

# THE NOOSELETTER



## CROAK & DAGGER NEW MEXICO CHAPTER – SISTERS in CRIME

Volume XVII, Number 4 — July / August 2021

### †The President's Corner†

Dear Siblings,

Rip off those masks, unless you're holding up a bank. Take off those gloves, unless you've just murdered someone, and step in closer than six feet, unless it's a rectangular hole in the ground. We're ready to meet face-to-face on July 27 at 7:00 p.m. in our new meeting place, Sandia Presbyterian Church, [10704 Paseo del Norte NE, Albuquerque, NM US 87122-3112](#). Click the link to see the map. Enter on Eubank to get to the frontage road also named Paseo Del Norte. The church has a north entrance and a south entrance. The south entrance has steps, but it may be the only unlocked way to get into the building.

We've been a busy chapter. Donnell's third Monday Zoom events are outstanding, and we hope to have more of them posted on our website soon. Check out our first Zoom presentation by Joseph Badal. It's up and running.

Our Great Library Adventure took a road trip last week to install your books in the Vista Grande Public Library, part of Santa Fe's public library system. Take a trip north out of Albuquerque and go a couple of miles east of Santa Fe to the community of El Dorado just south of I-40 to see your books at work. Your physical books are in a display case—with lights! Ann Zeigler's husband Paul created two colorful posters showcasing covers of our books, which the librarian has hung front and center for all to see. The librarian has even requested us to do an authors' event this fall.

Mystery Month Saturday Sessions, our dual Zoom event with SouthWest Writers in June, garnered many viewers and appears to have been quite a success in showcasing our authors and our books, and we've acquired new members. Welcome to you!

Do you set goals for yourself? I always have. In my billfold I have little pieces of paper written over the years about what I planned to achieve. What a surprise when I remember to pull them out and read

them. I often discover I've met those goals and now need new goals. Promotion ideas dominate my more recent slips of papers. Yet look at what our Chapter does to get our names and works out in front of the public. C&D works hard to bring you worthwhile up-to-date information about writing and publishing. We also strive to promote each other's works.



*Who invited those squirrels???*

What else do we do? We value reading. We support bookstores, our reading members, and our fans. Left Coast Crime (LCC), a huge author, writer, reading fan conference, will be in Albuquerque this coming spring, and we are the host chapter. I'm updating our volunteer-tasks list for the LCC coordinators, Lucinda Surber and Stan Ulrich. Email me if you aren't on my list and want to be a part of this: [chardietzpen@gmail.com](mailto:chardietzpen@gmail.com).

Take a slip of paper and write, "I love attending and benefitting from our Croak & Dagger Chapter events." and tuck it away. Then we'll see you July 27 at 7:00 p.m. when Janet Greger will be our speaker, and we'll serve you refreshments.

Looking forward to seeing your charming faces! —  
*Charlene Dietz, President*

### We're Back!

Don't miss our 27 meeting, when we will get together in person (!) at our new venue, Sandia Presbyterian Church on Paseo del Norte. See pages 1 and 14 of this Nooseletter for how to get there. The speaker will be our own Janet Greger, author of *The Coming Flu, I Saw You in Beirut*, and other mysteries, who will talk about "Setting as Character." See page 4 for a preview of her views on this topic and give some thought to your own. Tell us what they are.

There will be edible treats as well.

And in August... a special treat.

Steve Brewer, author of the Bubba Mabry mysteries, will tell us about creating a series character. Don't miss it!

Check out the Croak & Dagger Website ([www.croak-and-dagger.com](http://www.croak-and-dagger.com)) for:

- Upcoming Programs & Events
- Meeting Schedule
- Our Authors & links to member authors' websites
- How to Join C&D / SinC
- Link to the C&D blog

REMEMBER: Our Croak& Dagger blog provides opportunities for free publicity for members. Contact our website maven, Susan Zates (address below) for more information or with an idea for a blog article. Get your name out there wherever you can!



## Sisters in Crime Guppies

SinC Guppies is an online writer's support group. Guppies come from across the United States and Canada but share a passion for writing mysteries and a common goal of getting published.

