

Sisters
in
Crime †

SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume VII, Number 6 — November 2011

†Expert Testimony†

The mysteries we read always have a solution. We may not be able to figure it out or there may be a surprising twist, but there is always an answer. Unfortunately, real life mysteries don't always seem to have an answer and the best we can do is try to ask the right questions and consider the possibilities.

I think that is what is happening with all of the changes in the publishing and writing business. It is obviously changing things for writers, but it is also changing things for readers.

Several months ago I wrote about the closing of Borders, but concluded that there would still be a lot of bookstores – both the large ones and the smaller independent ones. However, the question may be, what will they have to sell? There will always be books – mysteries, other fiction, and non-fiction – but in what form?

One trend we have all seen is the shift to eBooks. For the first seven months of this year eBook sales were \$560.5 million, up 152% over the comparable period last year. While in July eBook sales were only 6% of total book sales, they were 22% of adult, children, and young adult sales. However, also in July adult paperback and mass market paperback sales were both down 29%.

From these numbers, it seems like eBook sales are growing much faster in some segments than in others and cannibalizing hardcopy sales in those segments. If this trend continues, are bookstores likely to reduce their inventory in those segments since you don't need to go to a

bookstore to order an eBook? If so, could this lead to a downward spiral – a smaller selection of these types of books in the bookstore, so more people order eBook versions which leads to still fewer sales of these types of books in the bookstore and still smaller inventories of them.... Could this lead to smaller, more boutique bookstores focusing on certain genres?

We all know of a few specialized mystery or science fiction bookstores, but they stand out because they are the exception. Will the current trend in eBooks result in more of these bookstores? The downside is that sometimes you just want to browse and find a good book, not a particular type of book, just one that catches your interest. For that you need a broad selection, not a single genre. The counter to that possible "overspecialization" may be the Barnes & Noble approach of allowing you to come in and browse through their eBook collection (reading of them for up to an hour) and then ordering what you like.

The other trend is self-publishing or going without a major publisher. eBooks and print on demand (POD) allow authors to do this. There is a lot of discussion of what this trend means for writers, but it also has potential implications for readers. The general advice seems to be that a best-selling author with a big following can probably do very well with eBooks and self-publishing. But for the new writer without a big following or name, the only guarantee is that their book will be out there, not that many people will hear about it and buy it.

(continued page 6)

Don't Miss It!

Tuesday, November 22, at 7 p.m.

Technology, especially information technology, is rapidly changing police procedures, crime, and intelligence analysis, such as for counterterrorism. Our speaker for November is Croak & Dagger president Olin Bray, who will provide some previews of these new procedures.

Terms like data mining, link analysis, neutral networks, and machine learning may not mean anything to you. However, some of their results, in law enforcement and intelligence, can make us all safer, although if pushed too far, some of these techniques can raise privacy issues.

For writers, they can also provide a lot of plot ideas, puzzles, red herrings, and good stories. Today a detective who can't use fingerprinting, DNA analysis, computers, and forensic science is hopelessly out of date. In 10 to 20 years a detective or intelligence analyst who can't use these new tools will similarly be out of date, especially when faced with criminals and terrorists who understand and can use or avoid these technologies.

Olin Bray retired from Sandia National Labs after 18 years working in information technology, intelligence, and nonproliferation. Most of his work focused on how new information technologies and capabilities could change, often drastically, the way we do things and even allow us to do completely new things.

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.

C&D meetings are held in the police briefing room of the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Substation, 12700 Montgomery NE (1 block east of Tramway). Unless otherwise noted, programs are free and open to the public.



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

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

And our motto is: "SinC into a good mystery!"

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

www.croak-and-dagger.com

- Upcoming Programs
- 2011 Meeting Schedule
- Membership Form
- Speakers Bureau
- Links to Mystery Websites & Websites for Your Favorite Croak & Dagger Authors
- *The Nooseletter* Archive

AND: Remember that all members are invited to join the Croak & Dagger Yahoo group, an online gathering place for mystery writers. Join in! Log on to C&D's web page (www.croak-and-dagger.com) and click on the link to moderator Nancy Varian for instructions. Exchange news and information about mystery books, movies, and TV shows, as well as online courses.

