

Sisters
in
Crime †

SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume VIII, Number 4 — July 2012

†Expert Testimony†

E-books Are Increasing Reading, Part 2

In 2011, according to *Publishers Weekly*, e-book sales accounted for 7% of consumer spending on books but 14% of all books sold. For 2010 the two numbers were 2% and 4%. Since e-book prices are lower, they bring in less revenue per book. However, the authors are actually getting more since the royalty rate is much higher.

For example, for Smashwords and Amazon, the rate is 60% to 70% of their net revenue versus 10% to 15% for print books. Of the major genres, mystery/detective e-books are the biggest percent of the units sold at 24% (up from only 6% in 2010). Its share of revenue jumped to 17% from 12% in 2010. The next largest share of e-book revenue was for the related espionage/thriller genre where it jumped to 15% from 4% in 2010. The next two genres were romance (15%) and science fiction (14% of revenue).

In summary, the e-book share of fiction is continuing to grow.

This leads to a second interesting, and perhaps disturbing, issue reported by the *Wall Street Journal*. In the past, when you bought a paper book, that is all the publisher knew. Remember the controversy over whether libraries should provide the government with information on which books you had checked out? And that is not very detailed information. You may have liked the book or put it down after a few pages. No one knew. Essentially the publishers and booksellers knew very little about their customers and how they read books.

However, with e-book readers, all sorts of data are now available to the publisher or distributor: How many times you opened it. What page you are on. Did you finish the book? Did you make any notes on the book and what are they? If data is available, someone will try to capture it and use it.

Suddenly our reading practices, at least with e-books, are transparent. Everyone—Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Kobo, Scholastic, and Colloquy—is starting to capture and analyze our reading data and patterns. Some publishers are even starting to test market an e-book version and then revising the print version based on the results.

Some of the patterns Barnes & Noble found were that people read nonfiction in bits and pieces and often don't finish the book. Novels tend to be read straight through, although not in a single sitting. Science fiction, romance, and mystery fans read more books and read them quicker than the readers of literary fiction, who tend to skip around among multiple books and quit reading a book more often.

The positive argument is that by knowing how people are reading, publishers and authors can tailor them for a better reading experience. The downside is that a lot of private personal information is being captured and available for all sorts of analysis. California now has a "reader privacy act" that requires a court order before law enforcement can get these records.

Another interesting unanticipated spin on the e-book revolution.

— Olin Bray, President

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

Our special guest speaker for May is Steve Brewer, author of more than 20 books, including the recent crime novels *Party Doll*, *Lost Vegas*, and *The Big Wink*. His first novel, *Lonely Street*, was made into an independent Hollywood comedy starring Robert Patrick, Jay Mohr, and Joe Mantegna.

Steve's short fiction has appeared in anthologies, and he's published articles in *Mystery Scene*, *Crimespree*, and *Mystery Readers' Journal*.

A writing coach, he has taught at the University of New Mexico, the Midwest Writers Workshop, and the Tony Hillerman Writers Seminar. He regularly speaks at mystery conventions and was toastmaster at Left Coast Crime in Santa Fe in 2011,

A graduate of the University of Arkansas-Little Rock, he worked as a daily journalist for 22 years, then wrote a syndicated weekly column for another decade.

Married and the father of two adult sons, Steve lives in Albuquerque. For more on Steve Brewer, go to www.stevebrewer.us.com.

The Albuquerque Croak & Dagger chapter of Sisters in Crime welcomes mystery fans, readers, and writers. 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

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- 2013 Meeting Schedule
- Membership Form
- Speakers Bureau
- Links to Mystery Websites & Websites for Your Favorite Croak & Dagger Authors
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Our speaker at the August meeting will be Jerry Goffe, crime scene photographer.

"Jerry Goffe loves *CSI*," said Jim Belshaw in a *Journal* profile a while back. "Both of them: the TV show that entertains him, and the work that has taken up much of his professional life. One never seeps into the other. The TV show is just that. A TV show. The work calls for more focus."

Jerry has been a photographer for over 40 years, mainly in forensic photography (having to do with criminal cases) and supplying legal evidence (in civil cases). He began this work when an attorney friend needed a photograph.

