



SISTERS in CRIME  
**CROAK & DAGGER**  
 ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



# THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume X, Number 1 — January 2014

## †Expert Testimony†

Lots of interesting and useful information from Sisters in Crime this month. There is a new website, “The Writer’s Guide to Government Information”. The subtitle is “Resources To Inject Real Life Detail Into Your Fiction.” The table of contents is six pages! There are 467 resource posts. You can find it at <http://writersguidetogovinfo.wordpress.com>

It contains everything from photolibraries and traffic cams to histories of particular eras to criminal and civil procedures among others. It should make beginning your research much easier.

Another new trend is **emerging services tracking reader’s habits**. They are answering question like how many pages are you reading in an e-book? How fast? Did you skip or skim? A wave of start-ups is using technology to harvest information from subscribers collected from their e-readers. For a flat monthly fee the subscribers get access to a library of titles that can be read on a variety of devices in exchange for the information harvesting. Smashwords recently made a deal to put 225,000 books on Scribd, a digital library that launched a reading subscription service in October. Many Smashwords books are already on another service, according to Oyster.

The move to analyze reading data is an aspect of consumer analytics which is pushing into every corner of the culture. Amazon and Barnes & Noble already collect information on you every time you turn on your Kindle or Nook, but they keep it proprietary. The start-ups are hoping to profit by selling it to

### *Don't Miss It!*

**Tuesday, January 28, at 7 p.m.**

At the first 2014 meeting of the Croak & Dagger Chapter of Sisters in Crime on Tuesday, January 28, 2014, our speaker will be B.C. Stone.

He's published two mystery series. His Kay Francis series features the 1930s film star in exotic locations, such as Mazatlan in Mexico and Bayreuth, Germany. He has a new series set in Phoenix, Arizona called *Coda in Black* with Peter Warlock as the sleuth. This adventure is set in 1949. Check out his blog, The Vagrant Mood: [www.vagrantmood.com](http://www.vagrantmood.com), for news of his latest books and to learn more about his thoughts on books and writing.

publishers and writers. Trip Adler, Scribd’s chief executive said, “We’re going to be pretty open about sharing this data so people can use it to publish better books.”

Is this good or not? Will it increase pressure for more formulaic writing? Tough questions to think about. Quinn Loftis, an author of young adult paranormal romance, interacts extensively with her fans on Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, Goodreads, YouTube, Flickr, and her own website. But having actual data on how her books are being read could take her market research to the ultimate level. She must be doing something right. She has a six figure income.

For another take on writing and marketing, consider the advice of Randy Ingermanson, who teaches creative marketing strategies for a living. He says:

Fiction writing=organizing+creating+marketing

He says that most books sell worse than average because the few megasellers bring the average way up. He reports that publishers, being human, sometimes drop the ball. The odds of that happening to an author are pretty good, eventually. If you write more than a dozen books, one of them will probably tank because of publisher mistakes.

So what is an author supposed to do? Writers have three things under their control. Develop your craft. Develop your marketing skills as well as you can. Take complete responsibility for your writing career. You are running a small business here. Invest! Find competent help—i.e. hire brains to do the things you can't or don't want to do. They are out there developing in the shifting ecosystem of publishing, according to Beat Barbian, Bowker's director of identifier services.

To paraphrase, it's the best of times—it's the worst of time—but it's definitely changing times.

--Jan Bray, President

### ***And Don't Miss This Special Event in February!***

The Croak & Dagger board has lined up another fun theater party for the New Year, when the Albuquerque Little Theatre will present Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*.

*The Mousetrap* premiered in London in 1962—and it's still running there. In classic Christie fashion, the play is set in a country house, Monkswell Manor guesthouse, which inevitably gets Trotter, who arrives on skis to tell the residents there's a murderer lurking nearby.

A woman is murdered in London just before the action moves to Monkswell Manor, where the guest list turns out to be full of suspects. The murderer's identity, of course, is not divulged until the twist ending of the play. Audience members are asked not to divulge the surprise—although after 60 years, you can probably Google it. But why spoil the fun? The

Croak & Dagger theater party will see *The Mousetrap* on February 2, at the 2 p.m. Sunday matinee. Those who wish may also attend dinner after the play at La Placita Restaurant, located approximately three block from the theater.

A discounted ticket price for members will be available. There are still tickets available at the group rate of \$18 per person. Croak & Dagger members need only pay \$13. Sorry, but the \$13 rate covers members only, not spouses, unless they are also members. To reserve a place in our Croak & Dagger chapter block of seats, contact Rob Kresge at rkresge777@comcast.net right away! And let him know if you'd like to attend the dinner.

### ***Looking Forward to Our February 25th Thriller Authors Panel:***

#### **Three Santa Fe thriller authors will speak to Croak & Dagger at the February 25 meeting.**

The panel will be moderated by Rob Kresge, author of the Civil War spy thriller *Saving Lincoln*.

