



SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSE LETTER

Volume IX, Number 2 — March 2013

†Expert Testimony†

The trial of the alleged shooter who went on a rampage in an Aurora, Colorado, movie theater, is in full swing. We are still trying to understand the massacre of six-year olds in a Connecticut school.

Katherine Ramsland, a professor of forensic psychology, writes about “Red Flags for Mass Murder” in the latest Sisters in Crime Quarterly. She reports that there are no sure signs or set of behaviors that clearly predict a rampage. But some behaviors show up more frequently than others in these incidents. As more of these “red flags” cluster together, the higher the risk.

If mystery writers are going to write about this type of event, it is a good idea to understand, as far as is known, the development of a rampage murder mentality. Writers have an obligation to “get it right” whether they are talking about what a particular gun can do or proper police or court procedures. Writers should not spread misinformation or myths about mental illness either.

Professor Ramsland has provided important and authoritative information for Sisters in Crime members:

What conditions can develop a mind that can ponder and rehearse a fatal assault on others? For many it begins with childhood frustrations and how they did or did not learn to deal with them.

A study of the backgrounds of mass shooters shows some common elements. Many showed an inability to deal with stress or exhibited chronic discontent and angry outbursts

or retaliated against others. Those with greater exposure to violence in their environment show an increasing tendency to duplicate it, especially if they suffer from certain forms of mental illness or have military experience.

It is important to note that not all children (or adults) react to stress, frustration, or disappointment in the same way. Not all angry children will turn into killers. However, since behavioral patterns in adapting to stress can point to the potential for more serious problems, it is helpful to pay attention to these signals and provide treatment.

Since many mass shooters have rigid temperaments, it is clear why their fantasies about being thwarted or picked on or ignored can lead to explosions. “Red flags” include an obsession with themes of violence in news, movies, or a gaming environment, low frustration tolerance, few or no resilient behaviors, significant stressors, collecting lists of injustices, or a tendency to blame others for life’s problems or unfairness. A person exhibiting a constellation of such traits signals the need for intervention.

Professor Ramsland lists two books for details on what is known about violent incidents involving the mentally ill – *The Insanity Offense* by E. Fuller Torrey and *Crazy* by Pete Farlay.

– Jan Bray, President

HELP WANTED!
See page 3 for details.

Don't Miss It!

Tuesday, March 26, at 7 p.m.

Our March speaker will be J. L. (Janet) Greger, a retired biologist, university administrator, and professor (University of Wisconsin-Madison), who will talk about “putting science in your fiction.”

Janet enjoys putting tidbits of science into her medical thrillers and mysteries. Her *Coming Flu* (published July 2012) compares two killers—the Philippine flu and a drug kingpin trapped in a New Mexican community quarantined because of the flu.

A light touch in *Coming Flu* is provided by some of the eccentric characters, including a Japanese Chin dog named Bug, who is modeled on Janet's own dog.

Her next novel, *Murder: A New Way to Lose Weight* (published this month) will make you think twice before you begin your next diet.

Find out more about Janet and her books at her website, www.jlgreger.com, or her blog, www.jlgregerblog.blogspot.com.

Author and retired academic Richard E. Peck was a popular speaker at C&D last May and will be making a return engagement at our April meeting.

Dr. Peck taught English at two universities and filled administrative posts at two more, before presiding as president at three more. His writing includes plays, short stories, and a Science Fiction novel, *Final Solution*.

Dr. Peck is a member of Screen Writers Guild of America (West) and has contributed occasional columns to a number of newspapers. He lives in Placitas, NM, where he meddles in the lives of his grandchildren, golfs at a level far below his aspirations—and writes.

The Albuquerque Croak & Dagger chapter of Sisters in Crime welcomes mystery fans, readers, and writers. 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
- 2013 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 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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Noose News

Albert Noyer's second Father Jake Mystery, *One for the Money, Two for the Sluice*, will be published in April by Plain View Press. The 70-year-old priest again teams up with Detective Sonia Mora in the fictional New Mexico village of Providencia. Amazon Publishing has reissued Albert's 5th-century mysteries, *The Secundus Papyrus* and *The Cybelene Conspiracy* in Amazon Encore, Kindle and audio editions.

Gail Rubin reports that *A Good Goodbye: Funeral Planning for Those Who Don't Plan to Die* is becoming a TV interview program. "We just recorded 12 episodes of 30-minute conversations on everything you need to know before you go—funeral planning, financial planning, new trends, pet loss, and much, much more. We hope to start airing on Albuquerque's Comcast cable channels 26 and 27 by April. Find out more about *A Good Goodbye TV* at <http://agoodgoodbye.com/a-good-goodbye-tv-series/>

Joseph Badal reminds us to look for *The Lone Wolf Agenda*, the fourth book in the Bob Danforth saga (*Evil Deeds*, *Terror Cell*, and *The Nostradamus Secret*), in April. Joe reports that he's just posted *Even Deeds*, Part III, chapters 49-51 on Wattpad! He also writes a blog titled Everyday Heroes, which can be viewed at www.josephbadal.wordpress.com.

Judith van Gieson reports that her first two Neil Hamel novels, *North of the Border* and *Raptor*, are available this month. You can listen to the first 5 minutes for free on Kindle. Enjoy!