He has also taught crime scene photography, but his avocation is wildlife photography, which he began when another friend suggested he be a volunteer at Bosque del Apache wildlife preserve.

Book Value—How Smashwords Came To Be

By J. J. Colao (excerpted from Forbes Magazine)

Mark Coker and his wife, Lesleyann, a former reporter for *Soap Opera Weekly*, had spent a year writing *Boob Tube*, a satirical novel depicting the seedy private lives of Hollywood soap opera actresses. Though lauded by agents, publishers fretted over the novel's salability. Why gamble on a couple of unknown authors?

Two years, several revisions and a dozen rejections later Coker and his wife were out of options. "Commercial merit is a dangerous way to judge a book," he argues. "It means you get more stuff by Kim Kardashian than by undiscovered authors potentially writing future classics."

Instead of getting mad, Coker got entrepreneurial, launching a printing press in the cloud. As the CEO of Smashwords, a 14-person company in Los Gatos, California, Coker gives authors free self-publishing software that converts Word documents into e-book files—and lets them set the price. Through distribution partnerships, those e-books line the shelves of digital bookstores run by Apple, Barnes & Noble, Sony and Kobo. No deal yet with Amazon.

Launched in May 2008, Smashwords published 140 books in its first seven months—a number Coker found thrilling, until he looked at sales. On a good day the company was selling \$6 worth of books through its website, its own take barely a dollar. Coker switched to a distribution model the following year, offering retailers a 30% commission in exchange for digital shelf space. After inking agreements with four major partners in a matter of months, Smashwords debuted in the iBookstore with 2,200 titles when the iPad launched in 2010.

The company has grown at a steady clip since. Now the top supplier of titles to the iBookstore, Smashwords reached profitability in September 2010. Smashwords publishes 127,000 titles by 44,000 writers, each of whom collects at least 60% of royalties—four times the amount offered by traditional publishers. The company takes a 10% cut of the proceeds from partner sales and 20% from books sold through its own website.

Coker projects \$12 million in revenue this year, double last year's take. The company intentionally keeps margins slim to squeeze out competitors, though Coker expects fatter profits to come. "It costs essentially the same to pump 10,000 new books a month through our network as it will cost to do 100,000 a month," he reasons.

Since authors enjoy a healthy cut of sales, most set prices low. A Smashwords book retails, on average, for just above \$3; 15,000 titles are free. Romance and erotica books account for nearly 40% of sales—no surprise for a medium that lends itself to anonymity (no nosy cashier, no bodice-ripping covers).

Coker, 47, is soft-spoken, spending much of his free time in a home library that bulges with thousands of the trade paperbacks he's helping to push into a diminishing number of used bookstores. He began his entrepreneurial career at the age of 5, selling a pet chicken's eggs door-to-door in Los Gatos. After graduating with a business degree from UC Berkeley he ran his own PR firm, then created BestCalls.com, a directory for public corporate earnings calls, in 1999.

In building Smashwords Coker shunned outside investment, took an \$80,000 home equity line of credit and borrowed another \$200,000 from his mother. He ran a lean, three-man operation well into 2010, working as his own customer-service rep while nailing down partnerships with corporate giants. He still holds 88% of the company's equity. "It gives me an incredible amount of freedom," he gushes.

What's that freedom worth? That's an unwritten chapter. Smashwords saw attrition when Barnes & Noble opened its own self-publishing platform in 2010, offering authors an extra 5% of royalties compared with Smashwords' terms. Apple, Amazon and Kobo have similar options, though Coker argues that none offers sales generation via multiple retailers. Rivals that cater to independent e-book

authors-BookBaby of Portland, Oregon, and Lulu of Raleigh, North Carolina, among them—match Smashwords’ breadth of distribution. But Coker points out they goose sales by hawking conversion, formatting and other services. Smashwords, he says, prefers to live and die by its authors’ sales.

