

Sisters
in
Crime †

SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume VII, Number 2 — March 2011

†Expert Testimony†

As you probably know, Croak and Dagger is the Albuquerque chapter of Sisters in Crime (SinC), a national organization. In this column I thought I would pass on some interesting information they sent out.

First, they recently did a study, “The Mystery Book Consumer in the Digital Age.” It confirms some of what we knew. Women purchased 68% of all mysteries and more than half of the buyers were over 45. Note that this is just buyers; we don’t really know about readers, since a book can be read by multiple people and some books are bought, but never read.

Buyers 18 to 44 account for only 31% of mystery sales. About 48 percent of the buyers live in the suburbs, with the remainder almost evenly split between rural (27%) and urban (25%) areas. The books are bought from brick-and-mortar stores (39%), borrowed from libraries (19%), and purchased online (17%). (Note these are online purchases, not e-books.)

Second, you have probably heard of Borders’ bankruptcy and closing of 200 of its 600 stores. SinC described some of the consequences that may not be obvious—at least they weren’t to me. Publishers stand to lose hundreds of millions of dollars for books they had shipped to Borders. Some of these losses will be passed on to authors. Do they have to pay royalties on books that were shipped but never paid for because of the bankruptcy? Furthermore, they will be reluctant to ship books to Borders in the future and Ingram, a major book distributor, has stopped shipments

to Borders. This reluctance will cut down on sales and hence royalties.

This will hit midlist and regional/local authors hardest because Borders was more willing than most to take a risk with these authors. Also Borders’ buyers will now be less willing to take a risk with these authors and will focus more on the big sellers. Ultimately, this will make it even harder for these authors to find publishers for their books, and when they do, the royalties will probably be much lower.

Finally, HarperCollins has come out with a new policy for e-books to libraries. They are still saying that when the library leases an e-book it can only be checked out to one patron at a time. However, now they are adding that the lease is good for only 26 loans, after which the lease expires and another lease is needed. As expected, librarians are up at arms over this proposed change. Some are even calling for a boycott of HarperCollins books.

A really interesting alternative proposal came from Michael Perry, a small publisher in Seattle. He says that the whole idea of buying to lend makes no sense with e-books. He proposes making the titles available to the libraries for free and charging a modest amount per checkout with no limitation to how many copies can be checked out at once. This would allow even small rural libraries to have a huge inventory of books and make all titles much more widely available. However, he doesn’t mention the consequences this would have on booksellers.

As the old curse goes, “May you live in interesting times.” We obviously do.

— Olin Bray, President

Don't Miss It!

Tuesday, March 22, at 7 p.m.

John Maddox Roberts, our March speaker, has written numerous works of science fiction and fantasy, in addition to his successful SPQR mystery series set in ancient Rome. St. Martin's Minotaur has issued trade paperback editions of the previous books in the series. He lives in Estancia, New Mexico, with his wife.

He published his first book in 1977, *The Strayed Sheep of Charum*. In 1989, Roberts published his first mystery, *The King's Gambit*, set in ancient Rome. The book was nominated for the Edgar award as best mystery of the year. *The King's Gambit* is the first in Maddox's SPQR series of mysteries.

Born in Ohio, Robert has lived in various places in the United States as well as in Scotland, England, and Mexico. He was in the US Army 1967-70, and did a tour in Vietnam.

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.



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
- 2011 Meeting Schedule
- Membership Form
- Speakers Bureau
- Links to Mystery Websites & Websites for Your Favorite Croak & Dagger Authors
- *The Nooseletter* Archive

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.

The Line Up

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Notice someone missing?

Yes, we are *still* in need of a membership chairman! The membership chairman works with the treasurer to maintain a data base of members and distributes the *Nooseletter* and meeting announcements to members. This is a fun position that will give you an opportunity to interact with the entire C&D Community.

Volunteer!

Noose News

April's C&D speaker will be Stephan Marshall, Chief Division Counsel of the Albuquerque Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He also serves as the Acting Supervisor of the Strategic Target Action Team, a team of Special Agents targeting drug cartel violence.