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. For more information, check them out at [www.sinc-guppies.org](http://www.sinc-guppies.org).



Sisters in Crime was founded in 1986.

**The mission of Sisters in Crime shall be "to promote the ongoing advancement, recognition, and professional development of women crime writers."**

**And our motto is: "SinC up with great crime writing!"**



### The Line Up

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# ***Is Location a Character in Your Novels?***

by J. L. Greger

Location is a character in all novels. The question is: Has the author developed the character well?

To me, the strongest example of location as a character is Joseph's Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. If you don't remember this novel from high school and college English classes, think of *Apocalypse Now*. The film was loosely based on Conrad's novel. Interestingly, the location in the novel is the Congo and in the film is Cambodia and Vietnam. It doesn't matter. The character is the dark, almost impenetrable jungle—the heart of darkness. It sets the stage for mystery and psychological terror. Here's a quote:

Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances.

Mystery writers like Agatha Christie have also used location as a character and as a way to strategically advance the plot. Think of her *Murder on the Orient Express*. An elegant train of is stopped by heavy snowfall somewhere in Yugoslavia and then a murder is discovered. Christie has effectively isolated a group of interesting characters and defined that the murderer must be one of them by encasing them in a claustrophobic location.

Now let's consider location in novels by members of our local Sisters in Crime group. Obviously Tony and Anne Hillerman have made the Four Corners region a character in their novels as much as Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee. In doing so, they have introduced millions of people to Navajo culture and probably spurred tourism to New Mexico. Similarly, Pat Smith Wood turned Petroglyphs National Monument into a character in *Murder in the Petroglyphs*.

Location can add authenticity to a novel. Sue Hallgarth features the area around the D .H. Lawrence house in San Cristobal, New Mexico, in her historical mystery about Willa Cather, *Death Comes....* She based her story on Willa Cather's 1925 trip to Taos. Similarly, Chicago of the roaring twenties is an "authentic" character in Charlene Dietz's *The Flapper, the Scientist, and the Saboteur*.

Sometimes a location sets the psychological tone of a novel. In many ways the most interesting character in Kari Bovee's *Girl with a Gun* is Buffalo's Bill's Wild West Show. This chaotic, inconsistent circus is a microcosm of life. In contrast, Louise Penny (not a member of Croak and Dagger unfortunately) makes the village of Three Pines a comfortable, sometimes humorously honest haven, which reinforces the basically humane character of Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of the Sûreté du Québec. Penny even says, "Three Pines is a state of mind. When we choose tolerance over hate... Goodness over bullying."

I've use locations to add sparkle and advance the plot of several of my mystery/thrillers, such as the Middle East in *I Saw You in Beirut* and Cuba in *Malignancy*. In *Dirty Holy Water*, I set part of the novel in India for a more symbolic reason. It's easy for American readers to recognize the incongruity of Hindus in India considering the Ganges River sacred but allowing it to become arguably the most polluted river in the world. It is less obvious to the same readers that an individual who venerates baptismal fonts and holy mud from El Santuario de Chimayó may be the worst villain in the novel.

In summary, I think a location can be a colorful character that adds authenticity to plots in novels. It can also be a way for an author to attempt to take readers deeper inside other characters in a novel and, more importantly, into themselves. What do you think?



# Crack the Case with 5 SFF Detectives

by [Neil Sharpson](#) – Wed Jun 23, 2021

*She walked into my office on a pair of gams so long she almost gave herself a haircut on the ceiling fan. She was a real classy website, the kind I didn't normally see in my line of work, but judging from the black eye, her comments section could get a little rough.*

*She leaned on my desk and told me she had a job for me.*

*"I need a list of five detectives" she told me. "And I will pay you a modest amount."*

*I leaned back in my chair, remembered it was a stool and rolled onto the floor.*

*"Sounds like a real easy job. What's the catch, doll-face?"*

*"They all have to be from science fiction or fantasy," she said, like she said things like that to men like me every day of the week. And maybe she did. Maybe that was one of her go-to article formats. Maybe the world was really that sick a place.*

*"That won't be easy" I said.*

*"You'll figure it out."*

*She left. I lit a cigarette and let the smoke waft over the Venetian blinds atmospheric like.*