Sarah Lovett, the author of four psychological thrillers, is currently collaborating with former CIA covert operative Valerie Plame Wilson, on the second book in the "Vanessa Pierson" spy novels. The series debut, *Blowback*, was published in 2013.

James Reich is the author of the novel *I, Judas* and the New York TIMES reviewed his terrorist thriller *Bombshell*.

David Wood's Dane Maddock series of thrillers take readers around the world in search of legendary artifacts and on quests to solve ancient mysteries. He is also the author of popular young adult and historical fiction titles.

***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.***

#### **Further Events of Interest:**

C&D author member Judith Van Gieson will be speaking to the Feb 18th meeting of Southwest Writers from 7 to 9 p.m. at New Life Presbyterian Church, 5540 Eubank NE on how

books live on by various means in the 21st century.

C&D author member Rob Kresge will be speaking and signing copies of his Civil War spy thriller *Saving Lincoln* at Alamosa Books, 8800 Holly Ave., on Lincoln's birthday, Feb 12th, at 7 p.m.

### **The 2014 C&D Chapter Line Up**

President – Jan Bray –  
*ohbray@nmia.com*

Vice President – Joan Saberhagen –  
*joan@joanspicci.com*

Secretary – Olin Bray –  
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Nooseletter Editor – Rob Kresge --  
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**Check out the Croak & Dagger Website for all your Croak & Dagger information needs.**

*www.croak-and-dagger.com*

- Upcoming Programs
- 2013 Meeting Schedule
- Membership Form
- Speakers Bureau
- Links to Mystery Websites & Websites for Your Favorite Croak & Dagger Authors
- *The Nooseletter* Archive

The logo for Sisters in Crime features the words "Sisters in Crime" in a stylized, handwritten font. The word "Sisters" is at the top, "in" is in the middle, and "Crime" is at the bottom, with a small dagger symbol integrated into the letter "i" of "Crime".

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!"

## **Mystery Writers of America 2014 Edgar Award Finalists**

**Mystery Writers of America** is proud to announce, as we celebrate the 205th anniversary of the birth of Edgar Allan Poe, the Nominees for the 2014 Edgar Allan Poe Awards, honoring the best in mystery fiction, non-fiction and television, published or produced in 2013. The Edgar® Awards will be presented to the winners at our 68th Gala Banquet, May 1, 2014, at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York City.

### **BEST NOVEL**

**Sandrine's Case** by Thomas H. Cook (Grove Atlantic – The Mysterious Press)

**The Humans** by Matt Haig (Simon & Schuster)

**Ordinary Grace** by William Kent Krueger (Simon & Schuster – Atria Books)

**How the Light Gets In** by Louise Penny (Minotaur Books)

**Standing in Another Man's Grave** by Ian Rankin (Hachette Book Group – Reagan Arthur Books)

**Until She Comes Home** by Lori Roy (Penguin Group USA – Dutton Books)

### **BEST FIRST NOVEL BY AN AMERICAN AUTHOR**

**The Resurrectionist** by Matthew Guinn (W.W. Norton)

**Ghostman** by Roger Hobbs (Alfred A. Knopf)

**Rage Against the Dying** by Becky Masterman (Minotaur Books)

**Red Sparrow** by Jason Matthews (Simon & Schuster - Scribner)

**Reconstructing Amelia** by Kimberly McCreight (HarperCollins Publishers)

#### **BEST PAPERBACK ORIGINAL**

**The Guilty One** by Lisa Ballantyne (HarperCollins Publishers – William Morrow Paperbacks)

**Almost Criminal** by E. R. Brown (Dundurn)

**Joe Victim** by Paul Cleave (Simon & Schuster – Atria Books)

**Joyland** by Stephen King (Hard Case Crime)

**The Wicked Girls** by Alex Marwood (Penguin Group USA - Penguin Books)

**Brilliance** by Marcus Sakey (Amazon Publishing – Thomas and Mercer)

#### **BEST FACT CRIME**

**Duel with the Devil: The True Story of How Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr Teamed Up to Take on America's First Sensational Murder Mystery** by Paul Collins (Crown Trade Group)

**Mortal Sins: Sex, Crime, and the Era of Catholic Scandal** by Michael D'Antonio (Thomas Dunne Books)

**The Good Nurse: A True Story of Medicine, Madness and Murder** by Charles Graeber (Grand Central Publishing – Twelve)

**The Secret Rescue: An Untold Story of American Nurses and Medics Behind Nazi Lines** by Cate Lineberry (Hachette Book Group – Little, Brown and Company)

**The Hour of Peril: The Secret Plot to Murder Lincoln Before the Civil War** by Daniel Stashower (Minotaur Books)

#### **BEST CRITICAL/BIOGRAPHICAL**

**Maigret, Simenon and France: Social Dimensions of the Novels and Stories** by Bill Alder (McFarland & Company)

**America is Elsewhere: The Noir Tradition in the Age of Consumer Culture** by Erik Dussere (Oxford University Press)

**Pimping Fictions: African American Crime Literature and the Untold Story of Black Pulp Publishing** by Justin Gifford (Temple University Press)