One other twist in the plot: Smashwords has no formal distribution agreement with Amazon, the current heavyweight of e-reading. Because Smashwords refuses to allow Amazon to set prices, the e-commerce behemoth denies the company access to the automated distribution system that supplies the Kindle Store. Though a compromise has been worked out for Smashwords to publish titles in bulk through Amazon’s self-publishing system, plans are over a year behind.

For now, Coker is focused on speed. The lag between the submission of a manuscript or the tweak of a book price and its appearance in retail bookstores is currently a matter of days. Soon it will be minutes, by dint of code being done in-house. Smashwords is working to offer authors instant, aggregated sales data from its myriad partners, all part of an effort to give ink slingers real-time control over their livelihoods. To cope with the growing volume of books, the company is adding two employees to its three-person vetting team to make sure that each book is formatted correctly and contains original content.

“This is the best time in history to be a writer,” Coker muses. If a Smashwords title doesn’t do well in its debut, it has plenty of time to pick up readers and gain an audience. Once upon a time your words lived forever only if you were Homer or Shakespeare or Dickens. Now, thanks to cloud-based publishers, any book can become “immortal.”

Boon For E-Books?

Older Americans Using Internet at Unprecedented Levels

For the first time ever, more than half of Americans 65 and older are on the Internet, according to a new report — and this could mean a whole new growing market for e-book publishers and retailers.

Readers in that age group are among the most prolific book buyers, according to research from the Codex-Group, a New York-based book-focused research firm. Book buyers 65 and older buy more books a month than those in the 18-to-24, 25-to-34 and 35-to-44 age groups.

This is still good news for e-book publishers, said Peter Hildick-Smith, principal at the Codex-Group. “With reduced mobility, the Internet allows them more purchase access to e-books than to p-books,” he said. “But of course retirees have less disposable income to purchase books.”

There are certain features about e-books that seniors prefer to print books, according to Kathryn Zickuhr, a research specialist at Pew and co-author of the report.

“Seniors that read e-books like the ability to change the type size and appreciate that they can get them at home,” she said, referring to an upcoming report from Pew that will discuss libraries and e-books and contains feedback from older adults on how they got started reading e-books and what they like and don’t like about them.

The spike in Internet usage among older Americans may also help them discover more new books to read. A third of online seniors are now using social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn, according to the Pew report, up from just 13% two years ago.

—excerpted from an article by Jeremy Greenfield, Editorial Director, Digital Book World

Noose News

Calling all members...

You are invited to contribute to Croak & Dagger's new blog! Go to our website, <http://www.croak-and-dagger.com/> and click on the "Blog" menu button, or enter croakanddagger.blogspot.com into your browser address box.

Our blog's purpose is to showcase members' talents. In the blog sidebar, I included links to each Croak & Dagger member's website or blog that I could find using Google Search. Please let me know if I missed yours.

Any C&D member is welcome and encouraged to write a blog post! As we are the Albuquerque chapter of Sisters in Crime, topics for our blog that immediately come to mind include mysteries, writing, Sisters in Crime, Albuquerque, Route 66, NM Centennial.

C&D published authors—would you like to be interviewed on the blog? (free publicity for your books). Our first blog post is an author interview with Joseph Badal. I sent him suggested questions by email, and he mailed back the ones he chose to answer. Feel free to supply your own questions, or write about yourself in another format if you prefer. You may want to schedule your interview to coincide with your next book release (for example, Joe's interview was in the week *Shell Game* was published, and Rob's interview will be in September prior to his next book in the Warbonnet series).

C&D aspiring writers—would you like to share your creativity in a blog post? Please do.

All members, please feel free to write reviews of our guest speakers' talks and our club events (for example, Pat will review Dr. Peck's talk, and Linda will review the play *Angel Street*). Our guest speakers invited to be "guest bloggers."

Anyone who is inspired to contribute often is welcome to become a "team author." Post by simply emailing your words to the blog. Contact me if you're interested. I enjoy reading blogs where mystery authors take turns posting (for

example Murderati), and I hope many of you will be team authors for Croak & Dagger.

How do you keep up with new blog posts? No need to remember to check the blog address. Simply subscribe to blog posts by email. Sign up once by entering your email in the "Follow by Email" box, then any new blog post will be emailed to you. Our blog will eventually become the means by which we send out announcements between club meetings—for example, notifications of book signings—so I encourage all to subscribe. If you would prefer to subscribe by RSS feed, please let me know and I will add that feature.

