



SISTERS in CRIME
CROAK & DAGGER
 ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER



THE NOOSE LETTER

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†Expert Testimony†

Do you e-book or not e-book? That is the question--in a new poll. Harris Interactive asked a large sample (2000+) of adults about their reading habits. Some interesting things emerged. According to this survey, they found that 54 percent of Americans read e-books. Harris also found that e-book readers read more books than other Americans. About a third read 20 or more books a year. E-book readers also purchase more books (about double) than other readers. This contrasts with a recent study from Pew, which found that 28 percent of Americans read an e-book in the last year. Why the big difference?

Methodology is the answer. The Harris sample was drawn from a list of people who agreed to participate and it was done on-line. Thus we have two large sources of bias. A sample of people who are active on-line is not the same as a sample of the overall population. Pew did a more classic technique with less selection bias. The true numbers are probably somewhere in between. Another interpretation is that Pew is giving you estimates for the entire US population, while Harris is providing estimates for that part of the population that is active on-line.

There were some tantalizing demographic tidbits in the Harris poll. Two thirds of millennials read at least some books electronically. Harris reported that that on average Americans reported reading 17 books a year in all formats. Baby Boomers and Matures read more in a year (averaging 19 and 25 books

per year respectively) than millennials (13). Women read twice as many books as men. In the Harris poll, two-thirds purchased at least one book in the past year, while one in ten purchased more than 20. The average was 8.

It seems there is a correlation between how much one reads and how one reads it. Those who read either more or exclusively in the e-book format are more likely to read over 20 books in average year (30 percent). This number applies to only 18 percent of mostly or only hardcopy readers. This trend applies to purchases too. E-book purchasers bought approximately twice as many books as those preferring hardcopies.

Don't Miss It!

Tuesday, May 27th, at 7 p.m.

At the May meeting of the Croak & Dagger Chapter of Sisters in Crime, our speaker will be **Judith Van Gieson** of Albuquerque.

Judith is the author of a children's book, a collection of poetry and short stories, and thirteen mystery novels in two series, including the Neil Hamel mysteries, featuring a female Albuquerque lawyer and sleuth, and the Claire Reynier series, which features an archivist and librarian at the Center for Southwest Research at University of New Mexico.

Judith lives in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, where she owns and operates the publishing company ABQ Press.

However, in terms of overall readers, the hardcopy format is predominant. Almost one half of Americans say they only read hardcopy books, with an additional 16 percent saying they read more hardcopy than e-books. About the same percentage say they read about the same number of e-books and hardcopy books. Only 15 percent read more in e-book format and 6 percent use the e-book format exclusively.

What about the trend in the amount read? According to the Harris poll, 51 percent say they are reading about the same number of books. Further reinforcing the interaction between reading format and overall readership, those who read either more or exclusively e-books are more likely to indicate reading more books over the past six months than others. There was no information about genre preferences in quantity of books read or purchased. I wonder how mystery readers would compare (as a sub-set--ed.)? --Jan Bray (ohbray@nmia.com)

Looking Forward to Our June and July Speakers:

On June 24th:

FBI Special Agent Stephan Marshall returns to speak to us on firearms safety and

familiarization. He will bring a variety of firearms to show and demonstrate.

Marshall is currently the Chief Division Counsel for the Albuquerque Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, a position he has held since August 2004. He also serves as the Acting Supervisor of the Strategic Target Action Team, a team of Special Agents targeting drug cartel violence. He has been an agent since 1996, previously serving in Laredo and Austin, Texas.

Besides serving as a certified firearms instructor, Marshall is also a frustrated author, who has given presentations to the Romance Writers of Austin and the Texas Writer's League.

And on July 22nd:

First-time mystery author Laura Sanchez will tell us about her novel *Killer Miracle*, which is set in small town northern New Mexico and involves the murder of a *santero*, a carver of wooden religious icons. She has lived in New Mexico for most of her life, acquiring an education in art and art history along the way, as well as running an architectural design and drafting business and writing for regional publications. Sanchez is also the author of *Freacking Green* and, with Alex Sanchez, of *Adobe Houses for Today* and *Fallingwater in 3D Studio*.

I'm Glad You Asked

Patricia Smith Wood's father, first as a police officer, and later as a career FBI agent, sparked her interest in law, solving crime, and mystery.

