



SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
 ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSELETTER

Volume II, Number 1—January 2006

†Expert Testimony†

From the Prez

It's hard to believe that we've just celebrated our first birthday! What a dynamic organization our chapter is proving to be. Par made it look easy to be prez, but I know how much hard work she did behind the scenes, and I'm grateful for her continued support and expertise. I also appreciate everyone who has gone—and keeps going—the extra mile to make our chapter successful. I started to say “especially . . .” Then I realized there is no “especially.”

Maybe it goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway: I'm looking forward to the upcoming year with Croak & Dagger! Thanks to all of you for your enthusiasm and participation. ✓

—Margaret Tessler

Croak & Dagger Lineup

Officers

President: Margaret Tessler
 Vice President: Sarah Schwartz
 Treasurer: Ira Rimson
 Secretary: Stephanie Hainsfurther

Committee Chairs

Programs: Rob Kresge
 PR/Publicity: Mary Edgar
 Membership: Stephanie Hainsfurther
 The *Nooseletter*: Shirley Coe
 Hospitality: Fred Aiken
 Web Site Coordinator: Nancy Varian

Don't Miss It!

Tuesday, January 24, 7:00 p.m.

Dirk Gibson, UNM professor and author of *Clues from Killers*, which deals with more than a dozen serial killer cases, is a true crime writer and technical expert in one.

—TRUE CRIMES—

Selected biographies of your Croak & Dagger board members.

Margaret Tessler (president) has been writing stories since she was in second grade and (according to her mother) wrote an imaginative tale about the family cat going to a honky-tonk. There is no record of the teacher's reaction to this topic, but the story did get an A.

Margaret was born in Houston, Texas. She attended the University of Texas at El Paso, then taught third grade at Burleson School in El Paso before “retiring” to become a stay-at-home mom.

In 1961, she and her family moved to Albuquerque. In Rudolfo Anaya's creative writing class in 1978, she met several women who formed the nucleus of a writing workshop, which is still active today. Thanks to their encouragement, she won awards for her short stories in various competitions.

After graduating from UNM, Margaret worked as a secretary at Sandia National Labs for several years. When she and her husband retired in 1990, they sold their home and bought a 30-foot fifth-wheel RV. Traveling the country was probably her second-most educational experience (next to parenting). For nearly eight years, they spent their winters in Zapata, Texas, and roamed the USA the rest of the year.

After settling back in Albuquerque and reconnecting with her writing group, Margaret began writing mysteries. Her first novel, *Tangled Webs*, is set in Zapata. The sequel, *Class Disunion*, is set in San Antonio, Texas. Margaret has just finished the third in the series, *Black Widow, White Lies*, which is set in Chama, New Mexico.

In addition to traveling, writing, and spending time with family (eight children and several grandchildren), Margaret enjoys the diverse culture Albuquerque has to offer. ✓

Book Talks

A Members' Selection of Favorite Crime Fiction

Presented December 17, 2005:

- Chabon, Michael. *The Final Solution: A Story of Detection*. New York: Fourth Estate, 2004.
- Fforde, Jasper. *The Eyre Affair: A Novel*. New York: Viking, 2002.
- Hogan, Chuck. *Prince of Thieves: A Novel*. New York: Scribner, 2004.
- Jacobs, Jonnie. *Evidence of Guilt*. New York: Kensington Publishing, 1997.
- Konrath, Joe. *Whiskey Sour: A Jack Daniels Mystery*. New York: Hyperion, 2004.
- Mayor, Archer. *Tucker Peak*. New York: Mysterious Press, 2001. [And all his other books, too!]
- Roberts, Lora. *Murder Bone by Bone*. New York: Fawcett Gold Medal, 1997.

BOOK REVIEW



The Final Solution

Michael Chabon

New York, Fourth Estate (Harper Collins), 2004
ISBN 0-06-076340-X

Michael Chabon is probably best known for his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, a 650-page novel featuring comic book heroes and their derring-do; and for collections of short stories, many of which have the word “amazing” in their titles—or at least in their subject matter.

