

Sisters  
in  
Crime †

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



# THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume III, Number 5—September 2007

## †Expert Testimony†

From the Prez

Fall is my favorite time of year. As a kid in Nebraska, I loved to watch the sky fill with so many Canada geese that you could hear fall coming. Other things happened too. It was a warm September day when I fell off my bike while practicing wheelies. As I lay crumpled on concrete, I was scared out of my wits and thought I might die. But I didn't, and the accident became my first real experience of overcoming fear. My bike accident coincided with the fall start of school. Scabby knees notwithstanding, I held my head high. After all I'd progressed to a higher grade and was obviously much smarter than before.

This fall, Croak and Dagger members will get a chance to escalate their mental prowess *and* experience new heights of spookiness and fear. On Thursday, September 20, we'll be unraveling one of the world's deepest mysteries—like a whodunit—at our first annual Croak and Dagger Mystery Dinner. On October 23, our members will be led on a white-knuckle ghost tour of Old Town Albuquerque. Who knows what past spirits you might encounter? These are two events that are sure to make this fall as memorable as any you've ever had.

Another important event this fall will be when I pass the Croak and Dagger cowbell to our president for 2008. Would you like to lead an energetic group on yet-to-be-determined adventures? Would you like a cowbell? Please let someone know if you are interested.

Finally, this fall will mark the end of our fourth year of criminal companionship. We've come a long way, so let's make it a high five!

Cheers. ✓

—Lucinda Schroeder

## Don't Miss It!

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

**Lisa Polisar's** love affair with mysteries began with Nancy Drew and Miss Jane Marple and continued with Sherlock Holmes, Inspector Dalgliesh, and Inspector Morse. In 1989 she did graduate work in psychology at the University of Exeter in England. Fascinated with the psychology of crimes and criminals, she has continued to independently study behavioral psychology ever since. Her psychological thriller, *Blackwater Tango*, was published in fall 2002, and her New Mexico mystery, *Knee Deep*, came out in December 2003. Her mystery and literary short stories, as well as her poetry, have been widely published in literary journals. She is currently putting together a collection of her short stories and working on another psychological thriller. Lisa also writes a humorous mystery spoof column, "Murder by Death," in *New Mystery Reader* magazine, and she is a fiction editor for *Carve Magazine* and *12 Gauge Review*. *Red Ryder: An American Icon*, her biography of the fictional Western superhero Red Ryder, is scheduled for publication in 2005. Lisa is an active member of Mystery Writers of America, Sisters in Crime, the National Federation of Press Women, and Southwest Writers. In 2004, she won two statewide journalism awards for two art reviews/profiles she published in *Crosswinds Weekly*. Lisa has lived in New Mexico for twelve years. Visit her at [www.lisapolisar.com](http://www.lisapolisar.com).

Tuesday, October 23, 7:00 p.m.

Join us on a spooky field trip as we take an **Old Town Ghost Tour!** (This replaces the regular program meeting at the substation.)

# Croak & Dagger Lineup

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## *The Mother of Sisters*

In the *Haycroft-Queen Definitive Library of Detective-Crime-Mystery Fiction* (see *Murder Ink*), she ranks as “the mother of the American detective novel.” Born in Brooklyn and raised in New England, Mrs. Charles Rohlf’s was a best-selling mystery author for twenty-five years.

Her pen name was Anna Katharine Green. “Who?” you say?

The following information is excerpted from a 1901 newspaper account and is available in full on the *Old and Sold Antiques Digest* Web site ([www.oldandsold.com/articles](http://www.oldandsold.com/articles)).

It is related that when “The Leavenworth Case” was published in 1878, the Pennsylvania legislature turned from politics to discuss the identity of its author. There was the name on the title page—Anna Katharine Green—but it must be a nom de plume, some protested. A man wrote the story—maybe a man already famous—and signed a woman’s name to it. The story was manifestly beyond a woman’s powers.

A New York lawyer happened to be present at the politicians’ discussion. “You are mistaken,” he said to the incredulous. “I have seen the author of ‘The Leavenworth Case’ and conversed with her, and her name is really Miss Green.”

“Then she must have got some man to help her,” retorted the more obstinate theorists. They strongly remind us of the characters whom Miss Green—as

we shall call her for the moment—portrays so skillfully, the self-willed characters that aim so well, but do not hit even the target, not to mention the bull’s-eye.

The incredulity exemplified by the Pennsylvanians was natural enough. That an American woman in those days should venture into the field of romantic literature was so uncommon as to be noteworthy, but that an American woman should write detective stories—well, that was quite preposterous.

