



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



# THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume VII, Number 4 — July 2011

## †Expert Testimony†

Well, it's finally happened. Borders is gone – or will be shortly [*Ed note: see page 5*]. Is this an omen for books, or just a business failure?

Many people (including David Morrell at Left Coast Crime 2011 in March) think that it was more a Borders problem than a books-in-general problem. They suggest a bad strategy and some bad business decisions. Borders had a three-prong strategy – books, CDs for music, and DVDs for video. Two out of the three are already entirely digital and are now primarily downloaded rather than bought in stores. If two of your three main product lines become primarily distributed by downloads rather than in stores, you are in trouble.

Also a big box, bricks-and-mortar store is a good strategy when you are competing with the smaller independent bookstores. It doesn't work as well against an Amazon or Barnes & Noble with a million titles that can be downloaded from almost anywhere.

Borders was a nice place to browse if you didn't know what you wanted or to get some coffee and read some before deciding. Unfortunately, too many would browse, read a little, decide on something, and then go home and download it from Amazon or elsewhere. If you wanted a specific book that wasn't a major seller, often you had to order it anyway. For years rather than doing those orders themselves Borders contracted with Amazon. Should you really be building up your competitor?

Also Borders got into ebooks late and its reader (Sony) was not one of the top ones (Kindle, Nook, and iPad). Even so one potential bidder wanted Borders for its ebook business, not its bricks-and-mortar stores.

In summary, Borders closing means a failed business rather than a collapsing industry. However, the paper book business is still in transition and rapidly changing. Borders closing should mean more business for the independent bookstores, at least for paper books. With or without Borders the independent bookstores are facing their own problems in the transition to ebooks, print on demand, and dealing with competitors' inventories of millions that you can order as paper or electronically.

We may have lost a nice place to browse and have coffee. But we haven't run out of places to get books, in either format, or even to browse. Barnes & Noble even lets you browse electronically, reading any ebook for up to an hour in their stores.

So we may mourn Borders for a little while, but its demise probably won't slow down our reading.  
– Olin Bray, *President*

**Don't Miss It!**  
**Tuesday, July 26, at 7 p.m.**


Jonathan Miller is the author of six books. *La Bajada Lawyer* recently won the silver medal for multicultural fiction in *Foreword Magazine's* National Book of the Year contest. His last book, *Conflict Contract*, was a finalist for New Mexico Mystery of the Year.

As a lawyer, Jonathan has traveled all over the state and has lived in Albuquerque, Roswell, and Las Cruces. His next book *Lawyer Geisha Pink*, a legal thriller with anime elements, should be out by the end of the year.

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.

August's speaker will be Ray Collins, award-winning author of several mystery, Western, and fantasy novels. He has been writing since the age of 14. He has numerous short stories in the same genres as well as a volume of poetry. With a mind for engineering and education, his love for history and creative writing continues to entertain and educate thousands. He lives in New Mexico with his wife, Dr. Darlene D. Collins.

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](http://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](http://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.



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.

"Few professions offer as many opportunities for rejection as writing does. Only the strong survive the path to publication. The encouragement and support of other writers can be the difference between giving up too soon and getting in print." (SinC 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.

Interested in joining this online writer's support group? Check them out at [www.sinc-guppies.org/](http://www.sinc-guppies.org/).

## The Line Up

President/Treasurer – Olin Bray –

*ohbray@nmia.com*

Secretary – Fred Aiken –

*FAAiken@aol.com*

Vice President – Joan Saberhagen –

*joan@joanspicci.com*

Membership – Pat Wood  
*pwood73@comcast.net*  
Programs/Publicity – Rita Herther –  
*RMHerther@aol.com*  
Website Technical Support Manager –

Susan Zates – *smzates@yahoo.com*  
Nooseletter Editor – Linda Triegel  
*newsette@earthlink.net*

## Noose News

**Judith van Gieson** reports that she “finally got the agreement worked out with the First Nation filmmaker (and former hotshot firefighter) who wants to film my Neil Hamel mystery *Hotshots* for TV in Canada with a mostly First Nation cast. Now all he has to do is raise the money and start a fire.”

