

THE NOOSELETTER



CROAK & DAGGER

NEW MEXICO CHAPTER – SISTERS in CRIME

Volume XVII, Number 2 — March / April 2021

†The President's Corner†

Hang in There, Fellow Croak & Dagger Members!

Today I'm back in my office after a failed furnace mechanism and weeks of freezing fingers. Most of the house stayed cozy, except for our offices. A month ago my laptop and I moved nearer the kitchen, close to the refrigerator, within easy reach of the pantry—and where the chocolate-chip cookies reside. Who would think waiting for the furnace repair guy would cause weight gain? He and his family were recovering from Covid-19. The restrictions of this pandemic haven't made much difference to me until last month with icy fingers and a scale that has to be wrong.

This pandemic has limited our ability to do book signings and other in-person promotions. But Yay! for Croak & Dagger. Members have more ways to promote than ever before. Donnell Bell has become our Zoom host for monthly speakers on the fourth Monday of each month. Joseph Badal kicked off our initial event in February with his *Killers, Krooks, & Kops*. If you missed it you can watch it on our website on the Special Events pages (public and free). Check the Welcome page to see who is our March speaker.

The librarian of the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library in Las Cruces has asked Croak & Dagger to present one evening in May. Also a senior center in Las Cruces has asked if we have authors who would be willing to speak, knowing any Las Cruces events will be in Zoom format for several more months.

Another exciting opportunity comes from SouthWest Writers. Croak & Dagger has been asked to do Mystery Writers presentations/

workshops every Saturday during the month of June. This month, starting Saturday the 6th, will be Romance Writers' month. Our joint member Sarah Baker will be part of that Zoom event. Check it out. It's free for members, \$20 for others.

Hopefully, by then our Great American Library initiative will be back up and running hither and yon with boxes of our books and poster of our covers. By fall, maybe—fingers crossed—we will have our long-postponed Rhys Bowen One Day Conference.

Even though the Treasure House Books and Gifts call for author participation in Albuquerque's Founders Day celebration in April (see page 5) isn't a C&D event, many of us who are members will participate. On March 13, a New Mexico Press Women's conference will have a Mystery Writers panel, consisting solely of Croak & Dagger members: Anne Hillerman, Kari Bovée, Robert Kidera, Joseph Badal, and Pat Wood.

Honestly, I have been a bit down not being able to promote my work live or on Zoom, not being able to work on my desktop, and being aghast at my new weight-gain program. Yet grumbling wastes unnecessary energy. Now I'm back at my desktop, I can now Zoom, the cookies have disappeared, and just look at all the community-connecting opportunities coming up. Watch for informational emails about these events. Yep, mental health improves if you're a member of Croak & Dagger.

Keep smiling behind those masks. We can see if your eyes crinkle.

—Charlene Dietz, President

SinC into Good Writing – Now!

Join long-time Sisters in Crime member and bestselling author **Tess Gerritsen** for a live chat

March 6 on how to stay relevant in a rapidly changing publishing landscape, interviewed by SinC national president SG Wong.

Then, in a live panel, authors Robin Burcell, Naomi Hirahara, and Sujata Massey will share their stories of zigging and zagging through some career “milestones”—with some models for renewing and reinvigorating to build a long-term career.

Attendees to the live sessions also receive free access to a recorded course with author and teacher Jess Lourey on what to do if the rights to a novel revert to the author, turning what might have been bad news into—possibly—very good news indeed.



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.



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!”

Check out the Croak & Dagger Website (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!



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Noose News

Mark your calendars

Sisters in Crime Desert Sleuths chapter presents their annual [WriteNow! 2021 Conference](#). This year the event is virtual and FREE and everyone is welcome to attend.

The conference takes place September 11-12 and features best-selling, critically acclaimed authors **Michael Connelly**, **Matt Coyle**, and **Naomi Hirahara**, plus top-tier developmental editor **Jessica Page Morrell** and Literary Agent **Kirby Kim**.

As a bonus, you can pitch your latest opus to Literary Agent **Chip MacGregor** (MacGregor and Luedeke) and Senior Acquisitions Editor **Terri Bischoff** (Crooked Lane Books). For more, go to: <https://desertsleuths.com/write-now/conference/>.



More from National

Other (see page 2) upcoming virtual events include, on **Tuesday, March 23, 2021, 8-9:30pm ET: *Con Women and Lady Killers with Tori Telfer***.

Women can have any role in a crime story, including as the villain. Who are some of history's notorious lady killers and con women? What parts of their stories are legacy, even myth? What do their stories tell us about the complex reality of female aggression and predation?

