



THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume VI, Number 6 — November 2010

†Expert Testimony†

Technology races on. I finally bit the bullet and got an e-book reader. For my birthday a couple of days ago, Jan got me a Nook, the Barnes & Noble reader. There are a number of readers out there, but I think it is like the early word processors. While there were differences among them, they were all so different/better than typewriters that it didn't matter which one you got – just get started with one of them.

While the touch and feel of real books are nice (but that may be or become a generational thing) and we haven't gotten rid of any bookcases yet, e-readers do have their place. Since Jan and I are both big readers, when we take off on vacation, there is always a big bag of books. Now it can be a much smaller bag of books and the Nook

Although we can now download books, magazines (single issues or subscriptions), and some newspapers, I doubt that it will cut down on trips to the library and bookstore. Downloading books definitely cuts the waiting if bookstore doesn't have the book you want. You can also download e-books from the library.

I am sure different people will use their e-readers differently. So far I like it more for fiction than for nonfiction, especially ones with a lot of detail. I find it easier to flip back and forth and compare things on paper than electronically. For research I like the find function. It is a lot easier than flipping through the pages to find where it mentioned X, especially since the X you want to find is never

something that is in the index – assuming the book has one. Although I haven't used it yet, there is also a way to flag and annotate things in the book.

In 5-10 years e-readers may be like the Internet. I wonder how we got through college and grad school without the Internet and the easy, ready access to almost anything. Even so the libraries and real books and magazines are still there and probably always will be.

I initially downloaded several books, including the new Tremayne book for Jan. The downside is that now I may have to get her a Nook for Christmas so I can get mine back..♦

– Olin Bray, President

Don't Miss It!

Tuesday, November 23, at 7 p.m.

Our November speaker is C&D's own Rob Kresge, whose debut mystery, *Murder for Greenhorns*, has just been published by ABQ Press and has been called a "page-turner" and "like the tang of well-oiled gun leather" by other writers who should know.

Rob's topic will be "Writing the Historical Mystery." *Murder for Greenhorns* is set in the fictional town of Warbonnet in 1870 Wyoming and deals with murder and deception. He will also be signing copies of his book at Treasure House in Old Town on November 28.

Rob is a founding member of Croak & Dagger and our 2008 president.

The Albuquerque Croak & Dagger chapter of Sisters in Crime welcomes mystery fans, readers, and writers who want to enjoy felonious fun, absolutely criminal companionship and sensational speakers.

Meetings are held in the police briefing room of the James Joseph Dwyer Memorial Substation, 12700 Montgomery NE (1 block east of Tramway). Unless otherwise noted, programs are free and open to the public.

AND: Remember that all members are invited to join the Croak & Dagger Yahoo group, an online gathering place for mystery writers. Join in! Log on to C&D's web page (www.croak-and-dagger.com) and click on the link to moderator Nancy Varian for instructions. Exchange news and information about mystery books, movies, and TV shows, as well as online courses.



Sisters in Crime **Guppies**

Guppies is an online writer's support group. 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.

SinC guppies come from across the United States and Canada. They have different occupations and avocations, but they share a passion for writing mysteries and a common goal of getting published.

Interested in joining this online writer's support group? 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 professional development and advancement of women crime writers to achieve equality in the industry."*

Our vision is: "Raising professionalism and achieving equity among crime writers."

And our motto is: "SinC into a good mystery!"

Check Out the Croak & Dagger Website for all your Croak & Dagger information needs.

www.croak-and-dagger.com

- Upcoming Programs
- 2008 Meeting Schedule
- Membership Form
- Speakers Bureau
- Links to Mystery Websites & Websites for Your Favorite Croak & Dagger Authors
- *The Nooseletter* Archive

The Line Up

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Don't
Forget
To Vote!
(see page 8)



From *The Book Deal* – An Inside View of Publishing:

Mystery and crime fiction is bloody booming!

Why would one of America's most distinguished literary publishers jump at the chance to sign up an unknown *hillbilly-noir* writer whose history so far consists of gritty short stories published online by pulp fiction e-zines?

Here's why: Mystery and crime fiction is booming – there are more debut authors, more acquisitions by editors, higher sales and greater dominance on the bestseller lists.