What, then, is one to make of a slim volume, a novella, really—a mere 20 percent of *Kavalier and Clay*—that is titled after Hitler’s dashed hopes for a *Judenrein* Third Reich, and subtitled “A Story of Detection”? It opens:

A boy with a parrot on his shoulder was walking along the railway tracks. His gait was dreamy and he swung a daisy as he went. With each step the boy dragged his toes in the rail bed, as if measuring out his journey with careful ruled marks of his shoetops in the gravel. It was midsummer, and there was something about the black hair and pale face of the boy against the green unfurling flag of the downs beyond, the rolling white eye of the daisy, the knobby knees in their short pants, the self-important air of the handsome gray parrot with its savage red tail feather, that charmed the old man as he watched them go by. Charmed him, or aroused his

sense—a faculty at one time renowned throughout Europe—of promising anomaly.

Last month, Susan Slater advised us to grab the reader’s attention on the first page. Better yet, in the first paragraph. Chabon does it in his first sentence: Who is the boy? Why does he have a parrot on his shoulder? Why is he walking along the railway tracks? By the time we get to the end of the first paragraph there are more questions: Who is the old man? Who WAS the old man? We turn the pages. And keep turning, rewarded with Chabon’s descriptive prose—thick as the honey manufactured by the old man’s bees. Example:

The memory of the taste of scotch was in his mouth like the smell of burning leaves lingering on a woolen scarf.

I read his prose—page after page—and mutter, “Damn, I wish I’d written that.”

Oh yes, the plot. Well, yes, there is one. Yet it seems to exist merely as a device to move the dense prose along, and by the time we reach the denouement we actually know little more than we knew at the outset. We don’t really care. It’s a great read, and the questions beg the readers to devise their own answers. The second time through I read it aloud. Much better that way. ✓

—Reviewed by Ira J. Rimson

IN THE LOOP

If you haven’t joined already, all members are invited to join the *Croak & Dagger* chat group, an online gathering place. Share news about mystery books, movies, and TV shows.

Contact Nancy Varian, thule21@att.net, for further instructions.

Croak and Dagger

Coming Events—

On Tuesday, January 24, **Dirk Gibson**, UNM professor and author of *Clues from Killers*, which deals with more than a dozen serial killer cases, will be our guest speaker. He is both a true crime writer and a technical expert. Bring your questions.

On Tuesday, February 28, **Virginia Swift**, author of the Mustang Sally mystery series, will be our guest speaker.

The Cairn of Albertvs

All are dead who spoke it,
All are dead who wrote it . . .

All are dead who learned it—
Lucky dead, they've earned it.

So *those* are the final verses of “**Latin is a language dead, et cetera . . .**”

The Cairn readily admits to absolutely no fluency in the language, despite three years of parochial school Latin and altar boy status, where **Memorization = Learning**. I'd wager a *sestertius* that servers of the Tridentine Mass can still recite the *Confiteor*, *Credo*, and *Suscipiat*, even though memorized at age ten.

I did like Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in ninth-grade English, where I first learned what anachronism meant (actually derived from a Greek word, *anakhronismos*), but memorizing Mark Antony's funeral oration and repeating it back to a nun was a bit like going to confession.

“Bless me, Sister, for I might err.”

“Go on.”

“FriendsRomanscountrymenlendmeyouears
IcometoburyCaesarnottopraisehimTheEvilthatmendo
lives . . .”

“NEXT!”

In the last Cairn, we mentioned that some English speakers, especially lawyers and writers, are familiar with Latin expressions that are still used: *ad hoc*, *ad-lib*, *alma mater*, *et cetera*. The Harper Collins Latin Concise Dictionary lists some lesser-known expressions that might be useful to mystery authors. Here is a continuation of those words with commentary by Cairn *gratis*.

In vino veritas—in wine there is truth. *The wine made me do it.*

Ipso facto—by the fact itself. *Aw, you knew that one; just don't confuse me with them.*

Mala fide—undertaken in bad faith. *As opposed to mala Fido . . . bad dog!*

Mea culpa—acknowledgment of guilt. *The wine again . . .*

Nolo contendere—a plea made by a defendant having the same effect as a plea of guilty, yet he/she may deny the charge in a subsequent action. *The wine may or may not have made me do it. Uh . . . what was it happened again?*

Obscurum per obscures—an explanation that is more obscure than the thing explained.
“Whatever you want to teach, be brief.” Horace,
Ars Poetica.

Onus probandi—the burden of proof. “Yes or no? Do-you-still-beat-your-wife?”

