



SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSELETTER

Volume IX, Number 5 — July 2013

†Expert Testimony†

The health of publishing and bookstore businesses is critical to both writers and readers. Both are changing rapidly. In publishing, the big six is down to the five with the completion of the Penguin-Random House merger.

Is less competition good for either authors or readers? What about the financial health of the e-book business? Barnes and Noble is losing money on the Nook. The New York Times says that, as competition wanes, Amazon is cutting back on discounts. Writers and publishers complain that Amazon became the biggest force in bookselling by discounting so heavily it often lost money. Books were essentially loss leaders. Amazon sells about one in four printed books and has a substantial e-book business.

Anybody see classic anti-trust problems here? Speaking of which, five major book publishers settled a price fixing case on e-book prices and Apple lost at trial on conspiracy to raise prices. It seems they agreed to charge more than Amazon as far as I could tell. It looks like publishers, writers, and readers are caught in the middle again. What will the fallout be?

E-book economics made headlines in a presentation to investors by HarperCollins. E-books are very profitable. It showed that savings on printing, binding, and distribution make up for the lower revenue from lower e-book prices and increased profitability is coming primarily off the backs of authors. Every time a hardcover sale is replaced by an e-book sale, the publisher makes \$2.60 more per copy and the author makes \$1.58 less.

Brian DeFiore, chairman of the Association of Authors' Representatives Electronic Rights Committee, puts it another way. If the author made the same \$4.20 royalty on the e-book as he or she would have made on the hardcover, the publisher would still be making an improved profit of \$6.28.

Where do writers and readers benefit or even survive with this situation? We have fewer publishers, fewer bookstores, a strange anti-trust situation, and less pay for authors. Is writing becoming a hobby rather than a profession? What does this mean for readers?

— Jan Bray, *President*

Don't Miss It! **Tuesday, July 23, at 7 p.m.**

Croak & Dagger's July program will be a unique one—an authors' round table featuring: Past C&D president **Margaret Tessler**, author of mystery novels and short stories; **Pat Wood**, current C&D Membership chair whose first mystery, *The Easter Egg Murder*, was published this year; **Albert Noyer**, whose latest Father Jake mystery is *The Ghosts of Glorieta*; and **Sarah Baker**, a New Orleans native and author of the Dassas Cormier mystery series. The authors will each speak briefly about their books and careers, then answer questions.


[Ed note: Look for bios of the speakers throughout this issue of the *Nooseletter*.]

Our August speaker will be Kay Lewis “Happy” Shaw, an award-winning artist, writer and teacher, as well as a former literary agent and now a small publisher. She has helped many writers get published, improve their work, and place and win in contests.

One Smart Cookie, the first novel in her comic mystery series set in Albuquerque, was released in March under her pen name of Joanna Blalock. She is also published children’s picture books, magazines, newspapers, novels, inspirational nonfiction, and books for writers.

Sarah will talk about developing characters for a mystery series.

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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Theater Party!

Croak & Dagger is arranging with the Adobe Theater for a group of our members to attend the afternoon performance of the comic mystery *Is He Dead?* by Mark Twain on Sunday, September 15. A sign-up sheet will be available at the July meeting.

Adapted from a little-known 1898 short story, the play was first published only in 2003 after being discovered among Twain’s papers in the archives of the University of California. The dramatic adaptation by David Ives was produced on Broadway in 2007.

Taking place in Paris in 1846, the play focuses on an impoverished artist who stages his own death in order to increase the value of his paintings. Combining elements of farce and social satire, the play raises questions about fame, greed, and the value of art.

Albert Noyer says about his work, “Stylistically, I’d probably be described as an illustrator, yet I try to make the image work without losing the revealing characteristics of the medium. “Since a great deal of my subject matter runs the danger of a picturesque solution, exploring the medium is essential to balance that tendency toward tightness which many illustrators have.”

After receiving a BFA degree from Wayne University, Detroit, Michigan, Noyer worked as a commercial artist in Detroit studios, then earned teacher certification and master’s degrees in art education and teaching humanities. Since moving to New Mexico, in 1986 with his wife Jennifer, he has continuously shown in art galleries and won awards in local exhibitions.

A member of SouthWest Writers, Albert is the author of three historical novels, *The Cybelene Conspiracy* (2005), *The Secundus Papyrus* (2003) and *The Saint’s Day Deaths* (2000). Of his writing, Noyer says, “I chose the fifth century in which to set my novels because, over the last 40 years, that formerly discounted era was re-evaluated and seen to be critical in creating religious and political institutions that have survived into our modern times/”

Noose News

Rob Kresge, halfway through his and Julie’s Grand Tour of Europe, reports from St. Gallen, Switzerland, “We’ve been lost with a rental car, lost on foot, and on July 18th got onto a wrong train, then couldn’t get off another train before it left the station with us. But we’re having great food, wonderful temperatures, and no rain in a month now.”