"I discovered [Frank Bill](#) on Twitter," literary agent Stacia Decker of the [Donald Maas Agency](#) said the other day about her new writer whose rural Indiana-based crime stories have an enthusiastic following online. "I recently placed him in a two-book deal with [Farrar, Strauss and Giroux](#)."

Terrific news for mystery writers of all stripes

Top literary agents in mysteries confirm an upsurge in the genre. "I started in 2009 and my business has only increased—with sales evenly split between hardcover and paperback," Decker said. She's one of most successful agents for mystery books over the past 12 months, according to Publisher's Marketplace.

Acquiring book editors agree. "Mystery publishing at [Thomas Dunne Books](#) is thriving," says Associate Editor Toni Plummer, who's the #1 dealmaker on PM's list for signing up mysteries. "We're serving a huge community of mystery readers." Terri Bischoff, the acquiring editor for [Midnight Ink Books](#), says the mystery business is so good, they're expanding.

The New York Times bestseller list confirms all this. Of the top ten books on the hardcover fiction list last week, five were mysteries. And last week's Nielsen's BookScan reports that for bestsellers in all categories or formats, eight of the top ten were mysteries.

So, why the big upswing today in activity by mystery writers, agents, and publishers? Here are some of the reasons.

Readers get hooked on series!

The modern successors to *Sherlock Holmes* and *Miss Marple* — including Lee Child's *Jack Reacher*, the *Liz Tucker* series by Janet Evanovich, and Michael Connelly's *Harry Bosch*, not to mention Stieg Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy* — all have irresistible heroes or heroines. Once an author has two or three titles going and the character begins to grow and cut loose, fans devour every new title. It's addictive. A successful series is the dream of every mystery writer, agent, and publisher.

Mystery readers cross gender lines. Jessica Faust, the eminent book biz blogger and CEO of [BookEnds Literary Agency](#) says unequivocally that "The reason mysteries sell better than romances or science fiction is they cross gender. That is, women will read tough action books with outlaw heroes, and men will read *cozies* for the warm relationships and sense of community." Faust recently sold three books to [Berkley Prime Crime](#) in the all-new *Charmed Pie Shoppe Mystery* series by Ellery Adams and two more untitled books in the *Cupcake Bakery Mystery* series by Jean McKinlay. Bischoff at Midnight Ink also reports "Before coming on board as an editor, I owned a mystery bookstore and can tell you that men read *cozies* but even more women read thrillers."

Mysteries are satisfying. Mysteries solve problems. My old pal Bruce Harris, the former VP of Sales at Random House, thinks people love to read mysteries for the satisfying payback. "They're so much fun to read because they answer questions, make order out of chaos, and create clarity out of confusion." He's right. A heinous crime is committed. The heroine or hero leads us on a logical process that figures it out, gets beneath the surface and discovers the truth about this puzzle.

[For much more, go to: www.alanrinzler.com/blog]

Couldn't make it to Bouchercon this year? Here's PW's report:

Bouchercon by the Bay

by Jordan Foster; Publishers Weekly, October 18, 2010

The annual Bouchercon World Mystery Convention returned to San Francisco for the first time since 1985, drawing a substantial crowd of nearly 1,400 pre-registered attendees to the city of Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*. Bouchercon 2010 fêted both an American and an International Guest of Honor, in addition to a Distinguished Contributor to the Genre and a Fan Guest of Honor.

Toastmaster Eddie Muller, a native son of San Francisco best known for his Billy Nichols boxing mysteries, launched the event on Thursday, October 14, during opening ceremonies that set the tone for the conference: exuberance at the chance to see friends and colleagues undercut with sadness over the untimely passing of beloved bookstore manager, publisher and stalwart of the mystery community David Thompson on September 13. Thompson was honored first during the opening night's presentation of the Macavity Awards, when Ken Bruen and Reed Farrel Coleman's *Tower* was chosen as Best Novel, and later during Sunday's Anthony Awards brunch.

