



SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER

THE NOOSELETTER

Volume I, Number 2—March, 2005

† Expert Testimony †

—From the Prez

When I think about Sisters in Crime and its beginnings, I often fantasize that I'm sitting in a smoky, hotel barroom in Baltimore. It's 1986. Bouchercon—the largest mystery fan convention whirls around me. At my table are Sara Paretsky, Margaret Maron and other women mystery authors. In the background, there's the hum of people networking, deals being made. But I don't care. The conversation at the table compels me to ignore everything else. I take a sip of The Glenlivet and listen as each woman describes the many inequities facing female writers—fewer contracts, lower advances, work ignored by reviewers . . . and heaven forbid you write a cozy!

Skip forward to 2005.

Whenever I tell someone about Sisters in Crime, I feel compelled to minimize the organization's core mission. I mumble a sentence or two about equality, look at my feet and hope the comments don't turn off prospective members. It's as if I'm ashamed that this group that I love so much could still be living in the past.

Why does Sisters in Crime insist on keeping its original mission statement? You'd expect by now that women don't have anything left to prove within the parameters of the mystery genre.

Alas. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. The more things change, the more they remain the same.

Last year, I was asked to write a general press release and fact sheet for our national organization. I wondered what would be *sexy* enough—what I could pin my hook on—to attract media attention. Since no publisher—and few authors—are willing to discuss advances and royalties, I decided to look for other information.

Here's what I found.

In 2003, women wrote forty-four percent of all new published mysteries, and increase of sixteen percent since 1989. Good news, right? Yes and no.

Since 2001, Sisters in Crime has spearheaded a media monitoring project to tabulate and compare the male/female ratio of reviews in publications ranging from *Publishers Weekly* to *The Arizona Republic* and from the *New York Times* to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. During 2003, forty SinC sisters (and brothers) systematically searched the print media looking at reviews.

Of the fifty publications—both national and international—that they monitored, sixty-six *underrepresented* female authors.

Why does this matter? Readers—including librarians and bookstore owners—depend upon book reviews to find out about new publications. If readers don't know about books, they won't read or buy them. And if women are underrepresented so consistently, guess who is at a disadvantage in the literary marketplace?

I wish I could find hard facts on the money side of this issue. My hunch—based on the review information—is that the majority of women mystery writers receive lower advances than their male counterparts. If I can figure out a way to get at those money stats, believe me, I will.

No matter. The fact remains. Though women mystery authors have made great strides since Sisters in Crime's birth nearly two decades ago, there's still work to be done.

So . . . to everyone who has joined our national organization, to everyone who has joined our local organization, to everyone who reads and supports their sister mystery authors, please accept my gratitude.

And, if you aren't doing your part yet, please join us soon.

Cheers to you all,

Pari Noskin Taichert, President

Sisters in Crime Croak & Dagger chapter

And the Nominees Are:

Mystery Writers of America has announced its Nominees for the Edgar Allan Poe Awards 2005, honoring the best in mystery fiction, non-fiction, television and film published or produced in 2004. The Edgar Awards will be presented to the winners at our 59th Gala Banquet, April 28, 2005 at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, New York City.

BEST NOVEL

Evan's Gate by Rhys Bowen (St. Martin's Minotaur)
By a Spider's Thread by Laura Lippman (William Morrow)
Remembering Sarah by Chris Mooney (Atria Books)
California Girl by T. Jefferson Parker (William Morrow)
Out of the Deep I Cry by Julia Spencer-Fleming (St. Martin's Minotaur)

BEST FIRST NOVEL BY AN AMERICAN AUTHOR

Little Girl Lost by Richard Aleas (Hard Case Crime)
Relative Danger by Charles Benoit (Poisoned Pen Press)
Cloud Atlas by Liam Callanan (Delacorte Press)
Tonight I Said Goodbye by Michael Koryta (St. Martin's Minotaur)
Country of Origin by Don Lee (W.W. Norton & Company)
Bahamarama by Bob Morris (St. Martin's Minotaur)

BEST PAPERBACK ORIGINAL

The Librarian by Larry Beinhart (Nation Books)
Into the Web by Thomas H. Cook (Bantam)
Dead Men Rise Up Never by Ron Faust (Dell)
Twelve-Step Fandango by Chris Haslam (Dark Alley)
The Confession by Domenic Stansberry (Hard Case Crime)

BEST CRITICAL/BIOGRAPHICAL

The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Short Stories
edited by Leslie S. Klinger (W.W. Norton)
Latin American Mystery Writers: An A-to-Z Guide by Daniel B. Lockhart (Greenwood Press)
Booze and the Private Eye: Alcohol in the Hard-Boiled Novel
by Rita Elizabeth Rippey (McFarland & Co.)
The Life of Graham Greene, Vol. 3: 1956-1991 by Norman Sherry (Viking Books)

BEST FACT CRIME

Ready for the People: My Most Chilling Cases as Prosecutor by Marissa N. Batt (Arcade Publishing)
Conviction: Solving the Moxley Murder: A Reporter

and a Detective's Twenty-Year Search for Justice by Leonard Levitt (Regan Books)
Forensics for Dummies by D.P. Lyle, MD (Wiley Publishing - For Dummies)
Are You There Alone?: The Unspeakable Crime of Andrea Yates by Suzanne O'Malley (Simon & Schuster)
Ballad of the Whiskey Robber: A True Story of Bank Heists, Ice Hockey, Transylvanian Pelt Smuggling, Moonlighting Detectives, and Broken Hearts by Julian Rubinstein (Little, Brown)
Green River, Running Red: The Real Story of the Green River Killer - America's Deadliest Serial Murderer by Ann Rule (Free Press)

BEST SHORT STORY

"Something About a Scar" - Anything You Say Can and Will Be Used Against You by Laurie Lynn Drummond (HarperCollins)
"The Widow of Slane" by Terence Faherty (EQMM - March/April 2004)
"The Book Signing" - Brooklyn Noir by Pete Hamill (Akashic Books)
"Adventure of the Missing Detective" - Sherlock Holmes: The Hidden Years by Gary Lovisi (St. Martin's Minotaur)
"Imitate the Sun" by Luke Sholer (EQMM - November 2004)