Anna Katharine Green, the woman in question, was born in Brooklyn, New York, on November 11, 1846. She was thirty-two, therefore, when the story that made her famous was published. Her father was a well-known lawyer; indeed, the Greens, we have been told, were a family of lawyers. This may account for the skill with which the daughter has tied and cut Gordian knots. It unquestionably accounts for her nimble imagination, her skill in producing subtle hypotheses, and her strength in handling the most intricate psychological problems. In 1867 Anna was graduated from the Ripley Female College in Poultney, Vermont, and she may, if she please, write BA after her name.

She felt drawn to literature, yet she was in no hurry either to decide which of the diverse literary fields was best suited to her taste and talent or to see her name in print. At this critical time her father was friend and counsellor. He perceived that there was no fickleness back of his daughter’s ambition to adopt literature as a profession, and, what is more important, he perceived that she might successfully qualify as a candidate. So he set about to direct and to encourage her zeal.

He found Anna a docile pupil. When doubts arose, when discouragement appeared, he was nearby to cheer her and to advise. He enlisted her sympathy in different cases that interested him; he sharpened her wits; he discoursed to her on his own interesting experience; he contributed judicious criticisms; above all, he fostered her confidence in her own powers.

We venture the prediction that the stories written by Anna Katharine Green, by virtue not only of their attractive skillfulness but also of their perennially interesting subjects, will be read eagerly and with delight when many of the novels of brighter present fame have accumulated dust. ✓



—Linda Triegel



## Book Review

*Monkeewrench* by P. J. Tracy. New York, Putnams, 2003. ISBN 0-399-14978-3.

The black **M** on the spine caught my eye from the blue book-jacket shelf. (Yes, Virginia, they display books by jacket cover color at my branch library.)

OK, so it was copyrighted in 2003. But it's also written by *two* women. Turns out that "P. J. Tracy" is the feminym for a mother-daughter team, and *Monkeewrench* is their "first thriller." The flap notes don't mention whether they might have published other books on, say, computer geeking, about which they seem to know volumes. My literary experience with another mother-daughter writing team left me skeptical, but if nothing else I'm open-minded.

I decided the first chapter would be the tipping point, or not. I never got through it. By the end of the second paragraph I was laughing so hard the librarian asked me to leave:

*The brandy had been absolutely essential. It always was on Sunday nights, when Sister Ignatius took it upon herself to cook and serve Father Newberry a "proper meal." In this part of Wisconsin, that usually translated into hamburger cooked in canned cream soup.*

*The shape varied with the good sister's whims—sometimes meatballs, sometimes meat loaf, and on one memorable occasion, rolled tubes that looked disturbingly like a casserole of severed penises—but the basic ingredients and the resulting indigestion were always the same.*

Shortly after 5 a.m. the next morning, when the dyspeptic priest trudged to the sanctuary to prepare for morning mass, he discovered two devoted parishioners kneeling in their pew, heads bowed, with a .22-caliber hole through each of their cerebella. End of page three.

What is the connection between the apparent execution in rural Kingsford County, Wisconsin, and a series of slayings patterned after a not-yet-released computer game in Minneapolis? That is the hook that keeps you turning the pages. *Monkeewrench* is the Minneapolis computer-gaming company that has developed a game called *Serial Killer Detective*, in which clues at each level lead to the capture of the perpetrator, which must be accomplished before being admitted to the next higher, and more complex, level. Someone seems to have appropriated a developmental version of the program, and the

game's first three levels have been duplicated, with human victims.

The authors—whose real identities are mom P. J. Lambrecht and daughter Traci Lambrecht—have captured the mind-set, dialogue, and POVs of both the stolid Midwesterners who inhabit Wisconsin and Minnesota and the kooky computer geeks who inhabit *Monkeewrench* with precision. The combination of whodunit, police procedural, psycho-thriller, and laugh-out-load humor makes *Monkeewrench* a great read. And did I mention, McGuffins abound? As a purely personal thing, another plus is the absence of either acknowledgments or foreword. There's just a seven-word dedication after the title page, before chapter 1, none of those Oscar-recipient appreciations of everyone from nursery-school teacher onward.

The problem with reviewing a book this superbly crafted is that the reviewer can't expound without revealing the details of its excellence. But if I were teaching Mystery Writing 101, I'd pick it for a text. ✓

—Reviewed by Ira Rimson

## Croak & Dagger Member's Book Review: *A Hunt for Justice*

*The Hunt for Justice: The True Story of a Woman Undercover Wildlife Agent*, by Lucinda Schroeder (Lyons Press, 2006).

Can a book receive further attention after its initial flurry of marketing promotion? Yes! Published in hardcover in April 2006, Lucinda Schroeder's fascinating real-life story, *A Hunt for Justice*, is still receiving excellent reviews. The August 2007 issue of *Alaska* magazine says, "Readers will be quickly sucked in to this exciting page-turner." ✓

## SinC Links

Check out this group at Yahoo; writers can ask for crime scene and forensics information:  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/crimescenewriter>.