**Ian Fleming** by Andrew Lycett (St. Martin's Press)

**Middlebrow Feminism in Classic British Detective Fiction** by Melissa Schaub (Palgrave Macmillan)

#### **BEST SHORT STORY**

"**The Terminal**" – *Kwik Krimes* by Reed Farrel Coleman (Amazon Publishing – Thomas & Mercer)

"**So Long, Chief**" – *Strand Magazine* by Max Allan Collins & Mickey Spillane (The Strand)

"**The Caston Private Lending Library & Book Depository**" – *Bibliomysteries* by John Connolly (Mysterious)

"**There are Roads in the Water**" – *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* by Tina Corey (Dell Magazines)

"**There That Morning Sun Does Down**" – *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* by Tim L. Williams (Dell Magazines)

#### **BEST JUVENILE**

**Strike Three, You're Dead** by Josh Berk (Random House Children's Books – Alfred A. Knopf BFYR)

**Moxie and the Art of Rule Breaking** by Erin Dionne (Penguin Young Readers Group – Dial)  
**P.K. Pinkerton and the Petrified Man** by Caroline Lawrence (Penguin Young Readers Group – Putnam Juvenile)  
**Lockwood & Co.: The Screaming Staircase** by Jonathan Stroud (Disney Publishing Worldwide – Disney-Hyperion)  
**One Came Home** by Amy Timberlake (Random House Children’s Books – Alfred A. Knopf BFYR)

## **BEST YOUNG ADULT**

**All the Truth That’s In Me** by Julie Berry (Penguin Young Readers Group – Viking Juvenile)  
**Far Far Away** by Tom McNeal (Random House Children’s Books – Alfred A. Knopf BFYR)  
**Criminal** by Terra Elan McVoy (Simon & Schuster – Simon Pulse)  
**How to Lead a Life of Crime** by Kirsten Miller (Penguin Young Readers Group – Razorbill)  
**Ketchup Clouds** by Amanda Pitcher (Hachette Book Group – Little, Brown Books for Young Readers)

## **Latest Forensic Tip for Writers, Readers, and Viewers**

*(If you're writing, viewing, or reading contemporary crime fiction, here's a new development you might like to be aware of. --Ed.)*

(Excerpted/adapted from an article in the January 24, 2014 issue of the *Albuquerque Journal*)

### **Frozen DNA May Help Solve Coldest Cases**

by Andy Stiny, *Journal Northern Bureau*

SANTA FE--Santa Fe police may be on the verge of solving a two-decades-old rape case after matching a DNA sample that had been stored in a Police Department refrigerator since 1992 with that of a suspect whose DNA sample is in a national FBI database.

"This is the second case we've been able to solve (with old DNA samples)--we're calling them the freezer cases," police spokeswoman Celina Westervelt said Thursday (Jan 23rd--Ed.). The other one was also a rape case.

No one has been arrested in the 1992 case at this point. But court documents show that DNA collected when the victim, then a 16-year-old girl, underwent a hospital exam just after her sexual assault has been matched with a 51-year-old Santa Fe man.

According to Westervelt, the SFPD's Crimes Against Persons Unit has been taking more than 100 items of old evidence, including hair, blood, and clothing samples from their ice box to the state crime lab to see if newly-developed "touch DNA" techniques, non-existent until recently, can now solve so-called cold cases.

Those techniques can reveal miniscule traces of DNA, for example left when someone briefly touches a glass or a weapon.

"Before, you couldn't do anything with it because there wasn't enough of a DNA sample," Westervelt said.

Last year, SFPD Sergeant Michelle Williams took the old rape evidence to the crime lab for a DNA analysis. About six weeks later, she got word from the lab that the DNA profile of an unknown male had been obtained from the 21-year-old sample. That profile was entered into the FBI's Combined DNA Index System, and on November 15, it was matched to a previous offender whose DNA was on file--the Santa Fe man who is now a suspect. Police obtained a search warrant and served it on the man on December 30 and got confirmatory evidence from two oral swabs of the suspect.

**Summary of the Board Meeting Minutes of Sisters in Crime  
Croak and Dagger Chapter, ABQ, NM, January 20, 2014**

Board members present: President Jan Bray, Secretary Olin Bray, Treasurer Fred Aiken, Program Chair Rita Herther, Membership Chair Pat Wood, *Nooseletter* Editor Rob Kresge, Website Manager Susan Zates.

President Jan Bray called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM. Minutes from the November 2013 meeting were approved.

The Treasurer reported that our checking account balance was \$2,704.24. Susan Zates was reimbursed for the annual web hosting fees with Homestead.