BEST YOUNG ADULT

Story Time by Edward Bloor (Harcourt Children's Books)
In Darkness, Death by Dorothy & Thomas Hoobler (Philomel Books)
Jude by Kate Morgenroth (Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing)
The Book of Dead Days by Marcus Sedgwick (Wendy Lamb Books)
Missing Abby by Lee Weatherly (David Fickling Books)

BEST JUVENILE

Chasing Vermeer by Blue Balliett (Scholastic Press)
Assassin: The Lady Grace Mysteries by Patricia Finney (Delacorte Books for Young Readers)
Abduction! by Peg Kehret (Dutton Children's Books)
Looking for Bobowicz by Daniel Pinkwater (HarperCollins Children's Books)

The Unseen by Zilpha Keatley Snyder (Delacorte Books for Young Readers)

BEST PLAY

Spatter Pattern (Or, How I Got Away With It) by Neal Bell (Playwrights Horizons)

Eliot Ness: An Untouchable Life by Max Allan Collins (The Art House)

An Evening of Murder and the Like by Edward Musto (Barrow Group Studio Theatre)

BEST TELEVISION EPISODE TELEPLAY

Law & Order: Criminal Intent - "Want", Teleplay by Elizabeth Benjamin. Story by René Balcer & Elizabeth Benjamin

Law & Order: Criminal Intent - "Conscience", Teleplay by Gerry Conway. Story by René Balcer & Gerry Conway

Law & Order: Criminal Intent - "Consumed", Teleplay by Warren Leight. Story by Ren Balcer & Warren Leight

Law & Order: Criminal Intent - "Pas De Deux", Teleplay by Warren Leight. Story by René Balcer & Warren Leight

Monk - "Mr. Monk and the Girl Who Cried Wolf", Teleplay by Hy Conrad

BEST TELEVISION FEATURE OR MINI-SERIES TELEPLAY

State of Play by Paul Abbott (BBC America)

Prime Suspect 6: The Last Witness by Peter Berry (Granada TV & WGBH Boston)

Death in Holy Orders by Robert Jones, based on the novel by P.D. James (BBC Worldwide)

Amnesia by Chris Lang (BBC America)

"The Darkness of Light" - Wire in the Blood by Alan Whiting (Coastal Productions)

BEST MOTION PICTURE SCREENPLAY

A Very Long Engagement - Screenplay by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, based on the Novel by Sebastien Japrisot (2003 Productions)

The Bourne Supremacy - Screenplay by Tony Gilroy, based on the Novel by Robert Ludlam. (The Kennedy/Marshall Company, Universal Pictures, Hypnotic)

Collateral by Stuart Beattie (DreamWorks SKG)

I'm Not Scared - Screenplay by Francesca Marciano, based on the Novel by Niccolo Ammaniti. (Miramax Films)

Maria Full of Grace - Screenplay by Joshua Marston (HBO Films)

ROBERT L. FISH MEMORIAL AWARD

Thomas Morrissey

"Can't Catch Me" - Brooklyn Noir (Akashic Books)

GRAND MASTER

Marcia Muller

ELLERY QUEEN AWARD

Carolyn Marino, Vice President/Executive Editor, HarperCollins

RAVEN AWARDS

Cape Cod Radio Mystery Theatre (founded by Steve Oney)

DorothyL listserv (founded by Diane Kovacs and Kara Robinson)

Murder by the Book, Houston, TX (Martha Farrington, Owner)

SPECIAL EDGAR AWARDS

David Chase (writer/producer - The Sopranos, The Rockford Files,

Kolchak: The Night Stalker and many other breakthrough TV shows)

Tom Fontana (writer/producer - Homicide: Life on the Street, Oz, and The Jury and many other breakthrough TV shows)

THE SIMON & SCHUSTER-MARY HIGGINS CLARK AWARD

Perfect Sax by Jerrilyn Farmer (William Morrow/Avon)

The Drowning Tree by Carol Goodman (Ballantine Books)

Scent of a Killer by Christiane Heggan (MIRA Books)

Grave Endings by Rochelle Krich (Ballantine Books)

Murder in a Mill Town by P.B. Ryan (Berkley Prime Crime)

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And more awards...

Malice Domestic is pleased to announce the slate of nominees for the Agatha Awards for the best mystery works of 2004.

Best Novel

We'll Always Have Parrots by Donna Andrews,
Thomas Dunne Books

By a Spider's Thread by Laura Lippman,
HarperCollins

High Country Fall by Margaret Maron,
Mysterious Press

The Pearl Diver by Sujata Massey,
HarperCollins

Birds of a Feather by Jacqueline Winspear,
Soho Press

Best First Novel

Till The Cows Come Home by Judy Clemens,
Poisoned Pen Press

Arson and Old Lace by Patricia Harwin,
Pocket Books

I Dreamed I Married Perry Mason by Susan Kandel,
HarperCollins

Dating Dead Men by Harley Jane Kozak,
Doubleday

The Clovis Incident: A Mystery by Pari Noskin
Taichert,
University of New Mexico Press

Best Nonfiction

Private Eye-Lashes: Radio's Lady Detectives by Jack
French,
Bear Manor Media

**The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes: The Complete
Short Stories**, edited with notes by Leslie Klinger,
W. W. Norton & Company

Best Short Story

"The Butler Didn't Do It" by Maria Y. Lima from
Chesapeake Crimes,
Coordinating Editor: Donna Andrews,
Quiet Storm Publishing

"The Two Marys" by Katherine Hall Page from
Mistletoe and Mayhem,
Avon Books

"Wedding Knife" by Elaine Viets from Chesapeake
Crimes,
Coordinating Editor: Donna Andrews,
Quiet Storm Publishing

Best Children's/Young Adult Novel

Chasing Vermeer by Blue Balliett,
Scholastic Press

Betrayal at Cross Creek by Kathleen Ernst,
American Girl

Green Streak: A Zeke Armstrong Mystery by Daniel J.
Hale and Matthew LaBrot,
Top Publications

Those attending the Malice Domestic conference (April 29 - May 1, 2005) will vote for the winners of the awards. The winners will be acknowledged and receive their awards at the Agatha Banquet on April 30, 2005 at the Crystal Gateway Marriott hotel in Arlington, Virginia. To learn more about Malice Domestic or how to register for the conference, please visit the web site at www.malicedomestic.org.