On July 30, 2011, 11:30 am - 4:00 pm, at Alamosa Books, 8810 Holly Ave NE (NW corner Ventura & Paseo), six authors from **SouthWest Writers** will speak on six genres, one every 45 minutes.

The schedule: Memoir by Margaret Wentz, *And We Ate the Leopard*; Mystery by Albert Noyer, *The Ghosts of Glorietta*; Historical by Sandra Toro, *By Fire Possessed: Dona Gracia Nasi*; Western by Melody Groves, *Arizona Rage*; Romance by Sarah Baker, *Carved in Stone*; and Nonfiction by Gail Rubin, *A Good Good-bye: Funeral Planning for Those Who don't Plan to Die*.

SouthWest Writers invites the public to come and listen to these fascinating stories and speak with the authors.

In September, just before Bouchercon opens in St. Louis, the **Sisters in Crime** SinC into Great Writing seminar puts the evolving world of publishing in the spotlight with practical sessions designed to help crime fiction writers manage a 21st-century publishing career.

The one-day event takes place Wednesday, September 14, from 1 to 9 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Select in St. Louis, Mo. Registration is \$50 for Sisters in Crime members, a deeply discounted rate provided as a member benefit. Registration for nonmembers is \$150.

The official title of SinC into Great Writing 2011 is “Mapping the New World of Publishing or How to Succeed in a Business That’s Really

Trying.” The seminar includes a keynote address on “Planning for a Long Career in a Changing Industry,” three professional development sessions, dinner, and an after-dinner address by New York Times bestselling author Meg Gardiner on “Lying for a Living.” The day wraps up with a panel discussion on “Brazen Hussies Speak Out: A Colloquium on Marketing.” To register online, [click here](#). You will need your username and password to register at the \$50 member rate.

The schedule for the **2011 Hillerman Conference**, November 10-12, is shaping up, and workshops so far include a pre-conference writing workshop, “A Writer’s Toolkit: 7 Essentials for Success” with Sandi Ault; “A Spy’s Guide to Santa Fe” with author Edward Held, Director of Intelligence and Counterintelligence at the Department of Energy in Washington, DC; “The Plot Thickens: Keep Readers Turning Those Pages with best-selling author Douglas Preston”; “The Art and Craft of Narrative Non-Fiction” with Hampton Sides; Creating GOOD Bad Guys: with Joe Badal, Steve Havill, John Vorhaus and Sandi Ault; and “The Changing Face of Publishing” with Edgar nominee David Morrell.

The conference will also offer one-on-one critique sessions for first chapters, short fiction, synopses, and non-fiction essays with the dynamic team of Sean Murphy and Tania Casselle. Conference registrants receive a discount on critiques and on the pre-conference workshop. The conference welcomes beginners and experienced writers. Click here for the complete [conference schedule](#).

The deadline for the **Tony Hillerman Mystery Short Story Contest** is **August 15**. *New Mexico Magazine* will publish the winning entry and give the writer \$1,000. To qualify the story:

- Must be 2,500 words or less
- Must be set primarily in New Mexico

- Must be a mystery
- Must be postmarked no later than August 15, 2011
- You'll find the entry form and complete [rules](#) here

# **Beach Books to Bury Yourself In**

*The following is excerpted from a May 26 article by New York Times critic Janet Maslin:*

The beach book has undergone a makeover for 2011. As the season's traditional big names and story lines run out of gas, new variations on old formulas have emerged. Want a story of power, greed and conspicuous consumption? Forget Hollywood; think hedge fund. Want a killer mystery? Forget that corpse in the opening chapter; think about the heroine who wakes up with amnesia and can't trust anyone around her.

Even if you wanted rereads of the same old stories, they would be hard to find. Chick lit? SO over. Police procedurals? Done to death. Smash-hit Scandinavians? Henning Mankell has kissed off Kurt Wallander. And Stieg Larsson remains dead.

