



THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume IV, Number 4—July 2008

†Expert Testimony†

From the Prez

Some new things at the halfway point in 2008:

We just had a vacancy on the executive board when Vice President Penny Rudolph had to resign for deadline and signing/travel commitments. The board and the chapter will miss her resourcefulness, experience, and calm and steady influence.

We had an all-time record audience in June for best-selling Santa Fe mystery author Michael McGarrity. We hope for an even larger turnout for New Mexico literary legend Tony Hillerman on July 22. Mark your calendars, and plan to get there early for good seats. I'll have some folding chairs, just in case.

Two new features mark the announcements portion of the meetings now. I want to keep these brief, so we maximize the time to hear from our speakers.

- **Successes.** Patterned after what SouthWest Writers does, but *drastically* abbreviated. Writer members are encouraged to share, in 30 to 60 seconds, writing successes they've experienced since the last meeting. I'll enforce brevity.
- Likewise, we want to encourage readers to tell us of **authors or books** they've recently discovered and why they're enthusiastic about them.

I kicked off the successes portion, noting I'd sent off a manuscript to a publisher I have high hopes for. And I got an encouraging

response the night following our meeting. More about that at the July meeting. I waxed enthusiastic about three authors/novels, including Sandra Scoppettone's *This Dame for Hire*, Megan Abbott's *The Song Is You*, and Robert B. Parker's body of work. The two novels vanished quickly from the book exchange boxes. See my reviews elsewhere in this issue.♦

—Rob Kresge

Don't Miss It!

Tuesday, July 22, at 7 p.m.

Our very special speaker on July 22 will be Tony Hillerman—soldier, journalist, college professor, poker player, and legendary mystery author,

The writer of a series of popular novels featuring Navajo policemen Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee, Hillerman has received numerous awards for his literary works and service to the intellectual community including the Mystery Writers of America Grandmaster Award and the Malice Domestic Lifetime Achievement Award. The Navajo Nation awarded him a Special Friends of the Dine Award in 1987. His memoir, *Seldom Disappointed*, received the Agatha Award for Best Non-Fiction Book in 2001. His portrait hangs in the Albuquerque Museum as one of only six distinguished New Mexicans chosen for this honor.

The Albuquerque Croak & Dagger chapter of Sisters in Crime welcomes mystery fans, readers, and writers who want to enjoy felonious fun, absolutely criminal companionship and sensational speakers.

June's speaker will be Tony Hillerman. Here is an excerpt from the New York Times review of his memoir, *Seldom Disappointed*:

"Blessed are those who expect little,' his mama used to say. "They are seldom disappointed." She taught him to seek adventure, never to whine and never to be afraid. His father... taught him never to envy and never to bear a grudge. To judge by this memoir, Hillerman did pretty well in all of the above....

In 1970, when he was already past 40, Tony Hillerman published the first of his famously successful series of Navajo crime novels, sleuthing done courtesy of tribal police officers Jim Chee and Joe Leaphorn. Learning en passant, much as readers of Patrick O'Brian learn about the British Navy by following Aubrey and Maturin, legions of Chee and Leaphorn fans became conversant with the Navajo nation and the spectacular mesas and canyons of Navajo country. They learned that traditional Navajos have a deep feeling for the beauty and harmony of the universe...

Hillerman's really bad characters come from off the reservation: paleface drug smugglers, land developers, crooked anthropologists. For Hillerman, moreover, Navajo religion, with its creation myths, gods and spirits like Monster Slayer and Born of Water, is as significant as anything from ancient Greece, and, it would appear, every bit as rich in suggestion as the doings of that dysfunctional family on Mount Olympus...

An appendix lists the dozens of books he's written or edited, with some notes about the origins of this quirk of plot or that actual crime...A writer, he says, is like "the bag lady pushing her stolen shopping cart through life collecting throwaway stuff, which, who knows, might be useful some way someday."

Check Out the Croak & Dagger Website for all your Croak & Dagger information needs.

www.croak-and-dagger.com

- Upcoming Programs
- 2008 Meeting Schedule
- Membership Form
- Speakers Bureau
- Links to Mystery Websites & Websites for Your Favorite Croak & Dagger Authors
- *The Nooseletter* Archive



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

The Lineup

Rob Kresge – President –
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Vice President – Penny Rudolph –
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HELP WANTED

The Croak & Dagger chapter works because of the efforts of dedicated volunteers. The four primary board members are elected to one-year terms by the members of C&D at the November meeting or by email before election night. The whole board—elected officers and appointed volunteers—takes office at the December meeting. Per our by-laws, the four elected officers—President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer—also have to be or become members of the National Sisters in Crime, although they do not have to be members of either the chapter or National SinC in order to run for office. None of the officers have to be published or aspiring authors. The officers and committee chairs serve on the executive board, which meets every other month.