Despite the pall cast by Thompson's absence, the convention carried on in high spirits, with a wide variety of panels and activities. Traditional panels covered topics as varied as the tastes of the readers who attended them. Those who preferred their whodunits to take place several millennia in the past packed the room for "Death and the Favored Few," which featured Lindsay Davis, John Maddox Roberts, Steven Saylor, and Gary Corby discussing their series. Nancy Drew, who celebrates her 80th birthday this year, was honored not only with her own panel—"Superstar: Nancy Drew was a Cosmo Girl"—but also with a birthday party. Highlighting their international lineup, Soho Publishing's "Flags of Terror" panel featured six of their authors whose settings include Belfast, Beijing, Johannesburg, Paris, New York City's Chinatown, and WWII-era Europe.

Fans looking for a hands-on experience visited the numerous craft rooms set up throughout the weekend. This year's convention also featured Continuous Conversations each day—on topics including Debut Authors, Traditional and Cozy Mysteries, Suspense Thrillers, and "30 on the 30," where a different author would present on the topic of their choice every half hour.

As always, Bouchercon is host to numerous award presentations. Macavity Awards—voted on by members of Mystery Readers International—were also given to Rebecca Cantrell's *A Trace of Smoke* (Sue Feder Historical Mystery Award); Hank Phillippi Ryan's "On the House" (Best Short Story); P.D. James's *Talking About Detective Fiction* (Best Mystery Nonfiction); and Alan Bradley's *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* (Best First Mystery). The Shamus Awards, presented by the Private Eye Writers of America, were awarded at an offsite banquet. Marcia Muller's *Locked In* won Best P.I. Novel; Ira Berkowitz's *Sinner's Ball* won Best Paperback Original P.I. Novel; Brad Park's *Faces of the Gone* won Best First P.I. Novel; Marcia Muller's long-running San Francisco-based series character—and the heroine of the Shamus-winning *Locked In*—Sharon McCone was honored as Best P.I. Character; and Robert Crais was given the Lifetime Achievement Award.

The American Guest of Honor title went to Bay area native Laurie R. King, known for her Sherlock Holmes and Mary Russell series as well as the San Francisco-set books starring P.I. Kate Martinelli. Scottish author Denise Mina—best known for her Garnethill Trilogy, her Paddy Meehan series set in 1980s Glasgow, and a new contemporary series with DI Alex Morrow, was the convention's International Guest of Honor. Lee Child, the creator of the bestselling series featuring laconic ex-military man and crime-fighter extraordinaire Jack Reacher, was honored as Distinguished Contributor to the Genre.

See you in St. Louis next September!

[For more (including more awards), go to www.publishersweekly.com]

THRILLING PLOT IDEAS FROM A NEW BUILDING

The New Mexico Scientific Laboratories, 1101 Camino de Salud NE, is a state-of-the-art facility that houses the New Mexico Department of Health Scientific Laboratory Division (SLD), the New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator (OMI), and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS). *The building is bursting with the potential biological hazards to create the perfect setting for a techno-thriller.*

The American Institute of Architects included the new building as part of its annual Albuquerque tour on September 20. The tour featured the operation of BSLs, or biological safety levels, within the building. Some characteristics of biosafety levels are: 1—wash hands frequently, the level used in most areas of a hospital; 2—lab coats or scrubs, gloves, and some respiratory protection, the level used in hospitals for surgery and for handling endemic diseases; 3—body suits with respiratory and eye protection, used for highly contagious diseases; 4—total protection from the environment with air supplied via a tank or umbilical line, used rarely and only at facilities like the Center for Disease Control.

OMI (Office of the Medical Investigator) occupies the building's first floor. The New Mexico OMI is the only facility in the country that does autopsies in a BSL-3 environment. Each of the sixteen autopsy stations has down-draft ventilation and three computers to link photos to descriptions. The new building has a CT scanner room. OMI has applied for a grant to compare CT scans with autopsies to see which is more effective in detecting cause of death, broken bones, and diseases. The office is hoping for an MRI, which will detect other problems; e.g. evidence of child abuse. *If you're writing police procedurals watch for changes in the way bodies are processed for evidence.*

(It's not always the high-tech equipment that thrills, though. One of my personal favorites, in the anthropology area, is a cylindrical metal container to deflesh skeletonized bones.)