Last but not least, below our blog posts I include a host of links to interesting mystery and writer's blogs I found while looking at the other SinC chapters' websites and blogs. Enjoy—and I bet after you browse the blogroll, you'll find yourself reading even more mysteries! If I missed your favorites, please let me know and I'll add them.

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

And all you readers too...

C&D is planning a panel-led discussion for the November meeting focusing on reader likes and dislikes. Three readers and a moderator will get things started, and members and visitors will be invited to express their pet "peeves and raves" about mystery books. What do you like about mystery books? What habits of highly successful—and not so much—writers make you want to throw the book at the wall, or give up reading any more by that author? What are your favorite plots, and what clichés are you really tired of? Do you hate some settings and love others? Give some thought to why you like or don't like the next book you read and bring your reasons to the November meeting.

Don't Forget:

Left Coast Crime is coming back to the Rockies! The 2013 conference will be held in Colorado Springs, March 21-24, 2013, where "Murder is the Last Resort." Featured guests: Craig Johnson & Laura Lipmann. To register and check for updates: www.leftcoastcrime.org/2013.

News from a future speaker

Elizabeth Ann Galligan, who will be Croak & Dagger's speaker in October, received an excellent review in the July issue of *New Mexico Magazine* of her debut novel, *Secrets of the Plumed Saint*, published by ABQ Press.

Set in northern New Mexico, the story demonstrates the power of faith and the strength of a community.

When the long-cherished statue of the Santo Niño de Atocha (the Plumed Saint) disappears, the leaders of the settlement of Villa Vieja decide to keep the news from the Church hierarchy for fear of reprisal—until their beloved chapel sacristan is attacked.

Said *New Mexico Magazine*, the novel "sings with lyricism and memorable phrases that nod to regionalism... Small town life in northern New Mexico is woven into the fabric of this crime novel, giving it local charm."

Author, Elizabeth Ann Galligan, Ph.D., holds degrees in anthropology and Latin American Studies. As illustrated in *Secrets of the Plumed Saint*, she is intimately familiar with the multicultural heritage of the Southwest and is enchanted by its ever-changing landscape.



Sisters in Crime **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.

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.

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

Reviews

Rob's Random Shots

July Case File Number 1

The Brass Verdict by Michael Connelly, Little, Brown, and Co., 2008, 422 pp (HC)

Yes, yes, I'm going to review another Michael Connelly in this issue. He is, as the cover quote on this book says, "the best mystery writer in the world." If you haven't read him, you ought to check out his earlier works. While it is not strictly necessary to read every book in a series in order, I've found myself claiming new favorite Connellys every few books.

Among the things he does better than anyone else is write the occasional standalone mystery, outside LAPD Detective Harry Bosch series that he's best known for. Then he inevitably finds a way to use those characters in a Bosch novel or even, as here, to give Bosch a major supporting role in this, the second Mickey Haller legal thriller-mystery.

Sequentially, this book falls after the Haller intro, *The Lincoln Lawyer*, which was faithfully made into a movie with Matthew McConaughey in the title role. I loved the first Haller, but for many reasons this one is better.

Haller has gone through rehab since his debut appearance and has not practiced law for more than a year. When his friend and former legal colleague, Jerry Vincent, is murdered only three weeks away from defending movie mogul Walter Elliott, Haller learns Vincent left his entire practice to Haller. He assures the State Supreme Court that he can be ready for the trial and scrambles to put his old office staff together. His major problem is that when Vincent was shot to death in the office building's garage, his laptop, phone, and file discs were all stolen.

Enter the LAPD detective investigating Vincent's murder—Harry Bosch. The two characters are polar opposites, but they grudgingly begin to cooperate. We get detailed insight into the legal process, from rules of

discovery to jury selection. But these details are introduced painlessly for the reader and the suspense builds, including threats to Haller.