# The Cairn of Albertvs

## A Healthy Mind in a Healthy Bod

*Mens sana in corpore sano*

The May 2007 issue of the *Historical Novels Review* devotes its cover and two inside pages to a new novel about a “doctor” (the word is Middle English *doctur*) in a Roman legion occupying Britannia at the time of Hadrian (117–138 CE). Legions then stationed there were II Augusta, XX Valeria Victrix, and IX Hispania, units that had been raised on the continent. Those legionaries and their auxiliaries were apt to speak regional dialects of Latin, Germanic, Gothic, Celtic as spoken in various Gallic provinces, Greek, Syrian, and Berber. Yet the doctor’s mates (sic) quickly mastered both the conquered Brits’ Londonium cockney (“Bloody nuisance, that!”) and Etonian upper-class colloquy (“Frankly, for a chap who’s just nearly had his house burned down . . . I’m really extremely calm.”), and then evidently handed them down verbatim to the cast of *My Fair Lady*.

But the Cairn wants to talk about a recent textbook, *Roman Medicine* by Audrey Cruse (Tempus Publishing Ltd., Port Stroud GL 5 2QG, 2004). Cruse’s lively and well-illustrated chapters cover Greek science and medicine, *materia medica*, Roman diseases, and physicians and healers in the Roman world. Hospitals to care for civilians did not exist until late 4th-century Christian times, yet much earlier military *valetudinaria* (literally, “places to put you back into good health”) have been identified through ancient writings and archaeological evidence. The layout of such medical facilities in forts on the Rhine-Danube frontier and in Britain suggests they had an operating theatre with hearths that could boil water and heat-cauterizing instruments. Wards holding five beds each on two sides of a dividing corridor housed injured patients and quarantined infectious ones. Medicinal plants were grown on the site: remains have been identified as henbane, St. John’s Wort, plantain, gentian, and fenugreek. Opium and hemp (*cannabis*) were used as sedatives. New Mexico just caught up in July with the Medical Marijuana Law! A bathhouse with its warm-hot-cold sequence of pools and humidity was “far better for the promotion of health and cleanliness than our modern practice of wallowing in dirty water. . . . Latrines were constantly flushed with the overflow.” (Footnote, p. 334, *The Army of the Caesars* by Michael Grant.) Military surgeons (*chirurgi*) were assisted by in-hospital orderlies. Field medics attached to the ranks dressed wounds

before bringing the men to MASH-like camp hospitals or the nearest fort.

Most army surgeons were Greeks. Several medical schools scattered throughout the empire provided training, the most famous being at Alexandria. Dissection and vivisection on animals—and convicted criminals—was practiced there as early as the 3rd century BCE and continued until Theodosius I closed the school around 390 CE. Aside from the well-known physicians, Hippocrates and Galen, a good source for ancient medical lore is the Roman writer Cornelius Celsus. He died ca. 50 CE, but his eight-volume *De Medicina* survives on Google.com.

*Val ere . . . Be in good health!✓*

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



## Book Review

*The Christopher Killer* by Alane Ferguson. (Viking, Penguin Group, 2006, \$15.99.)

This novel has been nominated by the Mystery Writers of America for the Edgar Allen Poe Best Mystery Award. Alane introduces her protagonist, Cameryn, teenage daughter of the local coroner. Cameryn begins her career early when her dad succumbs to her request to become his new assistant.

On her first case, Cameryn realizes that the victim is a friend of hers, which spurs her to find the killer. But this wasn’t the murderer’s first victim and may not be the last. After a while, not knowing where else to turn for answers, Cameryn visits a psychic who talks with the dead. Throughout the story, Cameryn’s deep-rooted emotions about her absent mother continue to surface. And to complicate her life a little more, she works closely with the young deputy on the case. It’s a good thing Cameryn is almost out of high school, because she grows up fast with dead bodies, a crime to solve, and her internal conflicts.

The story is somewhat gruesome for mid-teens, but fascinating for both teens and adults. It opens up new possibilities for young women who want a very different career. Alane Ferguson shows off her researching skills, nicely blending detailed forensics into the plot. The story is fast paced with strong characterization and conflicts. I look forward to reading the next book in this series, expecting it to be as enjoyable as this one.✓

—Cheri Stow

## Standing on Line at Costco

It was one of those hot, muggy late-June days in Pennsylvania. The high-ceilinged room was barely air-conditioned. The line stretched past the CD players, around the HP printers, and into the wide-screen TVs. At the end of it, Janet Evanovich was signing copies of her latest Stephanie Plum mystery.