Rob’s latest book is *Saving Lincoln* (see www.robertkresge.com for more). He is faithfully still reading and writing reviews of mysteries (see page 9).

The Lone Wolf Agenda, the fourth book in **Joe Badal**’s Danforth Saga, a series featuring Bob Danforth, his wife Liz, and their son, Michael, was released June 25.

This latest installment pairs Bob, who’s been called out of retirement by The Company, with Michael, a senior DELTA Force officer, and pits them against an OPEC-supported terrorist group allied with a Mexican drug cartel.

Learn more about Joe’s books at www.josephbadalbooks.com and click the link to his blog to read about “Everyday Heroes.”

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.

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 Writer's Block

A column on craft

At the June 25 C&D meeting, Steve Brewer reminded us, in his ~~own inimitable~~ ~~incomparable~~ unique style of some of the common mistakes ~~which~~ that make our stories harder to read:

ACCEPT / EXCEPT

Accept is a verb. (This store does not accept unwashed bottles for recycling.) **Except** is usually a preposition (everyone except thee and me), but sometimes a verb, meaning to exempt. (You are excepted from attending the meeting.)

ALL RIGHT

All right is two words (remember “all is right”), not one. Do not confuse **all right** with altogether, almost, or already. “Alright” is just bad spelling.

FEWER / LESS

Use **fewer** when referring to units that can be counted. Use **less** when they can be measured but are usually considered in bulk. (Cottage cheese is *less* fattening than ice cream because it contains *fewer* calories and *less* sugar and fat.)

FOREWORD / FORWARD

A **foreword** is an introduction, as in a book (it comes *before* the words). **Forward** as an adverb means ahead. (Having waded through the *foreword*, she plunged *forward* into Chapter One.)

IF / WHETHER

Use **whether** when a choice is involved. (I don't know whether to laugh or cry.) Otherwise, use **if**. (She knew that if she didn't finish, she'd have to work all night.) Since *whether* implies a choice, you don't need *or not* attached to it. Also avoid the redundant phrase *if and when*; one or the other word will be sufficient. (*If* it rains much more, the fish will drown. *When* the rain stops, let's swim in the puddles.)

ITS/IT'S

Its is the possessive, just like “his.” (The cat licked its paw.)

It's is a contraction (like can't and won't), short for “it is.” (It's a lovely day tomorrow.) Remember one and you'll remember the other. Don't be confused by the rule that tells you to form the possessive by adding 's. **Its** is the exception that proves the rule.

LAY/LIE

Lay means to place, put down, or deposit. As a transitive verb, it requires a direct object (the thing you lay down). The past tense of “lay” is **laid**. (Lay the book on the table. He **laid** it down. She has **laid** her books next to it. They have been **laying** things down all over the house.)

Lie means to be in a reclining position or to be situated. It is an intransitive verb and does not take an object. The past of lie is **lay**. (Let it lie. He **lay** there without moving. She had just **lain** down beside him. They have been **lying** there for hours reading Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*.)

Lie, of course, also means to tell a falsehood, in which case it is conjugated differently: I lie; he lied; we have lied like troopers; they have lied to us all along.

THAT / WHO

That refers to things (The apple that I gave the teacher had a worm in it); **who** to people (The teacher who screeched is the one who bit into the apple). If this were not so, *Who's Who* would be called *That's That*.

UNIQUE

A thing that is **unique** is like no other and so cannot be qualified or compared. A thing cannot therefore be very, more, most, or rather unique. Other “absolute words” are perfect, divine, fatal, universal, final, equal, total, and terms of geometry (round, square, etc.).

And furthermore...Adverbs such as *very*, *quite*, *somewhat*, *slightly*, and *rather* add nothing to the word they modify. Indeed (there's another one), they dilute the force of the writing. Avoid them.

Reading as an Agent: What They're Looking For

Excerpted from

www.childrenspublishing.blogspot.com: “This month we asked the agents: *What is different about the way you read the first pages of a manuscript as an agent versus how you would read them as a reader or critique partner?*”

Ginger Clark, Curtis Brown Ltd.

There is no difference. I read the first pages of a book thinking about whether a customer in a bookstore somewhere will pick up that book and start reading it and be enthralled. And if that customer won't be enthralled, then why? And are the problems something I can assist an author in fixing, or not?

Catherine Drayton, Inkwell Management

That's a really good question! When I read the first pages of an unsolicited manuscript as an agent, I'm hoping that the author will impress me, make me feel that I'm in the presence of a writer who has command of the language and their characters. I am looking for a distinctive, confident voice that isn't afraid to take risks and which makes me curious to keep reading. I'm basically looking to make a quick decision. I'm also always thinking about my clients - how the book I'm reading relates to their work in terms of quality and the market. It's a 24-hour job being an agent!