*This was going to get ugly. I knew right then that I was going to end up in the kind of dead end that can only be resolved by a character with a foreign accent walking into the room with a gun...*

**Detective #1: Rick Deckard in *Bladerunner*** (based on [/Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?](#) by Philip K. Dick)

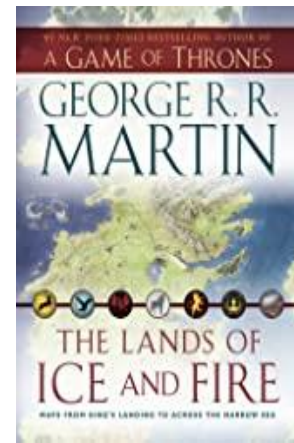
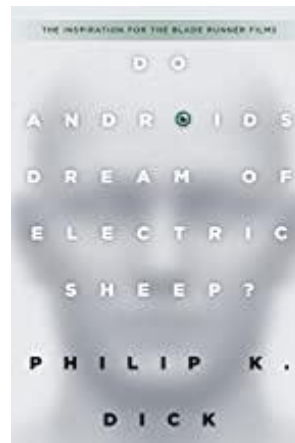
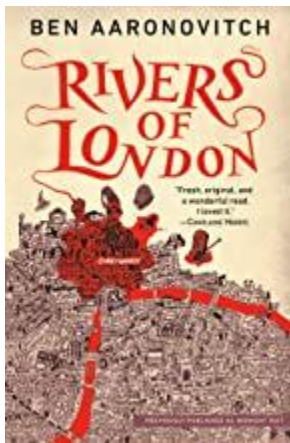
Harrison Ford famously called his third most iconic SF/Fantasy role "a detective who doesn't do any detecting." But Deckard, like the movie around him, is not about plot and Ford is playing less a character than the entire concept of the hard-bitten, morally compromised, hard-drinking gumshoe. Yes, it's all about the trenchcoat and the mood and the atmosphere. But what mood. What an atmosphere. What. A. Trenchcoat.

**Detective #2: Constable Peter Grant in Ben Aaronovitch's [Rivers of London](#) Series**

A young Sierra Leonean/British copper with an aptitude for magic, Grant is recruited into the Folly, the London Met's unit for dealing with magical crimes. A complete departure from your typical detective archetype, Grant is young, tech-savvy, snarky and genuinely seems to like other human beings(!) Sure, Grant might face ghosts and body-hopping serial killers, but he also acts as a mediator, brokering peace between the feuding gods of London's rivers and liaising with other agencies from across the world. *Rivers of London* takes a whole-cloth approach to depicting the day-to-day life of a modern British police officer which, honestly, makes it feel more faithful and realistic than a lot of straight crime fiction.

**Detective #3: Ned Stark in George R. R. Martin's [A Song of Ice and Fire](#) series**

So stop me if you've heard this one before. A good man comes to a corrupt city seething with intrigue and betrayal and tries to solve the murder of his old mentor. But he puts his trust in the one guy who he absolutely should not have trusted and in the end he's brought down by a beautiful, treacherous blonde with gams that go everywhere, noticeably around her brother's firm, dewey thighs. Yup. Ned Stark is your classic film noir detective trying to solve a hideous crime and ends up exposing corruption that goes all the way to the top, and which is he powerless to stop. Forget it, Ned. It's *King's Landing*.



#### Detective #4: Dirk Gently in Douglas Adams' [Dirk Gently Novels](#)

Less a single character and more a concept, Dirk Gently was Adams' commentary on fictional detectives who rely more on coincidence and always correct guesses than on anything remotely like actual deduction. Dirk believes in the fundamental interconnectedness of all things, and takes a holistic approach to solving his cases, just acting randomly until the universe provides him with a solution. Which it always does. For example, when stumped by a particularly vexing mystery Dirk muses that a child could see the solution, asks a random child and gets the correct answer (the perpetrator had a time machine). It's a very plastic concept, and probably why Dirk is so radically different across his many adaptations.