The next three programs (January, February and March) will be mystery author B.C. Stone, a panel of thriller writers from Santa Fe (Sarah Lovett, James Reich, and David Wood), and Santa Fe mystery author Christine Barber, winner of the first Tony Hillerman Prize for best unpublished novel.

Membership: We now have 33 paid up members, including one new member. The board decided for simplicity's sake to make our membership year the calendar year January 1 to December 31, rather than the current November 1 to October 31. (Motion by Susan Zates and seconded by Olin Bray.)

There are two separate mailing lists – members and friends, i.e. people who are interested in Croak and Dagger but who have not joined or members who have let their membership lapse. Both lists get the meeting announcements and signing notices, but only paid-up members get the current copy of the *Nooseletter*. Back issues of the *Nooseletter* are available to anyone on our website.

Budget: Treasurer Fred Aiken proposed a 2014 budget, which was seconded by Rob Kresge. Following discussion, the budget was unanimously approved. It shows \$640 in revenue (from 32 members) and expenses of \$845, with the difference of \$205 being covered from our reserves. We can make up this deficit with 10 new members.

Announcements: None.

Old business: Rob will look into a possible shooting event, perhaps tied to a program on firearms, or the possibility of handling unloaded weapons at a general meeting.

New business: None.

The next board meeting will be at 7:00 at Jan's home on March 24, 2014.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Submitted by Olin Bray, Secretary

## Reviews

(Next month, all three of these authors will appear at our 25 February thrillers panel)

### Rob's Random Shots

#### January Case File Number One

*Buccaneer, a Dane Maddock Adventure*, by David Wood, Gryphonwood Press, 2012, 290 pp, (TPB)

As you can surmise from the subtitle, this is one of a series of action/adventure novels. I chose this one to read because the Amazon summery mentioned Canada's mysterious Oak Island, a lifelong interest of mine. And the title suggested we might find out if buried pirate treasure lay at the heart of the carefully constructed booby-trapped cache on the waterlogged island. Well, that place was certainly the starting point, but the quest of this series' protagonist and his almost superhuman crew of salvage experts more resembles a classic Doc Savage adventure from the 30s, updated with A-Team technology, expertise, and firepower.

Reviewers on Amazon generally give this series high marks. It certainly was fast moving (literally), from one clue to the next, starting with Oak Island and progressing to New York City, Europe, Baltimore, and finishing in a shootout climax in an island off the coast of England, the postulated final resting place of King Arthur.

Along the way, we encounter a bewildering array of villains in more than one faction. Dane and crew pick up fantastical relics along the way, from a laser spear to an invisibility device. Although the dialogue is reminiscent of books for younger readers, the series is intended for adults. A large cast of apparent series regular characters means a high survival rate for those surrounding the protagonists, which somewhat lessens the suspense in the numerous armed encounters that punctuate the book.

Some reviewers indicate they'd have to read more books in the series in order to recommend it to younger readers, but there's no bad language or excessive gore. And the only sex is suggested in a lot of innuendo dialog.

All in all, this is a good example of how to build a thriller series with a large cast and set it in exotic locations. Sort of like a younger version of what Clive Cussler did with Dirk Pitt.  
--Rob Kresge (*rkresge777@comcast.net*)

Key:

PB=Paperback

TP=Trade paperback

NC=Hardcover

#### January Case File Number Two

*Bombshell* by James Reich, Soft Skull Press, 2013, 256 pp, (TPB)

This novel stands on many levels in sharp contrast with the previous thriller. Not only is it a standalone rather than part of a series, but it features a female protagonist, on the run, with helpful contacts in a few places. This is essentially the story of a lone terrorist on a mission. It is a more adult-oriented work, with references to previous sexual encounters and partners. And while it contains flashbacks to an exotic foreign location (Chernobyl), it is set entirely within the United States, much of the early part of it in New Mexico.

A couple of issues ago, I reviewed a novel by the Scots author Craig Robertson in which the first person point of view involves a serial killer, a character readers come to understand, if not sympathize with, an achievement I would have rated highly unlikely if not impossible. Varyushka Cash is a young woman approaching her 25th birthday and knows that radiation sickness (she was born in Chernobyl on the day of the reactor meltdown and massive radiation spew) is killing her. She decides to raise America's awareness of the dangers posed by reactors close to many of our major cities by attacking the corporation responsible for designing and building many of those. Thus, I'm now reviewing (and enjoyed) a novel in

which the protagonist is a terrorist, quite a turnaround for someone who was a founding member of the CIA's Counterterrorist Center

Before she begins her long flight across the country, she starts by destroying the Trinity monument north of White Sands, right here in New Mexico. Although I once counselled a fledgling author that 31 pages is too long to read without a scrap of dialog, Reich was able to hold my attention with a long prologue that contains no spoken words, an achievement I applaud.