C&D Members!

Send news of your latest releases, good news of any kind, and any news you hear about your favorite authors to the *Nooseletter* at the address on page 2.

Harlequin is acquiring novels for its new digital series, including Harlequin Shivers (the new gothic), Harlequin Horror, Harlequin Intrigue Noir (darker than the romance-centric print series), as well as for their Mystery, Fantasy/Fantasy Romance, Science Fiction/ Science Fiction Romance, Contemporary Romans, Erotic Romance, and Teen Romance lines.

And if you have a different Brilliant Idea, they want to hear that too. "Authors have always been the innovators in publishing. Do you have a trilogy that just never fit anywhere? Do you have a burning idea that keeps you up at night, but there has been no market for it? Now is the time to submit as we commit to the freedom to experiment in digital publishing." For more information, go to Submit_HDigital@Harlequin.com

HELP WANTED!

Assistant editor: The *Nooseletter* editor is looking for an assistant to learn the ropes of putting out our bimonthly newsletter. The various aspects of collecting material, editing for length, and laying it out in the established format—or a new way if you have some ideas—will be shared between the current editor and the assistant for the remainder of the year.

We hope the assistant will graduate to being the full-time editor with the November elections (with the current editor as assistant during your getting-comfortable phase).

The only requirements are a desktop word-processing program (PC), Internet access, a few hours a month to meet and observe the process, and preferably some editing experience.

It's fun—really!—and a great way to get to know local writers and what's happening in the mystery genre. If interested, contact the editor at newsette@earthlink.net.

The Croak & Dagger board is also looking for a **temporary secretary** to take notes at the board meetings in May, July, and September, when the regular secretary, Rob Kresge, will be away on an extended Grand Tour (tough job, but...etc). This position requires attendance at three board meetings and writing up the minutes for publication in the *Nooseletter* (see pages 14 and 15). Contact Rob at www.robertkresge.com or Jan Bray at ohbray@nmia.com.

Good Fit for Today's Little Screens: Short Stories

Excerpted from an article by Leslie Kaufman in the New York Times, February 15, 2013

The Internet may be disrupting much of the book industry, but for short-story writers it has been a good thing.

Story collections, an often underappreciated literary cousin of novels, are experiencing a resurgence, driven by a proliferation of digital options that offer not only new creative opportunities but exposure and revenue as well.

Already, 2013 has yielded an unusually rich crop of short-story collections, including George Saunders's *Tenth of December*, which arrived in January with a media splash normally reserved for Hollywood movies and moved quickly onto the best-seller lists. Tellingly, many of the current and forthcoming collections are not from authors like Mr. Saunders, who have always preferred short stories, but from best-selling novelists who are returning to the form.

"It is the culmination of a trend we have seen building for five years," said Cal Morgan, the editorial director of Harper Perennial Originals, who until last year ran a blog called Fifty-Two Stories, devoted to short fiction. "The Internet has made people a lot more open to reading story forms that are different from the novel, and you see a generation of writers very engaged in experimentation."

In recent decades the traditional outlets for individual short stories have dwindled, with literary magazines closing or shrinking. But the Internet has created an insatiable maw to feed. Amazon, for instance, created its Kindle Singles program in 2011 for publishing short fiction and nonfiction brief enough to be read in under two hours. Although the list price is usually modest, a dollar or two, authors keep up to 70 percent of the royalties: welcome revenue for fledgling authors and a potentially big payoff for well-known writers.

In addition, a group of smaller Internet publishers, like Byliner, are snapping up short fiction and gaining traction as distributors of stories. And the shorter format, writers say, is a good fit for the small screens that people are increasingly using to read.

"The generation of writers out of college in the last few years has been raised to engage with words like no generation before," Cal Morgan said. "Our generation was raised on passive media like television and telephones; this generation has been engaged in writing to each other in text messages on a 24-hour basis. I think it has made them bolder and tighter."

Best-selling author Tom Perrotta edited *The Best American Short Stories of 2012* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). While sifting through entries, he, too, noticed a change in fiction from the previous generation, although he said he was not sure that technology played a part. "I felt like the story form has started to loosen up some," he said. "And I was intrigued by the fact that a number of the stories felt novelistic — they were not 20 pages, but 40, and had shifting points of view and complicated structures."

Short stories have a rich history, of course, and many literary giants — Hemingway, Nabokov, Cheever and Welty, to name a few — have written memorable collections. But they were largely seen as exceptions that prove the rule: publishers and authors tend to be wary of short-story collections because of the risk of being critically overlooked and, worse, lower sales.

Now, however, besides warming to the growing artistic flexibility of the form, many writers and publishers are also sensing a market opportunity.

For well-known authors like Stephen King and Lee Child, who have both sold short stories or novellas through the Kindle Singles program, even small prices can add up to big money. For less established authors, the singles format means getting exposure by offering readers a sampling at an appealing price.

Amber Dermont, for example, is selling “A Splendid Wife,” a story from her coming collection, on the Amazon and Barnes & Noble websites for 99 cents. The idea is to whet the appetite of potential buyers of the whole collection.