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Amazon Signs Up Authors, Writing Publishers Out of Deal

[The following is excerpted from an article in the New York Times of October 17]

SEATTLE — *Amazon.com* has taught readers that they do not need bookstores. Now it is encouraging writers to cast aside their publishers.

Amazon will publish 122 books this fall in an array of genres, in both physical and e-book form. It is a striking acceleration of the retailer's fledgling publishing program that will place Amazon squarely in competition with the New York houses that are also its most prominent suppliers.

It has set up a flagship line run by a publishing veteran, Laurence Kirshbaum, to bring out brand-name fiction and nonfiction. It signed its first deal with the self-help author Tim Ferriss. Last week it announced a memoir by the actress and director Penny Marshall, for which it paid \$800,000, a person with direct knowledge of the deal said.

Publishers say Amazon is aggressively wooing some of their top authors. And the company is gnawing away at the services that publishers, critics and agents used to provide. Several large publishers declined to speak on the record about Amazon's efforts. "Publishers are terrified and don't know what to do," said Dennis Loy Johnson of Melville House, who is known for speaking his mind.

"Everyone's afraid of Amazon," said Richard Curtis, a longtime agent who is also an e-book publisher. "If you're a bookstore, Amazon has been in competition with you for some time. If you're a publisher, one day you wake up and Amazon is competing with you too. And if you're an agent, Amazon may be stealing your lunch because it is offering authors the opportunity to publish directly and cut you out."

Russell Grandinetti, one of Amazon's top executives pointed out that the landscape was in some ways changing for the first time since Gutenberg invented the modern book nearly 600 years ago. "The only really necessary people in the publishing process now are the writer and reader," he said. "Everyone who stands between those two has both risk and opportunity."

For a sense of how rattled publishers are by Amazon's foray into their business, consider the case of Kiana Davenport, a Hawaiian writer whose career abruptly derailed last month. In 2010 Ms. Davenport signed with Riverhead Books, a division of Penguin, for *The Chinese Soldier's Daughter*, a Civil War love story. She received a \$20,000 advance for the book, which was supposed to come out next summer.

If writers have one message drilled into them these days, it is this: hustle yourself. So Ms. Davenport took off the shelf several award-winning short stories she had written 20 years ago and packaged them in an e-book, *Cannibal Nights*, available on Amazon.

When Penguin found out, it went "ballistic," Ms. Davenport wrote on her blog, accusing her of breaking her contractual promise to avoid competing with it. It wanted *Cannibal Nights* removed from sale and all mentions of it deleted from the Internet. Ms. Davenport refused, so Penguin canceled her novel and is suing her to recover the advance.

"They're trying to set an example: If you self-publish and distribute with Amazon, you do so at your own risk," said Jan Constantine, a lawyer with the Authors Guild who has represented Ms. Davenport.

The writer knows her crime: "sleeping with the enemy." Penguin declined to comment.

If some writers are suffering collateral damage, others are benefiting from this new setup. Laurel Saville was locked out by the old system, when New York publishers were the gatekeepers. "I got lots and lots of praise but no takers," said Ms. Saville, a business writer who lives in Little Falls, N.Y.

Two years ago she decided to pay for the publication of her memoir about her mother's descent from California beauty queen to street person to murder victim. She spent about \$2,200, which yielded sales of 600 copies. Not horrible but far from earth-shaking.

Last fall, Ms. Saville paid \$100 to be included in a *Publishers Weekly* list of self-published writers. The magazine ended up reviewing her memoir, giving it a mixed notice that nevertheless caught the attention of Amazon editors. They sent Ms. Saville an e-mail offering to republish the book. It got an editorial once-over, a new cover and a new title: *Unraveling Anne*. It will be published next month.

Ms. Saville did not get any money upfront, as she would have if a traditional publisher had picked up her memoir. In essence, Amazon has become her partner.

“I assume they want to make a lot of money off the book, which is encouraging to me,” said Ms. Saville, who negotiated her deal without an agent. Her contract has a clause that forbids her from discussing the details, which is not traditional in publishing. The publicity plans for the book are also secret.

Can Amazon secretly create its own best sellers? *The Hangman’s Daughter* was an e-book hit. Amazon bought the rights to the historical novel by a first-time writer, Oliver Pötzsch, and had it translated from German. It has now sold 250,000 digital copies.