It's time to find new favorites. So English readers are being introduced to Scandinavian authors as obscure as Lars Arffssen — and that name *should* sound funny, since it's attached to ***The Girl with the Sturgeon Tattoo***, a nifty parody due late this summer. Its Goth heroine is Lizzy Salamander, and its muckraking journalist hero, Blomberg, has been asked to stop investigating “a vast ring of corruption, prostitution and ethnic cleansing involving the prime minister and the CEOs of Volvo, Saab and H&M” and instead write about Abba's Christmas reunion concert.

For those disinclined to laugh about the Larsson legacy, there is ***The Tattooed Girl***, a paperback devoted to topics like “Lisbeth Salander, the Millennium Trilogy, and My Mother” and also a guide to Scandinavia's next crime-writing stars, like the author of ***The Hypnotist***, Lars Kepler. *The Hypnotist* is a debut novel. It's the summer's likeliest new Nordic hit.

The summer's single most suspenseful plot belongs to ***Before I Go to Sleep***, by another debut author, S. J. Watson. Its heroine, the middle-aged Christine, is the spookiest amnesiac in a season that's full of them. As the book begins, she wakes up to meet Ben, the man to whom she has been married for decades, and Dr. Nash, who is treating her but for some reason doesn't want Ben to know. Goosebumps rise as snippets of Christine's memory come back. Mr. Watson has written this as pure page-turner — though stories as high-concept as this tend to begin more excitingly than they end.

More amnesia: in ***What Alice Forgot***, a pregnant 29-year-old, Alice Mary Love, goes to the gym, passes out and wakes up to find herself 10 years older. *What Alice Forgot* is written by the Australian Liane Moriarty, a relative newbie in the beach book world who makes this the affecting tale of Alice's chance for a 10-year do-over.

***Exposure***, by Therese Fowler, is a new entry in the torn-from-today's-headlines genre. It's the story of Amelia and Anthony, two super-nice high school kids whose parents want to keep them apart. Their love is perfect, their use of technology less so. One day, while his clothes are off, and she happens to have a cell-phone camera in hand, Amelia tells Anthony: “You look like a statue of some Greek god — Apollo, the god of prophecy and truth.” Prophecy: big trouble. Ms. Fowler avoids shrillness as she coaxes drama out of this timely issue. The story is based on something that happened to her own son.

Jennifer Haigh's expertly wrought ***Faith*** is also based on a real scandal. Set in 2002, it follows the family of a Boston-area priest who is accused of pedophilia. But Ms. Haigh, a subtle, serious novelist who happens to have a flair for capturing troubled family dynamics, never allows *Faith* to become predictable. And her book, while gripping, isn't really summer reading. It's a substantial novel that happens to arrive in time for summer.

*The American Heiress* is also far from fluff. Its author, Daisy Goodwin, has written a Gilded Age period piece (published in England as *My Last Duchess*) about an American girl from a Vanderbilt-like family who snags a British title, sort of the way Consuelo Vanderbilt did. According to Ms. Goodwin, about a quarter of the members of the House of Lords in 1910 had American wives. Ms. Goodwin is equally indebted to the great works of Edith Wharton and the high-end soap operas of Penny Vincenzi as she sends Cora Cash from Newport to England. “It’s not my fault I’m richer than anyone else,” Cora says in one of her less sympathetic moments.

A real American abroad is Elaine Sciolino, who was The New York Times’s bureau chief in Paris. She has written *La Seduction*, a nonfiction account of how important the idea of seduction is to all aspects of French life. She begins by describing what went through her head the first time a president of France kissed her hand. She also writes about Dominique Strauss-Kahn, whose behavior prompted one French comic to suggest that women better wear burqas in his presence.

*Robert Redford* is about as incisive a Redford biography as there is ever likely to be. Mr. Redford didn’t authorize this book. But he talked openly to Michael Feeney Callan, who has been tracking him since 1995. And he gave Mr. Callan access to letters and papers that are unguardedly introspective. This book presents a more intricate portrait than expected, even if you already think Mr. Redford is a complicated guy.