Prima facie—at a first view. *My gawd, I look terrible. What happened last night?*

Quis custodiet ipsos—who will guard the guards? Not, “*Is Ipsos on a custard diet?*”

Reductio ad absurdum—a way of disproving a proposition by showing its consequences would be absurd. *It's absurd to think Ipsos would reduce his weight on such a diet.*

Res ipsa loquitur—the thing or matter speaks for itself. *A ventriloquist and his dummy, or is it a dummy and his ventriloquist?*

Risus sardonius—contraction of the deceased's facial muscles, causing a distorted grin. *But what if he did die happy?*

Sub rosa—“Under the rose.” Thus, secretly: *The name of the rose really is . . .*

Taedium vitae—Life is tedious. *Ho-hum. Seen one pair of gladiators fight to the death, seen 'em all.*

Venire facias—a writ directing a sheriff to summon suitable persons to make up a jury. *And don't recruit yer relatives.*

Verbatim et litteratim—word for word and letter for letter. *Why don't we talk any more?*

Vox populi, vox Dei—the voice of the people is the voice of God. *Except, “Man proposes, God disposes.”*

Vale! Vade in pace—Farewell! Go in peace 'til the next *Nooseletter*. ✓

—Albert Noyer

—TRUE CRIMES—

Selected biographies of your Croak & Dagger board members.

Sarah Schwartz (vice president) is a native of Idaho and a graduate of the University of Washington, with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and a master's degree in what is now called library and information science. She worked at the Washington State Library and then in library technical services and administration for a regional public library system in the Seattle area.

Sarah moved to Albuquerque four years ago to write and to soak in the rays. Aside from trips to the gym, Sarah spends her days imagining homicide. Sarah has written two mysteries set in Idaho in the early 1950s. She is currently writing a mystery set a hundred years ago on the lower Columbia River. ✓

DIARY OF A MAD MYSTERY WRITER TURNED DRAMA QUEEN

by Sarah Schwartz

Does acting experience help writers develop believable dialogue? I was willing to give this proposition six weeks of my time and even allow myself to squirm a little while transforming myself into a grand dame of the stage.

I signed up for a class titled *Basic Acting* through the University of New Mexico Continuing Education. Let me say right off that, although my husband has on occasion characterized me as a drama queen, I have never acted on the legitimate—or any other—stage.

Night One

The instructor is Todd Thacher Cash, an actor with credentials from the New York stage and teaching experience at UNM. He is good, I decide, even after the shock of hearing that our “final” is a two- to five-minute monologue, of our choosing, memorized and delivered with penetrating understanding of our character. Getting used to the idea, I survey my eight classmates. I guess I can let myself loose with them. Then Todd lowers the ax: we can invite our friends, relatives, and bare acquaintances to the final. We all need to learn to act in front of a crowd. I am bringing no one with me!

We discuss what we need to know about a character. Of primary importance is motivation and intention. This is talk straight out of a writing manual—what does my character want? Todd talks about acting as physically acting out a character’s motivation in a scene. He elicits verbs—specific and dynamic—to describe possible motivation. This is an activity in which a writer can sparkle.

The central lesson from Night One is *show, don’t tell*. I learned this maxim the first night of my first writing class. But do I completely understand it? I write it splendidly in some scenes. It eludes me in others. As an actor, I cannot be inconstant.

Before class ends, I have hit on doing Martha from Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* I know, I know, it’s overdone, but I love Martha. Todd said we need to do a monologue we like enough to use over and over in future auditions. Do you think the Albuquerque Little Theatre will appreciate my Martha?

Our assignment for next week is to deliver a five-minute dramatization of a real story from our lives. Todd asks us to physically remember an actual scene and play it out.

Night Two

Great party game: We stand in a large circle. The person who is *it* makes eye contact with another player. The second player acknowledges the contact by saying, “Yes.” *It* then crosses to take the second player’s place. The second player, who responded “Yes,” is now *it*. She makes eye contact with another player, and the action continues. The hardest part is waiting until the player with whom I’ve made eye contact says, “Yes.” Most of us flub that part as we learn to move only with intention, not on impulse.

The first night, after I panicked over the real-life drama assignment, I chose to reenact a studio cycling session. My “performance” is a mosaic of several cycling classes. (I write fiction, and I’m not interested in the hard truth without a little creative interference.) As I participate in real cycling classes throughout the week, I watch myself act, think, and feel. I have some “be here now” experiences that are both illuminating and uncomfortable—as difficult as meditation for one who cannot sit still. Paying attention is a writer’s basic tool. I’m not as good at it as I would like. This assignment takes me one rung higher on the ladder of enlightenment.