“The great and fascinating thing about Amazon’s publishing program is that there can be these grass-roots phenomena,” said Bruce Nichols of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, which republished the novel this summer.

Ms. Saville no longer even contemplates a career with a traditional publisher. “They had their shot,” she said. She is now writing a novel. “My hope is Amazon will think it’s wonderful and we’ll go happily off into the publishing sunset,” she said.

Don’t forget that this year’s election for Croak & Dagger officers will be held at the November meeting. All dues-paying members are eligible to vote. If you cannot attend the November meeting, please e-mail your vote to membership chair Pat Wood at pwood73@comcast.net **no later than noon on November 21**. Ballots will be distributed and counted at the November 22 meeting and the results announced at the end. The board officially takes office in December.

The E-Book Revolution: Different Music, Same Song...

by Moira Allen

These days, it seems as if every writer’s magazine, newsletter, blog and whatever is talking about “e-books.” The age of the e-book is upon us, we are told. E-books are the hot new thing. E-books are going to change EVERYTHING.

And there is no doubt that the world of the e-book itself has changed. Finally, thanks primarily to Kindle, there is a hand-held reader that book-lovers can embrace. Yes, I know there are other hand-helds out there, but there’s no question that Kindle both started the pack and is leading the pack, with the highest market share of any e-reader and the highest volume of e-book sales.

What the Kindle has done, at long last, is make electronic texts “readable” for the average individual. When the “day of the e-book” was proclaimed over a decade ago, the problem was that you had to read them on your computer. Since the vast majority of “book lovers” like to curl up in a comfy chair, or sit on the deck, or read on the beach, or lie in a hammock, being chained to a computer screen to read the latest Clive Cussler just didn’t cut it.

Now, with today’s hand-helds, you can read in the hammock or on the beach or on a plane or up in a treehouse. And suddenly, hundreds of thousands of readers are buying e-books. I’ve already

noticed that my DogEar Publishing POD title sells more electronic copies than print copies, and Amazon announced in May that they were selling more e-books than print. (I suspect these figures apply only to the sales of NEW books and not to the millions of used books sold in Amazon's "marketplace.")

So far, so good. That's the "new music" that we're hearing. There's a new way to read e-books that people actually LIKE (including me), so people are buying and reading e-books. Unfortunately, that has led many pundits and self-proclaimed experts to jump, once again, on the "bright and shining future for all writers" bandwagon.

At last, we're told, the future of publishing is in the hands of WRITERS. Or, at least, it WILL be in the hands of writers. Soon. Any day now. The day of the dinosaur publishing company, cranking out its antique "print" books, and turning away worthy writers by the score, is over. I've already read several articles that declare that, in another ten years (or less), print publishing will be a thing of the past. The age of the "independent publisher"—the author/publisher—is upon us. All you need to do is polish up your opus, get it formatted for Kindle, load it up on Amazon, and voila! Fame and fortune will be yours.

I hate to rain on these pundits' parades, but... we've heard it before. And it simply isn't true. It wasn't true ten years ago and it isn't true today, for the same reasons. Just because a platform EXISTS doesn't mean it's going to "change the world" for independent writers, or wipe out those mean, nasty, greedy "corporate" publishers.

Yes, readers are embracing e-books, and buying them by the thousands. But what, exactly, are readers buying? Well... They're buying Clive Cussler, and Mary Higgins Clark, and Stephen King, and any of a thousand other authors, bestselling and mid-selling and barely-a-trickle selling, who are published BY MAJOR PUBLISHERS.

Readers are buying the SAME books they bought in print, written by the same authors, published by the same publishers. Only the format has changed. And who's producing (and profiting from) the vast majority of e-books being sold today? Big publishers. Folks, the dinosaurs aren't going anywhere. They may change their skins, but they're definitely not dying off just so that us little indie-mammals can have a chance to take over the earth.