Some of the following positions will be opening up for 2009. Contact Rob Kresge or any current board member if you're interested in running for any of the following:

President:

The President has two major functions—to preside over the monthly general meetings, at which he or she makes announcements, introduces the speaker, and leads the question-and-answer session. The president also sets the agenda and chairs the meetings of the chapter board, now held every two months at homes of the board members, by rotation. The president also interacts with National SinC through online messages and blogs and writes a column for each issue of the *Nooseletter*. And the President represents the chapter in meetings with National twice a year if he or she can and other functions in New Mexico or elsewhere.

Vice President:

Since the President may not be able to attend every monthly general meeting or the six board meetings, the Vice President's main responsibility is to fill in for the President as needed. Beyond that, the Vice President may be asked to work on some special projects as they

arise or represent our chapter at functions in New Mexico or elsewhere.

Secretary:

The Secretary maintains a mailing list of all current board members. The Secretary also takes notes at monthly board meetings, distributes the minutes to board members for approval within a reasonable time (before the next board meeting), then types them up for publication in the *Nooseletter*. The Secretary sends out notices of board meetings when needed and directions, prepares and distributes a board meeting agenda when directed by the president, and keeps members on track as to what matters have been decided.



Treasurer:

The Treasurer picks up chapter mail at the post office, logs all new members and renewing members into an Excel program, deposits checks & cash into the chapter bank account, emails new member information to the Membership chair, attends board meetings and reports finances at meetings, writes checks for expenses, presents expenditures to the board, and completes yearly tax info with IRS

Program/Publicity Chair:

Responsible for 1) all aspects of arranging speakers for monthly chapter meetings and other chapter events and 2) promotion and public relations related to speakers and chapter events. This includes coordinating with others to develop speaker/event ideas, contacting potential speakers and making all necessary arrangements for their presentation. Issues promotional materials, specifically press releases, to the media and to the Membership Chair, Webmaster, and Newsletter Chair regarding upcoming chapter events. Provides background information to President for introduction of the speaker at the meeting or assumes this duty if necessary. Purchases engraved bookmarks for presentation gifts to speakers.

Membership Chair:

Keeps an updated official list of current members and friends. Emails dues reminders to members whose anniversary date falls in the current month. Keeps in sync with Treasurer regarding members' payment of dues and from Program Chair receives program descriptions to email to all members and friends. Coordinates with *Nooseletter* editor to email copies of the bimonthly *Nooseletter* to members. The email tool you use is associated with the Croak & Dagger web site. All of the administrative and email communication structure for the above tasks are already set up and running.

***Nooseletter* Editor:**

Keeps *Nooseletter* format in chosen computer program. Collects news items, reviews, and other editorial material from members and any other available sources. Coordinates with the President and other committee chairs. Prepares the *Nooseletter* for bimonthly distribution before the middle of the month preceding the date of the issue (January, March, May, July, September, and November), including editing, formatting into columns, inserting graphics, etc. Coordinates with Membership chair to distribute finished *Nooseletter* via email.

May Mayhem in the Midlands

It was a cold, rainy day in May when over 150 people gathered in Omaha, Nebraska, to discuss murder, mayhem, and mystery.

The 9th annual Mayhem in the Midlands Mystery Conference included 42 authors, 4 forensic experts, and 2½ days of panels, talk, books, and food. The mystery dinner theater, a high point of the conference, was almost as much of a mystery for the performers as for the audience. Mystery writers and readers are not passive and don't always follow the script you give them. Below are some of the highlights of the sessions.

There was a full day of panels with the forensic experts on crime lab/crime scene issues, technology, and real cases. They also pointed out that for many people today text messaging is a way of life and can play a role in both the crime and evidence. They talked about statement analysis, a technique they got from the FBI that helps them identify suspects; it relates to how the person describes their relationship with the victim.

One panel discussed problems with cross-genre fiction. Several authors suggested it is more of a publisher than a reader problem. "We do mystery, not science fiction" or "We do science fiction, not mystery." Fortunately, there are publishers who will do cross-genre, but they are rare.

Several writers had interesting promotional ideas from the trenches. There was the usual about the importance of websites, newsletters, and blogs, but don't overdo it. "I may want to hear about a writer, but not daily or weekly, maybe not even monthly." The Minnesota Crime Wave interviews authors for the local PBS station and then provides the video as a webcast (URL). One author said he did a lot of talks to non-book groups and clubs since they are frequently looking for programs. Another author does book signings at libraries instead of bookstores.

Another interesting panel was "Masters of Mystery: Great Mysteries Past and Present." It was less an analysis and more of a brainstorming session of everyone's favorite mystery (or cross-genre) writers and their best work. Everybody, including the panel, left with a long list of new authors to go find. The bookstores in the break room did a booming business after this panel, but they seemed fairly busy throughout the conference. One of them, Rue Morgue Press, seems to fill a unique role. They are reprinting favorites from between the turn of the century and the 1960s. They welcome suggestions for possible reprints. I hope they had somebody at the brainstorming session. ♦

—reported by Olin Bray

Confidentially, She Wrote...

Former SinC Croak and Dagger President (and former federal agent) Lucinda Schroeder is leaving Albuquerque for greener pastures. She and her husband have sold their home and will be relocating to Montrose, in west-central Colorado. Before she left, however, Lucinda spoke at our May chapter meeting on “Confidential Informants.”