During class I pull off my real-life drama, forgetting many of my rehearsed lines. No one else knows the difference. I’m puffing and sweating almost as if I have really been on a stationary cycle. My own assignment from now on: pay attention, pay attention, pay attention . . .

Night Three

We read an actors’ exercise, a scene with lines that appear, on first reading, to be nonsensical. The words take on meaning only as the actors imbue the scene with motivation. My partner seats herself in chair. My goal is to take that chair for myself. After much prodding from Todd, the two of us manage to bring the scene to life. *Show, don’t tell!*

As on previous nights we engage in voice and movement exercises. Todd speaks a word and we act it out, individually or collectively, as our bodies take us. We are to let ourselves be carried away. I am reminded of those moments when—as I write—characters take on actions and dialogue I have not planned. This exercise is like a shift from writing with fingers on the keyboard to composing a scene with the whole body.

(cont’d on next page)

Night Four

We practice communicating physically, *through* words rather than *with* words. I am seeing the difference, although *doing* it and *knowing* it when I *see* it are not the same.

We cannot move unless we are speaking in an exercise that moves us downstage. We enact words that flow from our lips, words evoked in free association—a poem. We are learning to bring our bodies and our voices together as one and to let our bodies guide us.

Don't think this is some kind of New Age, woo-woo, flaky, interpretive dance crap. This is real, baby!

Night Five

Are you a butt person? Or, perhaps, a head? When a character is interpreted by centering through different parts of the body, one creates a new way of perceiving the role. We practiced our lines by emphasizing our heads . . . then chests . . . then stomachs . . . then hips . . . then butts. I'm thinking about using this technique in showing a character in a novel. As I read a character's lines aloud, I will try speaking from various body centers to gain more insight into the character's personality.

Night Six

Gadzooks! It's show time, and I have brought my husband for my "final." I'm on stage right after the monologue from Wendy Wasserstein's *The Sisters Rosensweig*. In practice today I kept leaving out the word *again*: *Their wives and sweethearts stick their noses up in the air, right through the ceiling sometimes, which sends the lunkheads back to the soda fountain again, where they fuel up some more*. I have my highball glass in hand—filled with ice and plain water. It's a comfort, even without the gin. I'm wearing a slightly slutty blouse and new shoes that are killing my bunions. My delivery of the line *There is only one man in my life who has ever . . . made me happy* sounds like amateur hour for sure, and I wonder how Sir Laurence Olivier would have played Martha.

I do it, though. I get through the whole *goddamn performance* (as Martha would have put it). I know I butchered a few lines, but I didn't stumble through them.

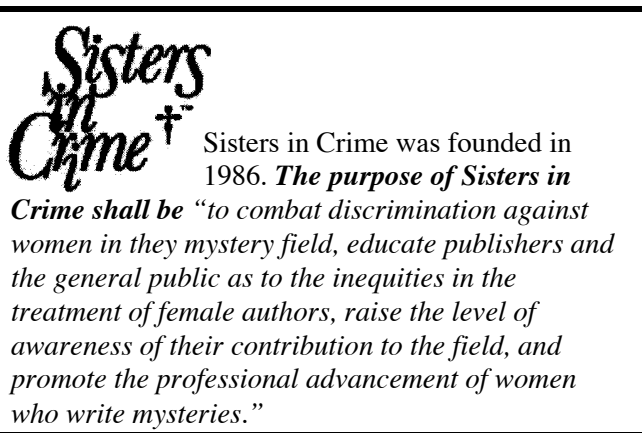
Afterward some of us retire for a drink up on Wyoming, in what turns out to be a karaoke bar. It's hard to separate from these women with whom I have shared some intimate moments of acting out. On Saturday we're meeting downtown to experience live improv (from the audience).

Was six weeks long enough to learn about acting? No, but I have a start. If I were ready to begin auditioning, I could at least get through one.

Did I learn anything useful for novel writing? You bet! I am one more tread up the stairway of understanding *show, don't tell*. I have learned more about working *through* words rather than *with* them. I am more likely to know what my character wants in every scene. Now I just have to practice and pay attention.

