she knows, praying all the while this information will won't make it back to her mother.

All in all, a very funny cozy and I hope the author has more stories to tell. –Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

November Case File Number Five

Nowhere to Run by Nancy Bush, Zebra, 2012, 399 pp, I used the Kindle version

I don't know if talent runs in families, but Nancy Bush is the sister of the more famous and prolific Lisa Jackson. This is her first novel in what is billed as The Rafferty Series, brother and sister police detectives in the American Northwest.

I didn't know this book would be part of a series (books two and three available now), but I'm glad it is and I look forward to reading the others. I plan to post a version of this review on Amazon. This is an excellent mystery.

Liv Dugan, a young woman working for a computer wargame company and the traumatized discoverer as a child of her mother's body (she hung herself) has nightmares years later and cares for a completely paranoid and disabled younger brother. She receives an envelope from her mother on her 25th birthday that has been held for her by a lawyer for 20 years.

Photos in the envelope show an unidentified man reaching for the camera. Liv shows the photos to her hermit-like brother, her father and his current wife and a neighbor in her apartment complex. In short order, a killer attacks the office where Liv works, shooting four persons, two of whom are killed on the spot and another dies later. Local police investigate.

The story has multiple points of view—Liv, a police detective named August Rafferty, and his detective sister September (yes, I know, but the author makes what would seem cute work here; other siblings are named but do not appear). Besides the office shooting, reminiscent of *Three (Six) Days of the Condor*, the author uses the unusual device of having the fleeing Liv steal the Jeep of a stranger, who turns out to be August, but he doesn't tell her he's a cop.

As he helps her hide out from the killer (but also from the police who are looking for her, either as a suspect or a surviving witness), the two begin to fall in love. The sex scenes, while tastefully rendered, should not be read in public (full disclosure: I was on an exercise bike at my gym while I read it). The likeliest suspect the

two focus on is a doctor who treated Liv's mother 25 years before.

Everything about this book is fresh, entertaining, and addictive. GET THIS BOOK. I'll be reading and reviewing the sequels. –Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

The following reviews are all by Susan Zates, smzates@qwest.net

Killing Critics by Carol O'Connell, Jove Books, 1996, 336 pp

This is the third book in the Kathleen Mallory mystery series set in late-20th-century New York City. Kathleen Mallory is an NYPD detective, following in the footsteps of her late adoptive father Louis Markowski. She's quick-witted, impatient, and does not care if she's going by PD procedure or not; she has her own code of honor. Investigating a murder at an art gallery, she immediately links it to a case Markowski worked on 12 years ago. He was never satisfied with the supposed confession, and so she decides to solve both cases, with the aid of Markowski's notes. But powerful higher-ups don't want the case investigated, and go to great lengths to keep her from uncovering secrets. Outside of the PD, Mallory partners in investigation with Charles Butler, friend of her father's. He has a genius IQ (able to match wits with Mallory) and is absolutely smitten (but of course she doesn't notice). The victims and perpetrators were of no interest to me. The man who stalks Mallory was interesting, and the woman he tried to keep Mallory from finding. But the true appeal of this book is Mallory herself, her single-minded pursuit of the case, and her interaction with Charles. Those two are fascinating characters I want to follow in their next adventure.

A New York Christmas by Anne Perry, Ballantine Books, 2014, 208 pp

This is the 12th in the Christmas novella series, set in 1904. Jemima Pitt (daughter of Charlotte and Thomas) has traveled to New York City with her friend Delphinia "Phinnie" Cardew. Phinnie has crossed the ocean to marry Brent Albright in a high-society wedding.

Brent's brother Harley takes Jemima into his confidence: To avoid scandal, he wants to find Phinnie's mother Maria (who left the family when Phinnie was a baby) and bribe her not to attend the wedding. Jemima does not know why Maria would cause a scandal, but she is willing to help Harley. Suddenly Jemima finds herself in jail, arrested for murder. The only person who believes she is innocent is Patrick, a young Irish policeman. Together they must solve the murder. Jemima is a spunky and resourceful character, a refreshing addition to the Christmas novellas cast of characters.