#### Detective #5: Tuvok in *Star Trek: Voyager*

Being the security officer on a Starfleet vessel is a weird job. On the one hand, you're a bridge officer responsible for the ship's arsenal which could literally devastate entire civilizations from orbit. On the other hand, you will occasionally be called down to Ten Forward to resolve a drunken dispute arising from the Betazed ambassador getting sloshed and sending telepathic dick pics to the Andorian delegation. You're basically a bouncer with nuclear codes. Other duties include getting thrown around by whatever insecure monster or space deity wants to make themselves feel like a big man this week and, of course, solving the occasional good old fashioned MURDER.

*I looked at the names on my list. Not a bad day's work. Now, I just had to figure out a way to wrap this all up.*

*A gun came into my office and made itself comfortable, followed by the shifty-looking mustachioed man hanging off the handle.*

*"My hemployer vishes to speak vith you" he said. "Please to follow me."*

[Neil Sharpson lives in Dublin with his wife and their two children. Having written for theatre since his teens, Neil transitioned to writing novels in 2017, adapting his own play *The Caspian Sea* into *When The Sparrow Falls*.]

For more: [https://www.tor.com/2021/06/23/crack-the-case-with-5-sff-detectives/?utm\\_source=exacttarget&utm\\_medium=newsletter&utm\\_term=tordotcom-tordotcomnewsletter&utm\\_content=na-readblog-blogpost&utm\\_campaign=tordotcom&e=61f950dcad57dd7846ed0256c48c38394e3ea808f2ba0c690a386d1966ca540f](https://www.tor.com/2021/06/23/crack-the-case-with-5-sff-detectives/?utm_source=exacttarget&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_term=tordotcom-tordotcomnewsletter&utm_content=na-readblog-blogpost&utm_campaign=tordotcom&e=61f950dcad57dd7846ed0256c48c38394e3ea808f2ba0c690a386d1966ca540f)

# Writers Conferences for 2021 and Beyond

by [Dana Sitar](#)

For (many!) more, go to: <https://thewritelife.com/writers-conferences/>

*Because COVID-19 has drastically changed the world we live in, many of these conferences may be canceled, postponed, or moved partially or entirely online. Check with conference organizers for details. But if you're tired of learning about interesting opportunities just a little too late, **check out this list of annual writers conferences for future planning**, so you can join in on the mingling, learning and inspiration.*

## Author Advantage Live

**When:** Annually in August

**Where:** Online

This 3-day interactive virtual experience contains all the information you'll need to be successful as an author—no matter your genre or goals! AAL brings a vast list of expert speakers to the table and allows you to connect with a community of like-minded authors.

## San Francisco Writing for Change Conference

**When:** Annually in September

**Where:** Online

This nearly month-long series of online events tells nonfiction writers, “Your ideas can change the world.” The conference brings together writers and industry experts to teach nonfiction writers about writing, publishing, marketing and technology.

## Writer's Winter Escape Cruise

**When:** Bi-annually February-March (Next: 2022)

**Where:** Departs from Miami, FL for the Bahamas

Join this unique writers' conference...at sea.

For five days, writers can enjoy the beauty of the Caribbean Sea while networking and learning about the publishing industry.

## SleuthFest

**When:** Annually in February-March

**Where:** Boca Raton, Florida

SleuthFest is an annual conference for mystery, suspense and thriller writers sponsored by the Florida chapter of Mystery Writers of America.

This conference includes writing and marketing workshops, networking events, and pitch sessions with guest agents and editors. It even includes hands-on forensic workshops!

## Killer Nashville

**When:** Annually in August

**Where:** Nashville, TN

While attractive to mystery/thriller authors and screenwriters for its unique crime-focused sessions, Killer Nashville welcomes writers of all levels and genres.

“Imagine hearing a CIA Analyst, an FBI agent on terrorism, Dr Bill Bass on The Body Farm, bestselling CJ Box on how he juggles his writing and plans his days, Heyward Gould on screenplays, and so much more. They even had a crime scene, with awards to those who studied the clues and figured out the mystery,” mystery author C. Hope Clark reflected on her 2012 Killer Nashville experience.