That ability to sell stories piecemeal, of course, is a big draw of short-story collections for authors. And in most cases, at least some of the stories have already been for sale. All but one of the tales in Mr. Saunders’s *Tenth of December* had been published earlier, many in *The New Yorker*, but that does not appear to have hurt sales for the collection.

Andy Ward, the editor who acquired the book for Random House, said that when he bumps into colleagues from other houses, they all say Mr. Saunders’s sales are giving them encouragement. “This gives us a lot of hope,” he said. “People say people don’t want to read short fiction, but this seems to be working out really well.”♦

On the other hand...

In a February 20 article on Salon.com (www.salon.com/2013) Laura Miller proclaims, “Sorry, the short story boom is bogus!”

The short story, like the western, is periodically said to be on the brink of a comeback. The most recent example of this boosterism: an article by the New York Times’ new(ish) publishing reporter, Leslie Kaufman, in which “a proliferation of digital options” is said to offer short fiction “not only new creative opportunities but exposure and revenue as well.”

This would be good news — if there were any reason at all to think it was true. Kaufman’s only evidence for this imaginary renaissance is the success of George Saunders’ story collection, *The Tenth of December*. Saunders’ longtime fans (I count myself among them) have reason to celebrate this, but it really has nothing to do with “digital options.” Saunders has built a devoted following over the past 17 years, hadn’t published a book in a good while and — most important of all — was heralded in the headline of a long, radiant profile in the New York Times Magazine as producing “the best book you’ll read this year.” All of that could have happened 10, 20 or 30 years ago and produced the same result.

Kaufman goes on to marvel at the “unusually rich crop of short-story collections” published (or about to be published) this year. Some, “tellingly,” are even written by “best-selling novelists”! This is all the more astonishing to her since “publishers and authors tend to be wary of short-story collections because of the risk of being critically overlooked and, worse, lower sales.”

That last statement is true, except for the part about authors sharing publishers’ uneasiness with collections. Many, many novelists also write short fiction, especially when they’re starting out and not least because most writing workshops and MFA programs find stories easier to work with than novels. Naturally, they’d like to publish their work. So, there’s nothing particularly remarkable or new about best-selling novelists writing stories or wanting to publish collections. In fact, best-selling novelists are frequently the *only* writers who are able get collections published because publishers can hope to capture some of the readership won by the authors’ novels.

Furthermore, while 2013 does promise a fine crop of story collections, it is not any finer than last year’s or the year before that or any other year for the past three decades. Every so often, a short story collection achieves the sort of sales and acclaim usually accorded to novels... But as a rule collections are still regarded by publishers as a long shot.

In case you hadn’t noticed, none of this has anything to do with a “proliferation of digital options.” Saunders’ collection is selling much better in its print form than it is in the Kindle store (No. 24 vs. No. 193), for example. Besides, any of the collections mentioned above are essentially the same book whether you buy them in print or digital form. So even if short story collections *were* enjoying a

boom in sales at the moment, there's no reason — or at least no reason the Times' piece presents — to conclude that digital publishing has played any role in that (nonexistent) phenomenon.

It is true that many online outlets are now selling short fiction to readers on a per-story basis; Kaufman mentions Amazon's Kindle Singles program and Byliner, a company with which the Times launched an e-books publication program late last year. In the past, these outlets have been lauded as a new way to purvey long-form journalism: reported articles too long for many magazines but not quite as substantial as a traditional book. As a reviewer, I can attest that many nonfiction books read like padded magazine articles, and if writers can make a fair return on their investment of time, research expenses and expertise from these leaner, less expensive pieces (a big "if"), this is indeed a promising innovation. But at the moment, it's not clear that they can.

Still, the idea that such programs have led to renewed general interest in reading short stories is, like much of the Times article, speculative and fueled by wishful thinking.

The idea that today's time-strapped and mentally scattered readers will find short stories more congenial is far from new; I remember hearing variations on this plaintive theme from authors, editors and publishers since before the rise of the Internet. Yet there is little to suggest that it is any truer now than it was, say, when we started Salon in 1995. In fact, a survey of Amazon, New York Times and USA Today best-seller lists suggests that most readers crave ever longer and more complex fictional narratives, such as George R.R. Martin's mammoth fantasy series (the basis for HBO's *Game of Thrones*) or the *Fifty Shades* trilogy, in which one couple's kinky courtship is drawn out over a preposterous three volumes.

A short story can be anything from an exquisite specimen of the literary art to a diverting pastime. In its mid-20th-century heyday, when even magazines like *Mademoiselle* published short fiction by writers like William Faulkner, stories offered readers an hour or two of satisfying narrative entertainment at the end of the day. Television has largely replaced that function, and the literary short story itself became a more rarefied thing, a form in which writers exhibit the perfection of their technique, rather like lyric poetry. With the exception of certain communities of genre writer and readers — most notable in science fiction — these writers aren't reaching a wider audience because they aren't especially trying to.

The advent of smartphones really is changing some Americans' reading habits. A recent Pew Research Center study indicated that, of those who read e-books, 41 percent read them on their phones (as opposed to 23 percent on a dedicated e-reader and 16 percent on a tablet). People carry their phones with them wherever they go and can snatch a page or two of reading at odd moments while waiting in line or riding the bus. (The newly coined term for this is "interstitial reading.") My own evidence is only anecdotal, but at least I can point to a few readers in my acquaintance who are reading more fiction thanks to new mobile technology. However, they're reading long novels — public domain classics like *Middlemarch* and epics like *A Game of Thrones* — because for the first time they can carry around a 900-page tome in their shirt pocket.