Special Agent Marshall has been an agent since 1996, previously serving in Laredo and Austin, Texas. He has been an attorney since 1985, and prior to joining the FBI he was an Assistant District Attorney in the Fort Worth, Texas, area for approximately 11 years. He received a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree from Texas Tech University School of Law in 1984.

Marshall is a certified instructor for the FBI and has taught numerous classes to agents, police officers, and law enforcement academies on legal and Constitutional issues including jurisdiction and use of force. He is also a frustrated author and has given presentations to the Romance Writers of Austin and the Texas Writer's League.

Here's a unique workshop/conference for mystery writers:

The **Writers' Police Academy**, in Jamestown, North Carolina, September 23-25, 2011, offers the most hands-on, interactive and educational experience writers can find to enhance their understanding of all aspects of law enforcement and forensics. Certified police academy instructors provide hands-on training sessions. Actual police tools, equipment, and firearms are used. Real-life, active scenarios offer on-the-scene experiences. For more information, go to <http://www.writerspoliceacademy.com/>.

Alas, this year's *Mayhem in the Midlands* mystery conference, scheduled for May 24-26 in Omaha, has been cancelled. Watch this space for news about 2012.

Left Coast Crime—The Big Chile is about to hit Santa Fe (March 24-27). Some of our favorite authors, and previous speakers at C&D meetings, will be there, including Anne Hillerman, Steve Havill, and our own Rob Kresge and Pari Noskin Taichert.

Pari is, of course, chairing the whole enchilada—er, the Big Chile—and is taking part in panel discussions on “Mysteries at the Heart of New Mexico” and “Spirit, Religion & the Holy in Mysteries.”

Anne Hillerman will be on hand with her husband, photographer Don Strel, to present a slide show of their book, *Tony Hillerman's Landscape*.

Steve Havill is Guest of Honor and will participate in a panel discussion on “Crime Solving in Fiction: Urban vs. Isolated Settings.”

Joe Badal will participate on a panel on “Santa Fe: The City Different” and moderate “International Settings.”

Former C&D president Margaret Tessler will help uncover some “Unusual Crime Scenes.”

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-call “Cookie Bandit” in July 2009. He will also appear on a panel titled “Breaking Barricades & Opening Doors.”

This month's C&D speaker, John Maddox Roberts, will be on a panel about “Pre-20th Century Historical Mysteries.”

Rob Kresge, apart from filling the Program Chair for LCC2011, is up for the Bruce Alexander Memorial Historical Mystery award for his first published mystery, *Murder for Greenhorns*. Rob will also take part in a panel on “Creating Characters Before Your Eyes” and moderate “Research: Stretching the Truth.”

Judith van Gieson, author and founder of ABQ Press, will moderate “Publishing Today & Tomorrow” and take part in a panel on “Crime Fiction on Big & Little Screens.”

The lost art of editing

The following is excerpted from a much longer article by Jeanette Winterson in *The Guardian*. Go to www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/feb/11/lost-art-editing-books-publishing for the full text.

The long, boozy lunches and smoke-filled parties are now part of publishing's past, but has rigorous line-by-line editing of books been lost too, a casualty of the demands of sales and publicity?

What fate befalls the writer who is not one of the literary world's heavy hitters as his or her magnum opus enters the publishing production chain? For some years now – almost as long as people have been predicting the death of the book – there have been murmurs throughout publishing that books are simply not edited in the way they once were, either on the kind of grand scale that might see the reworking of plot, character or tone, or at the more detailed level that ensures the accuracy of, for example, minute historical or geographical facts.

The time and effort afforded to books, it is suggested, has been squeezed by budgetary and staffing constraints, by the shift in contemporary publishing towards the large conglomerates, and by a greater emphasis on sales and marketing campaigns and on the efficient supply of products to a retail environment geared towards selling fewer books in larger quantities. In more broad-brush terms, the question is whether the image of the word-obsessed editor poring over a manuscript, red pen in hand, has given way to that of the whizz-bang entrepreneur attuned to the market's latest caprice, more at home with a tweet than a metaphor.

Make it known that you're interested in the past, present and future of editing, and there are plenty of people who want to share their thoughts – although not all of them, given the chatty and precarious nature of the world of publishing, on the record. Many speak of the trimming of budgets, the increasingly regimented nature of book production and of the pressure on their time, which means they have to undertake detailed and labour-intensive editing work in the margins of their daily schedule rather than at its centre.