*Good Stuff*, Jennifer Grant’s memoir about her father, Cary, is more emotional. Abundantly illustrated, it invokes a man who adored his only child and loved creating memorabilia. Sample artifact: Mr. Grant’s hand-drawn alphabet book for Jennifer, with a picture of him on the F page (for “Father”).

A word about heavy hitters: three big ones leap out of this summer’s book lineup. Daniel H. Wilson’s *Robopocalypse* is a Steven Spielberg movie in the larval stage, an ingenious, instantly visual story of war between humans and robots. “Hopefully it’s not prophetic,” one Amazon.com reader has said. *The Cut* is George Pelecanos’s chance expertly to introduce Spero Lucas, an irresistible 29-year-old Marine turned private investigator, at the start of a hot new series. And John Grisham’s 13-year-old star of a series supposedly aimed at young readers makes his second appearance in *Theodore Boone: The Abduction*. It’s another swift Grisham thrillerette about this “kid lawyer.”

## Borders bids a ‘fond farewell,’ says it lost the fight with e-readers

By [Hayley Tsukayama](#) (*The Washington Post*)



Borders CEO Mike Edwards said the e-reader revolution and a changing industry doomed the book retailer. (MANDEL NGAN - AFP/GETTY IMAGES) Borders CEO Mike Edwards wrote a final farewell to Borders Rewards Members, notifying customers that the book retailer is going out of business after 40 years.

Edwards didn’t beat around the bush when it came to his explanation of Borders’ decline. He said the company faced the rise of e-readers, a changing book industry and an overall bad economy, adding, “We put up a great fight, but regrettably, in the end, we weren’t able to overcome these external forces.”

Borders closed dozens of its stores — including several in the D.C. area — in January, my Post colleague Michael Rosenwald reported. Late to the game with e-readers, the company never saw the same success with digital books as its archrival Barnes and Noble has with the Nook, and fell too far behind Amazon's Kindle to compete. For those who love books and reading, there's a certain sadness that comes with reading the company's final goodbye today, which seems as sentimental and heartfelt as a corporate communication can be.

"My sincerest hope is that we remain in the hearts of readers for years to come," Edwards wrote. There is a bit of news to cushion the blow for bibliophiles: Borders final sales start today, July 22, and everything in the store is up to 40 percent off.

For those wondering, gift cards will be honored during the liquidation sale and Borders Rewards Plus members will be able to use their gift cards through Aug. 5. Borders Bucks, which are similar to gift cards, will expire on July 31.



# ***The (Really) Long Goodbye***

The following is excerpted from an article in the Wall Street Journal. For more: [The \(Really\) Long Goodbye](#) or [www.online.wsj.com](http://www.online.wsj.com).

*He's got a gun, a badge—and rheumatoid arthritis. The iconic detectives of best-selling authors from Michael Connelly to Ruth Rendell are fighting a new foe: old age.*

by ALEXANDRA ALTER

July 1, 2011

When he first appeared in a 1985 mystery novel by J.A. Jance, detective J.P. Beaumont was a brash 42-year-old chasing a serial killer. Twenty books later, the Seattle homicide investigator, now a cranky, weathered grandfather of two, is still hunting killers—but it's getting tough.

Beaumont needs knee-replacement surgery and constantly takes Aleve to ease his aching joints. He struggles to descend a ladder after pulling evidence from a hedge. When he threatens to arrest a fleeing suspect, the criminal taunts him: “You and who else, old man?” His partner chases the rogue on foot; Beaumont drives after them in his Mercedes.

“It's hell getting old,” he complains in *Betrayal of Trust*, out next week.

Ms. Jance says that if she'd known Beaumont would endure for 26 years, she wouldn't have aged him so much throughout the series. Now, with 5.5 million copies of her Beaumont books in print and legions of obsessed fans, she says, “it's too hard to put all that toothpaste back into the tube.”