I don't shop at Costco. I hate standing on line. And my tolerance of heat and humidity is minimal (hence my move a year later to Albuquerque). Still, for some reason, when I heard from my then-SinC chapter president that Evanovich would be signing at two area locations that weekend, including the Montgomeryville Costco, it seemed like a good idea to go. I told myself I was going for my gal-pal-since-the-third-grade, Julie, who turned me on to Stephanie Plum novels in the first place. I wanted to get her a signed copy—hopefully before she'd already bought it herself and finished reading it (Julie's the reading equivalent of the roadrunner—practically uncatchable).

As often happens in queues, though, I got to talking to the ladies around me, while their husbands went off with a cart and the shopping list in search of bottled water and paper plates, "plain white, no colors!" ringing in their ears. One redhead was buying the book for her husband who never read books by female authors (hiss!), and she wanted to change his mind (rah!). A young blonde was an avid fan, although her hubby went for Lisa Scottoline's books. They knew Lisa and had been overwhelmed by how nice a person she is. I assured them that all Sisters in Crime were lovely people.

Janet's daughter, driver, and general dogsbody, Alex, came by asking, "Babe or Cupcake?" which effectively separated the loyalists from the nonreaders. We all knew that Joe Morelli refers to Stephanie as "Cupcake," and Ranger (sigh) calls her "Babe"—and not much else. And we agreed that Steph should end up with Trenton cop (and former bad boy himself) Morelli. We got stickers to put on our . . . wherever, identifying us as either Babe or Cupcake.

An hour later, I was standing at the signing table, with barely time to say "Hi" (and give Janet a copy of *Belles Lettres*, the Delaware Valley SinC chapter's newsletter) before hitting the checkout line. Redhead kindly offered the use of her Costco ID (did I mention that I'd never set foot in a Costco before?), and I paid for my/our book.

It was only later that it occurred to me why this experience was such fun—I could imagine myself

sitting in that chair, surrounded by staff, signing my umpteenth best seller. If that isn't inspirational, I don't know what is.

Excuse me while I get back to my typewriter.

—Linda Triegel



## Croak & Dagger Coming Events

**Thursday, September 20, 2007, 6:30 p.m.:**

### **Murder mystery dinner party**

The Quarters Restaurant, Wyoming and Montgomery

(\$9 for Croak & Dagger members, \$14 for nonmembers).

**Tuesday, September 25, 2007, 7:00 p.m.:**

**Lisa Polisar**, Sisters in Crime mystery author

(*The Ghost of Mary Prairie*, *Blackwater Tango*, *Knee Deep*, *Straight Ahead*)

**Tuesday, October 23, 2007, 7:00 p.m.:**

### **Ghost tour in Old Town Albuquerque field trip**

(\$11 for Croak & Dagger members, \$16 for nonmembers)

*This replaces the regular program meeting at the substation.*

**Tuesday, November 27, 2007, 7:00 p.m.:**

### **To be announced**

**February 16, 2008:**

### **Mystery conference!**

Croak & Dagger and Southwest Writers are teaming up to host a mystery readers and writers conference.

## IN THE LOOP

If you haven't joined already, all members are invited to join the Croak & Dagger community group, an online gathering place. Exchange information about mystery books, movies, and TV shows; share news about local and national mystery events; and participate in occasional online classes. Join in!

Email [croakdagger@yahoo.com](mailto:croakdagger@yahoo.com) for further instructions.

# The Writer's Block



## A column on writing.

So you've written your book, polished and revised it according to advice from your critique group and from books like those by Hallie Ephron and Chris Roerden. Now what? One of the best ways to elicit the interest of an agent or editor is through face-to-face contact.

Sometimes you get a ten-minute interview. Often much less. So start small, with a 30-second "elevator pitch." How might you interest an agent or an editor that you meet in looking at a "partial" of your book (the first three chapters and a synopsis)? You'll need a concise, approximately three-sentence précis of your novel that you can deliver in about 30 seconds in an elevator, at the bar, in a restroom (God forbid), or other social situation. What can you say about your book that will get your work looked at?

At an all-day panel at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., best-selling medical thriller writer Tess Gerritson covered pitches. She said to create and refine your pitch just as you did your novel, writing it down so you can rattle it off convincingly when the opportunity arises.

Tess used as examples *Gone With the Wind*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. You'll deliver it to an agent or editor in an unscheduled meeting that would start something like this:

"Hello, Ms. Blank. I see you work for Blank & Blank Agency (or Blank Press). Are you interested in [your novel's genre]?"

"Why, yes, I am."

Then you launch into your carefully rehearsed pitch.

Here's how Tess encapsulated her own thriller *Gravity*: "In the near future, a young female doctor aboard the International Space Station sees her crewmembers fall ill and die one by one from a mysterious and unidentified disease. NASA covers up the crisis and tries to send a relief craft, but plans go disastrously awry and Houston decides to leave her to die in space. But her husband, a space program washout, takes matters into his own hands and mounts an independent rescue effort."