Mostly I've had an opportunity to step outside my comfort zone—always a good act for a novelist. ✓

—Sarah Schwartz



ROB'S RANDOM SHOTS

December Case File Number One

Eye of the Wolf by Margaret Coel, Berkley Prime Crime, New York, Hardback, \$23.95

One of the advantages of networking at mystery writers' conventions is that you make contacts, not only with writers who can help you, but with some whom you can help. In some cases, you get to see and comment on unpublished manuscripts. Of the eight books I will have reviewed in the *Nooseletter* this year, I've seen manuscripts by three of those authors, and more than one manuscript by some.

If you've admired the work of Margaret Coel for many years, as I have, this novel, the eleventh in her series set on present-day Wyoming's Wind River Reservation, will not disappoint. She keeps coming up with fresh premises, in this case the murders of three Shoshones on the site of an old battlefield where Arapahos were massacred more than a hundred years ago. It looks like someone is trying to resurrect old hostilities between the Arapaho and Shoshone on their shared reservation.

(cont'd on next page)

In any amateur sleuth series, the author is always challenged to come up with plausible reasons for her protagonists to investigate crimes that are properly the purview of the police—and in this case, the FBI. Father John O'Malley, the Jesuit priest at St. Joseph's Mission that serves primarily the Arapaho, is drawn in through a chilling audiotape that directs him to the murder scene. Arapaho lawyer Vicky Holden gets involved when one of her clients becomes the prime suspect in the killings.

Plausibility ensured, any author with an ongoing relationship between her protagonists also has to carry forward that subplot. And Margaret Coel does that as well as Tony Hillerman carries on his Jim Chee-Bernadette Manuelito complications. In this novel, Vicky experiences jealousy in her on-again, off-again relationship with her legal partner, while Father John must deal with his assistant pastor's suspicions that his feelings for Vicky are more than just professional.

Readers who enjoy trying to figure out the killer before the protagonists do will delight in the lineup of potential suspects and may not figure out the murderer until quite late in this book. And their suspicions may be momentarily thrown by a last-minute twist.

Finally, the author needs to put her protagonists in danger, and *Eye of the Wolf* is an excellent example of how to do that. Father John comes under fire at the murder scene and barely escapes with his life. Vicky is kidnapped; no one will come to her aid, and, as she has done in other novels, she must depend on her own considerable resources.

Margaret Coel's previous novels come out in mass-market paperback as each new hardback comes out. *Wife of Moon* is out in that format now. If you buy or browse that one, be sure to check out the acknowledgments; sometimes networking can get your name into a novel sooner than you can get it on the spine of one.

December Case File Number Two

Killer Swell by Jeff Shelby, Dutton, New York, hardback, \$23.95

Another advantage of attending mystery writers' conferences is meeting and listening to first-time authors, some of whom end up being nominated for "best new" annual awards. This has been an exceptional year for me to discover new authors, from J. Carson Black and David Ellis in El Paso in February to Jeff Shelby in Taos in September. Thanks to our chapter's book exchange

box, I was able to learn more about the "modern classics" in our genre. I found I like Michael Connelly better than Jeffery Deaver and Sara Paretsky better than Marcia Muller.

Well, some modern masters will have to move over and make way for a new name in private-eye fiction. One reviewer called Shelby's San Diego surfer P.I. Noah Braddock "a Travis McGee for the new millennium," and I can't quibble with that characterization. Too late for John D. MacDonald to look to his laurels, but living authors like Robert Crais and Robert Parker had better watch out.

Like the private eyes of those two award-winning authors, Shelby's Braddock has a large, lethal, and intelligent sidekick, but all comparisons end there. Shelby and his creation are originals. Thanks to the nature of his protagonist's first case (and client), we find out a lot about Braddock's youth and meet old friends and antagonists right away. And thanks to the time-honored P.I. novel first-person POV (point of view) that Shelby uses, we get inside Braddock's head early and we feel his shock and horror as events unfold.

But this P.I. is no superman. He's constantly plagued by memories, old slights, and doubts about his abilities. Even more original is Braddock's relationship with the San Diego police, in the person of Detective Liz Santangelo. When is the last time you read of Travis McGee, Elvis Coel, or Spencer sleeping with the police detective involved in the case? Not only that, but their affair ended bitterly and the two are at loggerheads. Yet another complication for Noah Braddock to deal with.

This missing persons case will not be everyone's cup of tea. Make no mistake; this is not a cozy traditional mystery. This is fairly hard-boiled, even by the standards of the other authors I mentioned. There is a high body count, both dead and wounded.