An individual who cooperates with police is called a confidential informant (CI) or a confidential participating individual (CPI). Informants provide inside information on criminal activity to local, state, or federal law enforcement agencies. However, they almost always carry extensive personal baggage or have personality traits that can create havoc for their police handler. As a fictional character, an informant can be useful and troublesome at the same time.

Informants often become psychologically dependant on their handler and will request numerous meetings to discuss personal problems. The case becomes secondary to the informant, and the handler finds it challenging to keep the investigation and the informant on track.

Here are six motivations of CPIs that writers may be able to work into their plots:

1. **Money.** Some CPI’s may treat their role as an informant as a job and will pester their law enforcement handlers for more assignments so they can make more money. This can put the agent at odds with the informant, since he wants to keep the informant on line, but doesn’t always have a case going. Some CPIs close to a lucrative criminal enterprise have skimmed off money or salable goods to enhance their economic situation. These are basically double agents.

2. **Work off a sentence.** If you’ve watched the Albuquerque-filmed new series on USA Network, *In Plain Sight*, you know that many CPIs have been or are facing incarceration. Under plea agreements with prosecutors, these individual are given a reduction in sentence in exchange for cooperating with authorities.

3. **Revenge.** Ah, one of the best motivators. CPIs of this type may hope to gain satisfaction from perceived slights, injuries, or financial losses by bringing about the ruin of a rival. It’s not uncommon for a legitimate businessman to inform on a criminal competitor whose activities are undercutting the legal businessman.

4. **Play cop.** The popularity of FBI and police TV shows and movies may help motivate CPI’s to fulfill a fantasy of carrying a badge and a gun. They enjoy the sense of power, which is usually the result of low self-esteem. Law enforcement washouts may fall into this category.

5. **Need for attention.** This is the most psychological of the motivations so far, a condition the CPI is unlikely to admit to others, perhaps not even to himself. He needs positive feedback and reassurance that he’s a good guy. Providing useful information in an investigation makes him feel better. These CPI’s are the most likely to make up evidence and observations to keep the good words coming.

6. **Special expertise.** For example, an art appraiser can be invaluable in solving an art heist. A diamond dealer can detect counterfeits, an orchid grower can curb the illegal orchid trade, and a Chippendale furniture expert can spot smuggled fakes.

Lucinda talked about several informants she has handled during her career, all of whom had their particular quirks that made her investigation more challenging. Her favorite informant story has to do with Myron Strong, an FBI informant who provided inside information to the FBI about organized crime, when in fact he was a member of the Chicago mob. For two years he provided the FBI with false leads while his cohorts committed crimes. He finally slipped up and is now serving time in a federal prison.♦

—reported by Rob Kresge

Michael McGarrity—The Importance of Place

Michael McGarrity began writing in 1982 while working in the New Mexico Department of Corrections but did not get published until 1996. Since then he has established himself as one of New Mexico's preeminent mystery authors by the publication of 12 books, with #13 in the works. The unpublished writers in the audience when McGarrity spoke at Croak & Dagger's June 24 meeting were definitely encouraged by this.

In his presentation, he stressed from the outset that his opinions about writing should be taken as applying to himself and not necessarily to other writers. He described himself as idiosyncratic, even opinionated. Nevertheless, the audience responded to his spirited remarks very favorably and with a great deal of interest and appreciation of his sense of humor.

The central theme of his talk was the importance of place. He said that three things were necessary for him to start working on a book: a working title, a location and a springboard event. The concept of place includes specific details about the landscape, including its animals and vegetation. The social landscape is crucial and so is a character's journey through life—what experiences preceded his arrival at this particular juncture, or “place“. Therefore, a well-crafted backstory is essential; however, to be effective it should be delivered piecemeal to the reader. He likes to create his richly drawn characters in a visual setting.

He does not write explicitly about sex, regarding it very much as private. Perhaps more engaging for the reader, however, he does bring strong sexual tension into relationships between his characters. Often they have a will of their own and have been known to demand reinstatement in the book after being dropped from the narrative.

McGarrity draws on experiences from his long and multi-faceted career in Corrections, which have determined his general perspective. In his opinion, few authors are able to write purely from imagination. Most need to combine imagination with observation of real life. Of course, one's life experience does not cover everything, so there is also much research that needs to be done.

He has drawn much of his inspiration from the work of Tony Hillerman, whom he regards as being amongst the first mystery writers to break away from the formulaic approach common in the earlier stages in the history of the genre. This paradigm change was a watershed event in the practice of mystery writing.

Regarding his own writing practices, he promises himself that the book he is currently working on will be superior to its predecessor, especially with regard to the quality of the writing, the dialogue, and whether the narrative is sufficiently streamlined. He produces a book about every 12-18 months, writing directly on his computer. He does not have rules regarding a specific quota of words or pages for any given day. Some days he completes only a couple of hundred lines, while on others he may complete a whole chapter.♦

—reported by Jonathan Sacks

Michael McGarrity's mystery novels in the Kevin Kerney series include his debut novel, *Tularosa* (nominated for an Anthony award, a Dilys Award, and a Spur Award from the Western Writers of America), *Serpent Gate* (a Booklist top-ten crime novel of 1998-1999), *Under the Color of Law* (a Top 10 bestseller for 2001 of the Independent Mystery Booksellers Association). His most recently published novel is *Death Song*.