The thinking behind Kaufman's article, and in the vague and unsupported statements she quotes from assorted short story publishers and authors, seems to be that because the screens of smartphones are small, people are somehow more inclined to use them to read shorter fiction. It's an absurd notion, really, and Kaufman offers no evidence to support it.

"Good Fit for Today's Little Screens: Short Stories" was greeted with hurrahs in many quarters of the literary world. That's understandable, given that so many have striven to write and publish the best short fiction they can, only to have their work greeted with general indifference. But just because publishers are, in Kaufman's words, "sensing a market opportunity" does not mean that a new market — let alone a booming one — actually exists. That's not to say that it wouldn't be lovely if smartphones suddenly led to an expanded enthusiasm for literary short stories, but a newspaper's job is to describe the world as it is, not as the members of an industry wish it would be. ♦

The New Yorker Rejects Itself: A Quasi-Scientific Analysis of Slush Piles

Excerpted from an article by David Cameron on www.thereviewreview.net/publishing.

It began as the kind of logical argument that seems airtight to anyone who has never studied logic.

If *The New Yorker* is the most desirable literary magazine in the world, and if *The New Yorker* can have any short story *The New Yorker* wants, then whatever story *The New Yorker* gets would—logically—be so intrinsically desirable that all lesser literary pubs (e.g., everyone) would pine for it. Just like the prettiest girl at the dance: the guy she picks is the guy chicks dig. Basic deduction 101.

After a few glasses of two-buck Chuck I was ready to test my hypothesis. I grabbed a *New Yorker* story off the web (no, it wasn't by Alice Munro or William Trevor), copied it into a Word document, changed only the title, created a fictitious author identity, and submitted it to a slew of literary journals. My cover letter simply stated that I am an unpublished writer deeply appreciative of their consideration.

That was it. I sowed the seed, and waited.

As for the result, dear reader, every single one of these journals rejected my poor *New Yorker* story with the same boilerplate “good luck placing your work elsewhere” auto-text that has put the lid on my own sorry submissions. Not a single personal pleasantry.

As the rejections rolled in, I began to feel sorry for this story in the same way you pity a one-hit wonder who ends up on infomercials: two parts schadenfreude, one part authentic compassion. This poor story, like the sly dude chosen by the dance-floor starlet, thought he had it all. Here he was convinced that he could effortlessly charm the panties off of any university-based handout with “Review” in the title. What the hell happened?

But it wasn't just the lower-tier non-A+ list who rejected this poor devil. Before I name-drop, bear with me. I'm being deliberately coy by not IDing the culprits, mainly because I don't want to be denied any free drink tickets at the next AWP. However, I'll break my silence to single out just one journal that declined this *New Yorker* short story: *The New Yorker*. Yes, in an act of inadvertent self-mortification, *The New Yorker* rejected itself.

I tried to console this sad, broken-hearted story, explaining to it the vagaries and randomness of the slush pile, how despite what many of these journal editors state in interviews, the slush is often just a clean-up chore relegated to overwhelmed readers, and that rejections might mean nothing or might mean everything, but there was no way of really knowing.

Still, my work wasn't done! No scientific experiment can be taken seriously unless it is reproduced, and so I grabbed yet another story, this one by a rather celebrated youngish *New Yorker* author and repeated the process. The results, as scientists say, were “elegant.”

Thus ended my life in research.

Now comes the trickier part. Commentary.

Slush sucks. It's as simple, and as unhelpful, as that. Keep in mind that they do in fact call it the slush pile, not the “jewel in the rough pile,” but the *slush pile*, named after the very same stuff that mucks your driveway up after a dank snowfall.

A part of me really wanted to be outed, to have some vigilant editor write back and say, “Nice try. Consider yourself blacklisted.” Or even to put me in the horribly awkward position of an acceptance!.* That would mean there's hope, that open submissions aren't just, in so many cases, empty gestures.

Yes, my ruse makes me snarky, but also sad. But not as sad as the poor *New Yorker* story that got so brutalized. If you see him standing next to a bar stool searching his pockets for loose change, give him a hug. He's still trying to figure out what went wrong. ♦

*For the record, in the event I received even a nibble, I would have immediately withdrawn the story from consideration. I actually do have scruples.

Contests & Conferences – Still Time to Sign Up!

Below are some regional writers' conferences coming up between now and the end of 2013 as well as contests of interest to mystery writers with upcoming due dates. For more information, click on the links to check them out online.

Conferences:

June 20-21

Crested Butte Writers Conference, held at the Elevation Hotel, Crested Butte, Colorado. "A small conference designed to be friendly and cozy with the caliber of a large conference." Book signings, contests, small-group workshops to encourage personal connections, genre-specific informal get-togethers. Speakers include authors, agents, and editors. Go to www.crestedbuttewriters.org/conf.php.

July 25-28

20th Annual Book Passage Mystery Writers Conference, Corte Madera, CA. "Discover all the clues for a successful career as a mystery of suspense writer!" Authors, Agents, Editors, and Panels of detectives, forensic experts, and other crime-fighting professionals. Contact: www.bookpassage.com.