I found it hard to pick out the likely killer until the last forty to fifty pages, and you may be challenged, too. I guarantee we'll have the opportunity to be challenged again. Not only will Shelby be back, but I believe he'll be nominated for more than one award for this novel. Don't wait for the movie; read the book. ✓

—Rob Kresge

DON'T FORGET

Tuesday, January 24, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, February 28, 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, March 25, 1:00 p.m.

—THE GALLOWS TRAP DOOR—

Get a Group!

As you set out on a possible writing career, a few words of encouragement and *discouragement*. First, it is a crowded and ruthless business with tens of thousands of writers competing for just a few thousand publication billets in any given genre. Rejection is the norm and acceptance is the rare exception. No wonder being a writer is a lonely and depressing business. Some editors will treat you with shabby disregard or even downright mean words, and you must develop a thick skin. And so, to keep going, a writer must set aside notions of fame and fortune and love the process for itself alone.

Writing groups can be a real help, depending, and we hope we've learned something from our experiences. We've been in a few groups, some of which we formed. A basic rule of group dynamics: the age of a group in hours is roughly equal to the age of a human being in years. Each group begins as an infant, groping around, reaching, crawling. Then it starts to pinch and bite. Hopefully, the group gets past the terrible twos and threes, the sullenness of the preteens, and the acne of adolescence and arrives at a mature stage where things really get accomplished.

Some groups die an early death based solely on the chemistry of their membership; a few die in their prime when a key member leaves. As your group goes along, try to step away and judge the dynamic. One thing is for sure; groups get old and die, just like the rest of us—naturally.

Group Process

Adopt a methodology for conducting meetings and considering manuscripts.

Separate the writer from the writing. What you put onto a piece of paper is just that—ink on paper. It's not your soul or your persona. So when someone criticizes your work, take in the information. Sift it. Cull out the useless aspects, then savor and incorporate the useful. The worst critic will praise everything you write.

We have initiated three writers' groups, one in Maine and two in New Mexico. The first one in this area was in Eldorado, a suburb of Santa Fe. We posted a notice in their lovely library. The initial response resulted in more than forty writers from wide-ranging experience levels and abilities. We split the group into two, but it was still an unwieldy situation. Later one of those groups split again.

We used the Iowa Writers' Workshop method developed by Peter Elbow. Each writer brought ten to twenty pages of Xeroxed work and distributed them. We went over the previous week's handouts, giving positive feedback and gently criticizing what didn't work. Then we had "Say Back," when we gave a précis of what we thought happened within those pages. It's interesting how different and helpful the various takes were. We met in writers' homes, but we didn't allow general conversation until after work was done.

All of us were writing novels at the time, and we met every two weeks. The protocol was strictly enforced. We stated what we liked, what didn't work, and then we did "Say Back." The work was judged, not the person. That particular group lasted more than two years, and our success rate was amazing: 50 per cent of the group found publishers within three years, through hard work and perseverance. We supported each other fiercely with ideas, encouragement, suggestions on possible publishers, and strict attention to pulling the best from each member. As previously stated, the worst critic will praise anything; the best critic will do a painstaking and truthful job.

In one group, a few members carried around heavy emotional burdens. You could almost see the monkey on certain shoulders. Who knew? Although they had talent, what they really needed was a talented psychiatrist. A writers' group, if they're willing to put up with this much neediness, is a whole lot cheaper than paying a shrink, but the more well-balanced writers (a relative term) soon saw with glaring clarity the direction we were headed; they suggested that our group wasn't really appropriate for them and bowed out gracefully.

Another member of that group was a lovely old gentleman, a retired attorney, with a great idea for a courtroom novel. It was sad to hear his first few chapters over and over. He was Alzhiemic; we got him some help. Our group shrunk from six to four.

It's risky to start a critique group, especially if it's an open call, but the results can be worthwhile. It's part luck, part timing, and part chemistry. Currently, our group is composed of four members, but, unfortunately, we're twenty-five miles apart—though we know each other so well that we can almost hear each others voices. One member is working on his fourth fifth-century mystery, and our enjoyment of his fine research is unflagging. We're on our own fourth mystery as well, and the group comments have fueled our zeal and ambition.