Beaumont is years past the standard retirement age for cops, but he's not the oldest fictional detective pounding the pavement. A handful of popular crime series feature protagonists who age in real time, and now, several decades on, the sleuths have matured well past their prime. These geriatric crime-busters are altering the crime-fiction landscape—grappling with creaky joints, hearing loss, poor eyesight, declining mental powers and the existential dread of retirement.

Michael Connelly's famous Los Angeles homicide detective Harry Bosch, who has starred in 16 novels over 19 years, will be 60 in the forthcoming fall novel *The Drop* (the title comes from an acronym for the Deferred Retirement Option Plan for cops and firefighters).

Lawrence Block's grizzled private investigator Matthew Scudder, an ex-cop with alcohol issues, has been tangling with henchmen, murderers and thieves since the series debuted in 1976. “The poor devil is 72 now,” says Mr. Block, who is 73.

Veteran mystery writer James Lee Burke's hoary heroes are even older. In Mr. Burke's 2010 novel *The Glass Rainbow*, his iconic Louisiana detective Dave Robicheaux has matured into a spritely 73-year-old who does 50 push-ups and 100 stomach crunches in his backyard. He's a rookie compared with Mr. Burke's other famous character, gunslinging Texas sheriff Hackberry Holland, who first appeared in 1971. In *Feast Day of Fools*, out this September, the sheriff is described as “an elderly six-foot-five widower” with a bad back. Now around 80, he's still wrangling criminals, wearing his trademark Stetson and .45 revolver.

Mr. Burke, whose books have sold 20 million copies, says he ages his characters as a matter of artistic principle. “Not to do so would be aesthetically dishonest,” says Mr. Burke, 74, who sells Robicheaux-themed hats and T-shirts on his website. “You'd be rigging the game.”

For crime writers who are committed both to realism and to their cash-cow characters, keeping old detectives on the beat requires some plot gymnastics. Mr. Block set his recent best-selling Matthew

Scudder book, *A Drop of the Hard Stuff*, in the 1980s to explore Scudder's younger years. Some writers have slowed down time, or arrested aging all together. Patricia Cornwell, who has been writing about forensic expert Dr. Kay Scarpetta for more than 20 years, said she decided to stop Scarpetta from aging further when both she and her character turned 50 five years ago. "People don't want to read about her when she's 80," she said.

Thriller writer Lee Child dutifully aged his laconic, violent drifter Jack Reacher for the first several books, then realized his character would soon be too old to plausibly dispense head-butts and elbow strikes to a room full of villains. So Mr. Child stopped the clock. "I'm going to play his age down a little bit and make the reader assume he's stuck in his mid-40s," says Mr. Child, who recently finished book 16.

Sue Grafton, author of the "A Is for Alibi" alphabet series, developed her own fictional time scheme so that her private investigator Kinsey Millhone ages roughly one year for every 2½ books. As a result, Kinsey, who was 32 when the series began in 1982, will be around 40 when it concludes. "You're never going to have to watch Kinsey Millhone go through menopause," says Ms. Grafton, 71, whose 22nd book, *V Is for Vengeance*, comes out in November.

It's easy to see why publishers and authors are reluctant to retire mystery icons. Crime-fiction sales have skyrocketed in recent years, driven in large part by successful series. Mystery and detective fiction became the top-selling genre in 2010, up from fifth place in 2009, according to Simba Information, which tracks the publishing industry. Recurring characters have built-in audiences and command reliable sales with each installment, which in turn boosts sales of paperback books in the series. Mr. Child's Jack Reacher books have sold more than 50 million copies in 40 languages. Mr. Connelly has sold more than 42 million books; last year, 1.2 million copies of his backlisted books sold.

Some writers say they now wish they could wind back the clock. British novelist Kate Atkinson wanted her sardonic private detective Jackson Brodie, originally 43 years old, to "experience time the way readers do." In her 2011 book, *Started Early, Took My Dog*, the fourth in the series, Brodie squints and struggles to recognize people because his eyesight is diminished. At 50, he's come out of retirement because it made him feel "redundant to the world's needs"; he's now semi-retired. "I wish I'd started him off younger," Ms. Atkinson says. "I don't want him to be an old man."