September 20-22

Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers' **Colorado Gold Conference**, Denver. Special guests: Historical novelist Margaret George, thriller/urban fantasy writer Rob Thurman, and horror author Ronald Malfi. For information: www.rmfw.org.

Contests:

Al Blanchard Award: Annual award sponsored by the New England Crime Bake conference. The story must be a crime story by a New England author or set in New England, previously unpublished, no longer than 5,000 words. **Submission deadline: April 30.** Contact: www.crimebake.org/Al.

Black Orchid Award: For original unpublished works of fiction that conform to the tradition of the Nero Wolfe series and are between 15,000 and 20,000 words. **Submission deadline: May 31.** For details: www.nerowolfe.org/htm/neroaward.

The First Line Contest: Quarterly contest, open to all genres, but all stories must start with the first line prompt given at the contest's website. Up to 3,000 words. **Submission deadlines: May 1, August 1, November 1.** For first lines, go to: www.thefirstline.com/submission.

Cutthroat Literary Award: Annual awards include the Rick DeMarinis Short Story Award, any subject, any style, up to 5,000 words. **Fee for entry; Submit between July 15 and October 15.** More information at: www.cutthroatmag.com/contest.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley Award for Imaginative Fiction: Annual contest for stories in the fantasy, science fiction, mystery, and horror genres, with publication in *Rosebud* magazine for winners. **Submission fee; deadline October.** More details at: www.rsbd.net.

Zoetrope All-Story Short Fiction contest: Created by Francis Ford Coppola, *Zoetrope* magazine sponsors an annual contest that could just win you a contract with an editor. **Contest opens July 1.** For details, visit the website this summer: www.all-story.com/contests.

Reviews

Rob's Random Shots

March Case File Number 1

Bones of Contention by Jeanne Matthews, Poisoned Pen Press, 2010, 250 pp (TP)

One of the many benefits of sitting on a panel at a mystery conference like Left Coast Crime (Colorado Springs, 21-24 March) is that you're exposed to other authors on that you might never have found otherwise. That's the case with both authors in this issue's reviews.

Jeanne Matthews began her (now) four-book series with this novel, set in the Top End of Australia's Northern Territory. Heroine and amateur sleuth Dinah Pelerin is a cultural anthropologist en route to a hastily called meeting in Australia, where her mother's ex-husband is convening family members to witness his assisted suicide at a hotel. Dinah refers to the man as "Uncle" Cleon Dobbs, since she was the child of her mother's second husband.

En route to the meeting, she meets Australian Jacko Newby, who plays a vital role later. Attending the event are Cleon's doctor, who will conduct the suicide, Cleon's first wife and their son, Dinah's half-brother, who is Cleon's son, and Cleon's current wife and her two children by Cleon.

Confused? I could have used a genealogy/scorecard/list of dramatis personae in the front of the book, but by the middle, I was comfortable with who all the players were.

This seems like an open-and-shut classic mystery in which Cleon will be murdered and Dinah must sift through a houseful of suspects. But Matthews turns convention on its head and the doctor is murdered instead, poisoned. Was the poison intended for Cleon or was the doctor the target? Why? Whodunnit?

This inventive first novel doesn't read like anybody's first book. Matthews takes off with Dinah's investigation, putting her into danger (she admits to poor impulse control).

Even the hotel staff is suspect. All this takes place with a wonderful sense of Australia—its lingo, customs, and culture, including that of the aborigines. It passed the authenticity test with me and I lived there for six months. Aussie words and phrases like hoovering (vacuuming), whiffy (suspicious), pulling the trigger (doing anything), real show (real McCoy), and even the Spanish pun "mi cama es su cama" all reflect "bonzer Strine" (real Australian slang).

Dinah's attempt to sort wheat from chaff (narrowing the suspect list) only turns up more motives, not fewer. Assisted somewhat by an Australian police officer, she forges on. The ending took me (and will take you) totally by surprise. All in all, a most promising debut.

The author asked me to blurb her fourth book in the series. I felt truly honored (and she described herself modestly (and colorfully) as "literary plankton." Her inventive language knows no bounds. ♦

Tip for readers interested in ANY book: Look it up on www.Amazon.com and go to the "Look Inside" feature. Do that for either of my choices this month, and you'll be hooked.)

March Case File Number 2

Burning Man by Alan Russell, Thomas & Mercer, 2012, 328 pp (TP)

This author has a lot of books out and I can't wait to meet him at LCC. My favorite authors have had the initials MC (Margaret Coel, Michael Connelly) or CJ (Craig Johnson, C.J. Box). Now I'm adding Alan Russell to that list and I have to get more of his work.

I recommend going to Amazon.com and looking inside this book. It has the greatest prologue I've ever read and the follow-up chapters are equally amazing. Pause at that point and consider that this book alone—not all his books, not an aggregate for the author—has received 570 reviews in less than two years. No, that's not a typographical error.

His protagonist, LA Police Officer Michael Gideon and his K-9 partner Sirius, are called out to a murder scene that devolves into a firestorm during Santa Ana winds. The pair corner and capture notorious serial killer Ellis Haines and all three are seriously burned getting through the fire. And that's just the prologue.