Broaden Your Horizons at a Writers' Conference (Part 2)

Haven't made up your mind if a writers' conference is for you? Maybe you missed the deadline to sign up for one of those listed in the May *Nooseletter*. Never fear—there are always more. Here's a nudge and a list of some conferences being held through the end of 2008. For more information, check them out individually online. (Listings from www.blackravenpress.com/calendar.)

Sept 12-14

Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers **Colorado Gold Annual Writers Conference**. Featuring actively acquiring agents and editors whom you can meet and pitch your projects to, guest speakers to encourage and inspire you, and workshops on every topic under the sun related to the art of writing and the business of selling commercial novel-length fiction. Contact: www.rmfs.org.

Oct 9-12

Bouchercon 2008 – Charmed to Death, Baltimore, MD. The largest annual mystery conference (1,500 attendees). US Guest of Honor: Laura Lippman. International Guest of Honor: John Harvey. Toastmaster: Mark Billingham. Contact: ruth@crimespreemag.com.



Oct 22-Nov 1

International Festival of Authors, Toronto, Canada. Mystery and suspense authors scheduled to appear include Mark Billingham, Jeffery Deaver, Linda Grant, Dennis Lehane, Louise Penny, Peter Robinson, and Gillian Slovo. Contact: readings@harbourfrontcentre.com.

Oct 24-26

Magna Cum Murder, Muncie, IN. 15th annual conference. Guest of honor: Louise Penny. Keynote speaker: Sharon Randall. Contact: magnacummurder@yahoo.com.

Oct 31-Nov 2

Great Manhattan Mystery Conclave, Manhattan, KS. The fifth year for this celebration of small-town mysteries. Guest of honor: JoAnna Carl. Contact: marolync@flinthills.com

Nov 5-9

Tony Hillerman Writers Conference: Focus on Mystery, Albuquerque, NM. Featured authors include Michael McGarrity, Craig Johnson, Pari Noskin Taichert, Sandi Ault, Paula Paul, Judith Van Gieson, Steve Havill, and Joe Badal. Check the website for information on the Tony Hillerman Mystery Short Story Contest (\$1,500 prize and publication in *Cowboys & Indians* magazine) and prize for best first mystery novel (\$10,000 advance and publication by the Thomas Dunne imprint of St. Martin's Press). Contact: wordharvest@wordharvest.com

Nov 8

Murder and Mayhem in Muskego, Muskego, WI. A one-day conference for fan, readers, and writers of mysteries. Attending authors include Dennis Lehane, Judy Clemons, Charles Todd. Contact: www.murderandmayhem.com.

Nov 14-16

New England Crime Bake, Boston, MA, area. Seventh annual conference for mystery writers and readers, co-sponsored by Scarlet Letters (New England Sisters in Crime) and the Mystery Writers of America New England Chapter. This year's theme is "Playbook for Murder." Guest of Honor: Harlan Coben. Contact: contact@crimebake.org

ROB'S RANDOM SHOTS

July Case File Number One

As you've probably noticed, all my reviews each issue reflect strict gender equality: one book by a female author, the next by a male. Well, not this time. I wanted so badly to review these two novels for you in the same issue that I'm going to indulge in a little pro-female-author bias this time. Easy to do, since both these established authors have accomplished voices, rave reviews, and awards to their credit.

This Dame for Hire by Sandra Scoppettone. Ballantine Books, 2005. 253 pp (HC)

Sandra Scoppettone is best known as the author of the Lauren Laurano contemporary PI series. But this novel and its sequel, *Too Darn Hot*, are World War II homefront noir with a neat twist.

New York, 1943: Almost everyone in pants has gone off to serve Uncle Sam, including PI Woody Mason. He leaves his agency in the uncertain hands of his secretary, Faye Quick, who soon hires her own secretary and becomes a gumshoe in high heels. If you find "gumshoe" difficult to fathom, this is not the book for you. Cover to cover, it is replete with 1940s slang for everything, including gams, eyeballing, cig, rag, yakety-yak, and everything you may remember from movies or, if you're old enough, from personal experience.

Faye's first case involves a slain college student who may have been pregnant. She faces a dizzying array of suspects, from Greenwich Village Bohemians to Fifth Avenue "swells," actors to college professors. There's plenty of opposition not only to her taking this case, but to a dame pretending to be a PI. And she faces her share of danger, finally deciding she'd better start packing Woody's old "gat." You know what that is by now?