*After retiring from a varied and successful business career (including eighteen months working at the FBI, being a security officer at a savings & loan, and owning her own computer business), she attended writing seminars, conferences, and in 2009 graduated from the FBI Citizens' Academy. Aakenbaaken & Kent published her first mystery, **The Easter Egg Murder**, in February 2013. Pat is working on **Murder on Sagebrush Lane**, the second in the series.*

When I meet a group of new people, inevitably someone in that crowd has aspirations to be a writer. Either that, or when they learn that I've had a book published, they want to know the "secret" of becoming a published writer.

Sometimes it's tempting to let them go on thinking it's a secret, and that once it's revealed, they can instantly have the thing for which they've yearned. But I remember too well how it felt to be that questioner, and the only fair thing is to tell them the truth: There is no secret. At least there's no ONE secret.

Unless you've taken college courses in creative writing, you probably don't know one of the basic facts: There is no one rule about how to write or how to become published. (There's the obvious caveat about spelling and grammar, of course, but as far as technique, or strict rules for telling the story, no.) If I could give a seminar about how to do that, I'd start out by telling them the first "secrets":

1. **Put your butt in the chair and start writing.** It doesn't much matter what you write, just write. I've heard countless people say, "I don't know what to write. I need ideas." To that I'd say, write about yourself and your life story, or write about one of your parents, aunts or uncles. Write *anything* as long as it gives you practice stringing sentences together.
2. **Join a writers group.** Find an organization of writers in your area and join. There you will meet writers in all stages of the craft. By associating with writers, you learn things you'll need as you develop your own writing skills. One of the first things I learned when I joined such a group is that if you're serious about writing, you need to call yourself a writer—even if you haven't written anything yet. There's tremendous power in taking on that persona. You have to first convince yourself.
3. **Take classes, attend writing seminars, go to writers conferences.** You'll meet people who understand the challenges of the craft, and writers at all stages in their careers. Take advantage of the panel discussions where writers share their experiences. When you decide what you are interested in writing, seek out authors with similar interests. If mysteries intrigue you, hang out with mystery writers; if romance is your desire, associate with romance writers.
4. **Don't shackle yourself.** When I first decided to write a novel, I was told I should outline. That technique works well for many writers, but not for all. I thought if I didn't outline, I wasn't doing it right. I wasted a lot of time trying to outline, got extremely discouraged when I couldn't do it, and gave up novel writing. Another twenty years passed, and by that time I was old enough to realize there might be another way. (I had become a bit rebellious by then.) I tried the "seat-of-the-pants" approach, and at last I got something going. It was a start and I was encouraged. Eventually, I met other writers who also were not fans of outlining. That solidified my decision not to worry about doing an outline before starting a book. If you want to try outlining as you go, that's another option available to you.
5. **Join a critique group.** This is probably one of the best things you can do for your writing. But there are some things to watch out for. Make sure it's a group you are comfortable with. You must be able to depend on their honesty and sincerity when giving criticism and praise. You also must be able to help other members of the group by thoughtfully critiquing their work, too. If you don't click with the first group, resolve to find another more in tune with your personality.
6. **Arm yourself with the proper tools.** Obviously you can write an award-winning novel using pen and paper, but I don't recommend it. You'll discover that most writers are expected to have basic computer skills in order to electronically transmit their work to an agent, editor, or eventually to a publisher. So if you can manage it, get yourself a computer equipped with Microsoft Word. That appears to be the standard everyone expects when you have your work ready to send out. Be sure you have a really good dictionary and use it. If you can do so, get yourself a copy of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. It's the industry standard, and as of now, the 16th edition is the most recent.

7. **Be prepared to spend some money.** I know, you thought you could write a best seller, then sit back and rake in the dough. Well maybe you can, but you'll have to jump through a lot of hoops first. One of those is to hire a professional editor to go through your finished product. Before you even think about shopping your book to an agent or publisher, make sure your work is as good as you can make it. Raw, rough talent has been discovered in the past, and a publisher might stretch a point and see through the bad spelling, grammar, and plot inconsistencies and recognize such rough work could be the next blockbuster. But don't handicap yourself like that. It's rough enough to get the attention of editors and publishers with a well-written, clean manuscript. You don't need the albatross of poor presentation hanging around your neck going in.

Perhaps the most important thing to take away from all this advice is that if you're out to become wealthy and have decided to become a writer in pursuit of that goal, give it up. There are plenty of better ways than writing books to become wealthy. Participating in the lottery is one way that comes to mind. What I'm saying is don't give up your day job. Never think that if you sit down, write a book, send it off, money will flow to you in large quantities. It does happen occasionally, but more often than not, it doesn't. And if you do manage to find a publisher, don't sit back and think your job is done. You will be expected to market and promote the book (unless you are one of those few that I mentioned above who DO get the magic book deal.) You must become a salesman, and the product is you and your book.

