

Sisters
in
Crime †

SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume VIII, Number 1 — January 2012

†Expert Testimony†

Believable vs Real: How Much Analysis Is Too Much?

They say too many cooks can spoil the soup. Sometimes too much analysis can spoil the story. Several weeks ago one of the mystery groups Jan and I belong to read and discussed a couple of short stories. They were by two popular writers using characters from their major series. The stories were fun, interesting, tightly focused, and with an O. Henry-like surprise at the end. However, as the group started talking about them, several flaws were identified.

In one the detective's gun was unloaded. He wasn't on duty yet, so he hadn't loaded it. It added an interesting twist to the ending, but it wasn't essential to most of the story. However, for some people it was a real distraction. To be fair, some of them did not notice a problem while they were reading the story, only afterwards when they were thinking about it and analyzing it.

In the other, a robbery was planned based on the unlikely meeting of two acquaintances and the assumption that they would discuss a letter one of them had received. Strange, but low-probability events do happen in real life. Several years ago on vacation we were driving around Minneapolis and stopped into a coffee shop we didn't know existed until we drove by it. Surprise – we ran into somebody I worked with at Sandia. The fact that such weird events do actually happen doesn't mean you should make them a key factor in your story.

In both of these stories the strange, “unbelievable” element wasn't critical to the story and could have easily been avoided. However, they did create a distraction. In our discussion we decided that there are really two types of distractions, one much worse than the other. If the story is good enough, you may miss or willingly ignore the minor distraction – that's not very likely, but I'll accept it and keep reading.

A major distraction is a problem that is so obvious, it hits you over the head, pulls you completely out of the story, and may even cause you to toss the book aside and read something else. Jan's favorite example of this type is the mystery that involved identical twins – one male and one female. The final complication is that whether or not something is a distraction of either type depends on the knowledge of the reader.

Some knowledgeable readers get very upset when an author refers to a safety on a gun that doesn't have one, while many other readers don't even know that there is a problem. Unfortunately for the author, there will always be readers who will find every little discrepancy. However, if the story is good enough and the problem is minor enough, they will ignore it and keep reading.

I have decided to cut the authors some slack. Read their stories and enjoy them and try to leave the analysis for later. Too much analysis as you are reading can turn you from a reader into an editor.

– Olin Bray, President

Don't Miss It!
Tuesday, January 24, at 7 p.m.

Our January speaker is our own Patricia Smith Wood, "struggling writer" and current Croak & Dagger membership chair.

After retiring from a varied and successful business career (including 18 months working at the FBI), Pat attended writing seminars, conferences, and in 2009 graduated from the FBI Citizens' Academy. Her first mystery, *The Easter Egg Murder*, currently seeks a publisher. *Murder for Breakfast*, the second in the series, is underway.

"My father, first as a police officer, and later as a career FBI agent, sparked my own interest in law, solving crime, and mystery."

Pat will talk about her adventures in writing and what she's learned about the process.

February's speaker will be Kirt Hickman, author of the sci-fi mystery *Worlds Asunder* and the comprehensive and practical self-editing guide, *Revising Fiction: Making Sense of the Madness*. Born in Albuquerque, Kirt was a technical writer for 14 years before branching into fiction. His methodical approach to self-editing has helped many make sense of the mass of advice available to the novice writer. He teaches classes through SouthWest Writers, has spoken at many conferences, and has contributed a monthly column to the SouthWest Sage.

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.

The Line Up

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Noose News

Book signings

All Croak & Dagger members are invited to notify the membership chairman, Pat Wood, pwood73@comcast.net, if they wish to promote an upcoming book signing and have members notified in advance.

Pat will need at least three days' notice prior to the date of the signing in order to initiate an email to the list of Croak and Dagger members. Include author's name, name of book being promoted, date, time, and place of the signing. Please be sure to send these notices to Pat at her personal email, rather than the Yahoo member list email.