### **Virtual Winter Thrills (Thrillerfest)**

**When:** Annually January–March

**Where:** Online

“It is the only conference where I really feel at home — and [International Thriller Writers] is truly the tribe I belong to...” says Joanna Penn (thriller author J.F. Penn) at The Creative Penn. “I can talk about ways to murder people and weapons of choice and not feel weird. I can learn from some of the biggest names in the business, whose hours of writing experience number in the many thousands.”

Virtual Winter Thrills is the latest iteration of the popular Thrillerfest writers conference from International Thriller Writers. It includes the perennial Practice PitchFest sessions and Master Class with bestselling authors, plus a new series of craft and business classes called Winter Thrills MBA.

### **American Society of Journalists and Authors Annual Conference**

**When:** Annually in Fall

**Where:** Various U.S. cities

Attend this one-day conference to learn how to manage a freelance business or publish a book in the new media environment. You can also find other one-day events throughout the year in other U.S. cities, covering various topics relevant to nonfiction writers, journalists and authors.

### **Writer’s Digest Conference**

**When:** Annually in Fall

**Where:** New York City

The Writer’s Digest editors bring you this annual conference with resources for craft, career and creative inspiration. Nearly 50 agents and editors participate in the infamous Pitch Slam, and dozens of industry experts lead educational sessions.

## **Or you might consider...a Writing Retreat**

Want to meet and work with other writers, but in a more intimate setting than a conference? A writing retreat might be just the ticket. And while these retreats might not happen this year as planned due to the pandemic, it feels good to dream a little, right?

Whereas conferences focus on networking and lectures, writing retreats fall somewhere in between. Most are in beautiful locations (where, presumably, your creative juices will flow more easily), and offer a combination of workshops, tours and interaction with a small group of writers. They can be pricey, however, so do your research and ask about scholarships.

For an extensive list of retreats, go to: *go to:* <https://thewritelife.com/writers-retreats/> Meanwhile, here’s one close to home:

### **The Taos Deep Dive & Revision Writer’s Retreat**

Want to get away, but not too far away? Try this women-only retreat in Taos, New Mexico, hosted by author Jennifer Loudon from October 24 – 30, 2021. Your fee includes everything: “All lodging and all meals, daily writing seminars, daily yoga classes, on-the-spot writing coaching, plentiful snacks, and love love love.” In a testimonial on Loudon’s site, an anonymous writer said: “The retreat was honestly life-changing for me because it helped me understand what it is to be a writer.”

**Cost:** \$2,390–\$2,790 per person.



## 22 in ABQ: Our Next In-Person Convention Southwest Sleuths: Albuquerque, New Mexico

**When:** April 7–10, 2022

**Where:** Hyatt Regency Albuquerque

**Guest of Honor:** Mick Herron

**Guest of Honor:** Catriona McPherson

**Fan Guest of Honor:** Kristopher Zgorski

**Toastmaster:** Kellye Garrett

**Ghost of Honor:** Tony Hillerman

[More Information and Registration](#)



Not sure if you are registered for Albuquerque? Check the [Attendee](#) page for your name.

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If you are interested in learning more about hosting or helping with a future Left Coast Crime Convention, please [let us know](#)! The LCC Standing Committee would love to help you with your bid and answer all your questions. You will receive all the support you need!

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## ***How Amazon benefits from counterfeit books***

*A New York Times report finds publishers are giving more money to Amazon to protect themselves from plagiarists.*

by [Kaitlyn Tiffany@kait\\_tiffanykaitlyn.tiffany@vox.com](mailto:KaitlynTiffany@kait_tiffanykaitlyn.tiffany@vox.com)

**Editor's note:** I've personally encountered this problem when the correspondence school I work for as a writing instructor sent its students a "new" edition of *The Elements of Style*. My first impression was just how horribly designed it was, then I noticed that the index references were incorrect, and finally other hints convinced the Institute to stop sending the books and apologize to students.

Amazon has a counterfeit book problem. But it isn't really a problem for Amazon itself, reporter David Streitfeld argued in an investigation published in the New York Times. In fact, publishers and authors whose books are photocopied or otherwise plagiarized just come to rely on Amazon even more.