A year later, in Chapter One, Haines is on Death Row in San Quentin, and Gideon has returned to duty as the police chief's special investigator for unusual crimes. Although he's off K-9 duty, the chief lets him keep Sirius as his partner. This makes for great repartee with a partner who can't talk. He keeps Gideon close company as the officer relives the night of their burning nearly every night in his dreams.

Gideon works on two cases simultaneously—the accidental death of an abandoned baby at the Angels Flight funicular (shades of Michael Connelly's book of the same name) and the crucifixion murder of a high school athlete in Beverly Hills. Totally unrelated cases take all Gideon's time, endanger his life, and land in the hospital again. Romance with an advocate for abandoned babies blossoms. Gideon himself was abandoned as a baby. No, this case doesn't lead him to his own mother; Russell is too good an author to put that much melodrama into this novel. But a sequel is possible.

A stellar cast of supporting characters ranges from a competent (for a change) police chief, helpful (not rival) detective colleagues, a mother superior, a helpful gift shop clerk, and his New Age next-door neighbor, whose license plate reads SHAMAN.

The eventual solution of the crucifixion takes Gideon and Sirius back through fire again and by book's end, that experience and the lover he's found look like they've ameliorated his nearly nightly dreams.

This is the best book I've read this year, and am looking forward to meeting Alan and telling him so. Go to Amazon.com and check out that prologue. All my books (so far) have prologues that I pride myself on, but I'm not in this author's league. ♦

—Rob Kresge (www.robertkresge.com)

Key:

PB = Paperback

TP = Trade paperback

HC = Hardcover

Old Flames by John Lawton. Grove Press, 1996, 424 pp (TP)

Chronologically the last of Lawton's series of mysteries featuring Inspector Troy, *Old Flames* takes place, unlike most of the previous titles, after World War II. In fact, we're in the midst of the Cold War, April 1956. The leaders of the Soviet Union are in London on an official visit, and Troy is assigned to be Khrushchev's bodyguard—and to spy on him.

Readers of the previous books know that Troy's family were Russian émigrés, escaping their homeland before the Revolution changed their way of life. So Troy speak flawless Russian, which is supposed to help him bond with his charge, but like most Englishmen, he gives away his class by his accent—even in Russian. Nonetheless, Khrushchev likes him, and his escapades, with Troy in dismayed attendance, are a highlight of the early chapters.

The mystery turns up with a dead Royal Navy diver, whose mutilated body is found in Plymouth Harbor when the Soviets are at anchor there, and it's Troy's job not to make any connection between the two facts. The frogman incident is based on real history, but Lawton, not feeling "bound by the facts of the matter," spins the never-resolved mystery of the diver's mission into an exciting chase around England and through the corridors of power.

Troy is aided—or hampered—in his pursuit by his "old flame," Tosca, a fellow spy he'd thought dead, who turns up to rekindle their affair. This provides the reader with more details from Troy's past and about him personally that readers may have wondered about in previous stories, when his family often seemed to overshadow the younger son.

A good read, particularly for those who like their mysteries with some history. ♦

—Linda Triegel (ljt23@earthlink.net)

New Series Mysteries

Still Life with Murder by P.B. Ryan, Berkley, 2003, 320 pages (PB)

Set in post-Civil War Boston, this is Book 1 of the Gilded Age series. Cornelia “Nell” Sweeney came from an impoverished childhood, but learned nursing skills through years of assisting Dr. Greaves with his patients.

She was in exactly the right place at the right time to be offered the position of governess by the aristocratic Hewitt family. And she has the right personality and courage for the next challenge: to try to rescue the Hewitt’s eldest son William from the gallows, while keeping her efforts a secret from his father.

Nell has good common sense and critical judgment. She’s not easily shocked or offended. She is able to weigh evidence, interview witnesses and deduce motives more astutely than the detective assigned to the murder case or the defense attorney. She follows the clues persistently to the surprising end. Along the way, we learn a bit about her past.

Historical detail in this first book includes the horrors of Andersonville Civil War prison camp, a blow-by-blow description of an opium den, and the medicinal potions that were sold at the time.

I was delighted that the author (or publisher?) offered this e-book free to introduce the series. I enjoyed it very much and highly recommend it to historical mystery lovers. ♦

Murder in Mykonos by Jeffrey Siger, Poisoned Pen Press, 2009, 279 pages (HC).

Set in modern-day Greece, this is the first book of the Andreas Kaldis mystery series. Andreas is a top homicide detective from Athens who was too good at solving crimes for his superiors’ comfort, so they “promoted” him to be police chief on Mykonos (really to get him away from Athens). Andreas fervently desires to succeed in Mykonos and somehow earn his way back to Athens.

Andreas’ first case on the island is the

mystery of the corpse of a tall, blond, attractive female tourist that turns up in a church burial crypt where only old bones should be. He must enlist the assistance of Tassos Stamatos, head investigator for all the Cyclades islands. Tassos is a long-time lawman, who served decades ago with Andreas’ father. The two men come to respect each other and work together well.