Theater party February 4

Final reservations will be taken at the January 24 meeting for the Albuquerque Little Theater production of *Witness for the Prosecution* on Saturday, February 4. The cost for paid-up members of Croak and Dagger is \$13.00. Non-members and guests \$18.00.

There will be a dinner at La Placita in Old Town at 6 p.m. that evening, just prior to the performance. Rob Kresge is taking reservations for the play and needs a final count of who will be attending, payment for the tickets, and an indication of those who will join us for dinner at La Placita. If possible, please e-mail Rob at rkresge777@comcast.net and let him know if you will be there.

Everything Up to Date with MWA

The Mystery Writers of America (MWA) National Board of Directors is pleased to announce that arrangements have been made with three companies to offer discounted rates in converting, formatting, and uploading your books to e-pub formats. The companies are as follows (they will verify your membership should you wish to use their services):

Blue Leaf Book Scanning (<http://www.blueleaf-book-scanning.com>): One of the first hurdles many authors have converting their backlist to e-books is getting digital files of their old books. Blue Leaf will scan your hardcovers

and paperbacks into PDF, Word, text and other formats, or even scan old, typed manuscripts.

52 Novels (www.52novels.com): Thinking about adding your book to the [Amazon Kindle Store](#) but don't know how to start? Frustrated with converting your Microsoft Word file or PDF to a Kindle-friendly format by yourself? We can save you time and hassle by getting your manuscript to play nice with Amazon Kindle, Barnes & Noble Nook, Apple iPad and other e-reader devices.

Genius Book Services (www.geniusbookservices.com) is an author services company assisting self-publishing authors and small presses in creating high quality e-books and print-on-demand titles. Services include editing, formatting and e-book conversions, layout for print, and cover art. We specialize in helping established authors with a backlist of titles reach a new generation of readers by converting scanned, previously published books into high quality e-books.

Just a reminder: the MWA Anthology deadline for submission is February 1, 2012.

From mythology's Pandora's Box to the hidden depths of the human heart to a 21st century digital strongbox containing invaluable data secured behind dozens of firewalls, this anthology will explore the secrets and treasures that are all secured inside something. Whether it be in the depths of the human mind or a supposedly impregnable bank vault, these all new stories will explore sealed containers and break-ins of every kind, each person seeking to unlock a mystery and gain whatever is hidden away.. Whatever the goal, whatever the risk, these stories will investigate the lengths people will go to...to get at *What Lies Inside*.

Ten new stories by MWA members will be commissioned by the editor, and ten new stories will be selected by an expert MWA panel from a pool of blind submissions by current MWA members. Members in any category of membership may submit stories -- you do not need to be previously published, but you must be a member in good standing (dues paid).

Five Things more Important than Talent

[The following is excerpted from an article by Jane Freeman in the July/August issue of *Writer's Digest*.]

Most writers I know, at some point, feel like they're making no progress—or that it's just not worth the effort any longer. It's difficult to keep trying, especially when you're not getting any professional, actionable feedback on how you can get closer to your goal.

Let me tell you a little story about my own writing life.

I have a BFA in creative writing, and when I was in college, I desperately wanted the professors to tell me if I had talent. I was never brave enough to ask directly, but I hoped they might take me by the shoulders one day, look me in the eye, and say: "Jane, you can't waste this gift, you must write!"

Now that I'm a professor, I realize just how irrelevant that question is. I see both talented and untalented students, but the ones who impress me are the ones who are motivated and driven to work—the ones who push hard despite obstacles. I also clearly see who has a positive attitude, and who is apathetic. So far, these other qualities have mattered more than talent.

Outside of the classroom, many writers ask me: "Should I keep going? Do I have any talent at this?" Boy, how have I come to hate that question! Let me tell you the five questions I find more relevant and meaningful.

1. What makes you remarkable?

Each of us *is* remarkable. We each have a unique set of strengths and weaknesses. For some, it takes a while before we realize what it is we *really* want to do, what we're doing here, and what we have to contribute in this world. But each of us does have something remarkable to contribute, and I hope you're gifted with the knowledge of what that is. If not, keep asking the question. The answer will appear.