Even those of us who write mysteries would be unable to anticipate the plot twists and pitfalls that arise. Will Haller be able to get his client off? Is his client, on trial for murdering his wife and her lover, complicit but not guilty? Does Vincent's murder have anything to do with the Elliott case?

Readers are sucked into the minutiae of Haller getting up to speed on other cases, managing office hiring and finances, and worrying about being stalked himself. The last third of the book builds to climax after climax and the final revelation, on the last few pages, of Haller's and Bosch's relationship hit me like a bombshell.

Read your way through Bosch and Haller books. Don't jump into this one straight away. You'll be glad you did.

And the "brass verdict"? You don't find out what it means until the last couple of pages. My verdict: This is now my favorite Michael Connelly book. 21 down, five (so far) to go.

Addendum: I needed some additional reading materials while sitting in airports during a recent trip. I downloaded onto my Kindle two collections of three Bosch short stories. They were priced at \$9.99 and I couldn't resist. *Suicide Run* and *Angle of Investigation* make great (and cheap) introductions to the world of Harry Bosch, who "speaks for the dead. Every victim matters or nobody does." If Hollywood ever makes Bosch movies or a TV series, these will be prime ammunition for the screenwriters. Short, breezy, easy-peezy.♦

July Case File Number 2

Raptor: A Neil Hamel Mystery by Judith Van Gieson, University of NM Press, 1990 (TP).

You can learn a lot from mysteries. More than just how to concoct a great plot, create fascinating characters, and take us to places we may only have imagined. Standard advice to aspiring novelists is "write what you know,"

meaning that if you are/were a real estate agent, then your protagonist should be a real estate agent. However, it's much more entertaining for readers (and demanding on authors) to "write what you don't know and would like to find out." Then share that knowledge.

Judith's series protagonist, attorney Neil (yes, it's a man's name) Hamel, leaves her comfort zone in Albuquerque and, after the death of a favorite aunt, takes the aunt's place on a wilderness birding expedition to the wilds of northern Montana, near Glacier National Park. After we meet a collection of odd-duck bird watchers, a clever and perhaps unique murder occurs when a reviled local poacher trying to snare a rare and elusive white female gyrfalcon is killed in the trap he set by a "wolf wipe" explosive cyanide device.

So Judith went to Glacier, learned all she could about birding, trapping, wildlife management and conservation efforts, and government sting operations. Once again, I failed to solve the mystery and identify the killer ahead of the sleuth. Being an author doesn't confer any extra deductive smarts on you, as Tony Hillerman once told me.

The second thing we can learn from this book is that beautiful lyrical prose doesn't come in first drafts. The muse only visits authors in the revision phase. Some examples:

"Timing is of the essence in law and in life, only there's an inner clock and an outer clock. The outer clock is digital, relentless, flashes red numbers, makes appointments, shows up in court on time. . . . The inner clock is a pendulum blown off track by every vagrant wind, a lover's clock, a poet's clock, the clock Latin America runs by."

"I knew a man from Montana once, an angry man. He came from someplace in the western part of the state, where high mountains lead to higher mountains, where the prevailing winds climbed up and hung a canopy of clouds over his town. The big sky was a gray sky where he came from. He wandered down to New Mexico to get some sun, because there's one thing you can count on in New Mexico, the sun. It trails you like a faithful dog."

“It had been a long time since the dirt road to the ranch house had seen rain. Montana had had a big dry summer, the kind of summer where the top layer of the state ends up in Pennsylvania and the national parks end up in smoke.”

If you’re writing and the muse doesn’t come to you with language like that, take a deep breath, let your work sit for a while, go back to flat passages and see if you can make them sing like the ones quoted above. ♦

—Rob Kresge (www.robertkresge.com)

The Stone Monkey by Jeffrey Deaver. Pocket Books 2003, 548 pages (PB).

I’d never read a Jeffrey Deaver thriller until my sister (an endless source of good reads) recommended this one to me, and I’ll certainly seek out more now. Despite its length, it’s a fast, exciting read.