It is certainly true that the new advances in electronic publishing offer new opportunities to writers. It is true that it is now easier than ever before to get an e-book "published" and up for sale on Amazon and elsewhere. But NOTHING ELSE HAS CHANGED. If you don't have a good book, it's not going to sell. If you can't effectively promote and market your book, it's not going to sell. And if, as happened with the first wave of e-books, the market becomes flooded with bad self-published offerings, potential readers are going to learn to shy away from ALL "indie" offerings, because it will become too hard to sort out the wheat from the chaff. When that happens, only the corporate dinosaurs win.

Don't get me wrong. I think the "e-book revolution" is a great thing. I am delighted that more readers are finding me on Kindle—because that means I have more readers! (I'm not so delighted that I make about half as much money from those sales....) I'm definitely planning to get more of my work out there on Kindle.

But don't mistake a new format for the "miracle cure" that will get your languishing book "published" at last. Don't imagine that if you post it, they will come. Nothing's going to make a BAD self-published book a success, and only one thing will make a GOOD self-published book successful: Lots and lots of hard work.

*Moira Allen is the Editor of "Writing World," an online newsletter for writers of all interests.
Subscription is free at <http://www.writing-world.com>.*

(continued from page 1)

In either case, the author must be willing to do (or pay someone else to do) the many things a publisher does. In a sense this is the reverse of outsourcing. The author now has to write the book, do the artwork, print it, market it, and distribute it. An author has to decide to be either a full-time writer or a part-time writer and a part-time small business owner and do a lot of other things in addition to writing. For a new writer only able to write part time, the problem is even more difficult.

What does this trend mean for the reader? If you are reading the best-selling authors, you probably won't see much change. Their work will probably still be available in electronic and paper form, although they may emphasize the eBook version if they are getting a larger royalty from those sales. Even with higher royalties, most of them probably will not want to go exclusively electronic and risk losing those readers who haven't started using eBooks yet.

The real benefit for readers will probably be that they will have a much broader choice of books and authors since the publishers' veto power of what gets published will disappear. Unfortunately, this benefit is also the downside. Whatever your opinion of the publishers, they have at least saved us from having to wade through a lot of real garbage. And unfortunately they also saved us from some books that could have been real masterpieces. We've all heard about the best seller that was rejected by dozens or hundreds of publishers. As readers we will need to find a different filtering mechanism, but I am sure that will happen.

As I said at the start, for some real-life mysteries there is no answer, just questions. If I were writing this column 15 or 20 years from now, I might have an answer but not now. Life isn't one of those books where you can skip to the last chapter and see the answer. You just have to go through it from cover to cover and see how it comes out.

Meanwhile just keep trying to come up with the right questions.

– Olin Bray, President

Noose News

Publishers Weekly recently announced that Shirley Raye Redmond's *Fairies: A True Story* (Random House) will have a 50,000-copy first print run. Release date in March 2012.

Fairies: A True Story related a historical incident involving Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes.

Congratulations, Shirley Raye!

Bookstore Sales Up 11.8% in August

August bookstore sales jumped 11.8%, to \$2.44 billion, compared to August 2010, according to preliminary estimates from the Census Bureau. For the year to date, bookstore sales have inched up 2.2%, to \$10.474 billion.

So far this year, bookstore sales have been erratic, falling in January, but then rising from February through May, and falling in June and July before rebounding in August.

Note: under Census Bureau definitions, bookstore sales are of new books and do not include "electronic home shopping, mail-order, or direct sale" or used book sales.



Sisters in Crime **Guppies**

SinC guppies come from across the United States and Canada. They have different occupations and avocations, but they share a passion for writing mysteries and a common goal of getting published.

"Few professions offer as many opportunities for rejection as writing does. Only the strong survive the path to publication. The encouragement and support of other writers can be the difference between giving up too soon and getting in print." (SinC Guppies)

Guppies is an online writer's support group. Subgroups represent cozies, noir, psychological and romantic suspense, and thrillers. The Mystery Analysis Group is a book discussion group aimed at discussing the craft, and the AgentQuest group can help with writing queries and synopses.

Interested in joining this online writer's support group? Check them out at www.sinc-guppies.org/.

Reviews

Force of Habit by Alice Loweecey. Midnight Ink, 2011, 299 pp (TP)

I stumbled upon this book the day I left for Bouchercon and two days before Borders closed their doors for good. I found it a delightful read.