Bits of Evidence

"A midlist author is one whose books are well received but have failed to make a commercial breakthrough; whose work sells solidly but unspectacularly, who's well known within the writing community but the majority of book buyers have never heard his name."

-David Armstrong, "How Not to Write a Novel: Confessions of a Midlist Author," 2003

Anonymous Excerpts from the Unacknowledged, Unpublished Publishing glossary of Terms:

When they say: "Americans read trash, not meaningful books like yours, you'd need to worry if your books were commercially successful." What that means: "Your next advance—if there is one—will be half the size of your last."

READ MORE AT:

www.salon.com/books/feature/2004/03/22/midlist/

CLIFF'S OLD-TIME CRIME OBSCURIA—By Cliff Gravel

Match 'em up—Answers at the next meeting.

THE CHARACTERS

___ Tommy & Tuppence
___ Nick & Nora Charles
___ Mr. & Mrs. North
___ Batman & Robin
___ Philip Marlowe
___ Philo Vance
___ Phillip Trent
___ Barnaby Trent
___ The Thin Man
___ The Fat Man
___ Nero Wolfe
___ Bulldog Drummond
___ The Falcon
___ The Green Hornet
___ Prof. Moriarty
___ Dr. Fu Manchu
___ Dr. Gideon Fell
___ Gideon Oliver
___ Doc Savage
___ Doc Long
___ Brother Cadfael
___ Father Brown
___ Boston Blackie
___ Harry Lime
___ The Saint
___ Ellery Queen
___ Judge Dee
___ Superintendent Alleyn
___ Inspector Morse
___ Sir Henry Merrivale
___ Lord Peter Wimsey
___ The Phantom
___ The Shadow
___ Miss Marple
___ Miss Withers
___ Mr. Wong
___ Mr. Moto
___ Fearless Fosdick
___ The Hardy Boys
___ George Smiley
___ Sam Spade
___ Mike Hammer
___ Horace Rumpole
___ Perry Mason
___ Lew Archer
___ Jessica Fletcher
___ Richard Diamond
___ Arsine Lupin
___ Auguste Dupin
___ Albert Campion
___ Adam Dalgliesh
___ Charlie Chan
___ Dick Tracy
___ Nancy Drew
___ Nick Carter
___ Mike Shane

THE AUTHORS

1. Ellis Peters
2. Lee Falk
3. John Dickson Carr
4. R. H. van Gulik
5. John Coryell
6. Henry Trendle
7. G. K. Chesterton
8. Margery Allingham
9. Carlton Morse
10. Dashiell Hammet
11. Maurice Leblanc
12. E. Bently & C. Rice
13. Stuart Palmer
14. S. S. Van Dine
15. Ross Macdonald
16. Dorothy Sayers
17. Sapper McNeile
18. Agatha Christie
19. Jack Boyle
20. Hugh Wiley
21. Bob Kane
22. Earl Derr Biggers
23. Edward Stratemeyer
24. Chester Gould
25. Al Capp
26. Michael Arlen
27. Arthur Conan Doyle
28. Norman Dexter
29. John Mortimer
30. Sax Rohmer
31. Leslie Charteris
32. Blake Edwards
33. Raymond Chandler
34. Erle Stanley Gardner
35. Rex Stout
36. Richard & Fran Lockridge
37. Frank Spillane
38. Davis Dresser
39. J. P. Marquand
40. Levinson, Link, Fischer
41. P. D. James
42. Mildred Benson
43. John Le Carre
44. Ngaio Marsh
45. Maxwell Grant
46. Edgar Allan Poe
47. F. Dannay & M. Lee
48. Carolyn Graham
49. Graham Greene
50. Henry Ralston
51. Aaron Elkins

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The Cairn of Albertvs

Of gods and Saints...

Bless them all, the long, the short and the tall.

OK, that subheading is from a World War II ditty, but the description goes for both gods and Saints. And you might throw in ugly (Vulcan), gorgeous (Venus), nympholept (Jupiter), balding and overweight (Dionysius...in Walt Disney's *Fantasia*, anyway), pious (Teresa of Avila), fanatic (Symeon the Stylite lived atop a 16-meter high pillar), conservationist (St. Francis).

You get the idea. If you're writing historicals of whatever era, your characters should talk knowledgeably about what those people talked about. Which brings us back to primary sources, books written by authors who lived at the time, or who refer to earlier sources that they've read. For Greek and Roman times, much material is available in English; the Penguin Classics lists over 100 works by 46 authors. Pagan gods of all sizes and sexual preferences run amuck throughout the stories, but who has time to find them all? A secondary source is Thomas Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable*. Bulfinch (1796-1847) taught the subject at Harvard at a time when most college students knew Latin and/or Greek and could read the same sources as did their professor. You can decide what god you want, find him/her in Bulfinch, then check to see what the ancient authors had to add. Now one of your characters can boast, "Say, wasn't that Bellerophon dude somethin' else?"

Christian saints are somethin' else. They're still referred to, prayed to, and lit candles to on a daily basis, especially in New Mexico, where churches, towns, counties, mountains, rivers, arroyos, streets and children are named after them. The earliest saints are in the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Mary, Martha, etc.—but those who followed run the gamut from Abdon to Zosimas. The 4th century *History of the Church* by Bishop Eusebius (c260-339) already presents mythologized saints' lives. The good bishop gives a final summary of the martyrdom of a teenage slave girl named Blandina. "...After the whips, after the [wild] beasts, after the [searing] griddle, she was finally dropped into a basket and thrown to a bull. Time after time the animal tossed her...then she too was sacrificed, while the pagans themselves admitted that never yet had they known a woman to suffer so much or so long."

The heroine of my first novel was named Blandina, at which my editor complained, "You can't call a heroine 'Blandina.' It's too...too..."

"Bland?"

"Exactly."

"The name in Latin means 'charming,' 'winsome.' And I

need her to be Blandina for the story line."

Blandina she stayed.

In the 13th century an Italian bishop named Jacobus de Voragine compiled an account of all the then-known saints into one volume, *The Golden Legend*. (Princeton University Press paperback.) This folklore of the saints is filled with their wondrous exploits, which on occasion, de Voragine says he doesn't believe, but will let readers decide. St. Francis, for example, practiced bi-location while alive and reanimated corpses after his death.