We'll talk with Tori Telfer, author of *Lady Killers: Deadly Women Throughout History* and *Confident Women: Swindlers, Grifters, and Shapeshifters of the Feminine Persuasion*, about a few spectacularly bad guys who just happen to be women. Learn more and [register here](#).

Do you have a book being released in 2021?

As part of SinC's resources for libraries and bookstores, we are compiling a list of our members' books. The information you provide will be downloaded as a spreadsheet that will be available on our website.

We'll also do an "upcoming releases" version that we'll send out with our *We Love Bookstores* and *We Love Libraries* monthly newsletters.

Note: in order to be able to use the form, you'll need to be a professional member of SinC. If you would like to upgrade, contact admin@sistersincrimelibrary.org.

The Pride Award

The SinC board is pleased to announce past president Sherry Harris's legacy project, the creation of the new **SinC Pride Award** for Emerging LGBTQIA+ Crime Writers. Submissions are open until March 15, 2021, for this \$2000 award.

Listen to This!

Two of Joe Badal's books, *Dark Angel* and *Natural Causes*, books #2 and #3 in the Lassiter/Martinez Case Files series, will be available in audiobook form as of March 1 from Chirp, an audiobook service that provides limited-time deals on popular books, including *New York Times* bestsellers, at up to a 95% discount. There is no membership fee, you get unlimited downloads, and the audio books are yours to keep.

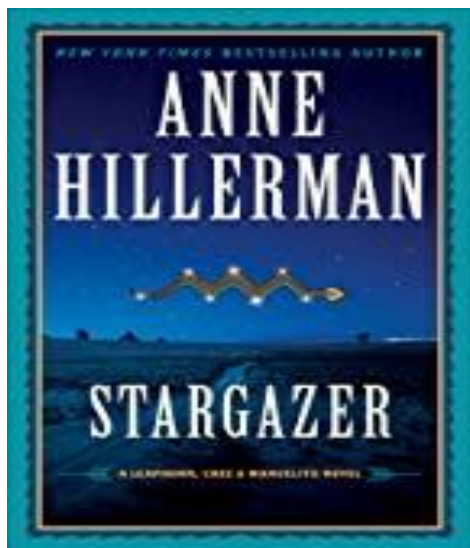
Sign up at <https://www.chirpbooks.com/> to download the two audio books above on March 1 for less than \$5.00 total.

C&D Members!

Your *Nooseletter* wants to hear news of your latest releases, good news of any kind, and all about that terrific mystery you just read. Email news and reviews to the address on page 2.

Wow! Congrats, Anne

Anne Hillerman's latest novel, *Stargazer*, will be available April 13. "I just learned," Anne reports, "that it's a selection for the Mystery Guild and a featured alternative for the Literary Guild, Doubleday Book Club, History Book Club, Military Book Club and Library of Science. Barnes & Noble will be selling a special autographed edition with an essay I wrote about the process of creating the story."



Another member heard from

Kari Bovée updates us on her pandemic-limited (or maybe "unlimited" in her case) activities:

2020 was a year of challenges, to be sure. I'm glad it is in the review mirror. The year started for me with some health issues, which I'd never experienced before. Three surgeries later, I'm now fighting fit and ready to take on the world again.

Despite my personal challenges, I also experienced some pretty outstanding milestones. Staying home enabled me to gain focus and perspective, and despite it all, I was productive.

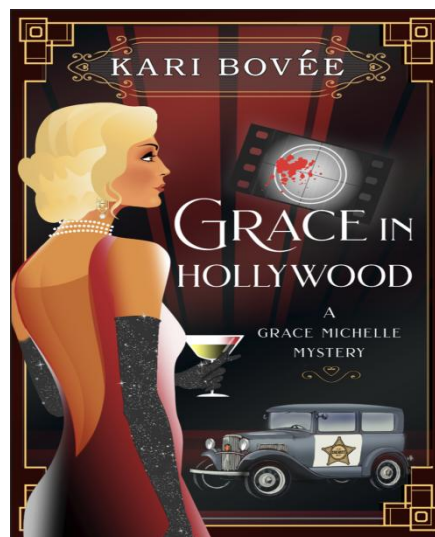
I released two books. *Folly at the Fair* is the fourth installment of my Annie Oakley Mystery Series. Annie and the Wild West Show travel to Chicago in 1893 for the Columbian Exhibition and encounter a serial killer.

The second book, released in the fall, is *Bones of the Redeemed* that takes place in 1952 and features Ruby Delgado, an archeology PhD

student. While on a dig in Northern New Mexico, Ruby finds herself smack dab in the center of a cultish secret society that is killing its members.

You can find out more about the books, and all of my others on my website at <https://www.Karibovee.com>. Subscribe to my newsletter to learn about upcoming releases and events. I also do some fun contests and giveaways.