Reminiscent of the best 1940's LA private eye movies, the dialogue crackles with wit, as do Faye's internal monologues. Scoppettone

wisely tells the tale from Faye's first-person POV. I received this book as a freebie at the Left Coast Crime conference in Denver last March, and I hope to find the sequel soon. Look for *This Dame for Hire* in the book exchange box at our meetings. It's too good not to share. ♦

—Rob Kresge (rkresge777@comcast.net)

Key:

PB = Paperback

TP = Trade paperback

HC = Hardcover

July Case File Number Two

The Song Is You by Megan Abbott. Simon and Schuster, 2006, 242 pp (HC)

Let's switch coasts and step forward into the next decade. *Noir* mistress Megan Abbott's novel take place in early 1950s Los Angeles. Movies are king, radio is second, and there is no viable television yet. Abbott not only drops the names of real stars, they make appearances in this novel and in some cases speak with the principals. A few, like Bob Cummings, Franchot Tone, Kirk Douglas, Tyrone Power, and Tom Neal, turn up as suspects, and a few stars even interact with the principal characters.

But this is nastier noir than my other July pick. Bad language and low-lives abound. B-girls try to become actresses and sometimes have to visit abortionists. If the underbelly of Tinsel-town doesn't appeal to you, take the New York novel.

There are no real chapters in this book, just notes that the scene has changed, or the point of view character has. But 90% of the action and internal monologue belong to the protagonist (if he can be called that), Hollywood publicity flack Gil "Hop" Hopkins. It seems that two years earlier, he was involved as a procurer for the stars, sending off two girls, black Iolene and white Jean Spangler, with a noted movie song-and-dance team. Jean never comes back and her purse is found in a park the next day. Now Iolene's crisis of conscience begins to shake

what few shreds of conscience Hop still possesses, so he starts his own investigation.

We get movie stars, minor celebrities, bar girls, and two newsies, a friends of Hop's who's now married to his ex-wife, and Frannie Adair, a possible love interest, but definitely a competitor in solving the disappearance. And since Hop feels responsible for that drunken night's outcome, if she uncovers the truth before he does, there may be legal ramifications, not to mention bad publicity for some stars.

I'll withhold the denouement, but I found it interesting at the end to find out that this is a real unsolved case. Abbott has done a fine job in inserting the reader so effortlessly into history that we don't know she's done that until the book is over. She is also the author of two other *noir* stand-alones, the well-received *Die a Little* and this year's Edgar-award winner for best paperback original *Queenpin*. Look for *The Song Is You* in a book exchange box near you.♦

—Rob Kresge (rkresge777@comcast.net)

Miracle Myx by Dave Diotalevi. Largo FL, Kunati, 2008. 277 pp (HC)

I've died twice.

So far.

But, then again, I'm only fourteen.

Thus begins Diotalevi's first-person-present first novel of a few days in the life of Myx Amens, whose real first name isn't Myx and whose last name may not be Amens, but then you never know. Myx has awakened twice in the "glow room," the waiting room en route to whatever lies beyond the morgue in Miracle, Massachusetts' Regional Hospital. The first time was when he and his grandmother were struck by lightning while raising his tent at the Scout Jamboree. Grandma walked out through the glow room wall. Myx coughed. In the words of Dr. Fabrizio, the Medical Examiner, "You were colder and stiller than she is. Then you coughed and scared the shit out of me." The second time was when "the Indian" tried to drown 11-year-old Myx in a 55-gallon drum.

"She," in this case, is—or was—Shelly Powell, high school hottie and "resident bitch queen," whose death, reported on page 23, complicates Myx's life in the person of Mrs.

Patty Powell, the dead girl's mother. After assurance that Myx could



not have killed Shelly, Mrs. Powell engages him to apply his capabilities toward identifying Shelly's killer.

Oh, yes, his capabilities. Myx's first "death" imbued him with total recall. His second rendered him polymodally synesthetic; i.e., he could "hear colors, taste shapes, smell sounds, and all sorts of other combinations," including the ability to recall them whenever it was advantageous. And besides that, he hadn't slept in three years, ever since his second death. That gave him plenty of time to practice petty B&Es, or at least Es, of the homes and offices of the residents of Miracle. Myx's stepfather is a locksmith, which affords him the opportunity to apply his total recall to duplicating strategic keys he happens to observe.

If my description starts to remind you of Dean Koontz's *Odd Thomas*, there is a slight similarity: both *Odd* and *Myx* talk to and, more important, listen to the dead, albeit employing different techniques with different results. Myx's are more transcendental, requiring analyses that lead to clues to clues. Otherwise the two protagonists seem to be making their ways through parallel universes. Of course, the differences between a teen and an adult male lead to major differences in point of view, with Myx's frequently ranging from pubescently raunchy to moderately pornographic, yet always possessed of understated wry humor.

The backstory of the town's origins is complex; its historical eccentricities and those of its founder occasionally strain the reader's credulity. One wonders whether the author's disgorgement of the town's and residents' secrets will preclude his using the setting for a sequel, or whether he might have been more frugal by relegating a few arcane details to future volumes.

The book is a fun read. Myx's character is sufficiently well developed to both strain and fulfill the reader's acceptance of his afflictions—or are they really attributes? Although the minor characters tend toward less well-developed dimensions, Diotalevi manages to keep them teetering on the brink between credibility and fantasy. After all, we are viewing the world through the eyes of a 14-year-old boy who's died twice. ♦

—Ira Rimson (*irimson02@comcast.net*)

The Celestial Buffet: and Other Morsels of Murder by Susan Dunlap. Norfolk, Crippen & Landru Publishers, 2001; 213 pp.