(cont'd on next page)

Writing is subject to all kinds of criticism. Abraham Hayward said of Dickens, “He writes too often and too fast . . . If he persists much longer in this course, it requires no gift of prophecy to foretell his fate—he has risen like a rocker, and he will come down like a stick.” Boy, did he miss the mark! We should all be such sticks.

Go forth and get a group. Just be sure that you find one that is genre specific. And good luck! ✓

—Page Erwin

Sarah Lovett, and James D. Doss, and moderator Fred Harris

Lunch speaker Margaret Coel: “Demystifying the Mystery”

Early panel “How to Be Your Own Editor” by Susan Slater

Early panel “From Manuscript to Movie” by Jann Arrington Wolcott and Martin Markinson.

Early panel “Secrets of Marketing . . . and How to Work with an Agent” by Pari Noskin Taichert

Later panel “Plotting for Success” by Margaret Coel

Later panel “Creating Compelling Characters: Journeys of Desire and Change” by Sarah Lovett

Later panel “Thinking beyond the First Book: Writing a Series/Finding the Right Voice” by Judith Van Gieson

November 5. Breakfast speaker David Morrell: “Platforms, Viral Markets, and the Seismic Changes in Modern Publishing”

Panel “Don’t Try This at Home: Insights from Law Enforcement Pros,” with Santa Fe Police Chief Beverly Lennen, P.I. (and Croak & Dagger March speaker) Pat Caristo, retired cop Don Bullis, and moderator Ann Palkovich, forensic anthropologist

Lunch speakers Susan Slater and Rob Rosenwald, president of Poisoned Pen Press in Phoenix: “What’s News in Mystery Publishing?”

Early panel “Creating Authentic Police Interview and Interrogation Scenes” by Michael McGarrity

Early panel “Let’s Get Physical: Researching and Writing Action Scenes” by David Morrell

Early panel “Bodies in the Freezer: The Work of a Forensic Anthropologist” by Ann Palkovich


Later panel “How to Get a Publisher’s Attention” by Rob Rosenwald

Later panel “An Introduction to Real-World Law Enforcement: Is There a Place for Harry Callahan and Cordell Walker?” by Don Bullis

Later panel “Creating, Building, and Sustaining Suspense” by Jann Arrington Wolcott
Dinner speaker Michael McGarrity: “A Scenic Look at Kevin Kerney Country”

November 6. Breakfast speaker Shirley Raye Redmond: “Unsolved Mysteries”

(cont’d on next page)



BOOKMARKS

Have you seen them? Bright yellow, with blood-red markings? Do you have one? Do you have a handful?

The new 2006 *Croak & Dagger* bookmarks are a great way to spread the word about our Sisters in Crime chapter. Hand plenty out, but keep one for yourself: they list all our meeting dates and times for 2006.

The 2005 Tony Hillerman Writers’ Conference: “Focus on Mystery”

There was more to this year’s Tony Hillerman conference that was important for readers or useful to writers than this report has space for. For further information, talk to or email Croak & Dagger’s former president and October speaker Pari Noskin Taichert, our current vice president Sarah Schwartz, November Croak & Dagger speaker Susan Slater, or our new president, Margaret Tessler, who all attended the conference as well.

No one can attend every session, but here’s a rundown of speakers and subjects. I’ll recount some of what I learned after this:

November 3. Preconference workshop “Discovering Story Magic,” taught by Laura Baker and Robin Perini. Character creation, turning points with conflict, crucial plot points, and the pacing of scenes. Separate fee.

November 4. Opening remarks by Tony Hillerman

Panel “Quirky Characters and Red Herrings,” with mystery authors Tony Hillerman,

“Plotting for Success”

I took extensive notes on only one panel, Margaret Coel’s “Plotting for Success.” But I also profited from David Morrell’s breakfast marketing talk. I gave away my copy of the two-sheet handout from Susan Slater’s talk on “How to Be Your Own Editor,” but she’s promised to share those via the chapter’s email loop with all of us.

Margaret said that to plot and write efficiently, your outline should be a road map for your book. You can veer off the route occasionally and even end up at a different location via a different route, but it’s still an indispensable tool to starting and feeling like you’re making progress.