Murder at the Tremont Theatre by C&D Member Frank Cullen and Donald McNeilly, CreateSpace, 2010, 352 pp

This is a peek into the history of vaudeville in 1908 Boston. Flora and Lavinia Portridge own and operate a boarding house for vaudeville performers, located near the Tremont Theatre. When one of their boarders is suspected of being involved in a murder, they feel they can find out better than the police what really happened, because they have personal contacts in the theatre and understand the vaudeville performers' culture, rich with historical detail of everyday life in turn-of-the-century Boston and eccentric, engaging characters. Rather long and dull portion on the competition between vaudeville booking companies in the first half, but the second half moves along at a lively pace. Short action-packed chapters share how several mysteries get solved, from different viewpoints. The book would benefit overall from better editing and proof-reading, to catch usage errors that spell-checkers cannot.

The Edge of Doom by Amanda Cross, Ballantine Books, 2002, 272 pp

This is the seventh (and final) book of the Kate Fansler mystery series set in late-20th-century New York City. Kate is a university professor of literature; her husband Reed is a retired district attorney. They live in an apartment with their huge dog Banny. I've read the series in order. While reading several books prior to this one, I felt the series had dragged on

too long. Although meant to be literary whodunits, I felt they had too much introspection, not enough plot to sustain interest (and I detested the motorcycle-rider detour the series took). But I was determined to finish the series, so I read this last one anyway. I'm glad I did. This book starts off interesting immediately: Kate finds out she was adopted. There is plenty of introspection, as you'd expect when your identity changes, but the pace keeps up with plot surprises, too. First Kate must decide how to relate to her father, then he disappears, then he returns but is in danger, and she must find out why, for her own safety.

Killing Critics by Carol O'Connell, Jove Books, 1996, 336 pp

This is the third book in the Kathleen Mallory mystery series set in late-20th-century New York City. Kathleen Mallory is an NYPD detective, following in the footsteps of her late adoptive father Louis Markowski. She's quick-witted, impatient, and does not care if she's going by NYPD procedure or not; she has her own code of honor. Investigating a murder at an art gallery, she immediately links it to a case Markowski worked on 12 years ago. He was never satisfied with the supposed confession, and so she decides to solve both cases, with the aid of Markowski's notes. But powerful higher-ups don't want the case investigated, and go to great lengths to keep her from uncovering secrets.

Outside of the PD, Mallory partners in investigation with Charles Butler, a friend of her father's. He has a genius IQ (able to match wits with Mallory) and is absolutely smitten (but of course she doesn't notice). The victims and perpetrators were of no interest to me. The man who stalks Mallory was interesting, as was the woman he tried to keep Mallory from finding. But the true appeal of this book is Mallory herself, her single-minded pursuit of the case, and her interaction with Charles. Those two are fascinating characters I want to follow in their next adventure.

Stone Angel by Carol O'Connell, Putnam, 1997, 400 pp

This is the fourth book of the Kathleen Mallory mystery series. The first three in the series are police procedurals set in late 20th-century New York City, where Mallory was a brilliant NYPD homicide detective, following in the footsteps of her adoptive father Louis Markowski.

The setting for this book is entirely different; Mallory has dumped her life in NYC and gone back to her roots in a small Louisiana town. Not from nostalgia; far from it. She is tracking down the town residents who killed her mother seventeen years ago. The town has a high poverty level; most residents are related to one another and many nasty secrets are long hidden. In her quest for justice, Mallory sets events in motion to bring up all the past evil for residents to face. Her wealthy NY business partner Charles Butler (a genius who is absolutely smitten with Mallory) manages to find her, assists her when he can, and tries to protect her from harm. He's a gentle soul, but finds inner toughness when Mallory is in danger.

As the story unfolds, you learn the shocking tragedy of her mother's death, and ever-so-slowly, the details of who and why. Charles is so in tune with Mallory and her brilliant mind, he intuits why she calls herself Mallory. Dog lovers beware; there is a heartbreakingly bittersweet moment with Mallory and her Good Dog. I absolutely loved this book, learning all about Mallory's past that was completely unknown in previous books.

Capitol Offense by Mike Doogan, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2007, 305 pp

This is the second book in the Nik Kane mystery series set in contemporary Alaska. Nik is a private investigator, formerly a homicide detective. He lost his wife and alienated his children due to alcoholism, and recently served prison time. He's hired by a wealthy woman to investigate the murder of a young woman who worked for an Alaskan state senator in Juneau. The police have arrested a native Alaskan politician who discovered the body; he won't talk with anyone. Nik has a lot to learn: how politics work in general, the quirks of the

Alaskan Senate in particular. Nik uncovers many secrets, exposes corruption, and solves the case, but at a shocking personal cost. Plenty of plot twists, with a heavy-handed emphasis on political corruption. Doogan worked as an *Anchorage Daily News* journalist for many years before becoming a novelist and serving in Alaska's House of Representatives.