Which brings us to our current bad-girl-turned-good-saint-du-jour, Mirium of Magdala. The *Legend* devotes over nine pages to her, accounts that are fanciful, yet without the least hint of a romantic involvement with Christ. One tradition holds that Mary Magdalene married St. John the Evangelist. She is said to be of royal lineage, then confused with the Mary who was the sister of Lazarus. She loved a good time all right, but after meeting Christ lived without reproach. As persecuted early Christians she and several friends were cast adrift in a boat that eventually landed at Marseilles. There the group went around performing miracles and converting the pagan Gallo-Romans. The Magdalene was buried at Vezelay. That's the western version; an eastern tradition has her accompanying the Virgin Mary to Ephesus and dying there, with her bones removed to Constantinople during the Muslim conquest of Byzantine lands. If your birthday is July 22, she's your patron.

Incidentally, Abdon was martyred at Rome around 253; in the same century Zosimas died in bed at an Egyptian monastery. —*Albertvs*

THE CASE OF THE SINISTER COMPUTER

by Margaret Tessler

As I straggle into the new millennium, I wonder what happened to "User-Friendliness" in the computer world? My ex-word-processing program was always so tactful: "Drive A isn't ready, Darlin'; do you s'pose you could have forgotten the disk?"

In its declining years it told me, between wheezes, "It's time to move on, Dear, time to find a new computer."

So I attended a Seminar for Nitwits, where I foolishly confided to the resident guru that my current system was ten years old. He looked as appalled as if I'd confessed to chiseling documents on stone. Clearly I should have been Keeping Up.

Finally I got a brand new system with all the bells & whistles — everything but a manual. "People don't read manuals." Really! No choice but to muddle through the "Help" menu while it laughed at my ill-worded questions.

Worse, while trying to pull up a file, I got a message that "Winword" (whatever that is) was going to terminate my program because:

(cont'd on page 7)

‘YOU HAVE PERFORMED AN ILLEGAL OPERATION.’

"Quick!" I shouted to my husband in alarm. "Look out the window. See if the Computer SWAT Team is surrounding our home even as we speak! Call a lawyer! Find out if they're expecting me at Sing-Sing!"

As I continued to stare in horror at my screen, I noticed that an "OK" bar had appeared. With no other options, I assumed I was supposed to click it. I've been involved in illegal activity? OK????

("OK")

On the next screen I clicked the word "Details," and a jumble of symbols and digits appeared with a message about something the mysterious WINWORD had failed to do. Fancy that.

On further investigation, I discovered that Winword was confused over a printer fiasco that had occurred earlier when the paper refused to budge. ("Not your fault, Dear," my old program would have consoled me. "Twas Error #172.")

Instead, the Winword message told me to get out of Windows, fix the printer, and try again. That's silly, thought I. Nothing wrong with the printer. Maybe the paper just needs to be lined up better. So, after making sure all the gasping and grinding had quit, I squared the edges, reinserted the paper, and clicked the "Print" icon again.

Even as my page was printing out, a new message flashed on my screen telling me the printer wasn't working. ("OK") Next came the message that if I dared fix the printer while it was in the process of printing, I would do permanent damage to the cartridges. ("OK")

The only logical move now was to call my favorite computer-support-person/therapist, my sister, who told me, "I got a message once that beats yours. It read,

‘FATAL ERROR ENCOUNTERED.’

However I'm happy to report that my computer did not die. Neither did I."

I'm happy to report that MY computer and I are not in prison. What's more, we've reached a truce. Who knows, we might even become friends before this century is over.

("OK")

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ROB'S RANDOM SHOTS

Who Killed Swami Schwartz? by Nora Charles, Berkley Prime Crime, 214 pp.

Go ahead and laugh. It's all right. "Nora Charles" (who's really MWA Executive Vice President Noreen Wald) has made a career out of making mystery readers laugh. And it's not just her titles. Some of her more memorable characters, from Gypsy Rose Liebowitz to retired Sister Mary Frances Costello, the "Dancing Nun," start us chuckling from the moment they're introduced. Don't believe me? Try saying Swami Schwartz rapidly three times. And you're off and running.

Here's the clever premise: Senior sleuth and recent widow Kate Kennedy accompanies Mary Frances to a dinner for local Palmetto Beach, Florida celebrity Swami Schwartz, born Allen Schwartz and raised in Brooklyn. When he drops dead of apparent poisoning early on (as all victims of murder should, so readers can focus on the suspects), suspicion centers on the other diners at his table: Sanjay Patel, a young Indian doctor who'd like to take over the Yoga Institute; Magnolia McFee, vastly rich local matron who intended to leave the bulk of her fortune to the Swami; her nephew Laurence, irked at losing so much of his inheritance; Dr. Jack Gallagher, local physician

and quiet partner of the Swami, who has more than lives at stake in the wake of the murder; rich Texas widow Dallas Dalton, who may be romantically involved with the doctor; young waitress Tiffani Cruz, who served the fatal dish and may be involved with Sanjay Patel; and restaurateur Danny Mancini, who, it turns out, is a World War II pal of Swami's dad.

It's easy to see how Noreen could write scripts for the game of Clue. Sooner or later, Kate finds that everyone at the table that night had at least one motive for murder. But the fun is in the discovery, following Kate and her sister-in-law Marlene as they interview suspects, sneak into forbidden properties, and learn more about a cryogenics company that links most of the suspects.

In this, the second book in Noreen's second series, sister-in-law Marlene gets many more chapters from her point of view than in the first Senior Sleuth novel, *Death With an Ocean View*, published in 2003. This doubles the amount of information the reader learns and introduces suspects who weren't at the table that night. The final confrontation occurs at an opulent mansion reminiscent of the best locales of Agatha Christie. Speaking of Christie, Kate Kennedy has been compared to a modern Miss Marple. Indeed, many, but not nearly all, of the suspects and other characters are men and women "of a certain age," but the reader quickly finds that preconceptions of senior citizens

don't fit the busy, inquisitive, sinister inhabitants of Palmetto Beach. Just like older readers enjoy Harry Potter, younger readers will get a lot out of this series.

So there's mayhem, suspense, romance, and above all humor in the works of Noreen Wald, from her start in the *Memoir of a Game Show Contestant*, to the humorous *Fit and Fifty*; *Foxy Forever*, to ghostwriting Roxanne Pulitzer's *Strumpet With a Trumpet*, and on through five volume series about New York's Jacqueline "Jake" O'Hara in the Ghostwriter mystery series for Berkley. There's no mystery about why Noreen Wald is one of the funniest and most inventive crime writers around. Just try and catch her.