To enter the autopsy suite, staff move through successive stages of clothing changes and increasing air pressure. Two observation rooms with two-way audio communication enable law enforcement to watch autopsies without entering the BSL-3 area. *In your next mystery set in Albuquerque, don't place your homicide detective at the autopsy table with the pathologist. She'll sit in a comfortable chair where she can drink her coffee and ask the pathologist for a close-up video of the bullet hole. After the autopsy she'll take a disk with pertinent photos back to her office.*

The New Mexico Department of Health Scientific Laboratory Division (SLD) occupies three floors of the building, including a floor each for the toxicology lab and for the chemistry bureau where staff track air and water quality and monitor for other hazards in the environment.

One of SLD's charges is to test dairy products. (New Mexico is the fourth largest cheese producer in the country.)

Researchers into terrorism consider an attack on our food sources to be the most effective way to threaten our health and economic well-being. If someone were to infect a cow with foot-and-mouth disease, for example, New Mexico's economy could be devastated.

Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS), which occupies the building's basement, works closely with SLD to identify and isolate animal disease. VDS receives animal bodies for diagnostic bacteriology and virology work. The unit can handle carcasses up to 4000 pounds, or, as they say, "silvery minnows to circus elephants." BSL-2 and -3 labs contain autopsy tables for small to huge animals. (Once the autopsy is completed a giant pressure cooker heats the dead animal with lye to create a sterile slurry for disposal. *Imagine someone trapped in the pressure cooker beneath a dead buffalo while the villains . . .*)

SLD tests for food-borne diseases as well as infections like swine flu, SARS, hanta virus, plague, rabies, dengue, malaria, anthrax, ricin, sarin—you name it. While the lab still grows cultures in Petri dishes, DNA fingerprinting is the principal means to track microbes. The labs are outfitted with an airlock system to transfer DNA material from one area to another for DNA extraction, then

amplification, then fingerprinting. *What if an airlock containing DNA for a deadly organism were breached?*

SLD is the state's diagnostic lab for investigation into weapons of chemical and biological terrorism—explosives, radiation, corrosives, nerve gas, toxins—all materials a writer can enlist for great plots.

One SLD floor contains a BSL-3+ area. Entrance requires a full strip and shower before one dons special lab gear. When one leaves the section, he or she reverses the process. *Where better for a weaponized substance to evade all precautions?*

All air from the building goes through filters before it is released into the atmosphere. *But what if something goes wrong?*

—contributed by Sarah Schwartz (schwartz@comcast.net)

Mark Your Calendars!



Left Coast Crime—The Big Chile is scheduled for March 24-27, 2011, at La Fonda Hotel, Santa Fe. Left Coast Crime comes to the City Different with your favorite Southwest writers, including Steve Havill, Margaret Coel, and Steve Brewer. Our own Pari Noskin Taichert is coordinating things (get the latest on her blog, www.murderati.com) and C&D's Rob Kresge is program chairman. Here are some of the activities tentatively planned for the weekend:

Wednesday, March 23: Early bird registration 3-6 p.m. (registration continues daily), day trips, and sign-up sheet so that LCC attendees can find each other, make new friends, and go to dinner that night.

Thursday, Thursday, March 24: Day trips, panel programming from 1-5 p.m., silent auction, evening programming begins at 7:30. Anne Hillerman will be on hand with her husband, photographer Don Strel, to present a slide show of their book, *Tony Hillerman's Landscape*. The evening will conclude with an informal memorial with members of the LCC writing and fan community sharing their favorite and personal stories about Hillerman.

Friday, March 25: Continental breakfast with new authors, day trips, morning and afternoon panels. Silent auction continues. Welcoming ceremony at 7 p.m.

Saturday, March 26: Registration continues, continental breakfast and Author-Go-Round (for established authors), day trips, morning and afternoon panels. Silent auction continues; Awards Banquet & Live Auction (and surprises), 6 p.m.

Sunday, March 27: Panels, 9 a.m. to noon

In addition, a program of *Cuentos* will be ongoing. Authors and other attendees will hold informal chats to describe their projects and share skills and information.

Special event: Michael McGarrity will interview Tonya Harris, widow of Sandoval County Sheriff's Deputy Joe Harris, who was killed in the shoot-out with the so-called "Cookie Bandit" in July 2009.

To register, go to www.leftcoastcrime.org/2011.

For general questions, e-mail lccsantafe@leftcoastcrime.org

Curl up with a Good Mystery this Winter

Both the nominees and the winners of the 2010 Edgar and Agatha awards are good reading for mystery fans. Below are partial lists of the 2010 nominees, with the winners noted in **bold face**.