The Celestial Buffet is the first collection of mystery short stories by Susan Dunlap, likely better known for her novels featuring Berkeley detective Jill Smith (10) and M.E.-turned-P.I. Kiernan O'Shaughnessy (4), as well as meter-reader Vejay Haskell (3) and Buddhist stuntwoman Darcy Lott (2). Yet, lest readers be awed by the superfluity of her riches, Dunlap is easily as comfortable with short stories, as the 17 gems that make up this anthology attest.

In her introduction, Dunlap admits to loving short stories. For her they are a vacation, especially from series characters, whose established baggage limits the imagination within which they can operate—but not much, as these stories show. Short stories afford Dunlap the opportunity to be playful and whimsical, to invent new characters with limited investment, to get revenge: "...the driver who cuts me off... becomes not an irritant but an inspiration." True enough, as the driver relegated to "pick-up hell" in her story has found out.

Four of the stories feature Jill Smith and the denizens of Berkeley: there's the P.I. being blackmailed by one of his former clients, the overstressed postal patron who takes the main Post Office hostage, and the lady dog-walkers with their secrets.

In his two stories, the Celestial Detective is stuck in Purgatory because of his inability to accept forgiveness for all his existential

misdeeds. He insists on knowing the breadth of the divine pardon and, more frustrating, the circumstances surrounding his death. Frustrating because the one eternal mental blank in the memory of each of the newly dead is what happened on the day of his or her death.

Kiernan O'Shaughnessy turns up in one story, Mullin the murderer-for-hire in another, and a would-be murderess who was just too careless to read the directions. Each of the stories is precision in its own right, whether populated with series or one-shot characters. The shortest story is two pages; the longest about two dozen. "A Surfeit of Deadline" would be especially valuable for writers harassed to meet deadline by an editor who's heard all the excuses before.

Dunlap's loving care for the short story is evident throughout this small volume. The fun she had writing them shines through the text. It might even match the snicker of those who recognize the namesakes of the book's publishing house. See www.crippenlandru.com for a publisher's website that is as well designed as any I've seen. ♦

—Ira Rimson (*irimson02@comcast.net*)

Temporary Sanity by Rose Connors. Scribner's, New York, 2003, 308 pp. (HC)

Authors of legal mysteries must have difficulty deciding at which point along the genre's continuum to site their story. At one end are courtroom thrillers where clues pop up during trial (think Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason) and the dénouement comes to the villain on the witness stand. At the other end (e.g., Harper Lee's Atticus Finch) the protagonist just happens to be a lawyer whose point of view teases out often-complex plots that are shaped as much by the foibles of the characters as their professional environments.

The latter is the case of Rose Connors' protagonist Marty Nickerson. She is in transition from the role of chief assistant to the assistant chief District Attorney of Barnstable County, Massachusetts, to the more capricious and challenging persona of itinerant defense

attorney with neither portfolio nor mindset as yet established. She has been taken aboard by Harry Madigan, former county public defender who has recently transitioned to private practice.

Their first shot is defending Buck Hammond, who put a rifle bullet into the head of the man who kidnapped, sodomized, and murdered Buck's son, while media videotapes were rolling. At first cut it looks like a natural for a temporary insanity plea. Of course, that's precisely what the D.A. expects and on which he has formulated his prosecution. The act was memorialized on video, and the defendant admits to his premeditation. Slam Dunk! Or so it would seem.

As Marty and Harry prepare their temporary insanity defense for the opening day of Buck's trial, the battered wife of the county's meanest probation officer shows up at their office for help. Her situation has been complicated by the discovery of her husband's inert body on the family's living room couch. Trying to juggle two seemingly guilty-beyond-a-reasonable-doubt clients stretches the legal team, including its neophyte associate Kevin Kydd ("The Kid," of course), to its limits of ingenuity and physical stamina.

Connors' unerring sense of place shows us Cape Cod in December: cold and damp permeate centuries-old clapboard houses lacking central heating; fog creeps under doorsills and through clothing. The setting seems to inform the personalities of the local characters as well, steeling them equally against intrusions by other humans as by climate. The cast of characters is well drawn and includes both the sympathetic and likeable, and those warped by ambition, arrogance, and evil. The frenetic pace set by preparation for the Hammond trial's impending commencement, compounded by the intruding side-plots, are hooks that Connors develops into deft McGuffins.

Temporary Sanity is Connors second novel. Her first, *Absolute Certainty*, was a finalist for the Mary Higgins Clark award. As an attorney, she knows the legal side of the story. It's her depiction of the human foibles of her characters

that raises this story above the mundane. It is quite literally a page-turner. Highly recommended. ♦

—Ira Rimson (*irimson02@comcast.net*)

Noose News

An Anthony Nomination for Pari

Mystery writer Pari Noskin Taichert has been nominated for a prestigious Anthony Award for Best Mystery Website. As a founder and regular blogger for *Murderati.com*, Taichert—and her co-bloggers—will be honored at the 39th annual Bouchercon in Baltimore in October.