The protagonist is Giulia (pronounced Ju-lia) Falcone, a former nun new to secular life. She is convinced she's going to Hell. First, because she left the convent. Second, her new job with a private investigator has her sneaking around and lying. Adjusting to life in the outside world isn't easy. Makeup, dating, and sex are new to her. And despite a crush on her boss, Frank Driscoll—a foul-mouthed, soft-hearted ex-cop—Giulia is sure he'd never fall for an ex-nun.

Her first case involves drop-dead handsome Blake Parker, a man with immense wealth and an ego to match. He and his fiancée are getting disturbing “gifts” with messages based on biblical verses. When Giulia is drawn into the stalker's twisted game, salacious pictures of her appear, threatening her job and her friendship with Frank. No one imagines—least of all naïve Giulia—the danger ahead, when following the clues turns into a fight for her life.

This is both a mystery of who the sicko ex-lover is and a story of unrequited love. Giulia is placed in situations which challenge her core beliefs. As a reader, I was pulling for the ex-nun to maintain her innocence and have her love for Frank returned. This story works on the emotional level and is a satisfactory read.

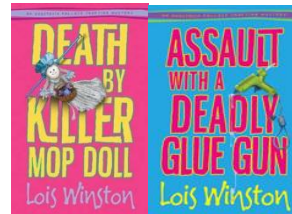
The only thing that did not work for me is the description of the town's location, purportedly a well-to-do suburb of Pittsburgh. I was born and raised in Western Pennsylvania, and rather than the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains the description gave me a mental image of the flat land of Butler and Mercer Counties. The story also could have been improved with more of the rich regional expressions unique to Western PA.

Despite these shortcomings, it is a story well worth reading. ♦

—Fred Aiken (FAAiken@aol.com)

Assault with a Deadly Glue Gun (2011, 301 pp) and *Death by Killer Mop Doll* (2012, 294 pp) by Lois Winston. Midnight Ink (TP).

These are the first two books in the Anastasia Pollack crafting mystery series. At Bouchercon, I was given an autographed proof copy of *Death by Killer Mop Doll*. I so enjoyed this character-driven story that I had Alamosa books order *Assault with a Deadly Glue Gun*; I equally enjoyed both books but recommend to the reader it would be best to read them in written order.



The heroine is Anastasia Pollack, craft editor for *American Woman* magazine. Until two weeks before the first book begins, she was living the American dream—house in the suburbs, working mom with two successful sons and an ideal job doing the things that brought her happiness. Then her world imploded. Her husband keeled over in a casino in Los Vegas of a fatal heart attack. She learns that he had a secret gambling addiction and that he borrowed against his life insurance policy, raided the boys' college fund, borrowed all the money from his IRA, stole his mother's life savings, and owed a bookie \$50,000.

Anastasia is a strong female character and relies on her internal strengths to formulate a plan to get out of this mess.

When *Attack of the Killer Glue Gun* opens, Anastasia is dealing with her abrupt change of circumstances at home and is commuting to her workplace, trying to keep her newfound poverty a secret. The fashion editor makes Anastasia's and coworkers' lives miserable. When the fashion editor is killed using Anastasia's hot glue gun, she becomes the prime suspect. While dealing with the police, she has to deal also with Ricardo, the bookie, who demands his \$50,000 or else.

Sharing Anastasia's home is an eccentric cast of relatives who don't seem to get along. Her mother-in-law, Lucille Pollack, is a nicotine-puffing, card-carrying, circa-1930 Communist, who must share a bedroom with Anastasia's mother, Flora Sudberry Periwinkle Ramirez Scoffield Goldberg O'Keefe, a five-time widow who is the Social Secretary of the local Daughters of the American Revolution. Add to the mix Ralph, a Shakespeare-quoting African Grey Parrot; Catherine the Great, a Persian cat; and Mephisto, a French boxer nicknamed the Devil Dog.

Death by Killer Mop Doll opens three months after *Assault with a Deadly Glue Gun* ends with the arrest of the murderer. Flora arrives from a cruise where she has gained a fiancé to become husband number six. It seems that Lou Belmont owns the holding company that owns the *American Woman* magazine. The idea that he had was to redo a morning talk show into a televised magazine similar to *American Woman*, giving the staff twice the work without an increase in pay. When Lou is found murdered in the storage closet where Anastasia stored her craft project with one of her long needles protruding from his heart, Anastasia must again solve the crime to prove her innocence.