To Perish in Penzance by Dorothy Martin, Walker Publishing, 2001, 224 pp

This is the seventh book of the Dorothy Martin mystery series set in late-20th-century England. Dorothy is a transplanted American, in love with her adopted country and her husband Alan, a retired chief constable. An unsolved case from 30 years ago, when he was a new detective in his native Cornwall, still bothers him. The incessant rain at their home in Sherebury bothers Dorothy. The sun is shining in Cornwall.... So she hatches a plot to get Alan back to Cornwall where he might uncover a clue, and they both can bask in sunshine. Soon after their arrival, another young woman is found murdered in the same place as the 30-year-old case. The local force welcomes Alan's help solving the case. The two murders are linked and Dorothy and Alan find out how.

Death on the Family Tree by Patricia Sprinkle, Avon, 2006, 348 pp

This is the first book of the Family Tree mystery series, set in contemporary Atlanta. Katharine Murray lives mostly alone in a beautifully decorated house. Her husband Tom travels extensively, always putting the job and its crises ahead of family. Her children are adults, living on their own; so Katharine finds herself alone on her 46th birthday, wondering a bit about her life's purpose. She receives an unexpected delivery--10 boxes full of a deceased relative's possessions. Mostly junk (the old woman was a packrat) but one box marked "Carter" holds a curious brass necklace and a diary.

Katharine unexpectedly runs into an old friend she hasn't seen since high school, now a university history professor. When she shows him the necklace and diary, he recognizes them

as historical artifacts and wants to take possession for a museum. Katharine first wants to understand who is "Carter" and why her relative saved the items. She asks a good friend who's a genealogy buff how to do some family research. Turns out, she really enjoys digging through records. She gets surprising results: Carter was a relative in her family, never mentioned in her presence. So she digs further into family records, while enlisting her history professor friend's help to translate the diary (written in German).

But someone else is interested in the artifacts, dangerously so. Katharine experiences a break-in one night, resulting in the theft of the diary. Then a few days later her house is completely trashed. She had the necklace hidden away, so it's safe, and she had made copies of the diary, so she continues with the translation and family research. Meanwhile Tom makes excuses and stays longer on his business trip, even though she is shaken and needs his support. Katharine is not quite sure who to trust, but after the murder of her genealogy pal, she has only the history professor to help her.

A Walk Through the Fire by Marcia Muller, Mysterious Press, 1999, 293 pp

This is book 19 of the Sharon McCone series, usually set in San Francisco, but this time set in Hawaii. Sharon's long-time journalist friend Glenna calls her with a frantic request for help, fearing her life is in danger as she is trying to make a documentary. Sharon and Hy travel to Hawaii, thinking Sharon can investigate, plus they can fit in vacation time together. They meet and befriend a helicopter pilot. Hy is eager to put in qualifying hours for helo flying in Hawaii, and Sharon feels an immediate attraction to the pilot.

Suspicious "accidents" befall the moviemakers, all involving the wealthy Wellbright family. They are not a close, loving family, and they guard many secrets. Sharon must dig into each family member's past to understand who would try to sabotage the movie, and why. She experiences the conflict between native Hawaiians and non-natives,

especially as she tracks a neo-Nazi group. Sharon is in danger more than once on the case, before its surprising conclusion. Not only that, but her strong physical attraction to the helicopter pilot puts her relationship with Hy at serious risk.

The Sauvignon Secret by Ellen Crosby, Scribner, 2011, 272 pp

This is the 6th book of the Wine Country mystery series, set in contemporary Virginia and Northern California. Lucie Montgomery owns and operates a winery established by her parents, with its rich tradition of French culture adapted to Virginia terroir. Like any winery, hers is affected by fluctuations in weather, pests, and market price. When wine distributor Paul Noble plans to extort a high price that will not allow her to cover costs, Lucie goes to plead with him - and finds him dead.

Lucie's French grandfather comes to visit unexpectedly, on his way to giving a talk in California wine country. An old friend of her grandfather pressures Lucie to accompany her grandfather on the trip, to investigate a Napa Valley winery. He believes its former owner was in a secret society, and is now seeking revenge for a past cover-up. Coincidentally (or is it?) a Virginia winemaker new to the business (and impatient for his own grapes to mature) has asked Lucie to help him purchase a blend of grapes from the same Napa Valley winery.