2. What's your community?

Your environment, and the people who surround you, are vitally important. Relationships matter. So what I want to know is: Who is your support network? Who is encouraging you? If you don't have anyone positive around you, you need to change that.

3. What risks are you taking?

It's the old cliché: Nothing risked, nothing gained. Playing it safe as a writer will lead to mediocre writing at best. If you're not failing, you're not shooting high enough. Which leads me to...

4. What do you do after you fail?

Everyone fails. That's not the important part. What's important is what you do next. Are you learning? Are you growing? Is your experience making your heart bigger? Or is it shrinking you down, making you small? Beware of cynicism and bitterness, because if these emotions stick around too long, they will poison your efforts.

5. How do you deal with change?

The only thing I know for sure is that publishing will change. Are you going to tighten up and resist, or will you look for the opportunities?

Those of you frustrated with where the industry is headed, or how you are being treated by this editor or that agent, consider these words from Joseph Campbell: Is the system going to flatten you out and deny you your humanity ... or are you going to be able to make use of the system for uplifting and positive purposes?

Every problem we face only appears unsolvable inside a particular point of view. Take a fresh perspective and problems vanish, while new opportunities appear.

Connelly gets 'The Drop' on readers in new novel

[from a report by Christian DuChateau, CNN, November 25, 2011]

(CNN) -- This has been a banner year for crime novelist Michael Connelly. A film adaptation of *The Lincoln Lawyer* was a critical success and could become a TV series next year. His most recent novel, *The Fifth Witness*, hit No. 1 on the bestseller list, and Connelly topped 1 million e-books sold online. His latest Harry Bosch novel, *The Drop*, arrives in bookstores Tuesday and is poised to be another top seller.

There's no talk of retirement with Connelly. With 42 million copies of his books sold worldwide, he's just back from a promotional tour in Europe. He's pressing ahead with plans to bring Bosch to the big screen. He's also preparing to celebrate 20 years as a novelist.

CNN recently caught up with Connelly to talk about his new book. The following is an edited transcript.

CNN: What was the spark behind your latest book?

Connelly: Actually, there were a couple different sparks. The book has two parallel stories going through it. One I call the political story. In a turnabout, Harry ends up more or less working for a guy who's been his nemesis in other books. That was an idea suggested to me by a cop a long time ago, and I've been holding on to it, waiting for the right time to write that story. The other story is Harry on a cold case, inspired by an aspect of L.A.'s "Grim Sleeper" case—the fact that when they caught the guy they say is the Grim Sleeper, they found thousands of photos and videotapes in his possession of women, many of them potential victims. A squad of detectives has to go to work looking through all these photos every day trying to identify the people. It just seemed like a very difficult task, knowing that all these people could have ended up being victims. Just that idea kind of shot through and gave me images, and I knew that was the other prong of the story.

CNN: Bosch is dealing with some pretty dark subject matter in this novel. Was that planned?

Connelly: You know, I don't really outline my books, so I can't say I knew what was going to happen. I was impressed by this real case, and I wanted to create a case that had that aspect. After I was done writing *The Drop*, I looked back at that chapter, and I thought that might be the darkest chapter I've ever written. Who would have seen that coming 10 months ago, when I started writing the book?

CNN: How has Harry Bosch changed over the course of your career?

Connelly: I think he's changed a lot. The books take place in real time, so it's more than 18 years of Harry Bosch. Like anybody who's aged 18 years, you're going to be different. A lot of his hard edges have worn down by his experiences. I think his cynicism has been alleviated somewhat by having his daughter in his life in the last couple of books. That's become a very big part of his focus in life. He'd been a father for a long time, but he'd never been engaged in raising her until she was a teenager. He's not that good at it. He's learning as he goes, but what's affecting him is what affects anyone who becomes a parent: You hope for a better world for your children, so that's kind of changed his outlook.

CNN: Your books always incorporate real Los Angeles landmarks; do you have any favorite spots you've written about?