One freelance editor I talked to remarked that “big companies used to have whole copy-editing and proof-reading departments. Now you'll get one publisher and one editor running a whole imprint.” She'd noticed that some editors tended to acquire books that arrived in a more or less complete state. From her own experience, she also noted that writers at the beginning of their careers were far more open to suggestions than those further down the line; one suspects that that must always have been the case, but it's her opinion that writers with a healthy sales history have become more powerful, and their editors less.

Others speculate about the changing nature of text itself, and of readers' expectations and demands of it. While most readers are understandably enraged when they buy a book and then spot spelling, grammar and factual errors, some may feel that other considerations are more important. Given the proliferation of user-generated content of all kinds, and the demand for instant gratification, it's unsurprising that speed and economy are often prioritised over care and quality.

Editors, before they are anything else, are avid readers. One of the most celebrated editors of recent decades, Robert Gottlieb – whose long list of charges includes Joseph Heller, John le Carré, Toni Morrison and John Cheever, and who also edited the *New Yorker* – insisted in a *Paris Review* interview

that “editing is simply the application of the common sense of any good reader”. Great editors are more than good readers – but an appreciation of the qualities of serious literature, often hard to define, is a starting point, not an optional extra.

Is there still enough good old-fashioned copy editing going on? Perhaps there isn't, because over the last decades, publishers have turned more attention to marketing and selling books. The old-fashioned editor has to a great extent disappeared, but I'm not too sure that's a great loss; and the improvement in sales, marketing and design effort, in my opinion, more than makes up for it.

Editorial work is often farmed out to freelance copy-editors, and not done in-house as it used to be. Have freelance editors got worse? I don't imagine so. Also, was “old-fashioned” editing as great as it is often claimed to be? Authors perhaps miss the close relationship they had with an editor who went through every word of their books, but the money saved by not having such editorial bums on seats has been well used.

That said, perhaps publishers should pay their out-of-house copy-editors more? When you encounter a truly great copy-editor, they are worth their weight in gold.

□ *Carmen Callil, author, founder of Virago Books*

Something, undoubtedly, will be lost, as it is being in other media. It is not uncommon, if you are of a certain cast of mind, to fling a book across the room and wonder if there is anyone still alive who cares about hanging participles, or the difference between that and which, or the fact that “whose” is a relative pronoun. Neither is it unusual to find a slender volume that seems short-changed by its brevity or an enormous one stuffed with extraneous material.

And the associated experiences of being what the industry calls a “heavy reader” have also changed. To buy a book, whether in a physical or virtual bookshop, is to navigate an obstacle course of special offers and money-off deals that are designed to make you buy more, not better; in the case of e-books, the retailers' first aim is to sell you a device, with hugely discounted books as the bait. Finding out what book you want has also changed; there is no doubt that there has been a shift away from the painstaking analysis of words and sentences and towards straightforward plot recital and a speedy thumbs up or down. If these peripheral factors are not directly linked to standards of editing, they are surely indicators of the extent to which books have been commodified. The word may still be the thing; but it isn't the only thing.

The concern about falling standards probably also reflects a certain amount of regret that the advent of digitisation and the increased importance of sales, publicity and marketing have all contributed to changing the face of an industry that quietly congratulated itself on its genteel bohemianism. Writers, except for the most financially successful, must maintain the solitary intensity of their creative life while adapting to new realities; they are now often advised to add mastery of social media to the publication round of interviews, readings and festival appearances, and many take on a heavy load of teaching to supplement their earnings. Publishing in its popular incarnation – the legendary long lunches, the opportunistic punts on unheard-of but brilliant young writers, the smoke-filled parties and readings – is probably gone for good. Although you do wonder about the halcyon version of events: with all those long lunches, how did anyone get any editing done in the first place?

New Mexico Book Co-op Announces the 100 BEST NEW MEXICO BOOKS

After a year of voting, the 100 Best New Mexico Books were announced in time for the New Mexico Centennial in 2012. Leading the list is *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya as the #1 Best New Mexico Book.