The website, a blog devoted to mystery writing and book marketing, ran its first post on April 3, 2006. It features a comprehensive list of mystery events and conventions. Visit Pari's blog and join her for a pre-conference workshop on marketing for authors and sessions during the Tony Hillerman Writer's Conference: Focus on Mystery, November 5-9.

Lifetime Achievement Award for Tony Hillerman

Tony Hillerman, author of the critically acclaimed mystery series set on the Navajo Nation, received the Owen Wister Award for lifetime contribution to Western literature from the Western Writers of America. The award was presented in June during the organization's annual convention. The nonprofit group was founded in 1953 to promote and recognize literature of the American West.

"Tony Hillerman is truly a national treasure, bringing all of us wonderful stories of the modern West while giving us memorable glimpses of the distinctive ways of the Navajo Nation," WWA President Cotton Smith says. "Western Writers of America is proud to present him with the Owen Wister Award for lifetime achievement." Tony hopes to attend the conference named for him in November.

2008 “Edgar” Award Nominees and Winners

This year’s Edgar Awards ceremony, presented by the Mystery Writers of America (MWA) took place in New York City on May 1. Below is a partial list of categories. (Bold type indicates winners.)

Best Novel

Priest by Ken Bruen (St. Martin’s Minotaur)

***Christine Falls* by Benjamn Black (Henry Holt & Company)**

The Yiddish Policemen’s Union by Michael Chabon (HarperCollins)

Soul Patch by Reed Farrel Coleman (Bleak House Books)

Down River by John Hart (St. Martin’s Minotaur)

Best First Novel by an American Author

Missing Witness by Gordon Campbell (HarperCollins—William Morrow)

Snitch Jacket by Christopher Goffard (The Rookery Press)

***In the Woods* by Tana French (Penguin Group—Viking)**

Head Games by Craig McDonald (Bleak House Books)

Pyres by Derek Nikitas (St. Martin’s Minotaur)



Best Paperback Original

Blood of Paradise by David Corbett (Random House – Mortalis)

Cruel Poetry by Vicki Hendricks (Serpent’s Tail)

Robbie’s Wife by Russell Hill (Hard Case Crime)

Who is Conrad Hirst? By Kevin Wignall (Simon & Schuster)

***Queenpin* by Megan Abbott (Simon & Shuster)**

Best Critical/Biographical

The Triumph of the Thriller: How Cops, Crooks and Cannibals Captured Popular Fiction by Patrick Anderson (Random House)

A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational by Maurizio Ascari (Palgrave Macmillan)

Deviance in Contemporary Crime Fiction by Christiana Gregoriou (Palgrave Macmillan)

***Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters* by Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower, and Charles Foley (The Penguin Press)**

Chester Gould: A Daughter’s Biography of the Creator of Dick Tracy by Jean Gould O’Connell (McFarland & Company)

Best Short Story

“The Catch” by Mark Ammons, in *Still Waters* (Level Best Books)

“Blue Note” by Stuart M. Kaminsky, in *Chicago Blues* (Bleak House Books).

“Hardly Knew Her” by Laura Lippman, in *Dead Man’s Hand* (Harcourt Trade Publishers)

“The Golden Gopher” by Susan Straight, in *Los Angeles Noir* (Akashic Books)

“Uncle” by Daniel Woodrell, in *A Hell of a Woman* (Busted Flush Press)

The Simon & Schuster Mary Higgins Clark Award

In Cold Pursuit by Sarah Andrews (St. Martin’s Minotaur)

***Wild Indigo* by Sandi Ault (Penguin – Berkley Prime Crime)**

Inferno by Karen Harper (Harlequin – MIRA Books)

The First Stone by Judith Eklman (Penguin Group – Berkley Prime Crime)

Deadman’s Switch by Barbara Seranella (St. Martin’s Minotaur)

Best Fact Crime

The Birthday Party by Stanley Alpert (Penguin Group – G.P. Putnam’s Sons)

Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy by Vincent Bugliosi (W.W. Norton and Company)

Relentless Pursuit: A True Story of Family, Murder, and the Prosecutor Who Wouldn’t Quit by Kevin Flynn (Penguin Group – G.P. Putnam’s Sons)

***Chasing Justice: My Story of Freeing Myself After Two Decades on Death Row for a Crime I Didn’t Commit* by Kerry Max Cook (HarperCollins – William Morrow)**

Sacco & Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders and the Judgment of Mankind by Bruce Watson (Penguin Group - Viking)

2008 “Agatha” Award Nominees and Winners

The 2008 Agatha Awards were presented at the Malice Domestic XX convention during the awards banquet on May 3. Below is a partial list. (Bold type indicates winners.)