Connelly: The Chateau Marmont is one of my favorites. I don't live in L.A. anymore, but I'm there a lot, and I stay in various hotels, but I stay there often, in room 79, which is a crime scene in this book. I really like that place. It's got some celebrity cachet, but it's also got this old-world charm. Some of this book was written in that room. That's always fun when you can do something like that.

CNN: You're just back from a book tour in the UK. What was that like?

Connolly: The book's just coming out here in the U.S., but it came out in October in Europe. So I was over there promoting the book, and it's not even out here, so it's a little bit unusual. It was fun, good reception, good weather when I was in the UK and Ireland, a fun thing to do. I did a number of events. They were well attended, and I just heard a couple of days ago the book is No. 1 in Ireland. I'm of Irish descent, so that's always good to hear.

CNN: You recently became part of a very exclusive club; your eBooks have sold more than 1 million copies online. How does that feel?

Connolly: That was actually shocking when I heard that and the company of authors I'm included with now. I think *The Lincoln Lawyer* movie had something to do with it; it's a pretty good movie, and I think that inspired a lot of people to check out the book. That probably pushed me over the top.

CNN: Do you have a favorite book this year?

Connolly: Two books I read recently, *The Cut* by George Pelecanos and *Feast Day of Fools* by James Lee Burke, were really outstanding. Also a new book I just read. It's called *Shortcut Man* by P.G. Sturges. It's set in L.A., kind of a noir story. His father was a famous screenwriter.

CNN: What's next for you?

Connolly: Well, you've always got to keep writing, so I'm writing. Next year is kind of a significant year for me. It will be 20 years since my first book came out, so next year, I'll publish my 25th book. I've thought a lot about that and just felt like it should be Harry Bosch. So I'm working on a Harry Bosch book. It's called *The Black Box*. That's under way, and hopefully it will be out around this time next year.

A Private Letter from Genre to Literature

by **Daniel Abraham**
from www.sfsignal.com

I saw you tonight. You were walking with your cabal from the university to the little bar across the street where the professors and graduate students fraternize. You were in the dark, plain clothes that you think of as elegant. I have always thought they made you look pale. I was at the newsstand. I think that you saw me, but pretended not to. I want to say it didn't sting.

Please, *please*, darling let us stop this. This artificial separation between us is painful, it is undignified, and it fools no one. In company, we sneer at each other and make those cold, cutting remarks. And why? You laugh at me for telling the same stories again and again. I call you boring and joyless. Is it wrong, my dear, that I hope the cruel things I say of you cut as deeply as the ones you say of me?

Our friends nod as they offer condolences and sympathetic condemnation. How many times have I heard voices that meant to be kind saying that you have descended into sophistication for sophistication's sake? And, love, would you believe that I deny them? I point to Harper Lee and Robertson Davies. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the dirty jokes in Shakespeare. I tell them how good *Pride and Prejudice* is, and *The Name of the Wind* and *The Life of Pi*. They smile. Worse, they smirk. I defend you to my defenders, and they see right through me.

But allow me this, dear: what you do is crueler. You take the best of me, my most glorious moments – Ursula LeGuin and Dashiell Hammet, Mary Shelley and Philip Dick – and you claim them for your own. You say that they “transcend genre.” There are no more heartless words than those. You disarm me. You know, I think, that if we were to compare our projects honestly — my best to yours, my mediocrities to yours, our failures lumped together — this division between us would vanish, and so you skim away my cream and mock me for being only milk.

I forgive you. I weep and I resent and I say how little I care what your opinions are. And, let me be honest, dear, I take comfort in the fact that I make more money than you. That my audience is larger. Outside the narrow halls of the academy, my star is brighter. I go to the movies, and I am on every marquee. A television is practically my mirror. My house is larger and warmer, and the people there laugh and weep more loudly. Not all of them are sophisticates. Many of them find comfort and solace in things you consider beneath you. But they are my people, and I love them as they love me.