Skeleton Man by Tony Hillerman; HarperCollins, 240pp

How can a reviewer hope to be original in describing this, the 17th mystery novel by Mystery Writers of America Grandmaster and New Mexico living literary treasure Tony Hillerman? Maybe by pointing out this novel's pedigree.

Like his Southeast Asia novel, *Finding Moon*, his political novel, *The Fly on the Wall*, his memoir, *Seldom Disappointed* and his recollections of World War Two, *Kilroy Was There*, this novel was a long-time a-borning. You get a sense of that from the historical note at the beginning that notes that the 1956 airliner crash depicted in the book was precipitating incident that led to the creation of the Federal Aviation Administration.

In a nutshell, like the novels of Ross McDonald, a tragedy of the past comes back in this novel to haunt the living. A rich man's son who was killed when two airliners collided over the Grand Canyon was on his last trip before marrying his pregnant sweetheart. Like many, his body was never recovered, nor was his attaché case filled with diamonds. Unlike many, however, the man's father refused to believe the fiancé's claim that the dead man was the father of her unborn child. Fast forward to the present. The father is old and ailing. The mother has died, a bitter and disappointed woman. Her daughter, now nearly 50 years old, sees a chance to prove her claim to a huge inheritance when diamonds of unknown origin begin to surface on the Navajo Reservation near the Grand Canyon.

Enter our sleuths: The retired Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn, still chafing for a chance to contribute to investigations. Sergeant Jim Chee, about to be married to the woman he proposed to in the last novel. And Bernadette Manuelito, Jim's fiancé. Leaphorn's early

actions propel the story. Chee and Manuelito descend into the canyon in search of a rumored hermit who may have the diamonds, and who may be associated with Skeleton Man, the Hopi guardian of the Underworld. Conflict arises when the daughter arrives at the site and is stalked by a ruthless killer working to prevent her inheriting millions from her grandfather's foundation if her claim can be proven. Find the body, find the diamonds. And the race is on.

As such, *Skeleton Man* is more a thriller than a mystery. So was Hillerman's previous novel, *The Sinister Pig*, although that book began with a murder. This is not a radical departure for Hillerman; *The Wailing Wind* was also a thriller and many of the author's previous mysteries embrace thriller elements. What is further developed in this book is the expanded role of Bernadette Manuelito, with many more chapters from her point of view than appeared in the two previous novels. It is not a stretch to say the Leaphorn-Chee mysteries have morphed into Leaphorn-Chee-Manuelito thrillers.

Readers who have followed the careers and romances of these three characters will be delighted to be among friends again. And Tony Hillerman continues to weave mystery-thrillers out of the legends of Native American cultures and historical events of the Southwest.

—Rob Kresge

Rob's off the ankle bracelet and has been on the loose lately, and woke up one morning to find himself in El Paso, Texas, at the LEFT COAST CRIME conference. Here's some stray voltage:

Snapshots of the 2005 Left Coast Crime Conference in El Paso, Feb 24-27

Disclaimer: The following article is meant to be a series of impressions by one attendee at an annual mystery conference held this year close to our neighborhood. Since no one person could attend all four panels held each hour, this will only be a representative sample of what went on. Aspiring mystery authors should consider attending conferences like this to network with published authors, agents, and editors. Conferences held close to where we live give writers a less expensive opportunity to learn about our craft and further our careers. Other important annual mystery conferences include:

Bouchercon, held each fall in a different city, awards the Anthony prizes.

The **MWA** (Mystery Writers of America) **Symposium**, held each April in New York City, awards the Edgars.

(cont'd p.9)

Malice Domestic, held just after the Edgars each late April/early May in Washington, DC. It awards the Agathas for “traditional” mysteries.

Besides these “big three” and LCC, the following annual conferences are also useful:

- **Sleuthfest**, held in late winter in Florida.
- **Mayhem in the Midlands**, held each May in Omaha.
- **Of Dark and Stormy Nights**, held each June in Chicago.
- Not a mystery conference per se, but chapter members Roy & Carolyn, Sarah Schwartz, and I plan to attend the first US conference of the UK’s **Historical Novel Society** in Salt Lake City April 15-17.

Left Coast Crime is held every February in a different city, usually on the West Coast, but that requirement is geographically flexible, as you can see from this year’s choice of El Paso as the host city. Next year, LCC travels across the pond for its first ever conference in the UK, in Bristol, which is—you guessed it—on England’s “left coast.”

Since this year’s LCC was being held so close to Albuquerque, four of us SinC Croak & Dagger Chapter members went—authors **Penny Rudolph**, **Pari Noskin Taichert**, **Margaret Tessler**, and aspiring author me. This is a smaller conference than the “Big Three, perhaps since it wasn’t being held in glamorous California. The nearly 300 attendees included only two editors and two agents, smaller numbers than the four Malices, two Bouchercons, and one MWA that I’ve attended. However, New Mexico mystery authors were heavily represented. Besides Penny, Pari, and Margaret, thriller authors **Joe Badal** and **David “Rambo” Morrell** were there. And mystery authors **Steve Hamill**, **John Maddox Roberts**, **Walter Satterthwaite**, **Susan Slater**, and **Judith Van Gieson** were also present, as were recent NM expats **Steve Brewer** and **Lauren Haney**. NM resident and nonfiction author **Ernie Bulow** was the Fan Guest of Honor and brought his family. And the two Eastern dude authors who spoke to our chapter in February, **Donna Andrews** and **Clyde Linsley**, also attended.

One of the best known authors in attendance was Guest of Honor **S.J. Rozan**, whose Bill Smith-Lydia Chin mysteries have won several awards. Her books have a unique twist in that each volume in the series alternates from one of those two protagonists’ points of view.

Other noteworthy attendees included **J.A. Jance**, whose Arizona and Seattle series have won several awards, **Rhys Bowen**, perennial Agatha and Anthony favorite, and **Dr. Doug Lyle**, whose helpful book *Forensics for Dummies* has been a boon to mystery authors and aspiring authors.