Tassos describes an old case with a similar victim, and Andreas decides to check more old church burial crypts, where he finds evidence of a serial killer. Andreas and Tassos pursue many leads, for many suspects, so much that they remark their case is like *Murder on the Orient Express*, where everyone was guilty. The detectives cannot figure out what motivates the killer.

Annika Vanden Haag is half Greek and half Dutch, and savvier than the usual tourist, being able to understand the rapid-fire Greek around her, yet she is captured by the killer. From then on, the story alternates between the killer with his captive, and the detectives hunting for them. The suspenseful chase makes the book hard to put down. The final resolution includes a surprise political deal. ♦

The Ghosts of Belfast by Stuart Neville, Soho Press, 2009, 326 pages (HC)

This first book of the Jack Lennon Investigation mystery series was originally a short story called “The Followers,” published in the UK as “The Twelve.”

The story is set in Northern Ireland today. Gerry Fegan is an IRA mercenary killer. He served years in the Maze (the Northern Ireland prison for political prisoners) for two of the killings. Since he’s been out, twelve ghosts of innocent people he killed haunt him. He sees them day and night, pleads with them to leave, and tries to drown them out with alcohol. Now they demand revenge. Driven by the ghosts, Gerry begins to kill the bosses who once ordered him to kill, and now are wealthy politicians.

A very dark and violent tale, filled with cruelty, betrayal, fistfights, and gunfights. A

single ray of light and hope is Gerry's tenuous relationship with Marie McKenna and her daughter. I assume the story holds even greater power and meaning for readers who understand the history of The Troubles and Irish politics.

A page-turner you can't put down as it winds up to the bloody final confrontation, but you will likely choose lighter reading afterward for relief. ♦

***Death in a Serene City* by Edward Sklepowich.**

The first in the Urbino Macintyre mystery series, the story is set in Venice during the weeks prior to *carnevale* in 1987. A wide variety of characters are introduced: a washerwoman, a hunchback, a priest, a countess, writers and artists. None are fleshed out in personality, but each eventually contributes at least a little bit to the solution.

Allow plenty of time to read this book; it's certainly not light entertainment. The author is a Fulbright scholar, and it shows: his narrative is at the college reading level, with constant references to history, art, the classics, literature, Italian phrases... Fascinating information can be learned by following up references on Wikipedia as you read.

Frankly the references are more interesting than the mystery: I first tried to read the book without stopping to look anything up, but found it far too dull. Mystery books typically start with a death and consist of the process of unraveling clues to identify the killer and his/her motivation. Although a death occurs early in this book, unlike most other mysteries it is not the subject of Urbino's investigation. He does not decide to investigate anything until page 100, and then he is only interested in the second death. He goes around talking to people (and not finding out much) for the next 100 pages.

Meanwhile more deaths occur. Finally Urbino looks for connections between them. He becomes rather smug around page 250, when he begins to figure it out and stages a not-very-suspenseful confrontation to reveal the killer.

The intricate and far-fetched plot is the least interesting part of the book. Of more interest is

Venice itself, the glassblowers on Murano, burials on the cemetery island, the masks worn for *carnevale*, and dramatic *acqua alta*. ♦

***Return to Marshall's Bayou* by S. H. Baker.**
Audio book

This is the first book of the Dassas Cormier mystery series set in 1920s rural Louisiana. Dassas Cormier returns to his ancestral home, now his brother's farm, in sleepy Marshall's Bayou. He is surprised to learn of a recent murder and a disappearance in the tiny hamlet where nothing ever happens.

Grace, the missing man's wife, asks Dassas to find her husband. He can't refuse because she is the girl of his dreams, the one he has secretly loved since childhood.

Listening to the audio production is a delightful experience. A full cast of actors portray the characters, and background sound effects make the setting come alive. This is a great way to experience a mystery! I hope the entire series will become available in this format. ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

Report of an actual telephone call:

"Thank you for calling Macmillan,
Formerly Holt/Springer Publishers
You have also reached
St Martin's Press
Tor Books
Henry Holt
Metropolitan Books
New York Times Books/Picador
Palgrave Macmillan
Thomas Dunne
Macmillan Audio
Macmillan Children's Publishing Group
and Bloomsbury
If you have a rotary phone, please hold for the operator..."

No wonder authors are self-publishing in increasing numbers, (And who uses a rotary phone anymore anyway?)
—Ed.

2013 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, March 26, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, April 23, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, May 28, 7:00 p.m.
(bookmarks listing all meeting dates will
be available soon!)

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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Still not a member of Sisters in Crime?

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

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

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

Contact our membership chair, at contact@croak-and-dagger.com.

Summary of the Board Meeting Minutes of Sisters in Crime Croak & Dagger Chapter, ABQ, NM, January 21, 2013

Board members present: President and Treasurer Olin Bray, Vice President Joan Saberhagen, Secretary Fred Aiken, Program Chair Rita Herther, Membership Chair Pat Wood, Website Coordinator Susan Zates, and *Nooseletter* editor Linda Triegel.

Outgoing President Olin Bray called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m., then turned the floor over to Jan Bray, the 2013 chapter president. Jan welcomed the new board and began with asking for officer reports.