So I forgive you and I long for you. I do. The beauty and depth and sophistication that you aspire to, I aspire to as well. You lay claim to a deep love of language, but I have Kelly Link and Carole Emshwiller. You say that your work plumbs the depths of the human experience, but I have Maureen McHugh. You are concerned with the deep questions of religion and philosophy. So is Gene Wolfe. Look at them, my dear, but not too closely. I don’t want to lose them to you, and each of them is good enough to be “literature.” The things you want, I want too.

What do our friends make of our assignations, do you think? Those nights when you come to me and we find ourselves in each other’s arms must seem comic to them, given how much we rail against each other in the day. And don’t tell me that no one knows. Cormac McCarthy took the Pulitzer for a post-apocalyptic horror novel. *Wuthering Heights* is as much romance as ghost story. Ishiguro wrote *Remains of the Day* and also *Never Let Me Go*. Don’t let’s start on Atwood. Everyone can see that you want me as much as I want you. And more than that. I have begun to suspect you need me, my dear.

I read through the collections of your most honored short stories, and what do I see? Fantasy, mystery, ghost stories, romance. How often you refresh yourself at my springs. I wonder whether your contempt might hide something deeper. Fear perhaps, that you might be less without me as I am less without you. Are you vulnerable, love? You can be. I will not turn you away.

I am sometimes loud. I am often gaudy. I am sentimental, and I embarrass you in public. I apologize for none of it. You are respected, sophisticated, more passionate than I give you credit for, and sometimes even wise. I would no more ask you to become me than I would suffer remaking myself in your image, but we belong together. The proof of it is in the thrill you take from me and the comfort I draw from you. And so let us end this. Let us stand by one another as we should have all along. Let us take pleasure in each other. Where could the harm possibly be? Whose good opinion could we lose, and why should they matter?

Come to me, my love. Come to me tonight. I will meet you at midnight in the garden outside my bedroom. I will wear those bright, lurid, exciting things that are my signature. You bring those pretensions that are your best and worst aspect, and – can I hope? – the willingness to shed them.

Daniel Abraham is the author of the critically acclaimed The Dagger and the Coin series. He has been nominated for the Hugo, Nebula, and World Fantasy awards. His forthcoming books include The King’s Blood and Caliban’s War. He lives in New Mexico

Reviews

Rob's Random Shots

January Case File Number 1

Séance for a Vampire: The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes by Fred Saberhagen, Titanbooks, 1994, 2010, 286 pp (TP)

I think I can start this review as Dr. Watson would. This book came into my hands accidentally. I found it a singular and enjoyable experience, as I think you, gentle reader, will also.

Okay, enough 19th Century prose from me. But trust me, this book, by one of science fiction's late and much missed grand masters, is a tour-de-force in two canons at once. We not only get a highly plausible "discovered" Watson narrative, but a second blending of genres in the Holmes-Meets-Major Historical Figures category of recent fiction. This volume is the second in which Holmes encounters his cousin, Prince Dracula, and indeed, Watson shares the narrative duties in this volume. It's part of a series of Holmes novels (see the "Further Adventures" subhead above) in which other well-known authors like Manley Wade Wellman and Dan Stashower take Holmes and Watson into the 20th century.

Back to the chase. This volume begins with a bang, a lengthy prologue set in 1765 that neatly sets up the premise for the main action of the novel. We visit Russian pirate Kulakov, who is actually a vampire, in his cell at Newgate prison shortly before his scheduled execution. Needless to say, hanging holds no terrors for a vampire and after the action, Kulakov is able to stow away on a ship headed back to Russia.

Flash forward to the "present," unspecified but certainly well into the 20th century of motorcars, incipient Russian revolution, and the world-wide interest in séances, vampires (thank you, Mr. Stoker), and the occult. Holmes is engaged by the family of a recently drowned young woman who want him to assess the honesty of a brother-sister team of occultists the

family has hired to conduct a séance with the spirit of their dead daughter. During the séance, chaos ensues after the young woman's "spirit" appears, resulting in the death of the occultist brother, the evidently obvious vampire nature of the spirit, and the "spiriting off" of Sherlock Holmes.