The plots of both books are filled with twists and turns. The clues are well laid out, but the attentive reader will have great difficulty in identifying who the killers are.

The only problems in the book are associated with the crafts. Unlike other themed books, the craft instructions are positioned in the text separated by a thin black line. This makes it difficult to determine when the instructions end and the prose resumes. It would make the book easier reading if the crafts were placed on separate pages such as done by Joanne Fluke and other theme authors.

My resident handcrafter, Nanette, has reviewed the instructions and believes illustrations may benefit the reader who wants to make the craft. She also would like to see an index showing page numbers for the craft instructions so that they can be more easily

found; again, this is what other theme authors have done. ♦

—Fred Aiken (FAAiken@aol.com)

She Murdered Me with Science, by David Boop. Flying Pan Press, 2008, 281 pp (TP)

This is one of the best examples of a plot-driven book that I have read in years.

Set in 1953, the story could be regarded as alternate history. The protagonist is Noel Glass, an up-and-coming world-class engineer working on using microwave technology to improve radar. In the testing of his concept, something goes wrong with the result that six people are killed, including his fiancée, and Noel Glass is disgraced and a pariah.

He rebuilds his shattered life in the mythical town of Industry City, Colorado, spending his time and limited funds on creating a new automobile that will run on water and moonlighting as a forensic detective to generate income.

In the course of events, he meets a rich, recluse businessman, C.J. Reece, who informs him that his project was tampered with and that the accident was a result of sabotage. According to the recluse, the technology was used to create a microwave-based weapon that might have been used in *Star Trek*.

The action is fast paced, full of twists and turns, as Noel Glass struggles to save the world as we know it.

Boop set out to write a book in the grand tradition of Raymond Chandler and Phillip K. Dick and the pulp adventure stories of the 1950s. The author leaned heavily on his research of 1950 slang in a reference book, *Straight from the Fridge, Dad* by Max Decharme. If the book suffers a problem, it is the overuse of slang terms that few of us have heard in decades. ♦

—Fred Aiken (FAAiken@aol.com)

Key:

PB = Paperback

TP = Trade paperback

HC = Hardcover

Rob's Random Shots

November Case File Number 1

Bootlegger's Daughter by Margaret Maron, Mysterious Press, 1992, 261 pp (HC).

Remember how I often say “go back and read the classics?” Well, this month's reviews deal with two of those—a genuine classic by one of the founding mothers of Sisters in Crime and a bogus classic involving the World's Greatest Detective.

First, the real deal.

Bootlegger's Daughter is the first of Margaret Maron's justifiably famous Judge Deborah Knott series set in a fictional North Carolina county. Sure this book is 20 years old now, but I figured better late than never. Many of you will already have read books in this series, but for the rest of you, it's my advice that you should get started.

This is a classic cold-case mystery. Young attorney Deborah Knott is asked by a teenage girl to cast light on the unsolved murder of her mother 16 years before. Mom was discovered beaten and shot to death and her baby dirty and dehydrated. Not only did the police fail to find the killer, but the State Bureau of Investigation reopened the case eight years later and got nowhere. However, many of the principals from that time still live in Colleton County and Deborah begins turning over stones.

Complicating her investigation is her status as a recently declared candidate for district court judge. Hanging over her campaign is her famous daddy's reputation as the old-fashioned bootlegger of the title, but we never get to meet him until the last few pages. As the jacket copy says, though, Deborah's twin disadvantages of being the sole female candidate in a “good old boys” county and the daughter of a well-known career criminal are nothing compared to posing a threat to a successful murderer.

I have seldom found a better drawn locale than this county and its people. It's worthy of comparison to Tony Hillerman's Southwest, to James Lee Burke's New Orleans, or to Robert B. Parker's Boston. You can hear the rhythm of

gentle people's speech, feel the breaking down of barriers in the New South, and almost taste the sweet tea everyone drinks like water.

But make no mistake. This is a convoluted and complex plot involving campaign skullduggery, misdirection, mistaken identity, similar vehicles, and a very late stunning revelation that stood all my expectations on their heads. Just as I was taken by surprise at the killer's identity, so you will be, too. But you'll enjoy the ride and feel the logic of the denouement, as I did.