Last year I also received some pretty amazing awards. *Girl with a Gun*, the first book in the Annie Oakley Mystery Series received First Place in Category in the Chanticleer International Murder & Mayhem Awards. *Peccadillo at the Palace*, the second book in the series, received First Place in Category, and was also the Grand Prize Winner in the Chanticleer International Goethe (Historical Fiction) Awards. And, lastly, *Grace in the Wings*, the first book in my Grace Michelle Series won First Place in Category in the Chanticleer Chatelaine Awards for Romantic Suspense.



Toward the end of the year, I completed the first draft of the second book in the Grace Michelle Mystery Series titled *Grace in Hollywood* that takes place in 1924.

Grace, a costume designer, has left the Big Apple and Broadway for a simpler life in Burbank, California. But, as we all know, life is never simple. While working as a lead costume designer at Ambassador Films, a famous director is murdered at her Burbank ranch, and one of her foster kids is accused of the crime.

Set in the heyday of the scandalous Hollywood silent film era, the book was so fun to write and features cameo appearances by Mary Pickford, Clara Bow, Charlie Chaplin, and Douglas Fairbanks. It will be released in May 2021.

The creative juices are still flowing and I am currently plotting and planning a historical paranormal cozy mystery series, and with any luck I will publish the first book in the series at the end of the year. Fingers crossed!

I've also established a Facebook group called Kari's Reading Corner. This is a place to discuss all things historical and mysterious, and members will get early access to all of my books, and will be able to participate in contests and giveaways.

We have a lot of fun there, so if you're interested come join us: <https://bit.ly/3pqQEOh>.



A Terrific Opportunity for Us All

I hope everyone is doing well, or at least as well as can be expected under the current circumstances. Hopefully there will be light at the end of our collective tunnel soon!

I wanted to tell you about some events coming up in April that will provide both our store and you some great opportunities to promote your books. Normally the City of Albuquerque holds a Founder's Day event to celebrate the city's birthday in early April. This

year, they have altered it from a one-day live event in Old Town to an almost month-long virtual event, going from April 10 to April 25. They are asking local businesses like mine to host specials and virtual events during this time, so I thought this would be a perfect opportunity to get the virtual author interviews/readings up and running again.

So, if you are a local (Albuquerque preferred but not necessary) author and want to do a short 10-20 minute recorded Zoom interview with me, for posting on Facebook and maybe even YouTube during this time, let me know. I'd like to focus on books with a high Albuquerque content if possible during this window, but that's not set in stone.

However, there is one day during this time that is extra special, and that's Saturday April 24, which is Independent Bookstore Day. Last year, we filled the day with virtual events, interviews, promo videos, pictures and all sorts of fun, and it turned out to be the biggest sales day of the year. Hopefully, we can do that again. This would also be a good day for featuring less local authors, like those of you in Santa Fe or Southern NM. Again, 10-20 minutes recorded interviews would be great, but you can also do the following:

- 1) A short prerecorded video 1-3 minutes introducing/promoting yourself and your books, while mentioning they are available at our shop.
- 2) A picture of yourself and your book, preferably in or in front of our store.
- 3) Offer discounts or giveaways of your books in the form of a contest through our store.

Or, gosh darn it, any other cool gimmick you can think of.

I still do not want to do in-store events unless occupancy restrictions begin to allow more than two people in my shop at a time, and I don't see that happening in April. This may change however, and I will let you know.

So if you are interested in doing something during these times, please let me know ASAP! I have to have the schedule of events into the city before March 15th. Thanks for your support.

Be well, stay safe and keep hanging by your thumbs,

—John Hoffsis

Zoom!

Croak & Dagger's first virtual event kicked off on Zoom in February. Host Donnell Bell has lined up the following speakers for March and April. For more information on how to take part, contact Donnell at www.donnellannbell.com or check C&D's website (www.croak-and-dagger.com).

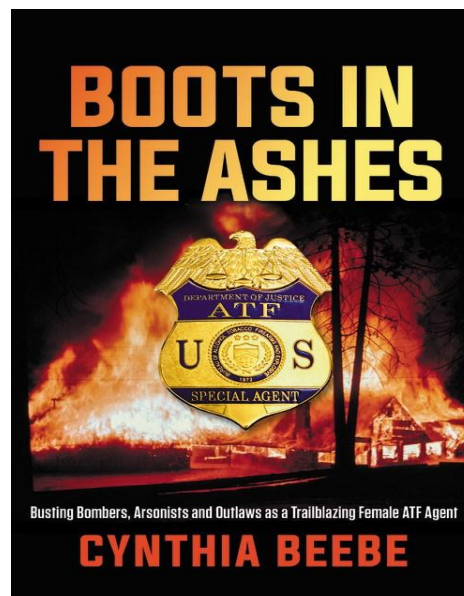
March 22:

Cynthia Beebe is a retired Senior Special Agent with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). She spent 27 years investigating bombings, arson, murder, illegal firearms, gangs and other crimes. Her cases were chronicled in numerous newspapers and TV newsmagazines. She was the first woman to earn the coveted "Top Gun" award at the ATF Academy, where she later worked as an instructor.