Some of Varyushka's early actions are bloodless, but the body count begins to climb at a modest rate as she bombs a nuclear materials storage site at Los Alamos, then heads home to Madrid, another New Mexico location local readers will find accurately portrayed (Reich, like novelists David Wood and Sarah Lovett, lives in Santa Fe). But she has managed to attract to attention of a CIA unit that begins to track her even before they learn her identity, her sex, her nationality or her eventual mission. Torture, beatings, and death ensue.

(Reviewer's note: Like many novelists, Reich attributes capabilities to the CIA within the United States that would more accurately be the mission of other agencies authorized to operate inside this county, as in this case, the Nuclear Security Office).

Varyushka and her pursuer head for a final (literally apocalyptic) showdown in New York City that had me turning pages (figuratively, since I was reading it on my Kindle) late into the night. This is a book you will not soon forget. And James had a major reviewer agree with that assessment: "Somewhere between the macho-hipster fantasies of Quentin Tarantino and the banshee-activist theatrics of Pussy Riot dwells Varyushka Cash.... Now that's entertainment." -- *New York Times Book Review*

### January Case File Number Three

*Dangerous Attachments* by Sarah Lovett, Villard Books, 1995, (HC)

I had read two other Sarah Lovett novels featuring Santa Fe forensic psychiatrist Dr.

Sylvia Strange, so chairing a panel featuring her and two other Santa Fe thriller authors gave me a great opportunity to read this, the first volume in her series. And it certainly contains every element that effective thrillers should have: a competent, even heroic protagonist with a plausible buy-in, through her vocation, to extreme jeopardy, even repeated violent attacks, in an escalating level of personal danger as she recognizes the higher stakes involved in what should be a simple psych assessment of a NM prison inmate that would get him transferred to a more lenient prison facility.

Like all good thriller authors, Sarah rapidly and effectively changes point of view, sometimes within the same chapter, in order to increase the suspense and drive the plot with scenes and characters Sylvia is not present for. There used to be a category of thriller known as "fem-jep," in which females in jeopardy were often stalked. In an earlier age, such authors as Daphne du Maurier, Phyllis Whitney, Mary Stewart, and Mary Higgins Clark often had their heroines rescued by men.

Sarah needs no such devices. Modern authors have their strong female characters rescue themselves. But Sylvia finds herself in so many dangerous situations that it's often the timely arrival/intervention of corrections officers or police that saves her, not without physical injuries and the near destruction of her home. A young boy and her dog are also put in jeopardy, and if you've ever wanted to scream at a heroine "don't go in your house," this will be a book you'll love.

Other Sylvia Strange titles are equally compelling and you'll enjoy the Santa Fe locales Sarah uses to great effect. Interesting aside: Sarah co-wrote with former CIA operative Valerie Plame the new spy novel *Blowback*, and the two are hard at work on a sequel.

--Rob Kresge (www.robertkresge.com)

*The Bull Slayer* by Bruce Macbain, Poisoned Pen Press, 2013, 271 pp (PB)

Set in A.D. 1<sup>st</sup> century Bithynia-Pontus (modern northwestern Turkey), *The Bull Slayer* intrigues with a short opening chapter that takes

us into an underground Mithraeum (place of worship) to witness the initiation of a new member into the rank of Raven. Mithra, a Persian sun-god, promised eternal salvation through participation in a bloody baptismal initiation, ritual meals, and advancement through a series of seven ranks.

Emperor Trajan sends Gaius Plinius—Pliny—as governor of a distant Asian province. He is to clear up political unrest, curb unregulated spending on unfinished public works, and reform a long-corrupt ruling structure. All this is in the midst of a hostile Greek-speaking population that considers their Roman conquerors as oppressors.

Pliny brings his young wife, Calpurnia, with him. Their age difference is 24 years, and his frequent long trips to inspect nearby cities causes loneliness. Ione, her maid, is her only companion. Calpurnia, an amateur artist, meets Agathon at a gallery exhibit. The younger man insinuates himself into her life by first offering to sketch her in his studio, then declaring his love. Ione is a co-conspirator until the affair gets out of hand and Agathon tires of Calpurnia.

From guilt, she calls on fortune-teller Pancrates for help; he offers to free her of a love-curse in exchange for confidential palace information, but she rejects his blackmail attempt.

Pliny encounters Marcus Balbus, Fiscal Procurator of the province. With absolute authority over its finances, he is wary of Pliny's investigation. When Balbus goes missing, his accountant Silvanus takes over the Treasury. Suspected of murdering Balbus, he soon disappears. After the two men's horses are discovered in a nearby village, a search finds the decomposing corpse of Balbus in a shallow grave.

Following the Procurator's ornate funeral, an investigation into his murder picks up tempo: Suetonius, on Pliny's staff, seeks information in taverns and from Balbus's brothel mistress, as well as others who conducted business with him. Suspicion gradually falls on possible members of the Mithraic cult; mystic greetings from an unknown Father to an unknown Sun-Runner are reader clues.