2010 “Edgar” Award Nominees,
presented by Mystery Writers of America:

Best Novel

The Missing by Tim Gautreaux
The Odds by Kathleen George
***The Last Child* by John Hart**
Mystic Arts of Erasing All Signs of Death by Charlie Huston
Nemesis by Jo Nesbø, translated by Don Bartlett
A Beautiful Place to Die by Malla Nunn

Best First Novel

The Girl She Used to Be by David Cristofano
Starvation Lake by Bryan Gruley
The Weight of Silence by Heather Gudenkauf
A Bad Day for Sorry by Sophie Littlefield
Black Water Rising by Attica Locke
***In the Shadow of Gotham* by Stefanie Pintoff**



Best Paperback Original

Bury Me Deep by Megan Abbott
Havana Lunar by Robert Arellano
The Lord God Bird by Russell Hill
***Body Blows* by Mark Strange**
The Herring-Seller’s Apprentice by L.C. Tyler

Best fact crime

The Fence: A Police Cover-Up Along Boston’s Racial Divide by Dick Lehr
Go Down Together: The True, Untold Story of Bonnie and Clyde by Jeff Guinn
Provenance: How a Con Man and a Forger Rewrote the History of Modern Art by Robert Arellano
***Columbine* by Dave Cullen**
Vanished Smile: The Mysterious Theft of Mona Lisa by R.A. Scotti

The Simon & Schuster Mary Higgins Clark Award

Cat Sitter on a Hot Tin Roof by Blaize Clement
***Awakening* by S.J. Bolton**
Never Tell a Lie by Hallie Ephron
Lethal Vintage by Nadia Gordon
Dial H for Hitchcock by Susan Kandel

2010 “Agatha” Award Nominees, presented by Malice Domestic.



Best Novel

***The Brutal Telling* by Louise Penny**
Swan for the Money by Donna Andrews
Bookplate Special by Lorna Barrett
Royal Flush by Rhys Bowen
Air Time by Hank Phillippi Ryan

Best first novel

For Better for Murder by Lisa Bork
***The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* by Alan Bradley**
Posed for Murder by Meredith Cole
The Cold Light of Morning by Elizabeth Duncan
In the Shadow of Gotham by Stefanie Pintoff

Best Nonfiction

Duchess of Death by Richard Hack
***Dame Agatha’s Shorts* by Elena Santangelo**
Talking about Detective Fiction by P.D. James
Blood on the Stage 1925-1950 by Amnon Kabatchnik
The Talented Miss Highsmith by Joan Schenkar

Best Children’s/Young Adult

The Morgue and Me by John C. Ford
The Case of the Poisoned Pig by Lewis B. Montgomery
***The Hanging Hill* by Chris Grabenstein**
The Other Side of Blue by Valerie O. Patterson

“Nobody reads a mystery to get to the middle. They read it to get to the end. The first page sells that book. The last page sells your next book.”
—Mickey Spillane

NOVEMBER ELECTION

The Croak & Dagger chapter works because of the efforts of dedicated volunteers.

Each year, members of Croak & Dagger vote for candidates for the four elective positions on the C&D board to 1-year terms. As usual, this year's election will be held at the November meeting. Members who paid dues in 2010 are eligible to vote. Please come to the meeting prepared to vote. If you cannot attend, please e-mail your vote to the current membership chair, Rob Kresge, at rkresge777@comcast.net **no later than** noon on November 23. Ballots will be distributed and counted at the meeting and the results announced at the end. The whole board—elected officers and appointed volunteers—takes office in December.

The slate of officer nominees is as follows:

President & Treasurer – Olin Bray (incumbent)

C&D's current president, Olin worked in information systems, technology planning, and homeland security before retiring from Sandia National Labs. He has written three computer books and over 40 conference papers and tutorials. He is a member of both C&D and Southwest Writers.

Vice President – Joan Saberhagen

Joan is a mystery reader who enjoys the company of fellow mystery enthusiasts. Her *Beyond The Limit* is a fictionalized biography of Sofya Kovalevskaya, noted 19th century mathematician. Joan is the owner of JSS Literary Productions, which manages her late husband Fred's literary estate.