Watson returns to London, consults Holmes' older and putatively wiser brother Mycroft, and informs the helpful, and not at all dangerous to most mortals Dracula, of events since there is evidence a vampire is involved. Watson and Dracula alternate as narrators from this point on, since Watson could not be privy to some of the things only an undead night-stalker can explore.

In short order, Holmes is rescued, the location of the master vampire (Kulakov) is ascertained, and the "game is afoot." There is rescue, heartbreak, new romance, and an eventful whirlwind trip to St. Petersburg, where the victim's kidnapped sister is rescued, the vampire is destroyed, and justice triumphs. As an added bonus, the reader is introduced to Rasputin, adviser to the czarina and an influential figure in the upcoming Russian Revolution. ♦

—Rob Kresge (www.robertkresge.com)

January Case File Number 2

The Amazing Mrs. Pollifax by Dorothy Gilman, Fawcett MMPB, 1985, 176 pp (PB)

For the second time in this issue, here's a treasure I came upon by surprise. Besides the Holmes novel reviewed above, I checked out the audio version of this book from my local library for a recent car trip we took. Never mind the copyright above; the book was originally published in 1970 and the audio version in 1971. I just wanted to tell readers how they might find it, in a library, a used bookstore, or on Amazon. Before I review the book itself, let me advise you that the audio version is read by Barbara Rosenblatt, then and now the best female audio book reader in the business (the male equivalent being George Guidall, but if

you've heard Jim Dale read Harry Potter, you may quibble with that recommendation).

To the story: This is the second in Dorothy Gilman's long-running and much honored (she was named an MWA Grand Master in 2010) Emily Pollifax series, at least a couple of which have been made into movies. In this outing, which takes place in a week or so, Mrs. Pollifax, 65-year-old New Jersey grandmother of three and recent CIA courier, is almost literally yanked out of her comfortable apartment life and put on a plane to Istanbul in a matter of hours by her CIA handler.

It seems that a former Russian agent has defected there, but disappeared from the British consulate. Spies from all the major powers want this agent, Magda Ferenci-Szabo, but the CIA handler had a history with her and knows that if she's at liberty, she will be at a particular hotel in Istanbul at 8 p.m. each evening watching for a contact carrying a copy of *Gone with the Wind*. Hence the pell-mell rush to get Mrs. P, unknown to the world's intelligence services, to that city with a brand-new false passport, tickets for two, a wad of cash and two local contacts, one CIA and the other a French criminology professor.

In short order, Mrs. Pollifax sees Magda, but she disappears from the hotel lobby. Her CIA contact is killed and she is left to her own resources. A chance meeting on an airplane to Istanbul gave her an introduction to Colin, a befuddled young British man, and she turns to him for help. He is knowledgeable about Istanbul and speaks some Turkish. They locate and rescue Magda, but a wild chase toward Ankara involves colorful locals, including a caravan of gypsies, who appear to be on no one's side but their own. There is so much on Istanbul neighborhoods, hotels, and customs, that I'm certain the author must have been there.

I was impressed with the plausibility of the plot (albeit from a time before I joined the CIA in 1973) and the resourcefulness of the never-fazed and determined protagonist. MWA was certainly overdue for recognizing Dorothy Gilman and I plan to go back and follow the further adventures of Mrs. Pollifax. ♦

—Rob Kresge (www.robertkresge.com)

Key:

PB = Paperback

TP = Trade paperback

HC = Hardcover

Earthly Delights by Kerry Greenwood.
Poisoned Pen Press, 2004, 250 pp (TP)

This first book in the Corinna Chapman series is set in modern-day Melbourne, Australia. Corinna is a former accountant who changed careers when she found that she loved baking more than accounting. ("I have a theory that kitchens, once they reach a certain level of complexity, attract new gadgets into their orbit, like planets.")