Deaver’s protagonist, or at least his main series character, is Lincoln Rhyme, a brilliant forensic investigator who, being a quadriplegic and confined to his swank New York apartment, relies on his protégée and would-be (on both sides) lover, Amelia Sachs of the NYPD, to do his leg work for him. Rhyme is also rich and connected (both electronically and politically) and seems to be able to draw on expertise from practically anywhere, which stretches the reader’s credulity at times.

The case in *The Stone Monkey* is the pursuit of “The Ghost,” a human smuggler who causes the sinking of a boat full of illegal Chinese immigrants off Long Island. A few passengers escape, and the psychotic Ghost hunts them down so they can’t reveal his well-hidden identity. Rhyme and his team try to stay one step ahead and protect two refugee families who, understandably, don’t advertise their whereabouts and won’t talk to anyone.

Sachs is attracted to another immigrant, Dr. John Sung, who is not only highly intelligent but provides her with herbal remedies to ease her arthritis pain. Needless to say, Rhyme distrusts him. He also distrusts a Chinese policeman, Sonny Li, who was on the ill-fated

Fuzhou Dragon, on the trail of the same Ghost. Li provides a welcome note of comic relief, although Rhyme eventually realizes that he’s no clown and Li’s inside knowledge of Chinese culture and the history of this particular “snakehead” (human smuggler) provide valuable help.

There’s a fair measure of violence in the story, due mostly to the Ghost’s ruthless measures, but it’s not dwelt on, and the suspense is kept up to the end. ♦

—Linda Triegel (ljt23@earthlink.net)

Key:

PB = Paperback

TP = Trade paperback

HC = Hardcover

Tumbling Blocks by Earlene Fowler (PB)

The 13th book of the Benni Harper mystery series, *Tumbling Blocks* is set in fictitious San Celina along California’s Central Coast.

Benni is curator of the Josiah Sinclair Folk Art Museum in San Celina. Famous “outsider” artist Abe Adam Finch has donated a painting to the museum, and Benni must write a speech for the museum’s celebration. But her mother-in-law is coming to visit for the Christmas holidays, she’s promised a friend to puppy-sit for him while he travels—and her pushy socialite boss, Constance Sinclair, insists that her best friend, Pinky Edmonton, was murdered and Benni must investigate.

Benni’s husband, police chief Gabe Ortiz, is certain that Pinky died of natural causes due to her known heart condition, not murder. He encourages Benni to pretend to investigate, which will keep Constance from nagging him.

Benni reluctantly agrees to interview the three women Constance suspects of murdering Pinky. Each was black-balled from the elite “49 Club,” which Constance considers sufficient cause for murder.

Benni is already concerned about Gabe’s stormy relationship with his mother, Kathy, and when she brings an unexpected guest with her, the tension escalates.

Benni juggles her responsibilities with good humor, but begins to wonder if Pinky's death was indeed murder. When a detail of the donated painting reminds Benni of something she saw recently, the killer tries to eliminate Benni as well.

All conflicts are resolved (and tasks completed) in a satisfying conclusion.

Reading about Benni Harper and her cohorts in San Celina is like visiting longtime friends. I recommend reading this series in order, starting with *Fool's Puzzle*, to enjoy the character development and relationship changes over the duration of the series. I certainly will continue reading the series; the next book after *Tumbling Blocks* is *State Fair*. ♦

Mallory's Oracle by Carol O'Connell (PB)

Kathleen "Kathy" Mallory was a street child caught thieving by NYPD detective Louis Markowitz. Louis and his wife Helen adopted and raised Kathy as a daughter. Now an NYPD officer herself, she specializes in computer work for the Special Crimes unit.

When Markowitz is killed while investigating a serial killer, Mallory is placed on bereavement leave and begins her own investigation. Markowitz's close friend Charles Butler and NYPD Detective Riker both attempt to protect Kathy from being another victim of the killer.

There are striking parallels between Kathy and Lisbeth Salander, the protagonist of the Millennium Trilogy by Stieg Larsson. Both women are fiercely independent, each with her own unique code of honor and vigilante spirit, preferring to operate outside conventional rules, brilliant computer hackers, loyal only to the few they trust, and coming from troubled childhoods.