Secretary – Fred A. Aiken (incumbent)

Fred teaches sciences at Rio Grande High School. He previously worked as a Professional Engineer for more than 35 years. He has been published in *Guideposts* and *Angels on Earth* and has written three so-far unpublished novels and numerous short stories in the mystery and science fiction/fantasy genres.

NOTE: Write-in candidates are acceptable, but anyone wishing to contend for a position must inform Rob Kresge in time for an e-mail reminder of the upcoming vote to be issued the weekend before the meeting. Consider the write-in or contested entry deadline to be midnight, Sunday, November 21.



Appointive Positions:

Programs/Publicity Chair - Rita Herther

In the 1980s, Rita published articles and children's stories. She taught creative and journal writing. After a long hiatus, Rita is now writing a YA novel, short stories, and articles.

Nooseletter Editor – Linda Triegel

Before taking over the *Nooseletter*, Linda also edited the newsletter of her previous SinC chapter in Pennsylvania. A freelance copyeditor and published romance writer, she is now working on a new romance and a historical mystery.

Membership – Jim Tritten

Jim is a retired US Navy officer and the author of many books on military strategy and international defense issues. He lives in Corrales and has recently formed a mystery writers critique group.

Website Technical Support – Susan Zates

Susan and her husband and two Siberian Huskies moved to ABQ in 2004 from California. She works as a software engineer and is an avid mystery reader, not a writer. She especially loves the police procedural, PI, and forensic genres.

Library Liaison – open position – Volunteer!

If you enjoy using your local library and would like to deliver our floating display to various library branches over the course of the next year, please email Rob or Olin (addresses on page 2).

Reviews

The Bone Fire, by Christine Barber. Minotaur Books, 2010, 308 pp. (HC)

Barber's second book, following her Hillerman-award-winning debut mystery, *The Replacement Child*, opens with the burning of the Zozobra in Santa Fe's annual fiesta of purging bad thoughts and atoning for past misdeeds.

Our heroine, Lucy Newroe, like many others, throws a letter into the flames, but it's what's raked out after the ashes cool—the skull of a child—that sets her off on another investigation that parallels the one the SFPD, in the person of Detective Sergeant Gilbert Montoya, is pursuing to discover if the skull belongs to a child who went missing some years before.

Bones appear decorating statues of the Virgin Mary around the city, but as a result of bureaucratic snafus (and careful ignoring of the question by the author), whether the bones are Brianna's isn't discovered until the end of the story, at which point an amusing, very Santa Fe twist accounts for them. Neither Gil's nor Lucy's time has been wasted, however, because a murder is solved and the culprit identified, often thanks as much to Lucy's inadvertent bumbling and Gil's partner Joe's equally unpredictable personality as to old-fashioned police work, which even Joe concedes Gil is very good at.

Barber is an extremely good plotter, and you don't see the loose threads coming together, although you're given plenty of clues to amuse yourself with in the meanwhile.

Lucy's instinct to do the right thing, even if it might get her fired from her job on the fictional *Capital Journal*, pushes her to help the cops, often against her will, and even to help make wrongs right for other people, but her apparent inability to do the right thing by herself is getting a little tiresome. She's a volunteer for the fire department too and resists her

newspaper boss's suggestion that she combine reporting with her rescue calls. And when she learns that the paper is stonewalling Montoya about some surveillance tapes, she calls him in the middle of the night, having fortified herself with five beers, to clue him in. She does manage to get rid of her latest pickup lover at the end, but there's no guarantee there won't be another next week, and no sign that her numerous hang-ups are loosening their grip on her.

Barber is also great at local color, from Santa Fe's well-known flakier element – a Shirley Maclaine-like actress into New Age mumbo-jumbo—to portrayals of the Hispanic families who have made Santa Fe their home for centuries. A journalist herself, it may be her objective eye that sees all this so clearly—but her heart is clearly in Santa Fe too. ♦

—Linda Triegel (ljt23@earthlink.net)

Rob's Random Shots

November Case File Number 1

O Is for Outlaw by Sue Grafton, Random House, 1999, 354 pp, \$7.99 (PB)

Yes, when you look at that copyright date, I am woefully behind on reading the classics. I have six more Graftons to go in order to catch up with the rest of you. But I was inspired to get back to the works of one of the handful of female PI authors by reading (and reviewing in the last issue of the *Nooseletter*) the exhaustive critique of Grafton's work, *G Is for Grafton*.