British crime writer Ruth Rendell made headlines in the U.K. two years ago when the Telegraph reported that she was done with her popular character—the genteel, cerebral Chief Inspector Reginald Wexford—after 45 years and 22 books. But this August, Wexford returns in *The Vault*. The retired inspector, now a doting grandfather, goes to plays and sits in his living room reading novels. He bumps into an officer he crossed paths with more than 30 years earlier, who asks Wexford to consult on an investigation into an underground vault that holds four decomposed bodies (three of which were buried there in Ms. Rendell's 1999 novel *A Sight for Sore Eyes*).

"I thought I should retire him but not leave him out of the series all together," says Ms. Rendell, 81. "He's very aware that he's no longer what he was."

The aging of recurring characters has been an issue for crime writers for more than a century, tracing back to archetypal sleuths like Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot. Holmes—who at one point died but was brought back to life by Arthur Conan Doyle when readers revolted—retired and devoted himself to beekeeping. Christie was blunt about her character's demise: In his final appearance, in *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*, an old, wheelchair-bound Poirot—with arthritis and a bad mustache dye job—dies of an apparent heart attack.

Other icons from the Golden Age of detective fiction in the early decades of the 20th century remained eternally in middle age. In the American hard-boiled detective tradition, investigators like

Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe hovered in midlife. The classic gumshoe archetype—the hard-drinking, jaded loner with emotional baggage and shrewd instincts—didn't change.

Some timeless characters—including Ian Fleming's James Bond, Robert B. Parker's Spenser, Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer and Robert Ludlum's Jason Bourne—have outlasted their creators, enduring as “zombie franchises” after literary estates contract new writers to keep the series going.

# Reviews

## Rob's Random Shots

### July Case File Number 1

*Hell Is Empty* by Craig Johnson, Viking, 2011, 309 pp (HC)

Wyoming can kill you. That's the simple subtext of Craig Johnson's grueling new Walt Longmire novel. Welcome to "Will Rogers meets Ernest Shackleton's *Endurance*." A prisoner exchange atop Wyoming's Big Horn Mountains goes disastrously awry and the only thing between hostages and certain death is one man—the sheriff of Absaroka County.

This is unlike any other Longmire mystery, but legions of readers will enjoy it as much or more than previous outings. True, we get less interaction with some series favorite characters, but Walt is as droll and on target as ever. Don't believe it? Let him speak for himself:

"I applied the simple rule that allowed me to make stupid decisions in these types of situations: If I was down there, would I want someone coming after me? Yep.

'Ready?'

He shook his head. 'No.'

'Alright then, let's go.'

All of a sudden the whiteout was so thick you could've cut sheep out of the air with a sharp knife.

It was the cleaning sound the wind made in the high mountain country, scrubbing the landscape in an attempt to make it fresh."

You don't have to been through the Big Horn Mountains to be impressed by Craig's feel-it-in-your-bones descriptions of the cold, the snow, and the hazards of icy ponds and sudden fires.

But it helps. My wife and I drove the high country road west of Burgess Junction on a stormy Monday afternoon in mid-June. The

road had only been plowed open the Friday before. Walt gets no such luxury.

And you don't have to dog Walt's footsteps in the fictional county seat of Durant.

But we did, first by eating in the Busy Bee café (it's in the town of Buffalo, cheek by jowl with the Occidental Hotel, where Owen Wister wrote *The Virginian*) and then by strolling downtown Sheridan the next day, prior to braving the Big Horns.

Craig gets to show his literary chops in this book. *Dante's Inferno* is prominently featured, although Walt experiences cold rather than heat and has to climb up rather than descend. The title is taken from Dante: "Hell is empty; all the devils are loose."

This is not a novel for the squeamish or faint of heart, but if you make this climb with Walt, you'll be exposed to lots of bad weather, survival tips, firearm lore, cell phone limitations, and Crow culture and mythology.