Other attendees included new Arizona author **J. Carson Black**, historical mystery novelist **Michelle Black**, thriller authors **David Dun**, **Barry Eisler**, **Lee Goldberg**, and **J.A. Konrath**, El Paso author and conference official **L.C. Hayden**, authors and photogenic guy magnets **Harley Jane Kozak** and **Twist Phelan** (her real name, incidentally), half of the **P.J. Parrish** writing team, historical mystery award nominee **Ann Parker**, and important independent mystery publisher **Barbara Peters** (Phoenix’s Poisoned Pen Press) and her husband editor **Rob Rosenwald**.

Presentations before the conference opened were taught by professionals in their fields, and included firearms familiarization, investigative procedure, forensic techniques, forensic success stories, and publicizing your books.

Panels began the next day. The following mentions are not comprehensive, but these are some of the panels that writer and fans enjoyed.

- Detectives in the Ancient World was chaired by **Doug Lyle** and included NM history/mystery authors **Lauren Haney** and **John Maddox Roberts**.
- At the same hour, **Pari** sat on a panel on the Tough, Edgy Sexy Female Sleuths of today.
- Writing Violence was chaired by **Barry Eisler**, author of the John Rain series of thrillers about a Japanese-American hitman living in Tokyo.
- **Penny** chaired a valuable Historical Research panel.
- The Old West as Background was chaired by Raton’s **Steven Havill** and included authors who write in that era, **Penny Rudolph** and **Ann Parker**. (cont’d p.10)

- **Pari** chaired a panel of authors writing protagonists of the opposite sex that included **Kit Ehrman** and **P.J. Parrish**.
- **L.C. Hayden** had a panel on humorous incidents on book tours and at signings on a whim and I laughed till I cried. **Lee Goldberg** and **Joan Hess** were particularly amusing.
- Friday night **David Morrell** hosted a well-attended showing of an episode from the first season of *Route 66* that took place in El Paso and guest starred Lee Marvin. Series writer Stirling Silliphant became Morrell's mentor in his early years.
- **J.A. Konrath** chaired Crossing the Threshold From Mysteries to Thrillers with **P.J. Parrish** attending. This was helpful to writers of spy thrillers. Konrath and panelist **Lee Goldberg** were quite interesting. Goldberg is a career screenwriter and author of the Diagnosis: Murder series based on the TV program.
- Must-Read Thrillers was chaired by **Barbara Peters** and included **David Morrell**. Informative and well-attended.
- The Hidden Message of Thrillers chaired by *Mystery Scene* magazine's **Adrian Muller** (also organizer of LCC 2006 in Bristol, England) included thriller author **David Dun**.
- Immediately following that panel, charter members of the newly-formed (Oct 2004) International Thriller Writers Organization held another standing room only session to acquaint the audience with what the group has already done and its plans for its own conference and annual awards.
On Sunday, **Barbara Peters'** panel on humor in mysteries included ABQ fave **Steve Brewer**. **Clyde Linsley** participated on a panel that dealt with research and what happens when fact and fiction don't match.
The conference was not only well attended but well appreciated. Look forward to attending the next Left Coast Crime Conference, across the pond in Bristol, U.K.
—**Rob Kresge**

Croak & Dagger Lineup

Saturday, 26 March, at 1 p.m., we will be hearing from Albuquerque PI Pat Caristo, who teaches courses on how to become a PI at UNM. She will be speaking on how real PIs and their work differ from the popular conceptions portrayed in books, movies, and TV.

Tuesday, 26 April, at 7 p.m., we will hear from former Federal Agent Lucinda Schroeder, who consults on security and mystery writing with her firm, The Crime Connection. She will be speaking on under-cover operations.

Tuesday, 24 May, at 7 p.m., the chapter will hear from Albuquerque Police Department spokesperson Trish Ahrensfield on a subject still to be determined. She has many years of experience and countless stories to relate.

Saturday, 25 June, at 1 p.m., UNM history professor Virginia Scharf, who writes the Mustang Sally mystery series as Virginia Swift, will talk about how she writes, how she develops characters and plot, and why the books are set in Wyoming.

**ALL MEETINGS IN THE POLICE SUB-STATION!
12800 Montgomery Blvd NE (across from McDonald's)**

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Nooseletter is the official internal organ of The Sisters in Crime (SinC), Croak & Dagger Chapter, Albuquerque, in association with The SinC national organization. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and editors. Members of Croak & Dagger are encouraged to contribute articles, reviews, essays, etc., for consideration for publication, average length 500 words or less. Publication is the first of every other month, submission target dates being the 15th day of the month prior to publication: 15 Jun, Sep, Dec. Send to: royandcal@netzero.com, subject line "Article Submission." *The Nooseletter* will be sent electronically to members and friends during the first week of each publication month.

—*Page Erwin*

BOOK REVIEW—Ira J. Rimson

Murder and Mayhem: A Doctor Answers Medical and Forensic Questions for Mystery Writers
by D.P. Lyle, M.D. New York; Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Minotaur, 2003. 278 pp.
ISBN 0-312-30945-7 \$23.95

Reviewed by

"I have an unusual question. A teenage girl catches her dad having an affair with a young mother whose child the teen-ager baby-sits. She wants to punish the young mom and her dad. Could something be put on the woman's diaphragm that would cause them some discomfort? I thought of Vicks VapoRub or Ben-Gay, but these would be detectable before she inserted it. Any other ideas?"

I'm not sure that's the kind of forensic medical issue that might arise in one of your books. If it does, you'll find the answer on page 276 of this strange and (for the mystery writer) invaluable tome. Luckily, it happens to be available at six branches of our local library.

D.P. Lyle is a California cardiologist who writes "The Doctor Is In" question-and-answer column in *The March of Crime* and *The Sleuth Sayer*, two newsletters from chapters of the Mystery Writers of America. *Murder and Mayhem* is a compilation of one-hundred and fifty some columns ranging from what a close-up gunshot wound looks like to the lethal dosage of strychnine in humans and animals. Any mystery or crime writer who needs to know how long it takes to smother someone with a pillow *needs* this book.

Lyle seems to delight in responding to sometimes bizarre questions posed by mystery writers intent on defining new and different mechanisms of mayhem and death. He gently advises a theorist that opium is a central nervous system depressant, and thus is a "downer," most likely incapable of stimulating violent behavior. However, he also advises the questioning author that were the character undergoing withdrawal, unruly behavior might just result.