I have the greatest respect not only for authors who are endlessly inventive, entertaining, and puzzling over a long series, like Grafton. Compounding my respect is that she writes so well from the first person perspective, a technique used by many of my favorite authors—Michael Connelly, Craig Johnson, Elizabeth Peters, Lindsey Davis.

Those who've read this book know why it stands out in the canon of PI Kinsey Milhone. We get to find out more—painfully more—about Kinsey's failed first message as a young

cop in the early 1970s to an older cop, Mickey Magruder. Kinsey walked out on Mickey, quit the Santa Teresa police force, and divorced him after Mickey was suspected of beating a suspect to death. She believed he asked her to lie for him to beat the rap. He re-enters her life when Kinsey learns Mickey has been shot and is in a coma in Los Angeles.

In short order, Kinsey burgles a house to get Mickey's address, is interviewed by two LA cops who have added her to their suspect list, and inveigles her way into Mickey's sealed apartment. She uncovers enough contraband and evidence there to suspect that Mickey, working as a lowly security guard, may have been targeted by someone in his present, but it begins to look like someone else may have killed that suspect 15 years before.

So Kinsey, driven by a guilty conscience, rather than by a client's retainer, struggles to investigate past acquaintances and follows Mickey's recent travels all the way to Louisville, Kentucky to see what he what recently led him there.

By the time Kinsey returns to California, the pot begins to boil over. Her frequent undercover visits to a local bar unravel one set of crimes. But is that related to the events of 15 years ago? Will Mickey's past catch up to Kinsey's present and doom them both?

You'll have to follow the same trail Kinsey and I did. If you're not already familiar with her, you can jump in at any letter of the alphabet, since all the books stand on their own. We faithful readers were surprised by the revelations in this book that damage Kinsey, but don't diminish our respect for her.

On to *P Is for Peril!* ♦

—Rob Kresge (rkresge777@comcast.net)

November Case File Number 2

The Pot Thief Who Studied Ptolemy by J. Michael ("Jess") Orenduff, Oak Tree Press, 2010, 233 pp, \$14.95 (TP)

Yes, this may look like a familiar title to astute reviewers, but it was Jess's *Pot Thief Who Studied Pythagoras* that I reviewed in the

September issue. I've found a new author to add to my favorites list and will meet him and exchange books before this issue goes to press.

Hubert Schuze is back, in the second in the series of homages to Lawrence Block's equally entertaining *The Burglar Who . . .* series. Albuquerque Old Town pot gallery owner, dealer, and occasional digger up of prohibited artifacts is up to his neck again in stolen New Mexican Indian pots, but—surprise—he didn't steal them this time. Elders in San Roque, a mysterious pueblo closed to outsiders, believe Hubie's old academic nemesis, Professor Ognan Gerstner, misappropriated the pots from display at UNM and is keeping them in his apartment in the exclusive Rio Grande Lofts.

Just as in Hubie's previous outing, we not only get to watch Amateur Sleuth 101 in action, we get to learn Burglar 101 as he attempts to penetrate security at the Lofts. I was pleased with Hubie's persistence in the aftermath of his first unsuccessful attempt. Of course, success is relative, since on his second trip, he's only able to ensure continued access to the building and doesn't actually gain entry to Gerstner's apartment. He does, however, score (in the best sense of the term) with a semi-familiar resident of the Lofts.

Enter Hubie's equally amusing "sidekick," perennial UNM student Susannah, who has a Basque last name almost impossible to spell, pronounce, or even remember. Susannah's latest love lives in the Lofts (is that overly alliterative?) and when she gets an invitation to a party, she's able to smuggle Hubie in for his third foray. But he finds Gerstner shot dead in his apartment, with no pots to show for it, and a spot as the leading suspect in the man's murder.

How can things get any worse? Trust me. Or rather trust Jess to paint Hubie into an untenable corner, of more than just an apartment. Can he avoid indictment, find the pots for San Roque, and identify the real killer? And what's his new lady love of the Lofts' (there I go again) relation to the victim?