Kelly Sonnack, Andrea Brown Literary Agency

When I read a submission, I read it like I would a “real” book - to be delighted, surprised, and to fall in love with the characters. I want to read it until the very last word because I'm loving it that much. Unfortunately, that doesn't usually happen and I have to stop reading when the story isn't carrying me away, is too familiar, the character isn't someone I want to go on a

journey with, or any of the other reasons that a manuscript stops keeping my interest. (I would stop reading a published book for any of these reasons too.) Of course, many of the authors whom I've offered representation to had sent me submissions that I still thought needed work. So, beyond simply falling in love or being carried away, I need to see that there are problems that can be fixed, and that are within my abilities and time limits.

Juliet Mushens, The Agency Group, Ltd.

When I read as an agent there are three different responses to what I'm reading. One is the ‘reader’ response, which is fairly instinctive stuff. Is it gripping? Do I like the characters? Do I want to know what happens? One is a more technical response which is where my editorial side comes to the fore. Does the dialogue feel believable? Does the style work? Do the sentences flow? Do the character motivations work? And finally I consider it with my ‘sales’ hat on. What would an editor think? Who would I send it to? How would I pitch it? That makes it sound very complicated when in reality it is much more of a gut feeling. However, if I am seriously considering something I am always aware of these three aspects to my reading process.

Marie Lamba, Jennifer de Chiara Literary Agency

I think when you read an opening as a critique partner, you've got your “editing hat” on. Meaning you are on the lookout for ways the manuscript can be improved right from the get-go. But as a reader, you are looking for a way into the story. Something that makes you flip the page and want to continue. With my “agent hat” on (which I imagine is large, flouncy, and probably has purple feathers sprouting from it), I'm seeing things more as a reader would. Does the writing and story pull me in and make me want to continue flipping pages? Is this a book that I'd purchase? Or would I set it back on the shelf and move on to something else? As an

agent, I'd hope to not see a ton of things that need fixing in those opening pages, since I assume the writer is sending me her very best work. Sometimes the pluses in a manuscript's opening will have me overlook bits of clumsy writing and read on, but more often it'll signal that this manuscript isn't at the level it needs to be for me to take it on.

Carlie Webber, CK Webber Associates

The biggest difference in reading a manuscript as an agent vs reading for entertainment is that I have to look at the pages with an eye towards the current book market and how well the manuscript fits into its gaps. I have to ask myself not only, "Do I like this book?" but "Will someone else like this book and want to invest time and money in it?" Reading as an agent means reading not only for pleasure, but for commerce.

Gina Panettieri, Talcott Notch Literary Services

When I read opening pages to a manuscript, naturally I'm looking for my 'reader reaction', but I'm also reading with an immediate eye toward the market. So not only am I gauging my enjoyment of the writing, but I'm evaluating where the book might fit and who I've heard asking for a project like this, how fresh and unique the concept feels, what I know is already 'in the hopper' at publishing houses that would compete with this book, and how it could be positioned. That doesn't mean I won't keep reading if something is amazing and I'm not immediately getting a clear view on those issues. A beautiful voice and compelling character will keep me turning the pages.

Laura Bradford, Bradford Literary Agency

When I read the first pages of a manuscript it is always in the interest of find a new voice, a new author to represent. And we are in the business of representing what we believe we can sell. When I begin the sample pages I would have already read the cover/query letter which will

have given me a brief introduction to the story. With the genre, hook, word count in mind, I may be starting out feeling like the work is super promising because of the general state of the market or a total long shot. At the end of the day, every agent knows that we can love something that may not be very marketable. And we can love work that isn't in our best interests to take on. We have to be mindful of business and not just purely at the mercy of our emotional reactions.

Margaret Tessler has been writing stories since second grade, when (according to her mother) she wrote an imaginative tale about the family cat going to a honky-tonk. Margaret was born in Houston and lived "all across Texas" for nearly 25 years. She attended Texas Western College (now UTEP) in El Paso, then taught third grade before "retiring" to become a stay-at-home mom.

She and her family moved to Albuquerque in 1961. Although she had continued writing stories off and on for years, she didn't become serious until inspired by both Lois Duncan and Rudolfo Anaya while taking creative writing classes at UNM. She was also encouraged by classmates and by *Daily Lobo* editor Debbie Levy to write humor articles for the campus newspaper.

Further encouragement came from a critique group that grew out of those classes and is still going strong. Her short story *Another Day of Loving* placed ninth out of over 2400 entries in the 1986 *Writer's Digest* short-story contest. Three of her mysteries—*Tangled Webs*, *Black Widow White Lies*, and *Deadly Triangles*—were New Mexico Book Co-op Awards finalists.