Bless Me, Ultima is set in the small village of Guadalupe, New Mexico, during World War II. Through the story questions about evil, justice, and the nature of God are asked. The book is part of a trilogy with *Heart of Azlan* and *Tortuga*. The book was published in 1972. Rudolfo Anaya lives in Albuquerque. *Bless Me, Ultima* has been a stage play and was just filmed and set to be released as a movie in 2011. The book has been banned and challenged by schools and libraries. *Bless Me, Ultima* is credited as the first important book in Chicano literature.

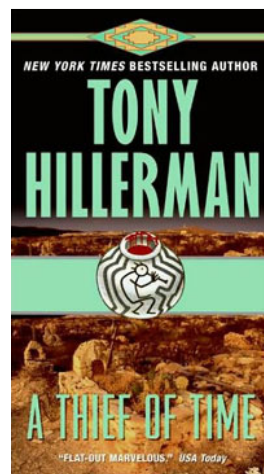
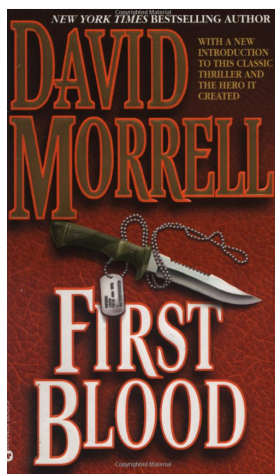
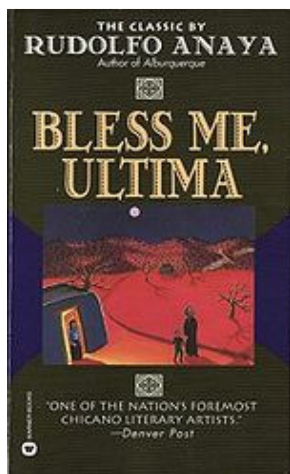
The list of 100 Best Books (below) is divided with the Best 10 Books followed by the other 90 books (listed alphabetically). The list includes books by Native Americans, Hispanics, cowboys, scholars, historians, women, and men. There are books for children and adults. A former New Mexico Governor, Lew Wallace, wrote *Ben Hur*. Pulitzer Prize Winners in Literature from New Mexico are among the list: William duBoys, Alex Harris, N. Scott Momaday, Willa Cather, and Cormac McCarthy. Two priests wrote books on the list: Thomas J. Steele and Fray Angelico Chavez.

A number of books were turned into films. There are classic books on the list as well as relatively new books. Books were voted on by librarians, authors and the public.

[Thanks to Judith van Gieson for providing the list]

The Top Ten

Bless Me, Ultima — Rudolfo Anaya
A Thief of Time— Tony Hillerman
Ben Hur — Lew Wallace
Death Comes for the Archbishop — Willa Cather
First Blood — David Morrell
House Made of Dawn — N. Scott Momaday
Lamy of Santa Fe — Paul Horgan
Milagro Beanfield War — John Nichols
Red Sky at Morning — Richard Bradford
The Rounders — Max Evans



And the Rest of the Best:

- Albuquerque* — Rudolfo Anaya
All the Pretty Horses — Cormac McCarthy
The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid — Pat Garrett
Black Mesa Poems — Jimmy Santiago Baca
Black Range Tales — James A. McKenna
The Blessing Way — Tony Hillerman
Blood and Thunder — Hampton Sides
Bloodville — Don Bullis
Bluefeather Fellini — Max Evans
Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood — Marta Weigle
But Time and Chance — Fray Angelico Chávez
The Centuries of Santa Fe — Paul Horgan
Ceremony — Leslie Marmon Silko
Chaco Banyon: Sheriff of Lordsburg — Fred Schmidt
Chaco Canyon — Robert Hill Lister
Charlie Carrillio: Tradition & Soul — Barbe Awalt and Paul Rhetts
Coronado, Knight of Pueblos and Plains — Eugene Bolton
Cuentos — Rudolfo Anaya
Curse of the ChupaCabra — Rudolfo Anaya
Dance Hall of the Dead — Tony Hillerman
The Day It Snowed Tortillas — Joe Hayes
Delight Makers — Adolph Bandelier
Ditch Rider — Judith Van Gieson
The Education of Little Tree — Forrest Carter
Eight Rattles and a Button — Merle Blinn Brown
El Gringo: New Mexico & Her People — Josiah Gregg
Face of an Angel — Denise Chavez
Fire on the Mountain — Edward Abbey
Forgotten People — George I. Sánchez
Great River — Paul Horgan
Hatchet — Gary Paulsen
Homesteading on Grasshopper Flats — Etta Knox
The House at Otowi Bridge — Peggy Pond Church
I Fought with Geronimo — Jason Betzinez & Wilbur Sturtevant
An Illustrated History of New Mexico — Thomas Chavez
In the Days of Victorio — Eve Ball
Jemez Spring — Rudolfo Anaya
John Gaw Meem — Bainbridge Bunting
Journeys of Faith — Lee Priestley
Kiva, Cross, & Crown — John Kessel
History of La Mesilla & Her Mesilleros — Lionel Cajen Fritze
Land of Poco Tiempo — Charles Lummis
Las Cruces — Linda G. Harris
The Last Conquistador — Marc Simmons
The Leading Facts of New Mexican History — Ralph Emerson Twitchell
The Legend of La Llorona — Rudolfo Anaya
Lottie Deno — J. Marvin Hunter
Maria — Alice Marriott
Mayordomo — Stanley Crawford
Mimbres Painted Pottery — J.J. Brody
The Missions of New Mexico, 1776 — Fray Francisco Dominguez, edited by Adams & Chávez
My Penitente Land — Fray Angelico Chavez
New Mexico: A Pageant of Three Peoples — Erna Fergusson
New Mexico Biographical Dictionary, 1540-2000 — Don Bullis
New Mexico Style — Nancy Hunter Warren
New Mexico Tinwork — Lane Coulter
No Life for a Lady — Agnes Morley Cleaveland
Nobody's Horses — Don Hogle
Origins of New Mexico Families — Fray A. Chavez
People of the Valley — Frank Waters
The Place Names of New Mexico — Robert Julyan
Popular Arts of Spanish New Mexico — E Boyd
Pueblo Nations — Joe Sando
Riders to Cibola — Norman Zollinger
Rio Grande Fall — Rudolfo Anaya
River of Traps — William duBoys & Alex Harris
Roadside Geology of New Mexico — Halka Chronic
Sabino's Map — Donald Usner
Saints of the Pueblos — Charles M. Carrillo
Santa Fe Design — Elmo Baca
Santa Fe on Foot — Elaine Pinkerton Coleman
Santa Fe Style — Christine Mather
Santos & Saints — Thomas J. Steele, S.J
Scavengers — Steven Havill
Shaman Winter — Rudolfo Anaya
Slash Ranch Hounds — Dub Evans
Stolen Gods — Jake Page
Tularosa — Michael McGarrity
Villages of Hispanic New Mexico — Nancy Hunter Warren
Visions Underground — Lois Manno
When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away — Ramon Gutierrez
The Whole Damned World — Martha Shipman Andrews
Wind Leaves No Shadow — Ruth Laughlin
Winter in Taos — Mabel Dodge Luhan
The Wolf Path — Judith Van Gieson
The Woman at Otowi Crossing — Frank Waters
Works on Paper — Georgia O'Keeffe & Barbara Haskell
Zia Summer — Rudolfo Anaya
Zuni Pottery — Marian Rodee

Reviews

Monkeewrench by P J Tracy. Signet, 2003, 404 pp (PB)

Monkeewrench (2003) was recently the chosen book for a mystery group I'm in. Before the meeting I had also read two other books in the series. (*Live Bait*, 2004, and *Snowblind*, 2006) There are several more, but I haven't found them yet.

P J Tracy is a mother and daughter team, one living in Minneapolis and the other in Los Angeles. The series focuses on a pair of Minneapolis detectives and *Monkeewrench*, a small software group that seems to attract problems.

In this first book in the series, *Monkeewrench* develops a software game, *Serial Killer Detective*. The first murder, a shot jogger, they can ignore. But the second body, elaborately costumed and posed in a cemetery just like in their game, they can't. Somebody is playing their serial killer game for real.