Lyle takes pains to explain more than just *what* happens in the situations posited by the questioners. He goes into sufficient detail that the reader can understand the factual bases for his explanations, in language that makes the science accessible, even to Humanities majors. I'd recommend this book for addition to any mystery or crime writer's library. Even if you don't have a situation currently that cries out for edification, there are enough novel ideas for dealing death and destruction that you're sure to find one that will fit into a future plot.

Oh, yes, the question posed at the start of this review. Dr. Lyle's answer: "Tabasco. No contest."

OP-ED

—THE GALLOWS TRAP DOOR—

REJECTED ? —by Page Erwin

You have to learn to love those rejection letters that you get from publishers and agents. The other option is to read them seriously and become terminally depressed. Of course, if you're a masochist, you can reach a state of ecstatic pain after just the first couple of years.

Page Erwin went through their fat folder labeled "Yellow-Bellied Rejects" in honor of those too cowardly to take on their work.

"Please forgive the impersonal note..."

"We're not the right match for you..."

"We feel we must decline..."

"It's just not right for us..."

"Better luck elsewhere..."

"We'll have to pass, the mystery doesn't engage us..."

Then there are the more humble, indecisive and guilt-ridden phrases:

"Though it is an intriguing concept, unfortunately it's not quite right for us."

"It just doesn't fit our list."

"We don't feel confident in our ability to place your manuscript." (Well, if you don't feel confident, why would we want to hire you to represent us?)

Personally we like the positive conclusions that give us reason to hope. Phrases like: "Good luck in placing your project well," and "We hope you're not discouraged by our decision," and "Another publisher may have room for your work," and "Your material

does not fit the list we're publishing, but we wish you well." (So what's on your list? Oh, please, please tell.)

One thing is for certain, not much reading of manuscripts, or front matter, or even, in some cases, cover letters is taking place. The uniformity of response and the fact that ninety-something percent of all rejects have not one personal aspect to them, not a single drop of pen ink, no hint that personal attention has been paid to the material sent.

The word "REJECTION" according to the dictionary, carries with it a sense of the following: To refuse, to act or throw away, to discard. Worse yet: to repel, to refuse to consider, to spew out (ouch!) or to forsake. Put that definition in the balance, and most of our reject letters amount to a rejection of the notion of even considering a rejection of our work. Nearly always what has been rejected is the idea of even reading your work.

Where has courtesy gone? Why do many agencies reject you in twenty-five words or less? Is there a paper shortage? Low on ink? There's certainly enough rudeness to go around.

That leads us to the more prickly question: Who's turning your work around? Probably it's neither a publisher nor an agent. "Kristy-Girl," age twenty-three, with a degree from Barnard in English lit and a lifetime of playing Game Boy, while watching rapid-fire TV programming and listening to her I-Pod. Thrilled to have a job in New York publishing, even if it mainly entails sending rejects after barely glancing at queries, getting double latte with cinnamon or Chai tea for the boss, handling his or her appointments, running interference, and once in a great while going to lunch at a swell place with a prospective author, and the boss. Usually, that's as far as your package gets.

Back when we were publishers, several of our assistants moved up to bigger houses, Boston and New York. Ironically, two of them were the poorest interns we ever had, solipsistic druggies with masters' degrees. They went on to become little Kristys.

Back to Kristy: she's not making quite enough to pay for the grubby basement apartment in East Fourteenth Street that she's sharing with her roomy who works at The Gap, and she's spending most of her time completing her own chick-lit masterpiece. Is she going to bother to sign her name as "first-reader." No way!

Poor girl! Hers is not an easy job. It's tedious, repetitious, and sometimes downright boring. There's sorting, filing, and that grotesque stack of queries, even complete manuscripts from those fools who think

they're going to get published. And there's the housekeeping. Did they include an SASE? Is there adequate postage on the mss box? Many publishers keep the boxes and never return the mss. "Whatever!"

Then there are the phone calls. Imagine, writers want to know, after waiting a year or more, what the action step is. The nerve! Word is, "Don't ever call the publisher. They don't like it." Just because the author probably put her life on hold and wrote for two years, doesn't mean you should reveal to her whether or not it has gone to the second round of readers. Keep her in the dark. Make her grovel!

How did such a system come to be?

As former editors of an award-winning small press that we operated out of a Maine farmhouse for twelve years, we have great understanding of editors, and we know how manuscripts can pile up. Once our press had established itself, we received almost fifty pounds of queries and manuscripts per month, and during competitions it was ten times that amount.

We have to admit that not every query or submission deserves a reply. There are crazies out there who think they can write. Editors and agents shouldn't be expected to reply to queries without SASEs, or to queries from filled with wild claims or threats. Lots of writers have the nerve to send messy, coffee-stained, refolded and re-used manuscripts. We used to don our rubber gloves and drop them into the nearest wastebasket. Some do not deserve a reply.

However, in our twelve years of serving the world of small press, publishing eighty-five titles, we hand-wrote replies to every legitimate query that came our way via the Troy, Maine, Post Office. When we had time, we offered constructive criticism, but only when asked. After a few years, writers began asking for rejection. They'd say things like "Dear Nightshade Press, that was the most helpful rejection I ever received. Thank you!" or "Please feel free to reject me, but could you make suggestions again?"

Our concern here is the way queries are handled and turned against us. Our own personal reject file, now that we are full-time writers, is the aforementioned "Yellow Bellied Rejects" file. (No point in taking ourselves too seriously.) When reviewing our rejects we noticed certain trends. How often the excuse involves volume. Examples: "Due to the large number of queries..."; "Of the thousands of queries we receive every year..."; "We receive more than two hundreds submissions per week..."; "...tremendous number of queries..."; "So many submissions...". Our response:

“Hey! That’s your job. Without writers, you don’t exist.”

Then there is the sincere reply so appreciated, “Please forgive the form of this letter, especially if you’ve waited a long time...”

We must say that the Michael Larsen-Elizabeth Pomada Literary Agency out of San Francisco sent a long, humble, and interesting explanation of why they could not represent us. What a refreshing change, and it provided useful information. (And it was signed.)

The Castiglia Literary Agency, also from California, sent a courteous and thoughtful reply, even if it was a form letter. It even appeared to be personally signed.

One of the most encouraging rejects we’ve received recently was from the John Hawkins Agency, which revealed that they had, indeed, read our manuscript and understood it. They even included concrete suggestions referring to the pacing of the first few chapters. Yes, there are respected and totally professional agents out there.