As you may know, this series was cast and shot as a pilot for the A&E network this spring in northern New Mexico, because Wyoming weather wouldn't cooperate. There's a lesson in that for the producers when (not if) the network likes the pilot enough to turn it into a series. This novel and the first, *The Cold Dish*, would make fine episodes, if Wyoming doesn't kill anybody first. ♦

### July Case File Number 2

*Detachment Fault* by Susan Cummins Miller, Texas Tech University Press, 2004, 236 pp (HC)

I'd been meaning to read a Frankie MacFarlane mystery ever since I met Susan Cummins Miller at a conference several years ago. This seemed like the perfect opportunity, since her publisher was giving away free copies of this, her second book, the sequel to *Death Assemblage*.

Susan and her heroine Frankie are geologists, probably the only geological mystery series ever attempted. As much as I like Susan, it was really hard to get through this book. We go from the discovery of a dead body in the Sea

of Cortez and the disappearance of Frankie's brother's girlfriend, then immediately back to Arizona, where in a few days a virtual duplicate—right down to hair color, clothing selection, and jewelry of the girlfriend—is murdered on Frankie's college campus in Tucson and a colleague is blown up in his office minutes after talking to Frankie.

I wasn't able to sustain my suspension of disbelief that Frankie knows a PI and a Tucson female police detective well enough to involve herself in the two Arizona cases, apparently with police blessing. The girlfriend's disappearance is not mentioned again for a hundred pages.

And this book falls into the trap of a first novel with a huge cast. Everyone from the first novel must be trotted out and given scenes in this book, too. I think the Rule of Four ought to apply in situations like this. If you've created really cute characters that your fan base loves, try to limit their scene stealing in sequels to about four carefully selected repeat characters who help move the plot along, not just bake cookies and trade recipes. I've limited my returnees in my second novel and I have even fewer original supporting characters in my third.

If you like a mystery with an amateur sleuth in an unusual occupation, this may be the book for you. I certainly learned a bit of geology from it, but I'm also reading John McPhee's nonfiction *In Suspect Terrain* right now. He may be short on plot, but he gives a hell of a lot of geology for only a third of Frankie's price.

Look for this one in the book exchange. ♦

—Rob Kresge ([www.robertkresge.com](http://www.robertkresge.com))

***Pie Town***, by Lynne Hinton. William Morrow, 2011, 314 pp (TP)

This isn't a mystery, but worth reading. The author, who writes mysteries under the name Jackie Lynn, was a speaker at C&D in that guise not long ago.

In *Pie Town*, the first novel in a projected series, Hinton populates a real town with imaginary characters that are a typical cross-

section of New Mexico culture. There isn't a main character, although two newcomers to town, a free spirit named Trina and a newly minted priest named Father George, stir up all sorts of trouble in a town that doesn't much like getting stirred up.

The plot is absorbing because you come to care for these people. The character around whom everyone else's life seems to revolve, is young Alex, who has spina bifida and is confined to a wheelchair. Abandoned by his heedless mother, who isn't even sure who his dad was, he is being raised by his grandparents, Roger, the local sheriff, and his ex-wife Malene, whose father, Oris, and his neighbor, Millie, also play a big part in Alex's life.

Normal small-town things go on, often described with gentle humor, including Alex's birthday party, the central event in the story, to which everyone is invited every year and a wonderful time is had by all. However, disaster on two fronts looms shortly thereafter and tests both the newcomers and the town itself.

One caution: skip Chapter 1, which is meaningless until you've read the rest of the book, especially if you're put off, as I tend to be, by new-agey, poetic descriptions hinting at a mysterious presence in the characters' lives (and I don't mean God). But if you're just looking for a good story, well told, *Pie Town* is highly recommended. ♦

—Linda Triegel ([ljt23@earthlink.net](mailto:ljt23@earthlink.net))

**Key:**

PB = Paperback

TP = Trade paperback

HC = Hardcover

***Dead Cat Bounce*** by Sarah Graves. Bantam, 1998 (PB).

“Dead cat bounce” is stock market jargon for a small temporary rise in a stock's trading price, after a sharp drop. In this first installment of the “Home Repair is Homicide” series, set in Eastport, Maine, the easternmost city in the U.S., Jacobia “Jake” Tiptree has traded her fast-

track life as an investment analyst for fat cats (including high-level mobsters) and escaped her marriage with an egotistic brain surgeon, for a more peaceful life in Maine with her son Sam in a 200-year-old home she impulsively purchased and which requires endless repair.