Besides being a charter member of Croak and Dagger, Margaret's a member of Sisters in Crime, SouthWest Writers, New Mexico Book Association, and New Mexico Book Co-op. In addition to writing, she enjoys traveling and spending time with family.

More agents next page...

Jennifer Mishler, Literary Counsel

As I read manuscripts that are sent to me, the first few pages undergo the most scrutiny. I have a checklist beside me with questions like: Do I like how this starts? Are the main characters interesting? Do I care about them? Does this fit my list? If I find myself wanting to skip past the first three chapters, odds are that I will most likely reject a manuscript. If the story cannot keep me interested, then how is it going to keep a reader's attention?

Jessica Regel, Jean V. Naggar Literary Agency

I actually don't see a difference in how I read a book as an agent versus how I read a book as a reader. The questions are the same: Does it immediately draw me in? Is it well-written? Is it fresh (or have I read an opening like this a million times before)? Does it flow nicely? Do I get a clear sense of setting and character? Ultimately, *do I want to keep reading?* As an agent *and* as a reader, I have a limited amount of time I can devote to reading, so I'm constantly asking myself that question. If a book doesn't *demand* that I keep reading, I won't... and neither will the editor that I'm trying to sell the book to... and neither will the reader who picks it up in a bookstore.

Gordon Warnock, Foreword Literary Agency

When seeking an agent, it's all about finding the perfect match for your work. You might find someone who handles your genre, but if they can't connect with your work, keep looking. I get asked to read a lot "as an agent" for critiques and consultations, and for those, I'm quicker to let go and be purely objective. Sure, if it works for me, I'll want to snap it up, but I tend to be more focused on matters of craft and marketability for the benefit of the author. Most of what I critique doesn't excite me enough to garner an offer of representation. But that's fine when I get an email later thanking me for helping them attract an agent or publisher.

Christa Heschke, McIntosh & Otis, Inc.

It's paramount that, as a writer, you really think about your opening pages as you're writing and after you finished the novel. Do they foreshadow what's to come and pull readers in? This is also why critique partners or trusted readers can be such a crucial asset to have in your corner. Think of them as a test audience before sending to agents (and beyond)—just make sure it's someone who isn't afraid to be completely honest with you.

Patricia Smith Wood's first mystery novel, *The Easter Egg Murder*, stems from a real-life New Mexico murder case in 1949. Friends and relatives knew many of the details, or knew the victim, and Pat conceived the idea of fictionalizing the case in a novel. "My idea was to create an interesting mystery, loosely based on the actual case, but I would have the advantage of revealing a fictional killer."

"I made several attempts at writing the mystery," as Pat reveals on her website (www.patriciasmithwood.com), "but didn't find the voice and the characters I wanted until 2000. Since then, I've created some wonderful characters who I hope will live on in a series."

Pat is now working on the second book in the series, *Murder for Breakfast*.

Sarah Baker grew up in New Orleans, the city of music, food, and wonderful stories. After running off to Alaska to enjoy a taste of the wild pipeline days, she returned to the Lower 48 and earned a master's degree in engineering.

Writing as S.H. Baker, Sarah has penned four installments in the Dassas Cormier Mystery Series so far. But she is most proud of her newest release, *Return to Marshall's Bayou*, a full-cast audio production of the first Dassas mystery from Albuquerque's Siren Audio Studios. Listen to a sample at her website, www.SHBaker.com.

My So-Called 'Post-Feminist' Life in Arts and Letters

By Deborah Copaken Kogan

Excerpted from an article in The Nation, 4/29/13

The Barbie critic was at that time a freelancer, so his editor suggests I call him at home for his e-mail address, a relatively new thing at the time and not easily obtainable otherwise. A few weeks later, I'm publicly shamed by this man at the National Book Critics Circle Awards when, though he stops short of naming me, he tells the story of the crazy woman who called him at home to complain about her review, though I was just calling for his e-mail address. Salon picks up the story and publishes both my full name and their own take, in which the critic's amusing if false hearsay is printed as fact, without ever having called to ask me for a rebuttal.

It's now 2006. I've just sold my first novel, *Suicide Wood*, a modern-day allegory of Dante's *Inferno* about a mother who kills herself and her children. I'm told books with the word "suicide" in the title never sell and that I should keep my mouth shut about the Dante business: women—my novel's alleged audience—will be turned off by Dante. And suicide. My title is changed to *Between Here and April*. I'm not sure what this means, but I'm told, once again, I have no say in the matter.

It's 2009. I should be getting over it by now, and I'm trying, I really am, but then my third book, *Hell Is Other Parents*, a collection of personal essays, is published with a pink cover and placed in the parenting section. Prior to publication, I try changing the color to robin's egg blue, the classification to memoir, and the title to *Screwing in the Marital Bed*, the title of one of the essays, which I think better encapsulates the thrust of the book. I am told, for the third time, that I have no say in the matter.