In San Francisco, Lucie reconnects with Quinn Santori, her winery's winemaker. In a pleasurable reunion, Quinn takes Lucie sightseeing along the coast: "If Quinn could have ordered up a day to dazzle me, along with the breathtaking scenery of the coast road, it would have been this one. The highway wound in and out of one pretty little bay after another, the Pacific flashing cobalt and turquoise, whitecaps crashing onto a rocky shoreline dotted with drifts of wildflowers. In some places, the heathery Santa Cruz Mountains telescoped out into the ocean, and the serpentine road cut inland so deeply that it looked like we were driving straight into the mountains. Then the highway would make a corkscrew turn and we'd wrap around another bend where the

outside edge of the road fell away to a vertigo-inducing drop off a jagged cliff to the ocean below."

Lucie clearly sees how and why Quinn loves his native California, but still fervently hopes he will return to Virginia and resume their relationship. So far, he will only commit to honoring his promise to return for the harvest. Quinn is reluctant to risk the danger of investigating the secret society, but Lucie feels she must right an old wrong, even if it costs her the relationship with Quinn.

House of Blues by Julie Smith, Fawcett, 1996, 340 pp

This is the fifth book of the Skip Langdon mystery series set in New Orleans near the end of the 20th century (pre-Katrina). A prominent restaurant owner is found shot dead in his home; his daughter, granddaughter and son-in-law are missing; the widow is not grieving much. That's all Skip has to go on. Was it a burglary? Nothing was stolen. A kidnapping? Why take three hostages?

Skip questions the survivors she can find: the capable restaurant manager Nina and the son Grady. Skip learns the son-in-law had underworld drug connections, and she faces danger following up on tenuous clues on multiple occasions. The more she digs, the more people turn out to be involved, and the more complicated the plot becomes. In the course of duty, Skip faces grave danger and witnesses senseless killing, which nearly destroys her spirit. In a real-world-style conclusion, corruption triumphs over justice.

The series always includes fascinating glimpses into New Orleans culture, past and present: "Like Mexico or the Caribbean, the city is an odd mixture of the up-to-the-minute and the archaic--with a good deal more emphasis on the latter. Yet perhaps even that is changing. A local publication recently lamented that people hardly ever say they're going out to 'make groceries' anymore. Only rarely now is a sidewalk referred to as a 'banquette'. Still, 'neutral grounds' continue to divide the streets, and a Mardi Gras trinket remains, not a string, but 'a pair' of beads. And some of the old

customs survive. It used to be that everyone cooked red beans and rice on Monday because this was wash day--you could put your beans on and go about your business.

Murder with Peacocks by Donna Andrews, St. Martins Press, 1999, 332 pp

This is the first book of the Meg Langslow cozy mystery series, set in contemporary Virginia. Meg is to be a bridesmaid in the upcoming weddings of her best friend, her mother, and her brother. She is expected by all three brides to handle all the wedding arrangements. Meg's best friend is a spacey airhead; if Meg doesn't keep Eileen's wedding on course, it will never happen. Meg's mother is a fanciful nut; Meg is probably the only one who can keep her wedding whims somewhat under control and achievable. Meg's brother's fiancée Samantha is a selfish demanding bitch; it's a true labor of love for Meg to plan her brother Rob's wedding. Meg takes time off from her job for an extended stay at her mother's Southern plantation in Virginia, to complete all the wedding plans and mastermind the big events.

Much of the story focuses on Meg and Michael, a gorgeous hunk minding his mother's dressmaking shop for the summer. Before she meets him, she hears local women gossip "What a waste"; so she believes he's unavailable romantically (although the opposite is obvious to readers). He has a great personality and comes to Meg's rescue every time. Whenever he tries to have a serious talk with Meg, they are interrupted by a ridiculous wedding crisis.

Ridiculous wedding crises fill Meg's days. There seem to be limitless funds with which to finance the merest whim. Wealthy family friends and acquaintances seem to have nothing else to do but waste their days (and nights) drinking. Meg's dad, although divorced from her mom, continues to maintain the huge estate. When a completely unlikable character is found dead, Meg's dad enjoys amateur sleuthing. With his knowledge of poisons, he frequently saves the day when attempts are made on his or Meg's life.

Overall, it's a humorous cozy-mystery

chick-lit froth of nonsense. Read it and laugh (or wince).