Beebe is a member of the International Association of Bomb Technicians and Investigators, the International Association of Arson Investigators, and Women in Federal Law Enforcement. She has a B.A. in English Literature and a Master's Degree in Journalism, both from Northwestern University, which she attended on an athletic scholarship. Since her retirement she has appeared as an expert commentator on law enforcement issues for WGN radio and television. She lives with her son in a suburb of Chicago.

Beebe's book, *Boots in the Ashes*, recounts six of her high-profile cases involving bombings, arson, and the Hell's Angels. A smart and independent girl growing up in suburban Chicago, she unexpectedly became one of the first women to hunt down violent criminals for the federal government. In her book, she tells the story of how, as a young woman, she overcame many obstacles on her journey through the treacherous world of illegal guns, gangs and bombs. She battled conflicts both on the streets and within ATF. But Beebe learned how to thrive in the ultra-masculine world of violent crime and those whose job it is to stop it.

Donnell Bell's interview with Cynthia Beebe: <https://donnellannbell.com/boots-in-the-ashes-interview-with-cynthia-beebe/>.



April 26:

USA Today and Amazon bestselling author Lois Winston writes mystery, romance, romantic suspense, chick lit, women's fiction, children's chapter books, and nonfiction under her own name and her Emma Carlyle pen name. *Kirkus Reviews* dubbed her critically acclaimed Anastasia Pollack Crafting Mystery series, "North Jersey's more mature answer to Stephanie Plum." In addition, Lois is a former literary agent and an award-winning craft and needlework designer who often draws much of her source material for both her characters and plots from her experiences in the crafts industry.

Lois will lead a discussion on "**How to Write a Mystery Series.**" Writing a mystery series is quite different from writing a stand-alone mystery—and much more challenging. For that reason, planning is everything. No author wants to cut a series short when sales are brisk and readers are clamoring for more books, but if you don't plan well, you may find your characters and/or your basic concept have a finite life. Lois will offer 12 steps to follow to create an ongoing mystery series that will continue for as many years as you want to keep writing it.

Connect with Lois at www.loiswinston.com as well as www.pinterest.com/anasleuth and <https://twitter.com/Anasleuth>.

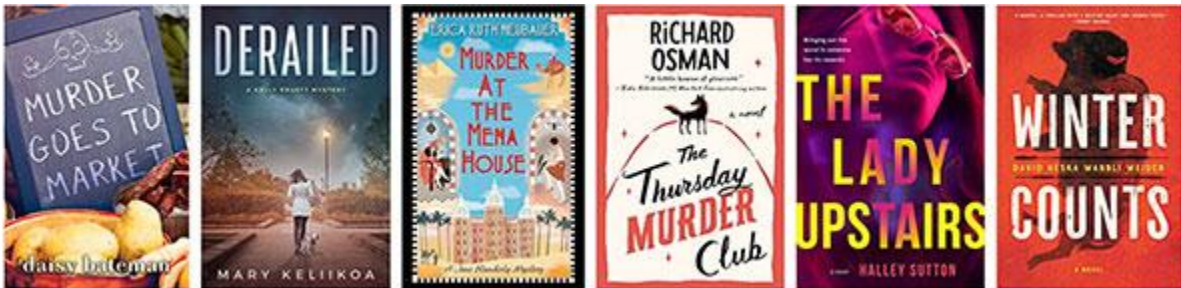
The Unconvention: 2021 Lefty Award Virtual Panels

On **February 27, 2021**, Left Coast Crime presented four virtual panels to introduce the 2021 Lefty Award Nominees and their books.

Following are the nominees, all worth reading. Winners will be announced in April.