Streitfeld starts by telling the story of the small, Sperryville, Virginia-based medical handbook publisher Antimicrobial Therapy. The company is best known for a book called *The Sanford Guide to Antimicrobial Therapy*, which is extremely popular, is commonly used by doctors to prescribe various drugs, and has been ripped off by counterfeiters regularly for the past two years, the Times reports. (This particular scam is actively dangerous, since photocopied versions of the book often smudge numbers in recommended dosages.)

Antimicrobial Therapy's vice president Scott Kelly told the Times that his company found out about the problem via Amazon reviews (customers wrote things like "Several pages smudged and unable to read"), and started test-purchasing copies of the book via Amazon and third-party sellers. At least 30 of those 34 books turned out to be counterfeit, and Kelly connected the dots between these knockoffs and a "downward spike" in sales in 2018. "My estimate is that approximately 15 to 25 percent of our sales were taken away by counterfeiting," he told the Times. "We're talking thousands of books."

Amazon provided a comment for the Times report, saying that "this report cites a handful of complaints, but even a handful is too many and we will keep working until it's zero." (Amazon also published a response to the story on its **company blog**, rebutting some of the specific points of the reporting.) But the theme of the various anecdotes Streitfeld lays out — from fake coding manuals to illegitimate paperback versions of popular novels to "summaries" of blockbuster nonfiction books like John Carreyrou's *Bad Blood* — is that they don't cause problems for Amazon directly. Amazon still makes money off all of these sales, and for the most part, it takes a reactive, not proactive, stance.

Amazon, which does not break out revenue or profit from bookselling or publishing, assumes that everyone on its platform operates in good faith until proven otherwise. "It is your responsibility to ensure that your content doesn't violate laws or copyright, trademark, privacy, publicity or other rights," it tells prospective publishers and sellers.

In February, Amazon included counterfeiting in its financial disclosures as a risk factor for the first time, saying it might not be able to prevent its merchants "from selling unlawful, counterfeit, pirated or stolen goods" or "selling goods in an unlawful or unethical manner."

Though this report focuses on physical copies, Amazon has long been criticized for plagiarism in its e-book store, particularly among users of its self-publishing platform Kindle Direct. In that case, it's protected by the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which shields third-party platform providers like Amazon from liability so long as they provide a system to receive takedown notices and remove copyright-infringing content.

The Atlantic published a feature on the **plagiarism problem** in 2016, citing instances in which popular works of fiction were tweaked, renamed, and uploaded as original on Kindle Direct, and pointing out that Amazon keeps its portion of any sales that happen before a customer or author complains.

This February, Amazon launched its **Project Zero anti-counterfeit program**, which gave Amazon-recognized brands the power to police counterfeits themselves and remove fake listings directly. Bill Pollock, founder of the San Francisco-based programming and science guide publisher No Starch, told the New York Times that this solution was just putting even more onus on rights holders to protect themselves: "Why should we be responsible for policing Amazon for fakes? That's their job."

But the kicker is that No Starch is still buying deeper and deeper into Amazon out of necessity, now spending "\$3,000 a month and rising" to keep its search placement higher than the people who are copying it.

For more, go to: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/11/14/how-amazons-quest-more-cheaper-products-has-resulted-flea-market-fakes/>

# Reviews

***Less than a Moment*** by Steven F. Havill.  
Poisoned Pen Press, 2020. 274 pp (TP)

Making an even two dozen in Havill's Posadas County mystery series is this story, in which former Sheriff Bill Gastner plays a side role to his protégée, now Undersheriff Estelle Reyes-Guzman.

Posadas County has made peace with Miles Waddell, a billionaire dreamer whose "NightZone" development on a mesa-top attracts both scientists and nature-lovers who want to study the birds, the scenery, and skies in a true dark zone.

The attraction also tempts a more commercial developer, Kyle Thompson, but no one has time to worry about what sort of speculative sacrilege he's planning next to the now-accepted, and job-creating, NightZone, when he falls from a cliff and is killed. Shortly thereafter, someone shoots up the local newspaper office, wounding two staffers. Are the two incidents related?