- Plan the events in your novel as the steps your characters take to answer the starting point “what if” question that is central to your plot. “What if a murderer was trying to aggravate age-old resentments between tribes sharing the same reservation?” Or “What if a spoiled Southern belle in Georgia had to grow up during the crises of the American Civil War?” Or “What if an American professor discovered that the key to a centuries-old Christian secret might be hidden in the works of old masters like da Vinci, Newton, and others?”
- Note that events equal scenes. You often find as many as forty events in a novel. There are usually more scenes than chapters in a book, but some scenes may fill a chapter or chapters by themselves.
- Think of your novel as a play in three acts:
 - I. Get your story question out there; establish conflict. This act should have ascending action. What must your characters accomplish?
 - II. Have complications and obstacles abound. At the end of act II, your characters should be in crisis, at their lowest point, filled with doubts, facing well-foreshadowed challenges.
 - III. Provide a resolution. Action should ascend to the climax (overcome the biggest obstacle). Resolve all the main story questions. Tie up subplots. Subplots should amplify the main plot or show character.
- If you have trouble with your ending, go check the beginning of your novel and the “what if” question.
- Make each event carry the story forward or reveal character.

- Identify the plot points in each chapter that propel or divert your plot line.
- Know that events can be either dramatic (with conflict) or reflective (insight, realization).
- Have conflict events rise slowly, though they can be punctuated by action.
- Consider using reflective events (via logic or reason) as sequels to conflict/drama events and as leads into the next scene.
- Think of dramatic events (faster) versus reflective ones (slower, shorter) as peaks and valleys to be crossed. Dramatic events need more details to maintain their intensity.
- Use narrative as the glue that holds novel scenes together. Narrative can be used for back story and for description.
- To increase pacing, make a scene read faster, with more action. Slow pacing down with reflective sequel scenes. But keep the level of drama higher in the middle of your novel (don’t let the middle sag).
- Give information to readers via dialogue, but be careful to avoid labored dialogue.
- Time the information you give out. Give it in small doses spread between scenes and among characters.
- Use conflict to make each chapter a mini-story in itself.
- Provide some sort of resolution at the end of each chapter; this can act as a bridge to the next chapter, unless you’re changing point of view chapter by chapter like Margaret does (and I do).
- In the revision process, make big cuts first, rather than wasting time by slowly tinkering with small changes in a mild rewrite of the whole thing.
- Use a line graph to chart the peaks and valleys of your plot scenes.
- Look at the language of narrative and your characters last; it has to support your story. Margaret recommended James Frey’s book *How to Write a (Damn) Good Novel*.

Useful Note

Of the five writers’ conferences I attended this year, only one required air travel; the other four were within driving distance. One was in El Paso, and the others were in Salt Lake City, Taos, and Albuquerque. The major expenses at conferences are transportation, lodging, and registration fees.

(cont’d on next page)

If you are working hard to become a published author, you should consider attending any conference at which you can eliminate one or more of those expenses. Can you stay with someone you know? Can you drive or carpool to the conference? Refer to the Sisters in Crime national newsletter for information on conferences in 2006, or email me.

The Hillerman conference fee of \$400 is twice as much as that of any other mystery conference, but since New Mexico attendees would have no transportation or lodging expenses, total cost becomes much cheaper. And you don't have to attend every nearby conference to learn things and make valuable contacts. Just attend *one* and see what a difference it can make. ✓

—Rob Kresge

†**Nooseletter Submissions**†

Croak & Dagger members are encouraged to contribute articles, reviews, and essays on various aspects of mystery writing *and* reading for publication consideration. Information on relevant conferences or events is also welcome. Articles should average five hundred words or less.

Publication is every other month, starting in January. Submission deadlines are the 15th of the month prior to publication: February 15, April 15, June 15, August 15, October 15, and December 15.

Please submit via email to shirleycoe@comcast.net, subject line "Nooseletter."

The *Nooseletter* will be distributed to members electronically. ✓

—Shirley Coe

Summary of Findings

The *Nooseletter* is the official internal organ of the Croak & Dagger chapter, Albuquerque, of Sisters in Crime (SinC), in association with the SinC national organization. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and editors.

2006 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, January 24, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, February 28, 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, March 25, 1:00 p.m.
Tuesday, April 25, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, May 23, 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, June 24, 1:00 p.m.
Tuesday, July 25, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, August 22, 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, September 23, 1:00 p.m.
Tuesday, October 24, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, November 28, 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, December 16, 1:00 p.m.

Free to the public in the briefing room of the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Police Substation, 12700 Montgomery Blvd. NE, one block east of Tramway.

For more information, call Rob Kresge, program chair, at 797-1874.



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