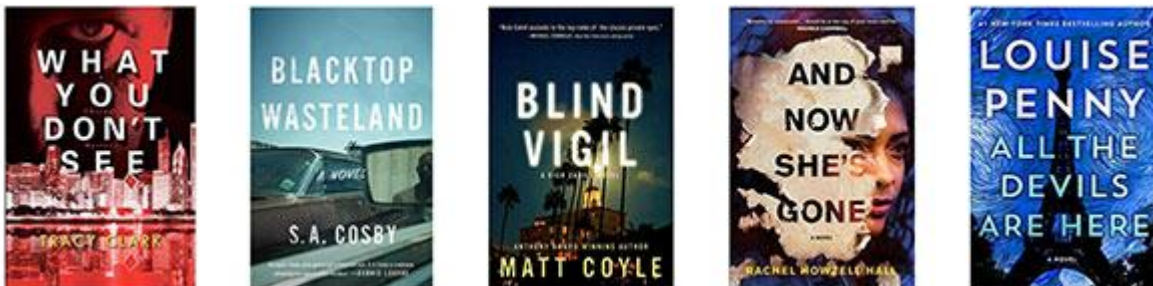
Nominees for the Lefty Award for Best Debut Novel

- Daisy Bateman, *Murder Goes to Market* (Seventh Street Books)
- Mary Keliikoa, *Derailed* (Camel Press)
- Erica Ruth Neubauer, *Murder at the Mena House* (Kensington Books)
- Richard Osman, *The Thursday Murder Club* (Viking)
- Halley Sutton, *The Lady Upstairs* (Putnam)
- David Heska Wanbli Weiden, *Winter Counts* (Ecco)



Lefty Nominees for Best Mystery Novel (not in other categories)

- Tracy Clark, *What You Don't See* (Kensington Books)
- S.A. Cosby, *Blacktop Wasteland* (Flatiron Books)
- Matt Coyle, *Blind Vigil* (Oceanview Publishing)
- Rachel Howzell Hall, *And Now She's Gone* (Forge)
- Louise Penny, *All the Devils Are Here* (Minotaur Books)



Nominees for Best Historical Mystery Novel for books set before 1970

- Susanna Calkins, *The Fate of a Flapper* (Minotaur Books)
- Dianne Freeman, *A Lady's Guide to Mischief and Murder* (Kensington Books)
- Laurie R. King, *Riviera Gold* (Bantam Books)
- Catriona McPherson, *The Turning Tide* (Quercus)
- Ann Parker, *Mortal Music* (Poisoned Pen Press)
- James W. Ziskin, *Turn to Stone* (Seventh Street Books)



Lefty Nominees for Best Humorous Mystery Novel:

- Ellen Byron, *Murder in the Bayou Boneyard* (Crooked Lane Books)
- Jennifer J. Chow, *Mimi Lee Gets a Clue* (Berkley Prime Crime)
- Carl Hiaasen, *Squeeze Me* (Alfred A. Knopf)
- Cynthia Kuhn, *The Study of Secrets* (Henery Press)
- J. Michael Orenduff, *The Pot Thief Who Studied the Woman at Otowi Crossing* (Aakenbaaken & Kent)
- Sung J. Woo, *Skin Deep* (Agora Books)



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.

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!

Great Opportunity – or Writer Beware?

Impact and Skydance TV recently announced a year-long deal to source television content from undiscovered writers worldwide. Over the course of a year, which started February 11, Impact would host call-outs and online submissions across four specific prompts “through which writers of all levels could apply with a well-thought out idea and writing sample.”

Impact’s algorithm claims to democratize access for the entertainment industry, removing bias from the submission process so that applicants can be considered regardless of their location, demographic or representation status.

Sounds great?

Not so fast, warns our own Art Eisenson, who’s had a long career in screenwriting. Art says, “The Skydance/Impact site states: ‘Writers selected by Skydance will have the opportunity to enter into an if/come agreement to develop the project further.’ This is not a good thing. “If come deals” are agreements on possible compensation *if and only if* the “developer” can sell the labor and/or original material by the writer. During the period of such a deal, the developer is spending its own capital, deductible as a business expense to work with the writer. The writer spends her or his overhead on what is essentially a wager that the developer can sell the project to another entity.

“If-come deals” have come to replace options on the disposition of original material. Writers do this with original scripts or treatments, usually in finished form. It’s like selling on consignment and allows writers for screen and TV to generate more of their own works to sell, or to pursue opportunities for work for hire. The Skydance/Impact deal not only ties up uncompensated writing during the development process (which on a WGA deal is called “free-rewriting,” something the Writers Guild has fought since the 1980’s) but requires writers to invest in the creation of a video.

“I’m not doing it,” Art says.

Judith van Gieson **1941-2021**



Judith Van Gieson, popular New Mexico author and friend of Croak & Dagger, passed away unexpectedly in January at her home in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque.

Judy published two series of colorful mystery novels about New Mexico people and places. The first of her 13 novels were based on the exploits of Neil Hamel, a tough, young Albuquerque woman lawyer with a passion for history and the environment. The protagonist of the second series is Claire Reynier, a middle-aged archivist and rare book buyer at the Center for Southwestern Research at the University of New Mexico library. Neither woman had an investigative background, but they were both adept at solving mysteries.