Jake has a new and rewarding relationship with Wade, a boat pilot, and a new best friend. Ellie, a calm and steady “down-easter.” When a shady millionaire with local roots is murdered, and her best friend Ellie confesses to the murder but asks Jake to investigate, of course she must.

What she doesn't expect are the threats followed by serious attempts on her life and Sam's, including arson. Complicating matters further is the unexpected appearance of her ex-husband with his latest young girlfriend, in another attempt to dictate their son's life. Jake prevails due to her loyalty and integrity. Look forward to many more in this series. ♦

—Susan Zates ([smzates@yahoo.com](mailto:smzates@yahoo.com))

***Murder at St. Mark's Place*** by Victoria Thompson. Berkeley, 2000 (PB).

This is the second installment of the “Gaslight Mystery” series. Sarah Brandt lives alone and works as a midwife in turn-of-the-19th-century New York City. She was born into a privileged family, but her love and marriage to Dr. Thomas Brandt caused a family rift. Now widowed, she chooses to continue to control her own life.

She is called to pregnant Agnes's home, not for childbirth but due to the murder of Agnes's younger sister Gerda in the heart of Little Germany, St. Mark's Place. Sarah investigates the circumstances of Gerda's death, because the grieving sister cannot afford to pay bribes to get the police to investigate.

Gerda's murder is similar to several other recent murders of young women. Sarah tries to find common factors linking the deaths, to identify a serial killer. In the course of her

investigation she goes to places the young women frequented—dancing halls and Coney Island.

Sarah seeks out Sergeant Frank Malloy for help. With her medical training, she can recognize his son Brian's true condition and recommend treatment. Sarah and Frank work together to find evidence to solve the murders.

Sarah encounters a childhood acquaintance, a privileged young man, while pursuing her investigation. To enlist his help, she first needs to reconcile with her family.

The story is satisfying on many levels. The historical background (the hardships that drive the victims to associate with their killers) rings true. The clues logically lead to the solution, with a slight and believable plot twist. The relationship between Sarah and Frank gets stronger, as they help each other. Sarah's reconciliation with her parents seems awkward to a modern reader, but possible given society's roles and expectations of the time. Sarah's nosy neighbor plays a great role in this book. I look forward to reading more of the series. ♦

—Susan Zates ([smzates@yahoo.com](mailto:smzates@yahoo.com))

***The Water's Lovely*** by Ruth Rendell. Crown, 2007 (HC).

I'm a fan of Ruth Rendell's Wexford series, and have read most (if not all) of her other books. Rendell has won just about every award for her superb mysteries, so I was certain this stand-alone (non-series) mystery, set in modern-day London, would be equally fantastic, but it's a big disappointment.

It starts out on a strange note, and remains a bit off-kilter. It's a story of relationships: two sisters live in a duplex with their mother and aunt, years after a traumatic childhood event. I could not relate to the self-centered and melodramatic protagonist Ismay, and her cheating and controlling boyfriend, Andrew, is a flat stereotype.

I detested the meddling and amoral Marion, hated even more that she succeeded. The big secret (between sisters) was obvious from early in the book. Certainly not a typical mystery, since there was no investigation to solve a crime. I will continue to read Rendell's books, since most are excellent, but I would not recommend this one. ♦

—Susan Zates (*smzates@yahoo.com*)

## 2011 MEETING DATES

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Tuesday, July 26, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, August 23, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, September 27, 7:00 p.m.  
Tuesday, October 25, 7:00 p.m.

*Chapter bookmarks list meetings through  
year's end.*

### **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](http://www.croak-and-dagger.com), for schedule changes and upcoming programs.

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](mailto:newsette@earthlink.net), with "Nooseletter" in the subject line.

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

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### **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





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