Olin turned the treasurer history and forms over to Fred Aiken, the 2013 treasurer. Olin said no tax return was filed for 2010, so he put that data into the 2011 return. At the end of calendar 2012, the chapter had \$2,850.40. The chapter took in \$480 in dues last year, and spent \$712, mostly for printing chapter bookmarks and for purchasing commemorative bookmarks for our guest speakers. With expenditures and income accounted for, the amount in the chapter account stands at \$2,617.66. Further expenditures are planned for printing the 2013 bookmarks and for buying more commemorative items for guest speakers. Membership chair Pat Wood listed the actual members of the chapter and noted that some board members were behind in their dues but would be paid up either this night or at the January 22 general meeting.

Program chair Rita Herther noted that we will get a few of the shorter bookmarks from The Palms, but they are out of the longer ones. There was discussion of the possibility of thanking speakers with gift cards or gift certificates from local bookstores, like Treasure House. As we run out of the customary commemorative bookmarks, Rita said we could buy gift cards instead. The suggestion was made to give a gift card when a speaker comes back a second time.

VP Joan Saberhagen asked about copyright issues for an article reproduced in the *Nooseletter*. Editor Linda Triegel said that we cite the original publication and author, and the consensus was that we do not need permission for individual articles. Linda also said she wants to announce at general meetings and in the *Nooseletter* itself the need for an apprentice to learn how to put each bimonthly issue together.

Rita said the notice for the January 22 speaker had gone in to the *Albuquerque Journal* too late to make the January 20 Books page. Things are, as we expected, different following the retirement of Books page editor David Steinberg and we will try to get meeting and speaker notices in to the paper much earlier.

Fred noted that the local group Writers to Writers, to which he belongs, will no longer hold their 6:30 Monday meetings at the West Side Hastings and is looking for other venues. Board members suggested West Side libraries and police substations.

In old business, Jan mentioned that we are not the only Sisters in Crime chapter with questions about local chapter membership vs National SinC's expressed desire to have all local members be members of National. We may meet the requirement with the block on our membership form for local members to indicate whether local members also belong to national. It doesn't look like National will make any declaration of the necessity for local members to join National any time soon.

Under new business, Fred requested funds for a check stamp with our account number and the note "for deposit only" that would make credit union deposits easier. The motion passed unanimously. Estimated cost of the rubber stamp is \$23.50.

The next board meeting was set for 7 p.m. March 18 at Jan Bray's house. Jan adjourned the meeting at 8:04.

—Respectfully submitted, Rob Kresge, Secretary

Summary of the Board Meeting Minutes of Sisters in Crime Croak & Dagger Chapter, ABQ, NM, March 18, 2013

Board members present: President Jan Bray, Vice President Joan Saberhagen, Treasurer Fred Aiken, Secretary Rob Kresge, Program Chair Rita Herther, and *Nooseletter* editor Linda Triegel.

President Jan Bray called the meeting to order at her home at 7:07 p.m. Minutes from the January meeting have been finalized and will be published in the March *Nooseletter* along with the final version of these minutes.

The Treasurer reported that as of February 28, there is \$5 in the chapter savings account, which allows us to have a chapter checking account. In the latter, we had \$2,659.49. There are four membership dues checks to be deposited and one more \$20 check also to be deposited. That would bring the total checking account balance to \$2,759.49. We will need to reimburse the Program Chair for the honorarium gift card to our February speaker. From last meeting's membership figure and the four more we have received checks from, our current paid membership stands at 34.

The March general meeting speaker will be medical mystery author J.L. Greger. April will be former UNM President and author Richard Peck, who has spoken to us before. Crime scene photographer Jerry Goffe, postponed from March, will speak to us at the May meeting.

In other activities, the Albuquerque Little Theater will once again have a mystery play in the January-February time frame. Website Coordinator Susan Zates will report on the play at a future board meeting.

Announcements:

--In the absence of the chapter president, Vice President Joan Saberhagen will host the March 26 general meeting.

--Linda Triegel is still seeking an apprentice to learn the ropes of assembling the *Nooseletter*. She will seek volunteers through the March *Nooseletter* and at the March general meeting.

--Secretary Rob Kresge will be traveling from mid-May through mid-September; former Secretary Fred Aiken will record the minutes of the May, July, and September Board meetings.

--Despite the pre-emption of last month's general meeting by our police hosts, chapter general meetings will continue to be held at the James Dwyer substation for the rest of this year. Keeping in mind the capacity of the parking lot and lack of lighting therein, the board will consider alternative sites for 2014, with a decision by October. 2013 bookmarks to be printed will continue to list the substation as our venue.

New Business:

--A motion to print 1,000 bookmarks for this year was approved.

--Joan mentioned a new community center opened fairly close to the substation, at the corner of Comanche and Juan Tabo. It is small and charges a fee.

--The North Domingo Baca Multigenerational Center, where we held our February general meeting, is larger and charges no room use fees.

--The Random House model of e-book publishing, in which authors share the production costs and Random House would retain all publishing and subsidiary rights, included performance rights, has been stirring controversy and was discussed as information only.

--Secretary Rob Kresge will represent our chapter at the Sisters in Crime national breakfast meeting at Malice Domestic in Washington in early May.

The next chapter board meeting will take place at 7 p.m. on May 20, also at President Jan Bray's home.

—Respectfully submitted, Rob Kresge, Secretary