Among the subjects Judy wrote about in her novels were the reintroduction of wolves in southern New Mexico (in *The Wolf Path*); the *Hot Shots*, the fire fighters who parachute into wild fires throughout the West; and in *Land of Burning Heat*, the story of the Conversos, the Jews who fled to Northern New Mexico to escape the Inquisition in colonial Mexico and subsequently converted to Catholicism but retained some Jewish rituals.

Van Gieson was born in New York City and grew up in New Jersey, where she graduated from Morristown High School in 1958. She graduated from Northwestern University in 1962 and took a job at a New York publishing house where she edited mystery novelist John LeCarre. She later attended writing school in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, then moved to Santa Fe, where she began writing her books before settling in Albuquerque.

Her short stories have appeared in several mystery anthologies, and the Neil Hamel series won the Spirit of Magnifico Literary Award. Two of the Hamel books, *Ditch Rider* and *The Wolf Path*, were included in a list of the 100 Best New Mexico Books. The Claire Reynier series involved rare artifacts and New Mexico history. *The Stolen Blue* was a finalist for the Romantic Times Reviewer's Choice Award. *The Shadow of Venus* was a finalist for the Barry Award and won the Zia Award given by New Mexico Press Women for Best Work of Fiction by a New Mexico woman.

After she retired from writing novels, Judy formed ABQ Press, an on-line publishing company. She helped more than two dozen aspiring writers to edit and publish their works.

Family and friends plan to hold a remembrance for Judy during the spring. The date has not been set.

The Story behind the Story of “To Catch a Thief”

“The easiest 80,000 words ever”

edited by Kingston Pierce

Excerpted from the Crime Reads website. For more, go to: <http://therapsheet.blogspot.com/2020/08/the-easiest-eighty-thousand-words-ever.html>



(Note: It was 70 years ago that an audacious burglary took place on France’s [Côte d’Azur](#), inspiring author David Dodge to pen one of the best-known crime-caper novels of the 20th century. In the essay below, **Randal S. Brandt**, a librarian at the University of California, Berkeley’s Bancroft Library and creator of the Web’s [A David Dodge Companion](#), recounts the circumstances of that robbery and the man responsible for its deft execution.)

Alfred Hitchcock’s romantic thriller *To Catch a Thief* was released by Paramount Pictures in August 1955. While generally acknowledged as being one of the lighter-weight films directed by the “Master of Suspense,” it contains many of the hallmarks for which Hitchcock is rightfully recognized: an innocent man falsely accused of crimes he did not commit; a cool blonde with mysterious motives; a setting shot through with glamour and romance; and a suspense-filled plot involving a race against time. In this case, an ex-jewel thief (played by Cary Grant) has to catch a copycat pulling off a series of daring heists on the French Riviera in order to prove his own innocence and clear his name.

As was common throughout Hitchcock’s career, this film was adapted from a previously published work. *To Catch a Thief*, the 1952 novel upon which the screenplay was based, tells the story of John Robie, an American expatriate who is trying to live a quiet life in a villa, which he audaciously names Villa des Bijoux (Villa of the Jewels), in the South of France. Before World War II, Robie had put his acrobatic training to use as a jewel thief operating on the Côte d’Azur and was nicknamed Le Chat (The

Cat) by the French press for his gravity-defying ability to soundlessly enter and exit hotel rooms and the apartments of his wealthy victims. He worked alone and “was never known to employ violence or carry a weapon more dangerous than a glass cutter.”

Eventually, he was arrested and sentenced to 20 years in a French prison. When the Germans occupied France during the war, they emptied the jails. Robie, along with his cellmates, went into the *maquis*, the French underground, and fought against the Germans. In exchange for their service to France, the ex-prisoners were extended an unofficial amnesty for their crimes—provided they stayed out of trouble. Now a new thief is at work on the Riviera, using Robie’s exact methods, and the police are convinced that Le Chat is back in business. So, Robie determines to catch the thief himself.

The novel was written by American mystery writer [David Dodge](#) (1910-1974) while he was living with his wife and daughter in the South of France. Even before being given the Hitchcock treatment, it was destined to become Dodge’s most celebrated—and successful—book. In his 1962 travel memoir, *The Rich Man’s Guide to the Riviera*, Dodge referred to the inspiration for the story as a “stroke of luck that fell to earth on the Côte d’Azur,” and he said that once he had the story in his mind, it was “the easiest eighty thousand words ever put together. The book practically wrote itself.”