Then Tess asked her audience: "Would you buy a book like that? Go see a movie like that?"

That's all you have to do—set up the premise of your book in present tense. You don't have to do what your synopsis does and tell how it turns out.

If you can't get someone aside for a three-sentence pitch, you ought to have as backup a one-sentence comparison, a pithy statement that likens your novel to something the listener will be familiar with. Besides Tess's pitch, she could have used a one-sentence comparison like: "*Gravity* is like *Marooned* meets *E.R.*" Obviously, that will only work if you pick elements you're reasonably sure your listener will be familiar with.

This is the pitch I use with agents and editors about my Civil War spy novel, *Fire from the Ashes*: "In the closing days of the Civil War, Beth Wendland, an accomplished Union spy in Richmond, stumbles upon a plot to send a wagon bomb to blow up the White House and kill President Lincoln. Abandoned by her masters in Washington, she must evade Rebel soldiers and a determined pursuer—the officer who had the wagon built—to get the information to Union intelligence in time to thwart the attack. Aided by the federal officer who loves her, Beth risks more than her life in trying to snuff out the burning fuse of the world's first vehicle bomb and prevent disaster on the eve of victory."

And my one-sentence comparison? "With its strong and resourceful heroine, facing danger with the help of her lover, this novel most resembles *Cold Mountain* meets *The Day of the Jackal*."

Then I follow up by asking, "May I send you a partial?" and exchanging business cards. I've been successful in these pitches at a rate of about nine in ten. Try your pitch out on your family, members of your critique group, or chapter members at one of our meetings. ✓

—Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

## Classified Information

### Are You Looking for a Critique Group?

Why not advertise for like-minded writers in the *Nooseletter*? Just email your announcement to shirleycoe@comast.net. Or if you prefer, bring up your suggestion at the next program meeting.

## Just the Facts? Not Necessarily



New Mexico is often forgotten when people list the fifty United States. That remains a source of humor among many New Mexicans, though not all. I mention this because most people know the other forty-

nine states, or have at least heard of them. If you make up a state as the location of your story, a reader will know that it doesn't exist and that might be enough to make them stop reading.

Readers are aware that the story is fiction, but can find it disconcerting not to be able to visualize this unknown place. Cities and counties are easier to create because few of us know every city or county in our particular state, and certainly not around the country. Science fiction and fantasy writers can create cities, countries, even entire planets because we step into those genres expecting to travel to places unknown. The expectations of mystery and crime fiction readers put a few limitations on the journey.

As I trek across cyberspace and read different authors' thoughts on using fact in fiction, I find a number of opinions and ideas. Some believe that mystery and crime fiction should be completely factual. Some, like me, believe in the gentle mixing of facts with the storytelling we love. As an author of mystery and crime fiction, I spend a lot of time researching in order to write as accurate a story as I can, but sometimes I simply make things up.

Many of my stories take place in Chicago, a city I know (and love). When I write about a small town, I create one. The main reason for doing this is to avoid inaccuracies and, of course, letters from people pointing out those inaccuracies. I've found that I do a better job writing about towns in the Midwest, where I grew up and spent a large part of my life. I can create things from my imagination, but I need real memories to build from, or it doesn't feel right, to the reader or me.

Another interesting thing I've found about using fact in fiction is that people don't always believe the truth. I've written at least two scenes that people told me they didn't believe, yet I personally experienced them. My life isn't exciting enough to be unbelievable, but these people weren't buying, which taught me another lesson. It's up to me to make even what's real, believable.

I put myself into my favorite comfy reading chair and asked this question: What is the line then as to what a reader will or won't believe? As a reader, I enjoy when my brain is busy chattering away about something being a bit implausible only to have an artful author stop the chattering in a single line. I don't know what's believable, but I know it when I read it.

The difference between writing nonfiction and fiction is, of course, that nonfiction is real and the facts must be accurate. Fiction on the other hand must make the reader believe the story is real. It has to "feel right." I read nonfiction to learn. I read fiction for enjoyment, and any learning I derive from it is a bonus. A good author can make me believe a great deal, although I'm still not sure if I'd believe a story based in this New Mexico place.

—Jean Sheldon

## For Love or Money?

While reading mysteries, we are commonly told that the motive for most murders is either love or money. Money is not the motive for most writers of mysteries, however. I say "most," since there are also "The Lottery Winner Writers," those who garner six-figure advances. They, I presume, write for love and money. I am speaking here of the journeyman or woman who writes and even publishes from one to ten mysteries, who finds a modest audience, who is often, rightfully, called successful.

When I first began this writing career. I was astonished to discover, at my first writer's conference, how many of these successful writers wrote only for love. I heard a published Samurai mystery writer talk of receiving five thousand dollars for each of his five published works. Another reported that after thirteen years of writing she had amassed around thirty thousand dollars. These successful writers, it turns out, were also architects, ranchers, teachers, and the like.