Earthly Delights, her bakery located in the Insula apartment building between Calico Alley and Flinders Lane in Melbourne, is named after *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch. Insula is the Roman word for apartment, and Corinna's building is entirely decorated with Roman deities.

Corinna lives alone with her cats, Horatio (the aristocrat) and Heckle and Jekyll (the Mouse Police). ("Horatio strolled nonchalantly ahead of me, sniffing at the occasional bloom in the condescending manner of a lord mayor at a local flower show. One almost looked for the elaborate gold chain around his furry neck.")

Corinna's offbeat neighbors in Insula include a professor, a Wiccan witch, two anorexic teenagers, a middle-aged couple with an annoying dog, three young nerds aka The Lone Gunmen, a roof gardener, a dominatrix, and most the most recent addition, a middle-aged drunk.

Each takes part in Corinna's efforts to solve several mysteries—a sudden epidemic of junkie deaths in Melbourne, violent and threatening vandalism in Corinna's apartment building, and a missing abused girl.

In the course of solving the mysteries, Corinna meets and befriends young waif Jase/Jason and the sexy Daniel, who will undoubtedly return in the series.

Corinna spends plenty of time baking, with tantalizing descriptions of her creations (a few recipes are included). Corinna's narrative is

entertaining and challenging to read, chock full of references to Melbourne, current pop culture, and classical literature. My copy of the book bristles with Post-its (to remind me of references to check) every few pages. Near the end, the main characters go to a Goth nightclub in costume, and the unusual experience is described in detail.

Although Corinna's last words are: "Memo to the universe re Corinna Chapman as an investigator: I quit", luckily for readers this is a series. I look forward to reading Corinna's continued adventures. ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

Roman Games, by Bruce Macbain. Poisoned Pen Press, 2010, 261 pp (PB)

It's rare that an author's debut novel places him at the top tier of his chosen genre, but in the opinion of this and other reviewers, that's the case with Bruce Macbain's *Roman Games*.

Set at Rome in A.D. 96, during the opening weeks of the ancient *Ludi Romani*—and the last days of an increasingly cruel and irrational Emperor Flavius Domitian—Macbain blends fact and fancy in fleshing out characters who are actual persons. Pliny the Younger, who 17 years earlier had recorded the eruption of Vesuvius; the dissolute poet, Martial Parthenius, the emperor's unctuous chamberlain, and Stephanus, scheming steward of the emperor's niece are a few of these.

After a fictitious senator, Ingentius Verpa, is murdered, Domitian calls upon Pliny, acting vice-prefect of the city, to investigate the crime. Should a slave be responsible, the senator's entire household will be burned alive—an execution designed to keep other slaves in constant fear of rebelling.

At a banquet, Domitian orders Parthenius to lead terrorized guests through a gloomy underground replica of Hades, where shades of the dead and palace guards block any attempt at escape. A rumored horoscope has predicted the day and hour of the emperor's death during the games, and the horrifying tableau is to test any expressions of guilt by his diners.

Rome's underworld of vice and debauchery is experienced through the wanderings of a dissolute and opportunistic Martial. Rome's timeless rites to a pantheon of gods involve animal sacrifice, Vestals, priests and soothsayers, while unpopular Jews and Christians struggle to survive among a myriad of eastern resurrection cults, especially that of Isis.

In a cameo appearance, Evaristus, bishop of Rome, brings a Christian visitor, John of Patmos, to an interview with Pliny. When the evangelist abruptly criticizes Rome as "The Harlot of the Seven Hills," his apocalyptic vision detailed in *Revelation*, the fearful bishop hustles him out. Other well-drawn locations and subordinate characters lead us toward Domitian's predicted fate through a maze of palace intrigues and false clues.

Macbain, a Classical scholar and teacher, intimately knows his material and writes both description and dialogue in a highly readable style. ♦

—Albert Noyer (www.albertnoyer.com)

Wicked Fix by Sarah Graves, Random House, 2000, 304 Pages (PB)

This third book of the Home Repair is Homicide mystery series is set in modern times on the easternmost point of the US—Eastport, Maine.