David Dodge arrived in France with his family in the spring of 1950, where they rented a house on a hill above Golfe-Juan. By agreeing to also act as groundskeeper, Dodge was able to install his family in a furnished villa with a view of the Mediterranean and employ an elderly, partially-deaf local woman named Germaine to cook and keep house. The Dodges’ modest villa shared a garden wall with a much grander villa occupied by a “millionaire industrialist” that was the scene of frequent, glittering parties with glamorous guest lists. Shortly after their arrival, David and Elva enrolled their daughter Kendal in a girls’ boarding school at Cannes and left for Italy, where David had a freelance assignment for *Holiday* magazine. The very night they departed, the villa next door was struck by an acrobatic cat burglar while the guests were dining on the terrace.

Inevitably, the mysterious American living next door, who vanished simultaneously with the jewels, became the prime suspect in the robbery. When questioned by the police, Germaine, who had a stubborn peasant’s natural dislike of the *flics*, did Dodge no favors when she refused to cooperate and answer questions about her employers, only adding to the substantial dossier of circumstantial evidence against him. As Dodge later noted, had he “been on hand to demonstrate the comic potentialities of a scenario calling for a middle-aged pear-shaped husband and father to shinny three floors up a drainpipe and back down again, the case against [him] would have collapsed in brays of appreciative French laughter.”

Eventually, when the police discovered that the Dodges had left a daughter behind in boarding school, the case did collapse. By the time David and Elva returned to Golfe-Juan, all the excitement had died down and Dodge was no longer on the “most wanted” list, because the actual thief was securely behind bars.

And thus were John Robie and the plot of *To Catch a Thief* born.

But who was the real thief?

There is very little consensus on the biographical details about the life of Dario Sambucco (aka Dante Spada), other than that he was Italian. After his arrest in 1950, Sambucco first insisted to the police that his name was Mario Noiret and that he was an itinerant antiques dealer, traveling around the French countryside on a motorized bicycle looking for deals in second-hand furniture. When confronted with

armfuls of evidence, he was accused of stealing, along with the detention of his girlfriend, however, he confessed to the robberies and claimed that his name was Dante Spada and that he had been born in Padua, the son of a pastry maker, on January 10, 1927.

Dante Spada's criminal career was documented locally in the pages of *Nice-Matin*, the daily regional French paper covering Nice and the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region (as Dodge noted, "The French press were crazy about him"), which emphasized his good looks by comparing him to French film star Jean Marais. His story was exported to the United States, where the press also clearly went "crazy" about him, picking up on his colorful nicknames and breathlessly reporting on the exploits of "Tarzan of the Côte d'Azur" or "Tarzan of the Riviera," or sometimes even the "Phantom of the Riviera."

Nice-Matin reported on 14 separate suspected burglaries committed by Dante Spada during the spring and summer of 1950. The most celebrated theft, by far, took place on August 5, 1950, at the Villa Le Roc in Golfe-Juan during a party given by American hostess Rosita Winston who, with her husband, New York property magnate Norman K. Winston, was installed in the villa for the season. Sharing the garden wall with Le Roc was Noël Fleuri, where the Dodges were in residence. In addition to netting Spada a significant haul, the list of victims read like a veritable "who's who" of the Riviera and included gossip columnist Elsa Maxwell and world-famous fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli.

Finally casting aside their initial, misguided suspicion of David Dodge, the police turned their attention to Spada, after finding a footprint on the top of a wall following a burglary a few nights later at the Villa Eldee, in Cannes. Up until this point, the police thought the robberies were inside jobs, but the footprint suggested that they were dealing, rather, with a "mountain climber." An inspector with the Cannes police, who had investigated Spada's work in 1948, knew he had been released from the Marseille jail. A fence with whom Spada had been negotiating the sale of a bag of gems soon identified a picture of him, and on August 25, 1950, he was taken into custody by the police outside of Nice.

Spada confessed to 12 burglaries in France and Switzerland, including the robbery at Villa Le Roc. After his arrest, he revealed a romantic motive to his crimes: "I intended to reach the 100-million [franc] mark, then settle down as an honest man and marry the girl I love."

On February 27, 1953, Dante Spada was sentenced in Nice to eight years in prison.

His actual stay behind bars was short, however. After his conviction, Spada was extradited to Monaco to face additional charges for a job he had pulled in Monte Carlo on May 27, 1950. On August 15, 1953, he and another prisoner escaped by sawing through the bars of their cell and taking two pistols from the guards. Spada then fled France for Italy. He was suspected of committing several burglaries in the ensuing months, including a high-profile heist of Hollywood movie mogul Jack Warner's villa in Antibes. More likely, he was lying low in Italy at the time. He was finally re-arrested in Genoa on November 2, 1953.