My own financial results after six years of writing two screenplays, several short stories, and one mystery confirm the above. Oh, I do dream of one day joining the lottery writers and receiving some six-figure payoff. But this is a dream. I write because most of the time I love the experience.

That's why I and other readers of mystery keep turning the pages. Isn't it?

—William Hershey

# ROB'S RANDOM SHOTS

## September Case File Number One

*Kill Me Again* by Terence Faherty, Crum Creek Press, Carmel, Indiana, 1996, trade paperback, 304 pp.

Ahhh, an historical mystery. As you know by now, that's my favorite subgenre. I met Terry at Thrillerfest 2006 last July in Phoenix. This was his first book in the Shamus Award-winning Scott Elliott, Hollywood PI series, but the era it concerns is not so long ago and features, in disguise, the characters from Nearly Everyone's Favorite Movie: *Casablanca*.

Many authors use real people as characters, following the general rule that you can't slander the dead. When an author undertakes to write about Hollywood starting to film a sequel to one of the best-loved films of all time and disguises the real people who made that film, it comes into the category of roman à clef. Faherty has done a masterful job of camouflaging the identities of all the principals and, indeed, the name and plot of the original movie.

The time is 1947. Elliott, like the rest of America, is recovering from World War II. A returning vet (field artillery in Europe) who used to work as a bit player in films before the war, he can't find work in the "everybody wants to be an actor" field, and goes to work for Paddy McGuire, whose Hollywood Security Agency specializes in protecting film studios, executives, and stars.

And how would movie producers like to help America get back on its feet again? By making a sequel to the most beloved film of the war years, in this case retitled and modified into *Passage to Lisbon*. Humphrey Bogart (Rick Blaine) is called Torrance Beaumont in this movie, and his character's name is Stephen Laird. Likewise Ingrid Bergman's name is Ella Larson, and her Ilsa Lund character is Maura Wocjik, still the wife of a famous resistance leader and Rick/Stephen's former lover. The movie takes place aboard a floating casino in the Mediterranean captained by a Frenchman, a casino run by Stephen. With me so far? Good, because the plot of this faux *Casablanca* is crucial to figuring out whodunit. The same noble sacrifice and thwarting of the Nazis occurs in this film, which is supposed to have left wartime audiences weeping, as they did for the real movie.

Enter Torrance Beaumont and producers with the idea of making a sequel to this most-beloved film, to be titled *Kill Me Again* and feature the same

three top stars. A screenplay has been written, and as Elliott gets to see in the opening sequence of the book, some early scenes with Beaumont and minor characters have already been filmed. So what's the beef, as they said in those days? Someone has written to the studio to say that the film shouldn't be made because the screenwriter is a communist, the emerging bogeyman now that the Nazis have been defeated.

Quick as you can say "Action," the screenwriter has been murdered in his home, clutching a copy of the script. Having set up a plausible story, Faherty does a great job sending Elliott through a labyrinth of Hollywood writers, actors, the director, and even figures from many of the suspects' pasts, all the way to New York and back by plane. And yes, once again a masterful author had me pinning the murder on the wrong suspect. Does the sequel movie get made? See the book or pin me down at a chapter meeting.

## September Case File Number Two

*Officer Down* by Theresa Schwegel, St. Martin's Paperbacks, New York, 2005, 287 pp.

Now for a complete change of pace. From a fairly genteel historical PI novel by a man to a hardboiled police procedural set in modern-day Chicago. Theresa Schwegel deservedly won the prestigious Best First Novel Edgar Award for this book from Mystery Writers of America in 2006. This novel proves that women can (and should) write hardboiled if the spirit moves them. My only disappointment by the time I closed the covers was that this wouldn't be the start of a series, but was a standalone. Ah, well . . .

Picture this setup (and I mean that in more than one sense of the word): Rookie cop Samantha Mack—known throughout the precinct as Smack—and her partner are pursuing a violent pedophile named Marko Trovic. In a darkened house, Smack returns fire from Trovic but is knocked unconscious. She wakes up next to her partner's body; he's been shot to death. No one can find any evidence that Trovic had been in the house, and the fatal bullet is determined to have come from her weapon. The department rules it as a case of friendly fire, and Smack is shunned at the precinct house while Internal Affairs investigates.

Neither her former lover—another officer—or Internal Affairs believes her story. Smack's efforts to defend herself have the effect of alienating other  
(cont'd. on next page)

*(Rob's Random Shots, cont'd.)*

officers in the precinct, her partner's widow, and others at the funeral. While the department seeks to avoid bad press, she tries to track Trovic through the Chicago underworld, but finds herself under surveillance. Can she clear her name and avenge her partner's death before the official investigation takes its course and ends her career?