As Kathy investigates the murders of elderly women, she considers more potential suspects than the police investigation and digs deeper into every detail of the victims' and suspects' lives, finding links to magic, seances, and insider trading. The plot contains red herrings galore, straightforward at first, but

more complex near the final suspenseful scene. No worries: the final shootout scene is thrilling even if you skim over the intricacies of the solution.

Kathy's relationship with Charles Butler is an interesting one: friendship and trust on Kathy's part, sheer love on Charles'. Kathy bullies Charles into giving her a partnership in his consulting firm, but he enjoys closely working with her. Detective Riker earns Kathy's trust by providing her information from the NYPD murder investigation while she is officially on leave.

The supporting characters (Kathy's suspects) provide interesting background stories and side plots. The eerie prologue scene seems unrelated to the story until a Santeria connection is revealed, but it is never quite explained, and lingers after the story is complete.

I recommend *Mallory's Oracle* to mystery fans who enjoy detailed police procedurals. I look forward to reading more of the series, of which this is the first of ten novels (as of July 2012). The next book in the series is *The Man Who Cast Two Shadows*. ♦

Sprinkle with Murder by Jean McKinlay (PB)

In this first book of the Cupcake Bakery Mystery series by Jean McKinlay, set in modern-day Scottsdale, Arizona, Melanie "Mel" Cooper and Angela "Angie" DeLaura are the proud new owners of their dream business, Fairy Tale Cupcakes. Mel, Angie and Tate Harper (the bakery's financial backer) have been best friends since grade school.

Tate is engaged to be married to Christie Stevens, an upscale clothing boutique owner with a hostile attitude. "Bridezilla" would like Fairy Tale Cupcakes to cater her wedding. Mel and Angie are unhappy to see Tate with a harpy, yet as loyal friends they agree to provide the cupcakes.

Mel is stunned when Christie requires her to sign a contract to design exclusive and unique recipes for the wedding, which Fairy Tale Cupcakes can never sell in the shop, but Mel agrees for Tate's sake. Christie sends her

assistant designers Alma and Phoebe to collect sample cupcakes for her approval, then summons Mel for an early-morning meeting to discuss changes. When Mel arrives, she finds Christie's corpse, holding a cupcake.

The police seem determined to pin the murder on Mel, Angie, or Tate. The negative publicity threatens the existence of Fairy Tale Cupcakes, so Mel decides she must find the real killer.

The only person with an obvious motive to harm Fairy Tale Cupcakes is Olivia Puckett, the owner of Confections bakery. Mel investigates Olivia and also looks for Christie's possible enemies. As she tracks a killer, Mel faces grave personal danger. Budding romances follow the resolution of the mystery.

Sprinkle with Murder is a light read; however I was frequently distracted by awkward sentences. I hope the writing and editing will improve as the series continues. The characters are likable, the premise of best friends owning their dream business is heart-warming, and the cupcake recipes look delicious. ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

As the Crow Flies: A Walt Longmire Mystery, by Craig Johnson. Viking 2012, 306 pp (HC)

Fans of Walt Longmire had a double treat in store for them in June, with the publication of Craig Johnson's eighth book in the series and the June 3 premiere of the 10-episode first season of *Longmire* on the A&E Network. While the series is mostly based on Craig's "ideas file" which he turned over to the screenwriters, and thus takes some liberties with the characters and, so far, lacks the trademark Longmire humor that permeates nearly every page of the books, this novel takes the series into new territory—and does so successfully.

As faithful readers know, Walt's daughter, Philadelphia lawyer Cady, has fallen in love with Vic Moretti's younger brother Michael, a Philly cop, and plans to marry him. Those plans come to fruition in *Crow Flies*, in a complicated but most satisfying way.

The book opens with Walt and perennial buddy Henry Standing Bear on the Northern

Cheyenne Reservation, Montana, well out of Walt's jurisdiction, finalizing plans to hold an outdoor wedding at Crazy Head Springs, Henry's recommended site and Cady's choice too. But Walt and Henry, acting as wedding planner, fall afoul of Dull Knife College's late scheduling of a Cheyenne language immersion course that weekend.