This time the police made sure they not only got their man, but that they held onto him, too. In June 1954, Dante Spada—by now more commonly known by his real name, Dario Sambucco—was sentenced to 30 years by the Tribunal Criminel de Monaco. Shortly thereafter, he was extradited to Milan to face charges stemming from his 1947 robberies. It was there, while recounting his life story to the newspapers, that word reached him that famed director Alfred Hitchcock was in the South of France making a film chronicling the exploits of an acrobatic cat burglar. Spada was not amused.

Reviews

Cold Cuts by Steve Brewer. Create Space, 2018, 216 pp (read on Kindle).

This isn't one of Steve Brewer's Bubba Mabry mysteries, but it's just as entertaining and is also set in Albuquerque (mostly the South Valley, but Brewer seems to know those mean streets).

Our hero, or anti-hero, is one Lucky Flanagan, who got his nickname after surviving three lightning strikes (he stays indoors during monsoon season now). Lucky is, let's face it, a loser, but you can't help liking the poor schmuck and rooting for him to survive his weird misadventures.

Always short on cash, Lucky takes a job driving to Juarez to pick up a load of—wait for it—Mexican sausage. Apparently it's illegal to bring any non-USDA-approved meat products, like the Rojo brand of bologna, into the U.S., but customers in the Southwest crave the stuff. Lucky is promised \$500 a run to bring 30 rolls across the border in a specially constructed truck that hides the rolls under a custom-built bed in back.

It works—to start with. Lucky avoids lightning strikes but not a smuggling kingpin and his minions, who make life difficult for him, as well as for his estranged wife Jewel. She's a smart cookie who's got Lucky's number, but you just know they'll get back together if he ever gets legit work. There's also Freddie, who owns a *carniceria* that's a way station on the smuggling route, and Inez, a USDA inspector who just knows something smelly is going on. Only the big boss could be described as unlikeable, but he'll get his just desserts, or sausage, or whatever.

There are no actual jokes or punch lines in the story, but you smile all the way through anyway. A quick, fun read. ♦

The Nature of the Beast by Louise Penny. St. Martin's Press, 2015.

I'd paused about halfway though my reading of Louise Penny's books, mainly because I didn't want to run out before she wrote another, but darn—she's written four more since!

Based on a real, if scary, historical incident, *The Nature of the Beast* (#7 of 11—so far) finds Armand Gamache retired from the Sûreté du Québec and living with his wife, Reine-Marie, in the Brigadoonish village of Three Pines. Only to find the Beast has come here too.

A young boy, whom Gamache has taken a liking to despite his tall tales and whopping lies,

disappears. Shortly thereafter something strange is discovered in the woods outside the village. And that's about as much as I can tell you without giving away something vital; the blurb writer on my edition had a worse time trying to describe the plot neatly.

Suffice it to say that all the usual colorful Three Pines characters are on hand, from the crotchety old poet Ruth Zardo and her pet duck Rosa, to Gamache's successor as Chief Inspector and her assistant, who's also Gamache's son-in-law. Very cozy. Except for the menace hanging over the village.

Penny writes compelling prose, and despite the nastiness of the crimes, this one keeps you interested and reading happily. Can't wait to see what else Gamache gets up to next in his "retirement." ♦

Symptoms of Death by Paula Paul, 2013. 260 pp in the print edition (read on Kindle).

Nicholas Forsythe attends a party at the country estate of his old school chum, Edward Boswick, Earl of Dunsford, when the festivities are interrupted by a hysterical kitchen maid, wielding a large knife, who claims Edward killed her fiancé. Shortly after Eddie is found stabbed in his bed.

A local doctor, a woman no less, is called to attend to the earl but it's too late. Alexandra Gladstone sees right away that the earl was strangled before he was stabbed, but everyone else is convinced that Elsie, the maid, is the murderer. Nicholas takes a liking to the lady doctor, and between them they discover that most of the earl's guests had some sort of vendetta against him.

Unfortunately, they have to split up to do their sleuthing, since Alix has to attend to her patients while she questions servants and the kitchen maid's friends. Nicholas heads to London to question Eddie's upper-class friends, though he learns more from their talkative wives than from the gentlemen.

Both investigators hear about ghostly sightings of the earl, and more murders are committed before the solution presents itself.

I'd have liked to see Alexandra take more part in the investigations, or partner up more closely with Nicholas, but maybe that's coming up in the next books in the series. The setting is Victorian, but no specific time in that long reign is specified, and there's very little historical detail, which other readers may not miss. ♦

—Linda Triage (ljt23@earthlink.net)

2021 MEETING DATES

NOTE: Due to the current pandemic, all meetings are cancelled until further notice.

Member Coordinator Pat Wood will continue to update you by email, And your Nooseletter will be sent every two months as usual.

Future meetings are tentatively scheduled for 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.

Check our Web site, 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, with "Nooseletter" in the subject line. The *Nooseletter* is distributed to all members electronically.

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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