The best part of this story is seeing how Estelle has learned to deal with both her boss, grumpy Sheriff Bob Torrez, and the assortment of other characters who make her life and job both easier and harder. The scenes where she counters Torrez's undiplomatic treatment not just of suspects but ordinary citizens too, are really well done.

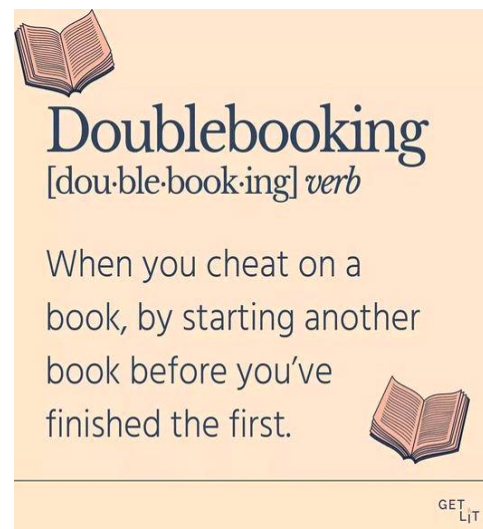
Of course, Estelle also has both fraught and loving relationships with both her husband; her old friend Gastner, who pumps her for information; Kyle's widow, who's a former cop; her musician son and daughter-in-law, visiting celebrities; and any number of townspeople. The question soon becomes, What did Torrez's nephew Quentin have to do with the murder and shootings, if anything? There's a bang-up ending, and all in all a really satisfying read. ♦

***Squeeze Me*** by Carl Hiaasen. Alfred A. Knopf, 2020. 336 pp (HC)

It's been a while since I read one of Hiaasen's always-entertaining Florida mysteries, so when I read the initial reviews of

this one, I couldn't resist. What gets things moving, and fast, is the murder, at the height of Palm Beach's charity ball season, of one Kiki Pew Fitzsimmons. Seemingly incidentally, a giant Burmese python has taken up residence in a tree at the same country club, and our heroine, one Angie Armstrong is called in to help.

Angie is one of those people who anywhere else would be called a pest control specialist, but this being South Florida, the pests get truly exotic, and sometimes it's hard to tell the human variety from the pythons, who are only doing what comes naturally. They never heard of politics, and swamps to them are just home.



And you guessed it—we're not far from a certain former president's home. Hiaasen never names him, but the home is appropriately dubbed Casa Bellicosa, and Kiki Pew was just one member of the geriatric fan club known as the "Potussies," who frequent the place. When her death is ruled a homicide, suspicion falls (naturally) on a hapless illegal immigrant—until Angie manages to sort it all out.

The most fun part of *Squeeze Me* is where Hiaasen aims his celebrated irreverent humor at the expense of the rich, powerful, and stupid—in spades. The dialogue zips right along, and there actually is a plot, which isn't hard to keep track of, but the laughs make reading this more than worthwhile as well as just plain fun. ♦

***The Cactus Plot*** by Vicky Ramakka. Artemesia Publishing, 2019. 268 pp (TP)

Easterner Millie Whitehall finds herself in strange country indeed when she takes on a summer job in the high desert of New Mexico, as a “seasonal botanist” with the Bureau of Land Management. Way out at the edge of beyond is hardly familiar territory for her, but she quickly makes friends with some of her co-workers and particularly with the intriguing little cactus plant she’s there to study—and protect from being trampled by development.

That’s not her only worry. A death that occurred before her arrival, and a second suspicious fatality, both linked to the cactus patches she’s investigating, occur much too close to ignore. As in most cozy mysteries, there are an abundance of characters, even here in the remote desert. They include a representative of the oil and gas business, a laid-back cowboy, a charmingly accented foreign tourist, and a handsome young Navajo biologist, who introduces Millie to his culture. Of course, most of them aren’t what they seem.

There’s a tad too much detail about cactus and other plants Millie meets in her explorations, but not enough that you lose track of the story, and Millie is a sympathetic character. ♦

***The Searcher*** by Tana French. Viking, 2020, 453 pp (HC)

A stand-alone novel by the author of the Dublin Murder Squad series (the first of those six-so-far being *In the Woods*), this one is a mix of genres with French’s keen ability to bring the Irish setting to life making it unique.