Obviously since they know unreleased facts about the second killing, police detectives Leo Magozzi and Gino Rolseth suspect one or several of the game developers. Things get more complicated when they discover that a beta version of the game is up on the internet for anyone to see. Also there are 21 murders in the game, so their game player can be in business for a while.

There are so many convoluted twists and turns in the plot that it is hard to discuss without revealing something. I'll simply say that Magozzi and Rolseth become even more puzzled when they discover that the partners in *Monkeewrench* didn't seem to exist anywhere before they showed up in Twin Cities ten years before.

There is also a murder in a rural Wisconsin county that eventually gets linked into killings in the Twin Cities. The interactions within the sheriff's department and between that department and the Minneapolis detectives

provide an interesting subplot. As in many police procedurals, the FBI gets involved, but doesn't come off looking very good.

The book has interesting and, at least for me, unpredictable twists and turns in the plot. The characters, even if some of them disappear after this first book, are interesting and well worth visiting again, which I have done twice. There is a good balance between the plot and the characters. It is a good police procedural that understands that computers are changing law enforcement, like many other areas.

Live Bait. G. P. Putnam and Sons, 2004, 340 pp. (HC)

A lull in Minneapolis homicides ends when Magozzi and Rolseth are called to the murder of an elderly Jewish florist, loved by everyone in the community. Unfortunately, his wife thought it was a natural death, moved the body into one of the greenhouses, washed the body and dressed it for the funeral – and then found the bullet hole. And this was after the body had been lying in the rain for hours. So much for preserving the crime scene.

Then an elderly Lutheran is reported missing from his blood-spattered house. Different MO, different type of victim, and no indication that they knew each other. Obviously, unrelated. Not so when another elderly Jewish man is found murdered.

The characters are interesting. The victim's wife, who continues the florist business almost as if nothing had happened; the victim's son, an ambulance-chasing often drunk lawyer who is hiding something; the victim's daughter, who was murdered a year ago; and her husband, a former detective who fell apart after she was murdered. Finally, most of the members of *Monkeewrench* show up again using their software skills to provide information and insights that Magozzi and Rolseth don't want to ask how they got.

Another great read. The Tracy team is off to good start with two books in a row.

Snowblind. G. P. Putnam and Sons, 2006, 311 pp. (HC)

When a snowman comes apart, what do you find inside? A body. Unfortunately, it's winter in Minneapolis and Wirth Park is full of snowmen. So what do Magozzi and Rolseth have to do? Tear them all down, but there are no additional bodies – yet. However, there is another body under the snow. Both are cops, which adds to the pressure.

Then they get a call from Sheriff Iris Rikker in a rural northern Minnesota county. She has a body in a snowman that may be related to their case. They hope it is just a copy-cat, but the only way to find out is to go and see, so they drive up. Minnesota, snow, so obviously they have to make the drive during a blizzard, which lasts almost as long as the case. They really don't want this complication, but untypically Sheriff Rikker would be perfectly happy to pass it off to them. How long has Rikker been sheriff? This is her first day, and she had previously been dispatcher, not a deputy. As in the first book, the sheriff's department provides more local color and an interesting subplot.

Again a convoluted, but believable, plot and interesting characters make this another great read. ♦

—Olin Bray (ohbay@nmia.com)

Rob's Random Shots

March Case File Number 1

A Trace of Smoke by Rebecca Cantrell, Tom Doherty Associates, 2009, 292 pp, (TP)

OK, this issue I'm breaking my rule. Unless I get more time, instead of reviewing one book by a male author and one book by a female, I'll be reviewing two female authors. And not just any female authors. Both these ladies won the Bruce Alexander Memorial Award for Best Historical Mystery with their first novels, and I'm up against both of them (and the ever popular Jacqueline Winspear, author of the popular Maisie Dobbs series) for

this year's Bruce Alexander to be awarded at LCC 2011 in Santa Fe on March 26'.

Perhaps 100 historical mysteries (as opposed to hundreds of romances and straight historical novels) are published each year and these two authors have risen to the peak of their profession. *A Trace of Smoke* won the Bruce Alexander in 2009 and its sequel, *A Night of Long Knives*, is a finalist this year. *Smoke* sets the stage, right from the get-go. Series protagonist reporter Hannah Vogel sees her brother's photo in the Berlin Police Department's Hall of the Unnamed Dead. No one knows the dead man in the photo is gay cross-dressing singer Ernst Vogel. Hannah keeps her knowledge secret and endeavors to find out how, where, and under what circumstances her beloved brother died.