Best Novel

The Penguin Who Knew Too Much by Donna Andrews (St. Martin’s Minotaur)

Her Royal Spyness by Rhys Bowen (Penguin Group)

Hard Row by Margaret Maron (Grand Central Publishing)

***A Fatal Grace* by Louise Penny (St. Martin’s Minotaur)**

Murder with Reservations by Elaine Viets (NAL)



Best First Novel

A Beautiful Blue Death by Charles Finch (St. Martin’s Minotaur)

A Real Basket Case by Beth Groundwater (Five Star)

***Prime Time* by Hank Phillippi Ryan (Harlequin)**

Silent in the Grave by Deanna Raybourn (MIRA)

Best Nonfiction

The Official Nancy Drew Handbook by Penny Warner (Quirck Productions))

***Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters* by Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower, and Charles Foley (The Penguin Press)**

Best Short Story

“A Rat’s Tale” by Donna Andrews, in *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* (Sept/Oct 2007)

“Please Watch Your Step” by Rhys Bowen, in *The Strand* (Spring 2007).

“Casino Gamble” by Nan Higginson, in *Murder New York Style* (L&L Dreamspell)

“Death Will Clean Your Closet” by Elizabeth Zelvin, in *Murder New York Style* (L&L Dreamspell)

Best Children’s/Young Adult

Bravo Zulu, Samantha! by Kathleen Benner Duple (Peachtree Publishers)

Cover-Up Mystery at the Super Bowl by John Feinstein (Knopf – Random House)

***A Light in the Cellar* by Sarah Masters Buckey (American Girl)**

The Falconer’s Knot by Mary Hoffman Bloomsbury (USA Children’s Books)

Theodosia and the Serpents of Chaos by R.L. LaFevers (Houghton Mifflin)

2008 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, July 22, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, August 26, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, September 23, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, October 28, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, November 25, 7:00 p.m.
December TBA

Meetings are free to the public.

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

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

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

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. ♦

†Nooseletter Submissions†

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

Length: Articles should average 500 words, but short items are also welcome.

Deadlines: Publication is every other month, starting in January. Submission deadlines are the 15th of the month prior to publication: Feb 15, April 15, June 15, Aug 15, Oct 15, and Dec 15.

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

Submissions: Please submit via e-mail to newsette@earthlink.net, with "Nooseletter" in the subject line.

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

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Still not a member of Sisters in Crime?

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

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

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

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

Summary of the Board Meeting Minutes of Sisters in Crime Croak & Dagger Chapter, ABQ, NM, 2 June 2008

The meeting was called to order at 7:15 p.m. at the home of Secretary/Treasurer Cheri Stow. Board members present: Rob Kresge (President), Cheri Stow (Secretary/Treasurer), Jonathan Sacks (Membership), Sarah Schwartz (Website Technical Support Manager), Linda Triegel (*Nooseletter* Editor), and Ruth Jimenez (Program Chair).

Old Business:

Tony Hillerman will be our July speaker, and Rob will write up both his talk and the announcement for the *Nooseletter*. Detective Brazas, a police forensic artist, will be our August speaker. In September, we will hold the Mystery Dinner instead of our regularly scheduled meeting. Ruth and Jen Williams will be looking for a play and a venue. With the October meeting, mystery writer Lynn Hinton will be our speaker. She has a new book coming out in July, the third in the Shady Grove Series, called *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*. Rob will do the write-up. As of yet, we do not have a speaker for the meeting in November. At the December meeting, we will feature as many of our author or writer members who care to contribute speaking for five minutes about their current "Works in Progress." Sort of like a panel. Rob will send around a sign-in sheet with pen on a clipboard at the start of each monthly meeting. He will also ask for brief (no longer than one-minute) reports of any writing successes or readers who've discovered an author they'd like to recommend. Volunteers will be asked to stand up at meetings to mention success of new authors, such as our web-mistress Sarah Schwartz receiving first place in a writers contest.

New Business:

Rob reports that we are doing well in publicity and meetings. He will find info on a mystery writers group in the area for possible new members to join Sisters in Crime. Also, he will find out which libraries would like authors to be speakers.

The election for new officers will be in November. Our Vice president resigned, and the VP slot is now vacant. The national SinC blogs: Rob will take some stuff off the blog and forward it to our C&D chat room. Sarah agreed to restrict author links on the C&D website to authors who are members of our chapter. Rob will ask her to link to NM authors who are members of National SinC but may not have joined our chapter.

We all agreed that a computer projector for use by our speakers would be a good investment. We will scout out prices on them, along with compatibility with current and previous Windows/Vista applications and whether it would work with a Mac, as well as replacement parts costs.

Program chair: Ruth continues to work on getting us a visit to the police communications center, but recognizes that that may not happen this year. Ruth also confirmed and reported on the speakers for the rest of the year (see old news above).

Secretary/Treasurer: Cheri reports our finances are doing well. We have one new member from the February conference, and seven renewals.

Membership: Jonathan purchased some "forever" stamps and was reimbursed. He suggested we have sign-up sheet at meetings to pass around, in order to make sure all members are accounted for. He reports we have 76 members total.

Web mistress: Sarah says the website features a link for a speaker's bureau. It lists members who are a good source for tapping into for a topic of expertise and anyone who wishes to add their name should contact her.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m. for dessert.

—Submitted by Cheri Stow, Secretary/Treasurer