That development sends Henry and Walt to check out an alternative site, the nearby Painted Warrior Cliffs. The pair arrive there only to witness the fatal fall of a young Cheyenne woman from the cliffs. When they reach her body, they find she was cradling a baby, who survives the plunge.

In short order, Walt and Henry examine the scene and discover the possible suicide is really murder. After that, things become really complicated when both of them fell afoul (how many falls can I put in this review?) of new Cheyenne Reservation Police Chief and Iraqi war vet Lolo Long. She is a masterful creation and one can only hope she figures in future novels. After citing Henry for the condition of his awful truck, "Rezdawg," and arresting Walt, they learn that the freshman police chief has never handled a homicide investigation and indeed makes enemies of everyone she encounters, having fired all her deputies when she took office.

So while Henry looks for yet another wedding venue and lodging and picks up the bride and her mother-in-law-to-be, Walt is drafted into helping Lolo, fending off an old "colleague" with the FBI (from *The Dark Horse*), and surviving threats to his own life.

Life on the Cheyenne Reservation is vividly drawn. New Chief Lonnie Little Bird also returns from previous novels. We get too little Vic Moretti in this book, but more than we encountered in the previous work, last year's excellent but dark *Hell Is Empty*. Needless to say, the Johnson trademark twists and turns in the plot come at a steady pace.

The screenwriters have done a fairly good job with *Longmire's* characters, but instead of mining Craig's ideas from his files, they should read the novels, like this one, and inject a little more humor into the show. ♦

2012 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, July 24, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, August 28, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, September 25, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, October 23, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, November 27, 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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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, 30 April 2012**

Board members present: President and Treasurer Olin Bray, Vice President Joan Saberhagen, Secretary Fred Aiken, Program Chair Rita Herther, Membership Chair Pat Woods, and Website Coordinator Susan Zates.

Olin called the meeting to order at 7:23 p.m. and thanked Joan for hosting the meeting. The agenda was accepted with the addition of attending a play at the Adobe Little Theater in July, which will be discussed under other activities, and the New Mexico Book Fiesta, which will be discussed under new business. The minutes were accepted as written. Olin reported that the treasury currently has a balance of \$2,279. He reported that membership now stands at 39. Pat questioned the figure as her records had 37 members. Olin and Pat will confer to determine which figure is correct.

Future programs:

Rita reported that the following speakers are scheduled: In May, Richard Peck to speak on his latest book; in June, poet and novelist Ann Marie Pearson; in July, writer Steve Brewer; in August, crime scene photographer Jerry Goffe, and in September Libby Fisher (topic TBA).

After discussion, the Board agreed to invite Gail Rubin to speak at a future meeting. She has had much success with her book *Funeral Planning for Those not Intending to Die*.

Other activities:

The board has postponed consideration of the wine tasting event until later in the year.

Pat presented information on the play to be presented during the early summer, Angel Street, at the Adobe Theater. The board approved attending the play on July 14, with a no-host dinner to be held prior to the play. Susan Zates is in charge.

Old Business:

Croak & Dagger Mystery Conference: The board decided not to go forward with planning a conference due to manpower issues and uncertainty over the financial prospects.

New Business:

Croak & Dagger logo use: The current logo was created by Albert Noyes. It was felt that the chapter needed to get a document from Mr. Noyes that he either transferred the copyright to Croak & Dagger or has given Croak & Dagger a license to use the copyrighted logo. A person writing for Examiner.com wanted to use the copyrighted symbol when she reported publicity for Croak & Dagger.

The New Mexico Book Coop will be hosting a book trade show, currently named the New Mexico Book Fiesta, May 10-12, 2013, at the Albuquerque Convention Center. Fred Aiken moved that we rent a corner booth (cost \$450) for presenting the work of our published members. After discussion, Fred was directed to contact the National Sisters in Crime organization to discuss their partnering with Croak & Dagger on this event and to discuss the liability insurance situation for club-sponsored activities. Further discussion will occur at the July Board meeting.

A general discussion on blogs ensued. The July Board meeting will take place at the home of Olin Bray, on July 16, 7:00 p.m. The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

—Respectfully submitted, Fred A. Aiken, Secretary