Not an easy task in 1931, with the Weimar Republic collapsing and the Nazis trying to come to power. In short order, Hannah loses her job, finds that her Ernst may have been having an affair with Nazi wonder boy Ernst Rohm, and may have fathered a child.

And that discovery begins the best part of the book. Hannah takes under her wing five-year-old orphan Anton, who may be Ernst's son and seems to have been raised by a prostitute, now also deceased. I received compliments for a young boy character in my own novel, but I can't hold a candle to Cantrell's depiction of Anton. He is deeply immersed in the "Western" novels of popular German author Karl May and speaks in the stilted language of his hero, Indian sidekick Winnetou. It's a testament to Cantrell's skill in juggling plot points and moving characterization that she's able to make readers smile at Anton while cranking up the constant suspense when we know at any moment Nazi storm troopers may snuff out Hannah's life and the boy's.

Cantrell lived and studied in Germany and her expertise shows, but she never flaunts her research or throws in detail unnecessary to the story. The novel concludes with a chapter from *A Night of Long Knives*. I have my own copy of *Smoke*, but will buy *Knives* at LCC. You should seek out these books too, if you enjoy excruciating suspense. ♦

March Case File Number 2

City of Dragons by Kelli Stanley. Minotaur Books, 2010, 335 pp (HC)

If you read the review above, you know I'm concentrating in this issue on my competitors for this year's Bruce Alexander Award. Kelli Stanley won this award previously with her ancient Roman *noir*, *Nox Dormienda* (Sleepy Night). Her finalist novel this year is a complete change of pace, set in 1940 San Francisco, filled, like Cantrell's book, with an overwhelming sense of dread as American involvement in World War II looms on the horizon.

This novel could easily have been named *Chinatown*, certainly more accurately than Roman Polanski's film. The shooting death of a young Japanese man right at the feet of protagonist PI Miranda Corbie sets in motion her quest to find out who killed Eddie Takahasi, given the depth of anti-Japanese sentiment in Chinatown at this time. In short order, more bodies pile up, an American shipping agent and a Chinese woman. Miranda takes on two more cases, the missing daughter of the shipping agent and Eddie's missing sister.

This is a bleak, foggy, and ominous San Francisco that Stanley paints, filled with grifters, prostitutes, corrupt cops, and possible Italian gangsters up from Los Angeles. We find out about Miranda's bleak backstory—raised by a drunken, abusive father who beat her mother to death, joined the ambulance corps for the Spanish Civil War, in which her lover died, leaving her the most bitter, self-destructive heroine I've encountered since Samantha Mack in the Edgar-winning debut novel *Officer Down*. And the most foul-mouthed (and foul-thinking, since we're exposed to Miranda's thoughts in this close third person POV). With the f-bomb in every paragraph of her thoughts and often in her speech, she makes Craig Johnson's Deputy Vic Moretti sound like a girl scout.

Dragons develops a very convoluted plot with murders that seem to have no connection to each other. Some seem to raise only scant interest among cops. Miranda is threatened,

nearly run down, and unsuccessfully sexually assaulted. But through persistence, connections, and her own personal armory, Miranda becomes like Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer before finally solving the case and, in an uncharacteristically tender finale, finds the last missing girl and we get a happy ending.

This book is not for squeamish or easily offended, but if you enjoy the *noir* of 1930s movies, you'll enjoy the atmosphere of the San Francisco setting. And if you warm to the protagonist, it looks like she'll be back for further adventures, maybe after winning her author this year's Bruce Alexander Award.♦

—Rob Kresge (www.robertkresge.com)

Key:

PB = Paperback

TP = Trade paperback

HC = Hardcover

Sizzling Sixteen, by Janet Evanovich. St. Martin's Press, 2010, 308 pp. (HC)

I was a little afraid, after the last few books in the Stephanie Plum series, that the author was running out of steam, which can happen with a long-running series, even a highly popular one. *Sizzling Sixteen* does pick up steam again, with a good plot that isn't quite so episodic, since it has a good "pull-through" idea.