This is not a straightforward open-and-shut case. Complexities in the story line find our heroine doubting the intentions of those supposedly trying to help her. Schwegel won her Edgar by portraying Smack as her own worst enemy—headstrong, prone to drinking too much and making bad choices, and romantic as well as professional. She is not always a sympathetic character, but the hole she keeps digging for herself makes you read on to see how this self-destructive character can possibly survive, let alone salvage her career.

I found myself casting actors for the movie version of this novel. Sandra Bullock would make a great Samantha, and Kevin Spacey would be a terrific Detective Mason Imes, her erstwhile lover. And I can't see Hollywood not doing this story. It's perfect for the Sandra who went to rehab in *28 Days*, and Spacey could play the same character he portrayed in *L.A. Confidential*. But don't wait for this to show up at a theater near you or on the small screen. Get a copy of this book. ✓

—Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

## Classified Information

### Would You Like to Be in a Book Reading Club?

On a regular basis that doesn't conflict with monthly Sisters in Crime program meetings? Just announce it at the next program meeting or advertise for like-minded readers in the *Nooseletter* by e-mailing your suggestion to shirleycoe@comcast.net.

## DON'T FORGET:

Tuesday, September 25, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, October 23, 7:00 p.m. (*Ghost Tour in Old Town instead of regular meeting*)  
Tuesday, November 27, 7:00 p.m.



Sisters in Crime was founded in 1986. *The purpose of Sisters in Crime shall be "to combat discrimination against women in they mystery field, educate publishers and the general public as to the inequities in the treatment of female authors, raise the level of awareness of their contribution to the field, and promote the professional advancement of women who write mysteries."*



## Book Review

*What the Dead Know* by Laura Lippman.

The title is intriguing but turns out to be misleading. This is not a reveal of what the dead know about life after death or the secret of living and dying. It is about two sisters who disappeared from a shopping mall in Baltimore, Maryland, on a Saturday afternoon thirty years ago. How could two sisters disappear without a witness, without a clue; who could have lured them away, why, and how?

Can a detective solve this mystery and answer these questions, when past attempts have failed? Will a disoriented woman, claiming to be one of the sisters, appearing unexpectedly on his Baltimore doorstep, unravel the mystery? Will this skeptical detective finally uncover the truth? Sounds like a real thriller, right?

Wrong. The reader has to wait until the last few pages to get the answers. This in itself is not uncommon. But in the slow revelation that follows the interesting beginning we discover a large collection of very unattractive characters. Even the victim is easy to dislike. If you enjoy dysfunctional families this is not to miss.

Nevertheless, I do recommend the book for the patient reader. One who is able to plow through a collection of manipulative and disagreeable characters, one who can wait for the answer to the questions in a most surprising ending. ✓

—Reviewed by William Hershey



## Book Review

*Girl Sleuth: Nancy Drew and the Women Who Created Her* by Melanie Rehak (Harcourt, 2005).

What do the Bobbsey Twins, Hardy Boys, Dana Girls, and Tom Swift have in common with Nancy Drew? They are all siblings—of sorts. As Rehak tells us in *Girl Sleuth*, they are in fact the “brainchildren” of the same man, Edward Stratemeyer. The son of German immigrants, Stratemeyer grew up clerking in his father’s tobacco store and dreaming of becoming a millionaire writer. He founded the Stratemeyer Syndicate for that very purpose, after realizing that there was a huge untapped market for children’s books. As he gave birth to one series concept after another, he hired freelancers to write the books based on his outlines and using his characters. Kids loved the books and so did their parents, who saw them as a huge improvement over the penny dreadfuls and dime novels so popular at the time.

For his fashionably dressed girl sleuth, Stratemeyer toyed with such names as Helen Hale and Nell Cody before settling on Nancy Drew. When the book mogul died in 1930, his daughter Harriet Stratemeyer Adams became CEO and, together with Iowa journalist Mildred Wirt Benson, brought the plucky, titian-haired detective to life.

Since Nancy’s debut in 1930, the series has sold more than 80 million copies and has survived the Depression, World War II, and the MTV age. Now “owned” by Simon & Schuster, Nancy is *big business*. Besides the books, movies, and television series, there are Nancy products from pajamas to paper dolls and stationery, not to mention interactive online stories and video gaming software. The plucky American detective is known all over the world. I recently purchased a Hebrew copy of *The Secret of Shadow Ranch* on eBay—it shipped from Tel Aviv. After recently returning from a business trip to China, my husband informed me that publishers in Shanghai knew all about the girl sleuth too.