Lost and Fondue by Avery Aames, Berkeley, 1997, 297 pp

This is the second book of the Cheese Shop cozy mystery series set in a small town in contemporary Ohio. Charlotte Bessette is the young enthusiastic and energetic owner of Fromagerie Bessette, a gourmet cheese shop, recently expanded to include a wine tasting bar. Charlotte's grandmother, mayor of Providence, has a passion for theater; she's putting on a production mixing Edgar Allan Poe and Sartre. Charlotte's best friend Meredith, an elementary school teacher, is in love with Charlotte's divorced brother and his two young daughters. Charlotte is certain Meredith will be an excellent stepmother and wife, far more loving than ex-wife Sylvia. Meredith is in charge of a fund-raiser at the abandoned Ziegler winery. Charlotte is catering the event.

Rumor has it the winery is haunted and contains hidden treasure. A group of teenage art students attending the fund-raiser cause scenes, all centered around Quinn, a female art student. When another art student is found murdered, the local police suspect Quinn. Because Quinn's father Freddy is a friend (or relative?) of Charlotte's, Charlotte considers it her responsibility to clear Quinn's name by finding the killer.

Charlotte considers everything that happens to everyone in Providence to be her responsibility to resolve. Her daily life is a sequence of minor crises. Each time she begins to solve one problem (or even just have a conversation), she is interrupted by another. But she has boundless energy to shoulder all this (implausible) responsibility, and all of the time, even during risky snooping, she endlessly fantasizes about her boyfriend Jordan, wondering if he is "Mr. Right".

While resolving crises and daydreaming about Jordan, she investigates each of the attendees at the fund-raiser, trying to find evidence to shift the police attention from Quinn. Most of these red-herring subplots are more convincing than the eventual solution in

terms of motive and opportunity. I wasn't able to relate to the characters, and found the book easy to put down at the smallest distraction. My favorite parts of the book are the descriptions of delicious gourmet cheeses. Although the book is a cozy mystery, it is also very light chick lit, with its primary focus on boyfriends and dating.

†**Nooseletter Submissions**†

Croak & Dagger members and 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 shorter 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 submissions 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, November 24, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, January 26, 7 p.m.

Tuesday, February 23, 7 p.m.

Meetings are free to the public.

As of January, meetings will be held every fourth Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m., at the North Domingo Baca Multigenerational Center, 7521 Carmel Ave, NE, one traffic light north of Paseo del Norte, off Wyoming Blvd.

(Check our website, www.croak-and-dagger.com, for schedule changes and upcoming programs.)

Our November 24 speaker will be Criminalist Cordelia Willis, from the county crime lab in San Jose, CA. She is a Crime Scene Investigator who previously interned with the NCIS Cold Case Squad. Over the past 17 years at the crime lab she has gone to crime scenes, tested drugs, processed items for fingerprints, analyzed items for biological fluids, worked with the DNA database, compared shoeprints and tire tracks, interpreted blood spatter, analyzed video and audio evidence, and processed cell phones.

Our January 26 speaker will be Christina Squire, who is retired from the University of New Mexico and is the author of the new mystery novel *Murder at the Observatory*. She has worked at the Department of Physics and Astronomy, the University Art Museum, the Department of Theatre and Dance, and has taught Theatre Appreciation. Christina has a Master's Degree in Theatre and Dance and has played in many community theatre productions. She wrote and performed a thirty-minute monologue that was featured at The Filling Station's 3rd Annual SoloFest in 2011. Christina and her husband Bruce live in Albuquerque.

Our February 23 speaker will be Jann Arrington-Wolcott, a former journalist and magazine writer. She was a founding member of Women Writing the West and a founding faculty member of the Tony Hillerman Writing Conference. Her award-winning Christmas celebration: *Santa Fe Traditions, Crafts, and*

Foods was named, “One of the best Christmas Books Ever!” by *Good Morning America*. Arrington-Wolcott’s first attempt at fiction, entitled *Brujo*, sold internationally and was filmed as a TV movie entitled *Seduced by Evil* in 1998. Her new thriller, *Deathmark*, was published to rave reviews in July 2014, by Pronghorn Press, WY. That publisher has just released a revised version of the original *Brujo*, with the subtitle “Eye of the Raven.” A sequel is scheduled for release the end of 2016. The author is currently having a wonderful time writing a fictionalized memoir entitled *The Daughter*. A third-generation New Mexican, she lives in Santa Fe.

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Sisters in Crime was founded in 1986. **The mission of Sisters in Crime shall be** “to promote the professional development and advancement of women crime writers to achieve equality in the industry.”

Our vision is: “Raising professionalism and achieving equity among crime writers.”

And our motto is: “SinC into a good mystery!”



Still not a member of Sisters in Crime?

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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.