It's now 2012. My fourth book, *The Red Book*, future nominee for the prestigious yet controversial Women's Prize for Fiction and *New York Times* bestseller, gets passed over for a review in *The New York Times Book Review*, just like its predecessors. One morning, I hit a few independent bookstores to sign stock. "Was it reviewed in the *Times*?" one bookseller asks me, searching his computer for any sign of the novel. I tell him no. "Then we probably don't stock it"

I consider throwing in the towel. The lack of respectful coverage, the slut-shaming and name-calling, all the girly book covers and not-my-titles despite high literary aspirations, has worn me down, made me question everything: my abilities, my future, my life. This is what sexism does best: it makes you feel crazy for desiring parity and hopeless about ever achieving it. A few months later, at the Sun Valley Writers' Conference, a song pops up on my iPhone as I'm walking back to my hotel room: Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone." "When you ain't got nothing," Dylan sings, "you got nothing to lose."

Yes, I think. Yes.

I suppress the three words that have haunted me my entire adult life—"They'll smear you"—and choose Dylan's instead, composing a carefully worded private e-mail to the editor of *The New York Times Book Review*, alerting him to his neglect of all four of my published books. He responds graciously with two sentences in which he promises to share this information with his colleagues. Eight months later, the novel remains unreviewed.

The past is not gone. Or as Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Until it is, we should not be expected to get over it.

I'm proud of my nomination for a prestigious if controversial British literary prize given only to women. I'm honored to be mentioned in the same breath as my fellow nominees, whose books I've been tearing through of late with relish and awe.

The Women's Prize for Fiction—and three cheers for the transparency of its new name—is not a "sexist con-trick" by any definition of sexism that I know. To the contrary, it redresses centuries of literary sexism, exclusion, cultural bias, invisibility. There's a reason J.K. Rowling's publishers demanded that she use initials instead of "Joanne": it's the same reason Mary Anne Evans used the pen name George Eliot; the same reason Robert Southey, then England's poet laureate, wrote to Charlotte Brontë: "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be."

In fact, I'm thinking about starting a women's prize here in the United States, to be given out once a year, every year, until gender parity in the arts is achieved.

I figure that should take me from now until my obituary.

Ed Note: Check out: www.aroomofherownfoundation.org

Reviews

Rob's Random Shots

July Case File Number 1

A Serpent's Tooth by Craig Johnson, Viking, 2013 (HC)

If you love Craig Johnson's Walt Longmire books and the TV series, you'll like this latest entry. As devotees know, the TV series takes liberties with Walt and his deputies; the screenwriters are using Craig's 400-page book of ideas that haven't made it into novels yet. The other major difference is that the TV series is almost entirely lacking in the humor of most characters' dialogue and Walt's thoughts in first person narrative.

Well, rejoice, novel fans. Craig breaks new ground in this book. The humor is there, mostly at the beginning and in the middle. By the time push comes to shove in the second half of *A Serpent's Tooth*, humor takes a back seat to violence. In this novel, war comes to Absaroka County and There Will Be Blood.

Series characters will be harmed and endangered. One will die and two others will be hospitalized in critical condition, their situations only partially resolved at the end. Craig twice hides the wounded characters and their fates from us and resolves those only in subsequent chapters.

On the bright side, Henry Standing Bear and Vic have major roles, the relationship with Vic deepens, the dialogue crackles (Craig has a PhD in playwriting), and the plot moves rapid-fire. By the end, you'll feel drained.

And don't forget to have a hanky or Kleenex handy. You'll need it. I did.♦

Key:

PB = Paperback
TP = Trade paperback
HC = Hardcover

July Case File Number 2

Bonereapers: A Dinah Pelerin Novel by Jeanne Matthews, Poisoned Pen Press, 2012 (HC)

By now you may have noticed that I've reviewed all four of Jeanne Matthews' Dinah Pelerin globe-trotting mysteries. I participated in a panel with Jeanne and other authors at Left Coast Crime in Colorado Springs last March, and after enjoying one of her books, I've been getting the rest of them on Kindle, just the right vehicle while globe-trotting.

Astute readers will note that this volume is the third in the series and that I reviewed the fourth in a previous issue. This only matters slightly (see below), since like most series, books can usually be read in any order; they should stand alone. Exceptions to this might include the deaths of series characters, where reading out of order leads to unanswered questions. Not in this case.

The minor blip in reviewing *Her Boyfriend's Bones* in a previous *Nooseletter* is that Dinah's boyfriend, Norwegian Police Detective Inspector Thor Ramberg, was a major character in the third and fourth novels. BUT although he and Dinah cross swords in *Bonereapers*, by no stretch of the imagination does he seem like a boyfriend serious enough to visit Dinah on a Greek island in the fourth book.