Jacobia "Jake" Tiptree used to be a financial wizard on Wall Street, married to brain surgeon Victor. After they divorced, she happened to stop in Eastport while on a business trip, and fell in love with the small-town environment, so different from Manhattan. She purchased an historic old house complete with ghost, that takes all her time to repair. She lives with her son Sam, who has discovered a love for boats and wishes to be a boat builder one day, and boyfriend Wade, the Eastport boat pilot.

Ex-husband Victor followed Jake to Eastport. With his temperamental and egotistical personality, he is the major flaw in her otherwise idyllic reinvented life. However she has taken the risk of investing in his new proposed trauma center because she knows the

town can benefit from having top medical skill available locally.

Reuben Tate, a vicious thug feared by town residents for his crimes in the past, returns to town and creates a nasty scene with Victor in the bar. When he ends up murdered the next day, Victor is arrested and his plans for a trauma center jeopardized. Jake knows her husband well, and has no doubt that he cannot murder, regardless of the ugly circumstantial evidence. She realizes that to save her investment in the trauma center so that she can afford her son's college education, she must find the real murderer.

Jake begins to interview townspeople about Reuben Tate's past violence. Meanwhile her best friend Ellie is busy preparing for the town's annual Salmon Festival, but also subtly questioning anyone who had a connection to Reuben. Everyone seemingly has something they'd rather not disclose, but not all of the subplots lead to murder.

As in her previous books, a storm threatens as the Salmon Festival approaches, helping to build the suspense. Once she gathers the final clues, Jake finds herself in danger again, a scene which would be even more effective on film than in prose. ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

No Way Home by Patricia MacDonald. Pocket Books, 2010, 384 pp (TP)

No Way Home is a suspenseful tale set in modern-day fictional locations in Tennessee. A tornado watch sets the eerie tone from the beginning.

Lillie and her daughter Michele battled since Michele's birth to save her life. Now she is a teenager glowing with robust health and beauty as they attend the town's Founders Day celebration. Lillie's husband Pink is her safe harbor, the second husband she accepted for a steady life after her passionate first love, Jordan Hill, abandoned wife and newborn daughter for a movie star career. Lillie's and Pink's son

Grayson is a popular teen in school, good at sports, headed for a bright future. Pink is a real estate agent, always focused on making a good impression and working his contacts.

Lillie and Pink go home from the Founder's Day festivities, expecting Grayson and Michele to follow later. But Michele does not return home. She is found murdered. A recent prison escapee is initially assumed to be the murderer, but evidence suggests otherwise.

Lillie's world is shattered by the loss of her daughter. She cannot celebrate Grayson's sports success as he and Pink do. Grayson appears to capitalize on Michele's death in his campaign for student council president, and Pink accuses Lillie of neglecting her son to focus on Michele.

Jordan Hill is devastated at the loss of his daughter, and comes to town looking for answers. He is not welcome in town, where everyone remembers he left his wife and newborn, critically ill daughter to chase fame and fortune in New York City.

A black circuit preacher tries to inform Lillie or the sheriff that he saw Michele that night, and also saw a young man near where she was later found. Prejudice prevents his eyewitness account from being considered. A young teenager with a crush on Grayson is jilted by him for a newcomer to town, and attempts suicide. Lillie realizes she has not been close to her son for years; only Pink has a bond with Grayson.

Lillie discovers that Pink and Grayson have concealed from her what happened that night with Michele. She confronts Pink and leaves home. The real truth does not come out until another murder occurs, and another attempt to frame an innocent man. Lillie and the sheriff are faced with an awful choice. The story winds up to a violent confrontation and death. In the aftermath Lillie begins life again.

This was a page-turner, can't-put-it-down read for me, the second time I've enjoyed a suspense novel by Patricia MacDonald (first one was *The Unforgiven*). ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

2011 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, February 28, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, March 27, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, April 24, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, May 22, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, June 26, 7:00 p.m.

Meetings are free to the public.

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

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

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

Summary of 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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