Pliny visits the murder site to search for hidden entrances to the underground temple. After false leads, the Mithraeum is discovered, just as an earthquake shatters the area in an unexpected ending that involves Calpurnia.

N.B.: Macbain's plot involves Calpurnia in a fictional, if plausible, sexual affair. Pliny's historical letters have several entries relating to his young wife. One written to the aunt who helped raise her praises Calpurnia's intelligence, virtue and devotion to him. She expresses interest in reading copies of his writings, learning some by heart, and setting his verses to music. One letter to her expresses Pliny's concern over her health and asks that she write once, even twice a day to reassure him. Another speaks of his love and longing for her. A final letter thanks Trajan for allowing Calpurnia to use the Imperial Post in returning to Italy and attending her grandfather's funeral. They never see each other again; Pliny died shortly afterward.

—Albert Noyer ([www.albertnoyer.com](http://www.albertnoyer.com))

*The House at Riverton* by Kate Morton,  
Washington Square Press, 2009, 468 pp (TP)

Set in England from 1914 to 1999, *The House at Riverton* is a saga of the heyday and subsequent decline of the English country house, as well as a gothic mystery with a tragic secret. The story is narrated by Grace Bradley, who served at Riverton Manor and kept the secret until her deathbed. Fans of *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs* will love this saga!

Grace Bradley, at age 99, is asked to serve as an expert consultant on a film being produced about Riverton Manor and its tragedy. The memories come flooding back to Grace, who has successfully suppressed them for decades. As her life comes to an end, she dictates her memories and confesses the secret, in hopes her grandson will cherish the story.

The author skillfully weaves the past and present, telling the story of young housemaid Grace who began her life of service, at age 14, in Riverton, where her mother had served before

her. The reader quickly figures out the identity of Grace's father and the reason her mother left service, long before Grace does.

Young Grace longs for the camaraderie of siblings that she observes between the Hartford children: Hannah, Emmeline, and David. As a servant, she is virtually invisible to the family, all the better to observe their relationships. Grace is high on a balcony dusting the library's 9,000 books when she witnesses a pivotal scene between the Hartfords and their friend Robbie.

Grace forms lifelong friendships with the other servants 'downstairs': Mrs. Townsend the cook, Katie the scullery maid, Mr. Hamilton the butler, Nancy the ladies' maid, Alfred the footman. The servants at Riverton are bound together with kindness and loyalty to serve the 'upstairs' family.

World War I permanently changes everyone's life. Individuals begin to think outside their traditional roles as they serve their country from the smallest local volunteer duties up to the ultimate sacrifice. Shell-shocked survivors find it impossible to re-integrate into their previous roles.

Never fear that the author has overly romanticized the lives of servants by portraying the loving and cohesive servants at Riverton. When Hannah marries and moves to London, Grace is elevated to lady's maid, and finds herself in a much different servant environment than Riverton. The servants in the new household are encouraged to spy and tattle upon one another.

Grace is many times torn between the desire to find her own happiness, and duty to Hannah. She chooses duty. What a different story this might have been otherwise!

With heavy foreshadowing throughout the book, I was sure I had guessed the tragic secret – but I didn't. The story's conclusion comes swiftly and ties many relationships together – I slowed down my reading to savor it.

The author's note describes her extensive research of the socio-historic period, including gothic novels. As I read *The House at Riverton*, I felt there were many parallels to *Downton Abbey's* subplots; now I see they both are based on a wealth of research. The book is long but

never drags; I wish it had gone on longer and explored the happiness Grace found later in life as an archaeologist.

—Susan Zates ([smzates@yahoo.com](mailto:smzates@yahoo.com))

## **Series Mysteries**

*The Girl on Legare Street* by Karen White, NAL, 2009, 352 pp (PB)

The second book of the Tradd Street mystery-supernatural series set in modern Charleston.

Melanie Middleton is a super-organized, successful realtor. In the first book, *The House on Tradd Street*, Melanie inherited a historic home she didn't want. With the help of her friends and father, she embarked upon a complete restoration project. Melanie has begun to appreciate the beauty and tradition embodied in the historic homes of her beloved Charleston.

At age seven, Melanie was abandoned by her mother shortly after her grandmother died. For 33 years Melanie has survived by her wits, first having to care for her alcoholic father, then establishing her career. She is organized to the point of obsession, a coping mechanism she relies upon to keep her life running smoothly.

Melanie is astonished when her mother, Ginnette Prioleau, returns to Charleston and asks Melanie to be her realtor to buy back the family home on Legare Street. Melanie is bitter about being abandoned and wants nothing to do with her mother. She is manipulated into taking on her mother as a client, then further manipulated into moving into the Legare Street house while her Tradd Street house's floors are sanded.

The first book of the series focused primarily on Melanie and her obsessive personality, introducing her eccentric friends and the mystery of the Confederate diamonds. The supernatural element was a light touch. However in this second book, the supernatural element is the primary focus, and Melanie is in danger.