That aside, Jeanne Matthews continues in this book, as in the other three, to be a world champ in changing foreign locales in every book, and using an entirely different (except for Thor) cast of characters/suspects in each one. So far, she's convincingly set novels in Australia's Northern Territory, Hawaii, the northernmost human habitation (Svalbard, Norway), and on a Greek island. How she finds time and money to travel to these places amazes me. I'd like to have gone with her and know most of her travels have been in person, not just by research.

This novel is set at the international seed repository outside Longyearben, Norway, in the dead (pun intended) of winter (23 hours of darkness) over Christmas. The entirely new slate of characters includes a visiting group of

US politicians (including the leading Republican nominee for President), other Senators, and staffers. The murder victim is a whistle-blowing Norwegian journalist. The weather and darkness are so important to the story that they seem like major characters.

I have to say this chilling story (pun intended again) baffled me, and I couldn't uncover the real motive or the killer until the author revealed it. You'll have the same fun with this one that I did.

One minor quibble: There are so many suspects in each of these books and they get so much "screen time," I wish Jeanne would include a list of them and their relationships at the beginning of each book, a *Dramatis Personae* that was much in vogue in classical mysteries of the 20s and 30s. I almost have to take notes to keep track of who's who. ♦

—Rob Kresge (www.robertkresge.com)

Peggy Sue Got Murdered by Tess Gerritson.
Harper Monogram, 1994, 276 pp (PB)

I enjoyed this early book of Gerritson's when it first came out, and finding it still on my shelf, decided to give it a second read. It's still a good tale, but in hindsight it looks like a practice run for the author's much better known Rizzoli and Isles series.

M.J. Novak is a streetwise medical examiner in the fictional city of Albion (think Boston) and, having grown up in one of its seedier neighborhoods, thinks she's seen it all. When a red-haired woman named Peggy Sue mysteriously dies—the first victim of what, when more murdered young women turn up, might be an epidemic—M.J.'s only clue is a matchbook clutched in the victim's fist. The telephone number scrawled inside leads her to Adam Quantrell, the sexy president of a highly respectable pharmaceutical company. With nothing else to go on, M.J. reluctantly accepts the enigmatic Adam's help.

I notice that the author has this title listed on her website as one of her romance novels, and the romance plot is more plausible than the

opposites-attract cliché might lead you to expect, and I have to hand it to Adam for not caring that his \$400 suits are going to be the worse for wear if he hangs around with M.J. much longer—particularly when she ventures into her old neighborhood in search of answers.

The technology is good for an occasional eye-roll—who'd have thought that things would change so much in 20 years? No one has a decent computer, much less a cell phone. Still, it's the story that counts. ♦

—Linda Triegel (ljt23@earthlink.net)

Series Mysteries

In the Woods by Tana French, Hodder & Stoughton, 2007, 496 pp (HC).

In the first book of the Dublin Murder Squad mystery series set in modern day Ireland, Detectives Cassie Maddox and Rob Ryan investigate the murder of a young girl whose body was found in the woods near Knocknaree. Rob is all too familiar with those woods – 20 years ago he and his two best friends went into the woods to play on a summer day, and only he came out. Trouble is, Rob can't remember what happened. He was sent to boarding school, no one on the Murder Squad knows of his past, and he hopes that by investigating this murder, he can regain his memories and solve the original case as well.

Ryan and his partner work together exceptionally well and become best friends. They include a third detective, Sam O'Neill, in their after-work meals and case discussions. The trio work tirelessly to solve the case, seeming to get nowhere. They pursue red herrings galore. Rob tries too hard to force his memory and strains his working relationships. He has a great breakthrough in the case, but unforeseen complications arise.

The story is long, with plenty of detailed police work and intensely psychological analysis of relationships – which I find wonderful, but other readers may prefer more action and a simpler resolution. The end is not at

all what you expect, by no means neatly wrapped with a bow, and it left me curious as to what happened later in the detectives' lives.

It's no surprise that the book won several major awards, and I'm eager to continue the series with *The Likeness*. ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

Death at Blenheim Palace by Robin Paige.
Berkley Prime Crime, 2006, 309 pp (PB)

I once walked from Oxford to Blenheim Palace. It's eight miles. I was training for a 35-mile London-to-Brighton walk sponsored by the American Banks in London. I walked that too. My bones were a lot younger then.

I digress. So does this mystery novel. Not that the digressions aren't enjoyable, especially for those of us fascinated by English social history. Real people—Winston Churchill, Consuelo (née Vanderbilt), Duchess of Marlborough, even T.H. (Ned) Lawrence—take part. The picture of life at Blenheim in 1903 seems accurate (not my period), though I noticed a few chancy facts and title usages.