Jess will be following up the successful reception of his first two caper novels, which go by turns from amusing to hilarious, with his third, *The Pot Thief Who Studied Einstein*,

available this month. It's not only a treat to visit with Hubert and Susannah at frequent intervals, but intriguing to find out how the author ties his seemingly obscure titles to the events that unfold. Treat yourself to an Orenduff mystery. It won't be your last. ♦

—Rob Kresge (rkresge777@comcast.net)

Key:

PB = Paperback

TP = Trade paperback

HC = Hardcover

The Bone Garden, by Tess Gerritsen.
Ballantine Books, 2007, 370 pp. (HC)

I got this on tape to listen to in the car, but I didn't drive far enough to finish the 12 discs—but far enough to get caught up in the story, so I went back to the library and got the book.

Not that it's great bedtime reading, since it doesn't stint on the gore, but I love historical mysteries, and this one comes with a time travel/reincarnation element as well. Most of the story takes place in 1830s Boston, with the present story to set up the history. My favorite device of including a historical figure, in this case Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., a physician among his many other renaissance-man talents. (He later studied in Paris, and while not the first to advocate the radical notion that doctors should wash their hands after doing autopsies and before examining a patient, he was the first to bring idea to America.)

The story: Julia Hamill, recovering from a divorce and determined to find her own way in the world, buys an old house in the Boston suburbs, only to find a skeleton when she starts to dig her garden. It's female, scarred with sure signs of a murder. Julia sets out to solve the mystery of who the woman was and who killed her—and it's to Gerritsen's credit that I didn't guess either until she chose to reveal them at the very end, and then they made perfect sense.

The main 1830 Boston plot concerns Norris Marshall, a medical student whose poor background is in direct contrast to the affluent

circumstances of his fellow students (how he got the place in the medical college is part of the ultimate solution to the murder). But there's murder afoot in 1830 too, in the form of a Jack the Ripper type who gorily slices up nurses and doctors. Because of his brilliance in medicine, his background on a pig farm (and familiarity with slaughtering them), and his lack of social status or useful friends, Norris is accused.

Then again, so is Mary Connolly, the sister of a young woman who died of childbirth fever in Norris's hospital. Mary doesn't know her place either and first insists on proper care for her sister, then, on her inevitable death, on taking care of her infant niece herself. Mary witnessed the first West End Reaper murder and is being hunted for more than just her stubborn refusal to bow to her "betters."

Real but gruesome details of grave-robbing to provide corpses for anatomy classes are also included, as are the unsanitary but entrenched medical practices of the time, and the murders themselves. I liked Gerritsen's early present-day medical mysteries, which were full of fascinating details (if I forgot to mention it, the author is also a doctor), but I was turned off her later, bloodier, stories, until this one, which I liked despite itself. *The Bone Garden* has enough interest to a historical mystery buff to overcome my squeamishness. ♦

—Linda Triegel (ljt23@earthlink.net)

Memories Can Be Murder by Connie Shelton.
Worldwide 2002 (PB).

Charlie Parker unexpectedly learns her parents died under suspicious circumstances and ferrets out the truth in the fifth of this series, while at the same time merging households with her significant other. A delightful quick read.

As an Albuquerque resident, I enjoy the references to familiar city locations. Charlie Parker is an engaging protagonist with believable emotions and relationships, who gets into dangerous situations due to her tenacity, and has the spunk to fight her way out. I like the layout of the story in short, concise chapters.

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

2010-11 MEETING DATES

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

December – no meeting

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

Tuesday, February 22, 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, March 22, 7:00 p.m.

Meetings are free to the public.

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

(If the substation lot is full, there is more parking available just below the substation, accessed via a driveway below the substation on the right.)

Check our Web site, www.croak-and-dagger.com, for schedule changes and upcoming programs.

Summary of Findings

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

†Nooseletter Submissions†

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

Length: Articles should average 500 words, but short items are also welcome.

Deadlines: Publication is every other month, starting in January. Submission deadlines are the 15th of the month prior to publication: Feb 15, April 15, June 15, Aug 15, Oct 15, and Dec 15.

The Living and the Dead: As a general policy, articles and information should focus on living authors rather than dead ones, but that's not set in concrete shoes. Articles about specific historical development of the crime-mystery writing genre, for example, would be welcome.

Submissions: Please submit via e-mail to newsette@earthlink.net, with "Nooseletter" in the subject line.

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

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