This book is in the book box for you to enjoy. Please return it there so that others may share the ride.

Oh, and in case you thought I was going to avoid temptation in going for a cheap joke, Judge Knott, lest ye be judged. ♦

—Rob Kresge (www.robertkresge.com)

November Case File Number 2

Sherlock Holmes: The Montana Chronicles by John S. Fitzpatrick, Riverbend Publishing, 2008, 239 pp (TP)

For our second foray into “classics”: Authors writing Sherlock Holmes stories and novels are legion, ranging from homages like the famous Laurie R. King series, to newcomer pastiches like this one.

John Fitzpatrick is a Montana native and a lobbyist for Montana mining and utilities. This book shows that he's also an amateur historian of considerable skill. He's concocted a series of four short stories that purport to show that Holmes and Watson visited Montana in the mid-1890s after having come to America in response to a request for aid for an old friend then living in Chicago. In fact, in the book's foreword, the author explains how an unopened packet of Watson-written stories was found in the library in Anaconda, Montana, the author's home town.

He then presents the stories exactly as he said he found them, with some helpful footnotes to place them into perspective, footnotes that clarify local personages, mines, hotels, and other institutions of the time; period photo-

graphs; and explanations of certain “Americanisms” for stories Watson presumably intended for British readers more than a century ago.

In “The Opera House Murder,” set in the tiny town of Rogersburg, an actor (a local Lothario) had been shot to death on stage during a fight scene a few days prior. Through judicious investigation of the theater, the stage, and the location of the wings and trapdoors, as well as interviews with local citizens to determine motive, Holmes is able to identify the true killer in short order. We are treated to a short discourse on rifle ballistics during the investigation.

The second story, “The Tammany Affair,” set a few days later in the town of Anaconda, involves anonymous threats to the owner of a huge copper mine there. The object of the threats is the owner’s famous racehorse, Tammany, who is training for an important upcoming race back East. Period photographs include the Montana Hotel in Anaconda, the hotel bar, and an inlaid wooden portrait of Tammany on the floor of the bar.

Holmes’ solution to the case involves nighttime stakeouts of the stable, Holmes’ well-known mastery of disguise, and unfortunately for animal lovers, the destruction of one stable by fire that kills several horses.

“The Ghosts of Red Lion” involves superstitious Irish miners who are kept away from their jobs by a ruse, while others work at night to remove valuable ore from the Red Lion mine. Again, nighttime stakeouts are pivotal in Holmes’ solution of the scam. The story appears to have come to the author by a photograph of an old ore tram used to haul material down the mountain.

The last story, “The Mysterious Woman,” finds Holmes and Watson finishing up an improbable three-month stay in Montana and involves the wife of a prominent mine owner who has been suffering from blackouts in her own home, passing from one room to another with no recollection of having walked there. The woman does recall a head injury, but some time ago. Holmes is able to unravel the true nature of these discrepancies, and the responsible party and readers are treated to an

extensive footnote on medical and psychiatric theories of the time.

All in all, if you’re able to suspend disbelief to accept Laurie King’s 20th century married Holmes, it’s no great stretch to imagine him in Montana. Fitzpatrick has certainly done his homework well enough. Look for this volume in the book box as well. ♦

—Rob Kresge (www.robertkresge.com)

Devil’s Food, by Kerry Greenwood. Poisoned Pen Press, 2009, 234 pp (HC)

I’ve very much enjoyed Greenwood’s Phryne Fisher series—thanks to Rob Kresge’s reviews in past *Nooseletters* for putting me on to them—and was curious about her other series, beginning with *Earthly Delights*. *Devil’s Food* is the second installment.

Corinna Chapman is the zaftig baker of said earthly delights, who lives over her Melbourne shop with an Israeli PI named Daniel and a cat name Horatio. Cats abound, as do eccentric fellow denizens of the apartment building.

On the side, or inadvertently, Corinna solves mysteries (in the plural). In this case, the mysteries concern the whereabouts of her father, who has disappeared from a commune and his faithful if equally eccentric wife; the origin of a poisonous weight-loss tea that nearly kills two of Corinna’s helpers; and the curious case of the Discarnate brotherhood, a pseudo-religious cult whose members believe all flesh is vile (especially a few extra pounds around the middle) and pleasure in eating is a sin. Needless to say, Corinna finds this weird in the extreme.