Early on in the story, something happens to a housemaid, but it's a dozen chapters before Kitty's name even comes up again, and in the meanwhile we're diverted by another young woman's disappearance. If, like me, you cheat and look at the end notes, you'll learn that she was a real historical personage too, so I was pretty sure she hadn't been murdered.

The main plot—I think it's the main plot—concerns a gang of jewel thieves led by a master criminal referred to as “the Napoleon of Crime.” At this point, you're not sure if this plot is semi-historical/biographical or derived from Sherlock Holmes. However, the king and queen are coming to a house party at Blenheim, and the idea that jewels might be stolen from them and the several other titled guests, puts the Marlboroughs in a quandary, and it's up to Kate and John Sheridan (he's a lord, but I'm a little fuzzy about what kind so I won't give him a title) to stop the plot. Oh, and find out what happened to Kitty. Did I mention that the Sheridans are the detectives in this series?

I'm only kidding, honest. *Death at Blenheim Palace* (#11 in this historical mystery series), co-written by the husband-and-wife team of Susan Wittig Albert and Bill Albert, is an enjoyable read, more so if you've ever toured that huge and most impressive palace.

Each chapter is headed by an excerpt from one of the authors' research sources. The best for mystery writers comes from, of all people, Henry David Thoreau in his 1850 journal: “Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, such as when you find a trout in the milk.” ♦

—Linda Triegel (ljt23@earthlink.net)

Dead and Berried by Karen MacInerney,
Midnight Ink, 2007, 312 pp (PC)

This is book 2 of the Gray Whale Inn Mystery series set in modern-day Cranberry Island, Maine.

Natalie Barnes left behind a broken engagement and all the aggravation of big city life when she moved from Texas to start living her dream of owning and operating a bed-and-breakfast inn on a small island. Her new best friend Charlene runs the post office and general store, and Natalie has started a romantic relationship with the local policeman, John, who is also her neighbor.

Once again developers are threatening the peace, natural beauty and wildlife on the island. In the first book, *Murder on the Rocks*, the rare tern population was at risk; now the natural cranberry bogs that give the island its name are doomed if the developers prevail.

That's not all Natalie has to resolve. A local woman who helps with laundry has not come to work for days, and dirty linen is piling up. Charlene is infatuated with a new lover, who doesn't impress Natalie at all, so the two friends are not speaking to each other. Rumor has it that the Gray Whale Inn is haunted; Natalie hears bumps in the night and heads to the island museum to research an old murder.

When new murders occur and Detective Grimes considers Charlene a suspect, Natalie promises her friend to find the real killer.

I love the setting— a small island, a just-friends atmosphere with summer crowds gone, fall weather, a new experience for a Texas girl. Her inn has only one telephone, no Internet connection. She rides a bicycle to town for errands or pilots a small boat to explore the island. It seems like a restful place for a relaxing “unplugged” vacation; too bad the Gray Whale Inn is fictional. I look forward to reading more of the series. ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

The Anatomist's Apprentice by Tessa Harris, Kensington 2012, 320 pp (PB)

The first book of the Dr. Thomas Silkstone mystery series set in late 18th century England. The protagonist is based upon early pioneers in forensic medicine.

Thomas Silkstone is originally from Philadelphia, teaching and practicing medicine in England in his early twenties. (It's odd that he is referred to throughout the book as a “New Englander.”) Thomas is fascinated by the wealth of knowledge obtained from autopsies and has become sufficiently expert to be called upon to teach the art as well as to resolve mysterious deaths.

Thomas is called to the country estate of Sir Edward Crick, who died a painful and suspicious death. Edward's sister Lydia is married to Michael Farrell, who rumor has it poisoned the landowner to gain control of the estate. Lydia is no longer smitten with her husband and has her own doubts about her husband's role in her brother's death.

Thomas presents inconclusive findings in the court trial. A decision is reached by general opinion rather than by evidence, and Farrell is jailed. When suspicious events and additional deaths occur, Thomas is forced to explore further possibilities for causes of death.

The mystery has interesting historical details and plot twists. Unfortunately the romance is trite. An unexpected treat was the glossary at the end of the book, clear proof of careful research by the author. ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

If You Can't Stand the Heat by Robin Allen, Midnight Ink, 2011, 288 pp.

This is the first book of the Poppy Markham: Culinary Cop mystery series set in modern-day Austin, Texas. Poppy worked for years at her father's restaurant, but now she is a health inspector (a restaurant owner's worst nightmare).

Poppy's stepsister Ursula is the head chef at Markham Grille and furious at the Michelin Star Chef, who seems to be taking over the restaurant. Poppy agrees to help out in the kitchen for a grand reopening featuring the Michelin chef's recipes. When he is found stabbed to death with Ursula's knife, and Ursula is arrested, Poppy agrees to find the real killer.