Cal Hooper is a retired Chicago cop who somehow happened on an ad for a distressed property in rural Ireland being offered for a price he could afford, and suddenly it looked like a perfect place to fix up and live happily ever after in.

Surprisingly, he kind of does, although nobody wants to leave him alone to tinker on his cottage. The old man from the next farm over likes to lean over the fence and chat. The ladies in the shops in the nearest village want to make a match for him. Most compellingly, a young neighbor, 13-year-old Trey, comes to help him repair this and that, until finally revealing what’s really eating the kid: Will Cal to track down his missing brother? Trey is convinced that Brandon is still alive, although the more Cal (reluctantly) inquires after the missing boy, the less convinced he is that Brandon just ran away from home. And that’s not the only secret he

uncovers—or that suddenly surprises him, the street-smart ex-cop who can still be surprised.

This is a classic setup—the lone stranger coming to town and uncovering its secrets, as well as the dark doings beneath the bucolic surface. You can’t help but warm to Cal and sympathize with his struggles to catch on to local mores—and language. Trey is likeable too, though I warmed up more to the neighbor, Mart, even when his secrets became less appealing. Mostly, like Cal, I enjoyed the rooks squabbling in his trees and hurling insults at him.

Like most of French’s novels, *The Searcher* is a long one, but it’s an easy read, less tense than the Dublin novels and as bucolic as its setting. ♦

***Old Bones*** by Douglas Preston & Lincoln Child. Grand Central Publishing, 2019. 304 pp (HC)

The title of this thriller refers to the bones of the ill-fated Donner party, who became snowbound and died horrible deaths in 1847; given the tales of cannibalism among the pioneers, bones would be all that’s left of them.

Nora Kelly is an archeologist, hot on the trail of the “Lost Camp,” an as-yet undiscovered (likely because it’s fictional) site of an off-shoot of the Party, who are also rumored to have been in possession of a stolen fortune in gold, which was never found. Nora teams up with Clive Benton, a historian who’s come into possession of a diary kept by one of the doomed members of the group. Clive is also a descendent of one of the Donner families, so has as personal interest in the expedition Nora persuades her Institute to sponsor.

Most of the story takes place in the rugged Sierra Nevada, where Nora’s team make camp for an extended stay. Joining them at one point is a young FBI agent, Corrie Swanson, who’s been investigating a murder that looks to be connected with the Donner story, and when one of the party is killed under suspicious circumstances, Nora can’t get rid of her.

The historical research that went into *Old Bones* is fascinating and compellingly presented. However, I was disappointed in the solution to the murder(s), which didn’t seem all that plausible, possibly because the characterization didn’t give much of a hint to who the villain(s) of the piece would turn out to be. There’s also a series featuring FBI agent Pendergast, who’s introduced briefly at the end of *Old Bones* and looks more promising. I may give him a try. ♦

—Linda Triage (ljt23@earthlink.net)



## 2021 MEETING DATES

**Tuesday, July 27, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Tuesday, August 24, 7:00 p.m.**  
**September through November: TBA**

Upcoming meetings are scheduled for the fourth Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m., at Sandia Presbyterian Church, 10704 Paseo del Norte. Park in back of the building and enter by the back door.

**Meetings are free to the public.**

Check our Web site, [www.croak-and-dagger.com](http://www.croak-and-dagger.com), for any new schedule changes and upcoming programs.

### **Summary of Findings**

The *Nooseletter* is the internal organ of the Croak & Dagger (New Mexico) chapter 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. 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 and ideas for sources are also welcome.

**Deadlines:** Publication is every other month, starting in January. Submission deadlines are the last day of the month *prior* to publication: Feb 28, April 30, June 30, Aug 31, Oct 31, and Dec 31.

**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.

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## *Still not a member of Sisters in Crime?*

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*Croak & Dagger* members must also be members of the national organization of Sisters in Crime. For information on joining SinC, go to <http://www.sistersincrime.org>. For information about your local chapter, contact our membership chair at [pwood73@comcast.net](mailto:pwood73@comcast.net)