The solutions to the mysteries are only tangentially related, but Corinna’s investigation does produce her reprobate father—allowing her to get her exasperating mother off her hands—and a turnaround in the views of the head of the Fleshless Friars, as well as convincing (if not lastingly) the young tea drinkers that yes, you can be too thin.

Devil’s Food is perhaps over-supplied with eccentric characters, but at least they all hang out in the same place, so eventually you figure out who’s who (if not which cats belong to

whom). Corinna, and the series, has the same virtue as Phryne Fisher, who accepts everyone, no matter how odd, as a good person underneath and makes no judgments about anyone's lifestyle (although accepting eating well as a sin is a stretch for Corinna).

Greenwood's style is amusing and readable. I'm still fonder of Phryne Fisher and her friends, but will happily read more in this series as well. ♦

—Linda Triegel (ljt23@earthlink.net)

Whiteout, by Ken Follett. Signet, 2005, 474 pp (PB).

Ken Follett is one of those story-tellers who can really draw you in, and since his novels tend to length, that's just as well. I'm currently reading *Night over Water*, in which a disparate group of passengers embark on a transatlantic flight aboard the Pan Am clipper, a phenomenon of the late 1930s, which had to cease operations on the outbreak of war.

Follett imagines one last flight and lays out his passengers' stories, in classic disaster movie fashion, before they even board the giant sailplane. It works better in a novel.

Whiteout isn't quite as successful because the personal stories get a bit too soapy and hold up what could be an exciting tale about the theft of a deadly virus from a lab in Scotland, just as a freak snowstorm blows in. The main character is the lab's security expert, Toni Gallo, who's in love with the head of the lab, but despite that she's a likeable character. The boss's family aren't and get tiresome pretty quickly.

The action does get more interesting toward the end, as the snow hinders both the police trying to identify and find the thieves as well as the thieves themselves, whose plans to escape by private plane are thwarted by the weather. ♦

—Linda Triegel (ljt23@earthlink.net)



Many Genres, One Craft: Lessons in Writing Popular Fiction, eds. Michael A. Arnzen & Heidi Ruby Miller. Headline Books, 2011, 384 pp (HC)

Many Genres, One Craft, a collection of how-to articles on writing popular fiction, by participants in Seton Hill University's Master of Fine Arts program. These articles are listed in three board categories:

- Craft [Style and Process, Character and Dialogue, Plot and Structure, Setting]
- Genre [Genre and Originality, Romance and Women's Fiction, Science Fiction and Fantasy, Horror, Mystery and Suspense Thrillers, Children's and Young Adult Fiction, Alternative Approaches]
- The Writer's Life [Learning, Working, Promoting]

I have learned new things from each of the articles I have read to date. Information that I have previously learned has been reinforced.

For example, in an article by Barbara J. Miller on Empowering Female Characters, applies to all characters. She lists and defines four categories of powers. These powers are:

1. Intellectual powers (learning, ethics, Justice, the gift of words, quick wit)
2. Physical power (hard work, endurance, healing, strength, beauty, wealth)
3. Emotional Power (love, courage, magic, nurturing, seduction, patience)
4. Psychological power (empathy, goal setting, manipulation, anger, deception)

An article on Demystifying What Editors Want, by Venessa Giunta, examines the favorite answer to the question "What do editors want to see in a story?" That answer remains the same regardless of who answers the question: A tightly-written story with interesting, well-rounded characters and a unique and compelling plot with lots of conflict.

Ms. Giunta breaks this answer down into its four parts (a tightly written story; interesting, well-rounded characters; a unique, compelling plot; lots of conflict] and discusses each one in turn. Her final advice is to make the manuscript stand out, to have it live up to its query letter, sales pitch, and synopsis. ♦

—Fred Aiken (FAAiken@aol.com)

2011 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, September 27, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, October 25, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, November 22, 7:00 p.m.
December - TBA

Chapter bookmarks list meetings through year's end—pick one up!

Meetings are free to the public.

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

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

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

Summary of 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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\$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.

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