Melanie has to figure out who is the kind and protective Hessian soldier ghost, who is the

malevolent ghost wishing to destroy her and why, who are the girls wearing lockets in family paintings, what happened in a last-century shipwreck, and why a persistent reporter is competing with her to unravel the mystery. Along with the mysteries and reconciling with her mother, Melanie is on-again, off-again with boyfriend Jack.

There is quite a bit of interesting detail to follow in the story, although too much “woo-woo” for my taste. I’m fond of Melanie’s snappy sarcastic wit. The surprise cliff-hanger ending ensures I will read book 3, *The Strangers on Montagu Street*. According to the author’s website ([www.karen-white.com](http://www.karen-white.com)), the series will end at the fourth book, *Return to Tradd Street*.

—Susan Zates ([smzates@yahoo.com](mailto:smzates@yahoo.com))

***Watchers of Time*** by Charles Todd, Bantam 2001, 339 pp (PB)

Book #5 in the Inspector Ian Rutledge historical mystery series, set in post-WWI England.

Ian Rutledge is shell-shocked and haunted by the ghost of Hamish Macleod, a soldier he was forced to execute during WWI. Seriously wounded on a previous assignment in Scotland, Rutledge isn’t ready for full duty at Scotland Yard, but wants to return anyway. His supervisor Bowles sends Rutledge to Osterley in Norfolk on a cursory polite visit, to follow up on the local investigation into the killing of a priest.

The local police are convinced Father James was killed by a burglar, an outsider who was in town for a seasonal fair. Rutledge learns it’s important to all in Osterley that a stranger be found to have committed the crime – they can’t tolerate the suspicion that one of their own could be a murderer. But Rutledge can sense that not everyone believes the circumstantial evidence is correct.

Rutledge lingers in Osterley and learns many dark secrets, stretching back to the Titanic disaster and even further, to earlier generations. He eventually discovers why Father James, a Catholic priest, was called to the deathbed of an Anglican man, whose vicar was in attendance with the family. In the end, Rutledge assures

justice is done.

Red herrings abound in this dark, atmospheric tale. Rutledge feels tormented by Hamish’s constant presence during his waking hours. At first Hamish reminds Rutledge of his last outing in Scotland, where he was seriously wounded, but as the case unfolds, Hamish actually provides keen insights and evaluates witness veracity and strength of evidence, much as a detective partner on the force would--an interesting evolution.

I highly recommend the Inspector Ian Rutledge series. Start with *A Test of Wills* and read the series in order to fully understand the characters. The next book is *A Fearsome Doubt*.

—Susan Zates ([smzates@yahoo.com](mailto:smzates@yahoo.com))

***Haunting Jordan*** by P.J. Alderman, Bantam 2009, 421 pp (PB)

The first book of the Port Chatham mystery series set in Washington State in the present as well as in 1890. Fictitious Port Chatham seems to be modeled after Port Townsend.

Jordan Marsh is a therapist from L.A. fleeing the publicity of her husband’s murder. She is LAPD Detective Drake’s primary suspect, due to his own emotional baggage. Jordan purchased Longren House, a 19th-century Queen Anne Victorian in historic Port Chatham, to restore and enjoy as a refuge. On her first day in Port Chatham, she is adopted by a dog and meets sexy neighbor Jase, who owns a local pub; smart and sympathetic police chief Darcy; and Hattie and Charlotte, the ghosts who haunt her house.

Jordan discovers from her new friends Jase and Darcy that being able to see and hear ghosts is held in high esteem in Port Chatham (not considered a sign of mental illness). Hattie and Charlotte beseech Jordan to solve Hattie’s century-old murder. The man hanged for the crime was framed, they assure her.

Jordan finds her life in Port Chatham is quite different from her Four-Point Plan for Personal Renewal (FPP). She spends her days cleaning up her old Victorian, researching the Hattie Longren murder case in historical

documents, and trying to name her dog (he doesn't like any of the names she suggests). At first she has to make a conscious effort to be social, but dinner at Jase's pub becomes a welcome habit, a time to compare notes with Jase and Darcy.

Point of view alternates between Jordan in the present and Hattie in June 1890. Hattie is a widow. Her husband Charles was killed in a mutiny aboard one of his ships, incited by a pro-union newsletter. Longren Shipping is rumored to have shady dealings, and Hattie determines to find out the truth. She meets stiff resistance from business manager Clive Johnson and police chief John Greeley. Greeley is attracted to Hattie's young sister Charlotte, Hattie's ward since their parents' deaths. Hattie is determined to keep Charlotte away from Greeley.

Rival businessman Mike Seavey is rumored to traffic in white slavery. He is attracted to Hattie, but she rejects his offer of protection. The madam of the Green Light brothel, Mona Starr, cautions Hattie not to ruin her reputation by coming to the waterfront. Hattie holds union organizer Frank Lewis responsible for her husband's death, by printing the union Red Letter, but she realizes Frank can help her uncover information about her husband's business dealings.