Our final words are these, directed to those “straw man” agents and publishers in whom we place our trust as mystery writers.

1. If you’re going to use a preprinted card, have more than twenty-five words on it and no faded ink!

2. Explain a bit about what you’re currently looking for. Many authors write in more than one genre.

3. Avoid ruthless rudeness. It’s bad enough being a writer, but do we need to be bullied?

4. Can’t you at least thank us for our interest and sign your name, personally?

5. In a more perfect world, you’d actually read something we wrote and give us a substantive reason *why* you can’t use it.

Listen up, Sisters, hang on to those vacuous rejection slips. Two reasons come to mind. The most practical is that it proves to the IRS that you are a serious writer and that you are seriously seeking publication. The second is that you can examine the few personalized rejects, looking for patterns and common threads of complaint. Not much consolation in that kind of salvage work, is there? A bit like the crow picking through a cow paddy for a few kernels of corn.

Much of being successful as a writer has to do with attitude. Use those rejects as a cheer-me-up when your car gets totaled. (Everything’s relative, even joy and sadness.) Those innocuous pieces of correspondence are the writer’s badges of honor. They

represent commitment, dedication and belief in oneself. So keep them in a safe place for that day when you luck out, and that envelope with a “yes” in it arrives in the mail. The reject slips will mean so much. —ED

PLEASE NOTE: You too can submit essays for OP-ED or use in any other part of the *NOOSELETTER*. Make it about as long as the one you just read, or a little shorter. ED

LOCAL APPARITIONS

BARNES & NOBLE At the Coronado Mall—

*Wednesday, March 30 at 7:00 pm— **Nevada Barr**, well-known author of mysteries set in U.S. National Parks, will sign her latest Anna Pigeon mystery, *Hard Truth*.

BOOKWORKS—

*Sunday, April 10 at 3:00 pm— **Walter Satterthwaite**, Santa Fe author, will read, sign, and discuss his latest book, *Cavalcade, a Phil Beaumont and Jane Turner Mystery*.

*Thursday, April 21 at 7:00 pm— **Aimee and David Thurlo** will sign and discuss their Ella Clah mysteries and other books.

BORN TO BE READ—Nothing Scheduled!!!

PAGE ONE— Nothing scheduled!!!

A THANK-YOU NOTE TO THE C&D CHAPTER

To: 'Pari Noskin Taichert'

Subject: Gracitudoous Greetings

Pari –

Please extend my thanks to the membership of the Croak and Dagger chapter of Sisters in Crime for a marvelous evening. Albuquerque is wonderful, and so are its people – at least those I met on that great Tuesday at the cop shop. I hope you'll see fit to invite me back someday.

My best to everyone,

Clyde T. Linsley, Jr.

—TRUE CRIMES—

Selected biographies of your Croak & Dagger board members

Pari Noskin Taichert, our Chapter President, Pari Noskin Taichert hails from Albuquerque and has worked as a belly-dancing instructor, textbook sales consultant, and waitress—among her more respectable jobs. She earned her B.A with Distinction in Far Eastern Languages & Literature and masters of Social Work in Transcultural Therapy from the University of Michigan. Unable to sit still for very long, Pari has traveled to—and lived in—enough places to have the good sense to finally come home. Among her longer adventures were a year as a foreign exchange student to Tours, France while in high school and a little under a year of study at the Chinese University of Hong Kong while in college.

A national award-winning journalist, Pari writes freelance features for *Crosswinds Weekly*, *Albuquerque, The Magazine*, and *Mystery Scene Magazine*. Formerly, she wrote a monthly literary column for the *Albuquerque Tribune*. She also maintains a small public relations consulting business.

In February, 2005, Pari Noskin Taichert earned her green belt in Tae Kwon Do with a mean side kick that cracked through three boards. This same strength and determination has seen her through years of rejection and struggle until her first book, *THE CLOVIS INCIDENT*, was published by the University of New Mexico Press in February 2004. Now an Agatha nominee for best first novel, *THE CLOVIS INCIDENT* features Sasha Solomon, a strong, independent, and intelligent woman with a tenuous grasp on reality. Her next book, *THE BELEN HITCH*, continues Sasha's adventures.

Pari married late, had children even later, and loves Guinness, Glenlivet and strong coffee. When she isn't punching or defending against her black belt husband and colored belt children, she's writing.

This year, Pari also helped start the first Albuquerque chapter of Sisters in Crime—of which she is now president. In addition, she is an active member of Mystery Writers of America, the American Crime Writers League and Southwest Writers.

Stephanie Hainsfurther, our Membership Chairperson, is a freelance business journalist and editor with 17 years experience. With Emily Esterson, she is co-author of *Covering the Business Beat: Strategies for Publishing What You Write* (Purdue University Press, August 2004). She has published more than 650 articles in regional and national magazines and newspapers, and in international trade journals in the fields of the arts, architecture, energy, the environment and commercial real estate.

Stephanie also is the author of *Pocket Gardening for Your Outdoor Living Spaces: Tips for creating the perfect garden in small places* (Hobby House Press, 2004). She is the Southwest region writer for *Gardening How-To* magazine. Recently, she became a garden scout for *Better Homes & Gardens* Special Interest Publications in the desert Southwest.

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WHO DONE IT?

Results of the *Croak & Dagger* poll of favorite mystery writers of all time.

Here are the **NEXT TWENTY-FIVE**. In the last issue we gave you the **TOP TWENTY** vote getters: **These are in no particular order.**

Nevada Barr
Lillian Jackson Brown
Robin Burcell
Lawrence Block
Wilkie Collins
Patricia Cornwell
Carol Nelson Douglas
Daphne du Maurier
Antonia Frasier
Frederick Forsythe
Dorothy Gilman
Carl Hiassen
Jonnie Jacobs
Jonathan Kellerman
Laurie King
Philip Loraine
H.P. Lovecraft
Miriam G. Manfredo
Philip MacDonald
Albert Noyer
Paula Paul
Kristen K. Rusch
Augusta Seamon
Josephine Tey
James Lee Burke

We urge mystery fans who have not tried some of these writers to give them a try.

NEXT ISSUE END OF JUNE. FOR NOW, CASE CLOSED!

—Page Erwin, ED

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