The writing style is engaging and the heroine likable. There are red herrings and subplots galore. Poppy's ex-boyfriend would like to reconcile, and helps her investigate. Her neighbors John With and John Without come to her rescue. Poppy uncovers business deals affecting the restaurant, and she can't challenge her father for details because he's in the hospital, zealously guarded by her stepmother, Nina. One of the waitresses seems to have been privy to the Chef's plans, but won't reveal them to Poppy.

Poppy barely survives a tense confrontation with the killer (who she identifies by process of elimination), frees her sister and saves the restaurant. Her next escapade, *Stick a Fork In It*, should be equally enjoyable. ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

Murder in the Marais by Cara Black, Soho Crime, 1999, 354 pp (HC)

This is the first book of the Aimée Leduc Investigations series set in modern-day Paris. Aimée is a private investigator specializing in computer crimes with her partner René – a dwarf.

Since her father was killed in the line of duty as a police detective, Aimée has resolved to stay out of violent crime investigation. But

she cannot refuse when Soli Hecht, a Holocaust survivor, asks her to decode an image and deliver it to an elderly Jewish woman in the Marais, Paris' historic Jewish quarter.

It's easy for her to decrypt the image – she's a computer whiz – but when she goes to deliver it, she finds the woman has been murdered. Aimée stays on the case to find the killer. Plus she's curious about the people in the photo, once she sees a similar photo in the victim's home.

Aimée discovers a web of secrets dating back to WWII, at its heart a love affair between an SS officer and a Jewish woman, and the tragic practice of denunciations for pay within the Jewish community. Since the murder in the Marais is thought to be the work of the French Aryan group Les Blancs Nationaux, Aimée goes undercover to group meetings, and succumbs to the sex appeal of its leader.

The story picks up pace as Aimée survives one hair-raising escapade after another, bouncing back from lethal attacks like a cartoon character. Her wild adventures are reminiscent of a James Bond caper, but even less plausible. I don't plan to continue the series.

I listened to the audio book version for the novelty of the French street and place names pronunciation. ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

Exit Music by Ian Rankin, Orion, 2008, 400 pp (PB)

In the 17th book of the Inspector Rebus series set in modern-day Edinburgh, it's November 2006, the final week before John Rebus retires. He's reviewing "cold" (unsolved) cases with Siobhan Clarke, hoping she will keep on them, as they expect she will be promoted into his position after his retirement. They are called out to a murder scene: a popular Russian poet has been found dead.

At first the crime looks like a mugging gone wrong. As they interview the people who found the body and called the police, and investigate the victim's recent activities, they begin to discover the victim's ties to the underworld and to government officials.

The poet had dissident views – did Russian officials consider him a risk? High-ranking government officers and business leaders are wining and dining Russian politicians – why? Is the poet's death related to a political discussion taping project? Last but not least, Rebus' nemesis, "Big Ger" Cafferty, is involved with the Russians in a business deal.

Rebus' temper gets him suspended, and Siobhan is put in charge of the investigation. She adds Todd Goodyear to her team, an officer from another branch who is eager to try Criminal Investigation Division (CID) work. Todd's grandfather was convicted based on Rebus' testimony, and Todd's brother is probably dealing drugs, but Todd has chosen a different path. It's easier for Siobhan to bring a new short-term recruit along in her investigation "for training" than to choose between two team members vying for promotion.

The case gets more complex, Rebus working covertly now that he's suspended. Management accused Rebus of making a big case out of simple one. And there are still all the suspicious links they were investigating...what do they all mean, if not related to the poet's death? And who has "Big Ger" under surveillance (besides Rebus)? Officers from another agency do not seem to care about getting to the truth. A recording studio with valuable evidence is torched.

Eventually all the loose ends of the case are solved, including a surprise plot twist or two. Siobhan holds a retirement drinks/dinner event tailor-made for Rebus' preferences, including an iPod retirement gift preloaded with his favorites: "exit music."

I've thoroughly enjoyed the Rebus series, love the mutual respect and friendly banter between Rebus and Clarke. I especially enjoy listening to the audio version, to hear the brogue. I hated to see the series end. ♦

—Susan Zates (smzates@yahoo.com)

[Ed note: At the Hay Festival in June 2012 Rankin announced a further book entitled *Standing in Another Man's Grave*, subsequently released in November 2012].

2013 MEETING DATES

Tuesday, July 23, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, August 27, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, September 24, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, October 22, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, November 26, 7:00 p.m.

Meetings are free to the public.

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

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

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

Summary of Findings

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

†*Nooseletter* Submissions†

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

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

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

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

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

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

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