It's easy to guess the identity of the murderer in the historic murder case, but the present-day murder resolution comes as a surprise. Jordan calls upon the ghosts to help save her life from a former patient.

The series debut is very appealing and entertaining, with quirky characters, the Pacific Northwest coastal setting, and Jordan's ongoing Victorian restoration project. The second book of the series is *Ghost Ship*. —Susan Zates ([smzates@yahoo.com](mailto:smzates@yahoo.com))

***Last Car to Elysian Fields*** by James Lee Burke, Simon & Schuster, 2003, 352 pp (HC)

Book 13 of the Dave Robicheaux series set in modern-day Louisiana.

Dave Robicheaux formerly served as a homicide detective on the New Orleans Police Force with his partner and best friend Cleve Purcel. Both were infamous for taking justice into their own hands, breaking every rule with reckless abandon, and causing as much or more trouble as the criminals they pursued. Both drank heavily, losing personal relationships and jobs. Dave, twice widowed, is now living in New Iberia, a recovered alcoholic working for the sheriff's office.

*Last Car to Elysian Fields* opens with Dave investigating a teenage drunk-driving fatality. The driver purchased alcohol from a drive-by daiquiri stand, lost control of her vehicle, and ran off the road, killing herself and her friends in the car.

Meanwhile in New Orleans, Dave's longtime friend Father Jimmie Dolan is stalked by hired Scots assassin Max Coll. The clever priest thwarts a few attempts on his life, and puts Dave on Coll's trail. A Mafia gangster is killed by Coll, and his brothers come after Dave.

Father Dolan wants Dave to investigate a toxic landfill in a poverty-stricken area. Dave uncovers connections to ex-girlfriend Theodosha's father, Castile LeJeune, and her mobbed-up husband, Murchie Flannigan. Dave becomes obsessed with the 50-year-old disappearance of Junior Crudup, a convict at Angola who was a talented blues musician.

Violent confrontations abound as expected in a Dave Robicheaux book. I recommend listening to the series narrated by Will Patton, who has the perfect voice to fit Dave's character. Next book in the series is *Crusader's Cross*. —Susan Zates ([smzates@yahoo.com](mailto:smzates@yahoo.com))

***A Cold and Lonely Place*** by Sara J. Henry, Crown, 2013, 304 pp (HC)

The second book of the Troy Chance series, set in the Adirondacks of upstate New York.

Troy is a freelance journalist, single by choice. Last summer she rescued a small kidnapped boy from drowning in Lake Champlain, and she had the opportunity to wed the boy's father and move to a luxurious life in

Canada. Troy chose to return to her home in Lake Placid, where she shares a house with roommates on a casual basis. She remains friends with the boy Paul, his father Philippe, and police detective Jameson who helped her trace the kidnappers.

Troy is on a routine assignment to cover the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival, as chunks of ice are cut from the lake for an ice palace, when a body is discovered under the ice. Troy recognizes the drowned man as her roommate Jessamyn's boyfriend, Tobin.

A young, inexperienced reporter writes a sensationalist story insinuating that Jessamyn killed her boyfriend, and posts it on the newspaper's website. Troy discovers the story and alerts the editor. The story is promptly replaced with a well-written factual story by Troy, but the damage is done--Troy and Jessamyn are hounded by media and irate townspeople.

Troy takes Jessamyn with her to visit Philippe and Paul in Canada, hoping the negative publicity will dissipate. When they return home, they have a surprise visitor: Tobin's sister Win. Tobin was the second son of a wealthy family, who had fled to the Adirondacks for unknown reasons.

Win asks Troy to write an extensive retrospective of Tobin to commemorate him, and the newspaper agrees. It's going to be the biggest and toughest assignment Troy's ever had.

Together Troy, Jessamyn, and Win investigate the circumstances leading to Tobin's death. Win proves to be an essential ally and provides a wealth of family history, including a photo album documenting her and Tobin's childhood.

The more interviews Troy conducts, the more mysterious Tobin's life seems. Eventually Troy discovers tragic secrets and has to decide what needs to be revealed, and what should not.

As well as a mystery, this is a rewarding story of friendship, family, trust and loyalty. Troy is a believable protagonist, steadfast but occasionally beset with doubts, as any intelligent sensitive person would be.

A few extra small mysteries at the end

don't seem to contribute much, but overall the story builds steadily in suspense, and the solution resolves loose ends. I look forward to the next book of the series. —Susan Zates ([smzates@yahoo.com](mailto:smzates@yahoo.com))

## 2014 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, January 28, 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, February 25, 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, March 25, 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, April 22, 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](http://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](mailto:newsette@earthlink.net), with "Nooseletter" in the subject line.

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

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