Steph's cousin and employer, Vinnie the bail bondsman, is kidnapped. Steph and her pal Lula, who sort of works for Vinnie as a file clerk, and Vinnie's secretary Connie (who deservedly gets a bigger part in this story) have to rescue him, or they're out of a job. (Nobody much likes Vinnie, but he's a good bail bondsman and they do occasionally get paid). First they have to figure out who snatched Vinnie, no easy task, and when they do find out, the danger level (to them) ratchets up considerably.

Turns out Vinnie owes a small fortune to a mobster, so his staff have to raise some money fast. Steph isn't the world's best skip tracer, but she gets after a polygamist, a drug dealer, and a toilet paper bandit (if you've ever made a rest

stop on the Jersey Turnpike, you'll get this one) to raise money. In desperation, the ladies even hold a yard sale at the bonds office, unloading Vinnie's stash of illegal weapons and most of the office furnishings.

Sizzling Sixteen contains Evanovich's trademark whacky characters—this time she adds another dizzy character from Steph's high school days who's organizing a Hobbit convention out of his RV—and nutty situations. Apart from the usual stops at Cluck-in-a-Bucket whenever Lula falls off her latest fad diet, the ladies set loose a herd of cows in downtown Trenton and encounter a burglar alarm in the form of Mr. Jingles, a full-grown alligator with a lucky taste for fried chicken.

Steph's complicated love life doesn't get any simpler as Ranger continues to keep an electronic eye on her and comes to the rescue when he doesn't have a choice, and Morelli makes regular appearances only to spark another quarrel with his cupcake, who's still of six minds whether or not she wants to settle down with him.

The ending of *Sizzling Sixteen* is a bit of a letdown, seemingly rushed through and leaving a lot of loose ends not even counting the Morelli-Ranger question. Is Vinnie really out of business? Will Stephanie have to find a new job? Does the author intend to stop at an even score of books in the series, or sooner? Will Stephanie still be single then? Stay tuned. ♦

—Linda Triegel (ljt23@earthlink.net)

Short Takes

The Peach Cobbler Murder by Joanne Fluke (Hannah Swensen series #7)

A light, fun read that dwells more on winter in Minnesota than on solving the murder, but like all Hannah Swensen cozies, it's filled with delightful characters, humor, and recipes. I prefer listening to the series on audiobooks, to enjoy the accents and regional speech patterns.

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

State of the Onion by Julie Hyzy (White House Chef series #1)

White House assistant chef Olivia "Ollie" Paras is focused on winning her dream job—executive chef. Trouble is, her nemesis is vying for it, too. And then there's that elusive assassin who wants to see her fry...

Fascinating detail on what it's like to work in the White House kitchen. Nice balance of character development vs. action. Light entertainment, hard to put down.



Hail to the Chef by Julie Hyzy (White House Chef series #2)

Ollie handles her new responsibility as head chef with aplomb, still fiercely loyal to White House occupants. She provides moral support to the First Lady in a financial crisis and foils a plot to bomb the White House during the Christmas holidays. Of course Ollie is attacked during her efforts to solve the mystery. Predictable yet enjoyable. Recipes included.

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

A Lily of the Field by John Lawton.

This fourth book in Lawton's Inspector Troy series is my favorite so far—though I have to catch up with #3, *Black Out*, since events in that story are referred to in this one. Lawton's stories overlap, covering 30 years of English history from the early 1930s, and he occasionally makes smartyass (the word one character uses to describe another) asides wondering about the unlikelihood in the future of machines that answer the telephone and frying pans that food doesn't stick to.

There's more of a traditional police procedural in this one, putting Troy front and center, even though he's often in danger of being overshadowed by colorful secondary characters. The main one here is Merek Voytek, a Viennese musician whose story begins the novel, much as the tailor's tale began *Second Violin*. The resolution of the crime, and Merek's fate, are strong yet believable. As usual, the minor characters are beautifully drawn and the history is fascinating.

—Linda Triegel (ljt23@earthlink.net)

2011 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, March 22, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, April 26, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, May 24, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, June 28, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, July 26, 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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