Rehak’s book is a fascinating read, and I recommend it to anyone interested in Nancy in particular and children’s publishing in general. ✓

—Reviewed by Shirley Raye Redmond

*Shirley Raye Redmond is the award-winning author of a romantic suspense novel, Stone of the Sun, and ten children’s books—two of which have sold more than 100,000 copies each. This fall she has four more books being released, including a children’s mystery published by Simon & Schuster. She’ll be speaking at the upcoming Tony Hillerman Mystery Conference in November.*



EFFICIENCY OF FEMALE POLICE IN WHAT IS VULGARLY CALLED A “JOLLY ROW.”

## Top Tens of Mysteries— The Third Installment

The numbers in each category do not imply relative merit. All my choices are subjective; let the author or the *Nooseletter* editor know some of *your* choices.

### Legal Thriller/Courtroom Drama Authors

1. David Ellis
2. John Grisham
3. Scott Turow
4. Erle Stanley Gardner
5. William G. Tapply
6. William Bernhardt
7. Steve Martini
8. Michael Gilbert
9. John Mortimer
10. Lisa Scottoline

### PI (Private Investigator) Novelists

1. Raymond Chandler
2. Robert Parker
3. Robert Crais
4. Lawrence Sanders
5. Arthur Conan Doyle
6. Loren Estleman
7. Sue Grafton
8. Sara Paretsky
9. Ross Macdonald
10. Walter Mosley

### Authors with Religious or Spiritual Sleuths

1. G. K. Chesterton
2. Tony Hillerman
3. Margaret Coel
4. Aimee and David Thurlo
5. Ellis Peters
6. Julia Spencer-Fleming
7. Harry Kemelman
8. Antonia Fraser
9. James Doss
10. Ralph McInery ✓

—Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net

## Croak & Dagger MID-YEAR FINANCIAL REPORT

The following chart is a year-to-date financial statement for our chapter. Members should note that the receipts in this report consist entirely of \$20 per-person dues, and the expenditures are to specific persons for items needed to maintain Croak and Dagger business. Read and enjoy. Fortunately, not much mystery here.✓

*—Bill Hershey, Treasurer*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Incoming</b>	<b>Outgoing</b>	<b>Paid To</b>	<b>For</b>	<b>Balance</b>
1/9/07		\$211.01	Program Chair	Speaker Gifts	\$1,219.46
1/18/07	\$20.00				\$1,239.46
1/24/07	\$40.00				\$1,279.46
1/30/07	\$20.00				\$1,299.46
2/13/07		\$143.99	Web Manager	Website Hosting	\$1,155.47
2/27/07	\$20.00				\$1,175.47
3/7/07	\$40.00				\$1,215.47
3/14/07	\$20.00				\$1,235.47
3/27/07	\$20.00				\$1,255.47
4/18/07	\$100.00				\$1,355.47
5/7/07	\$20.00				\$1,375.47
5/25/07	\$80.00				\$1,455.47
6/4/07	\$40.00				\$1,495.47
6/6/07		\$21.37	President	Speaker Gift	\$1,474.10
7/10/07	\$100.00				\$1,574.10
7/30/07	\$80.00				\$1,654.10

## 2007 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, January 23, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, February 27, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, March 27, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, April 17, 7:00 p.m. (*third Tuesday*)  
Tuesday, May 22, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, June 26, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, July 24, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, August 28, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, September 25, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, October 23, 7:00 p.m. (*off site*)  
Tuesday, November 27, 7:00 p.m.  
December TBA

### Meetings are free to the public.

Unless otherwise noted, meetings are held every fourth Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m., at the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Police Substation, 12700 Montgomery Blvd. NE, one block east of Tramway.

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

## †*Nooseletter* Submissions†

*Croak & Dagger* friends are encouraged to contribute articles, reviews, and essays on aspects of mystery writing *and* reading for publication consideration. Information on relevant conferences or events is also welcome. Especially let us know if you have published a new book or story, or have an upcoming local author event. (Unbridled enthusiasm for your own mystery book is encouraged here.)

**Length:** Articles should average 500 words.

**Deadlines:** 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.

**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 email to [shirleycoe@comcast.net](mailto:shirleycoe@comcast.net), with "*Nooseletter*" in the subject line.

The *Nooseletter* is distributed to all members electronically. ✓

—*Shirley Coe*

## Summary of Findings

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



## Still not a member of Sisters in Crime?

\$20/year brings mystery to your life! The Albuquerque *Croak & Dagger* chapter welcomes mystery fans who want to enjoy felonious fun, absolutely criminal companionship, and sensational speakers.

Benefits of membership in the *Croak & Dagger* chapter include a subscription to our *Nooseletter*, close contact with local mystery writers, and fun events with other mystery fans.

You do *not* have to be a member of the national organization to join us. Come hear our next program speaker and meet the gang. We promise to bring mayhem and murder into your life.

Contact Sarah Schwartz, membership chair, at [croakdagger@yahoo.com](mailto:croakdagger@yahoo.com).