But if you love to write, none of the above will discourage you. If you write, every day if you can, eventually you will have learned enough, practiced enough, and become a writer for real. And when you do, I want to read your book!

--Patricia Smith Wood (pwood73@comcast.net)

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(In the spirit of Pat's good advice, culled from years of experience, here are the three short pieces of advice I gave to members of *Invisible Ink*, the CIA writers group that I founded in 2000--Ed.)

1. **Start writing early.** If you find you're good at it, you'll be glad you didn't wait until your 50s like I did. If you find it's difficult, you'll have plenty of time to read more, take writing courses, and join writers' groups.
2. **Develop writing habits that fit with your work life and family life.** Your family wants to see you on weekends and your employer expects a full work week. Some writers rise early. I found that two hours a night, Monday-Thursday, while my family did homework or watched TV, was a good time for me, us and my bosses.
3. **From the moment you start writing, introduce yourself as a writer.** You never know whom you'll meet or sit next to. Aspiring writers need all the breaks serendipity may strew in their paths.

(Also, I use *The Elements of Style* by Strunk & White, also an industry standard. --Ed.)

MWA Announces 2014 Edgar Winners

At the 68th annual Edgar Awards Banquet on May 1st in New York City, the Mystery Writers of America announced this year's recipients of the Edgar Allen Poe awards in the following categories:

Best Novel: *Ordinary Grace* by William Kent Krueger
Best First Novel by an American Author: *Red Sparrow* by Jason Matthews
Best Paperback Original: *The Wicked Girls* by Alex Marwood
Best Fact Crime: *The Hour of Peril: The Secret Plot To Murder Lincoln Before the Civil War* by Daniel Stashower
Best Short Story: "The Caxton Private Lending Library & Book Depository" in *Bibliomysteries* by John Connolly
Best Critical/Biographical: *America Is Elsewhere: The Noir Tradition in the Age of Consumer Culture* by Erik Dussere
Best Juvenile: *One Came Home* by Amy Timberlake
Best Television Episode Teleplay: "The Fall" by Allan Cubitt
Best Young Adult: *Ketchup Clouds* by Annabel Pitcher

Grandmasters: Robert Crais and Carolyn Hart

Raven Award: Aunt Agatha's Bookstore, Ann Arbor, Michigan

The Simon and Schuster Mary Higgins Clark Award: *Cover of Snow* by Jenny Milchman

Hunting Tactics for a Voracious Reader

How do I find books I might like to read?

- I read book reviews in newspapers, especially the *Wall Street Journal*.
- I look up the authors and titles listed in flyers from organizations such as Literary Guild of Orange County and Men of Mystery.
- If a Goodreads ad (on the right of the screen) looks interesting, I click on it and learn more about the book.
- I subscribe to *Mystery Scene* magazine (print).
- When checking out or reserving a book with ABC Library online catalog, I look at the readalikes displayed.
- I check Goodreads recommendations, which are customized based on books I read & ratings I give them.
- I look for books by my favorite authors.
- Goodreads, Amazon and FictFact notify me by email when a book is published by an author I like.
- I read book reviews on the book blogs of bloggers in the same reading challenges I'm in, such as Historical Fiction.
- I look up the books my family and friends recommend.
- I look for books by the authors I meet at Croak & Dagger meetings.
- I check the library staff picks and themed booklists (online or at a branch), and special displays at a branch.
- I browse the Croak & Dagger book swap.
- I browse bookstores when I'm on vacation.

What criteria do I use to select books from those sources?

- I select books first and foremost by setting (second by protagonist, third by plot).
- I prefer to read books that are in a series, since if I enjoy the first book, I can repeat the pleasure in subsequent works.
- I choose mystery books much more often than others, but I occasionally like a short dose of chick-lit.
- I like to read about feisty independent female protagonists bucking tradition.
- I check the library catalog. There are plenty of choices at the library, and I read so many books, I normally don't buy fiction for myself. If I am really excited about a book, I can request the library purchase it, or just wait. They get new books regularly, and they're likely to get the popular ones.
- The last step before I add a book to my To-Read list is to check its Kirkus review on ABC Library Online Catalog. If Kirkus didn't like it or didn't review it, I don't bother with it.
- I keep track of the books I want to read with Shelfari, Goodreads and FictFact (I used to keep a spreadsheet).

How do I choose the next book to read?

- I look at my reading challenges, and consider the books I listed for each challenge. Late in the year, I only consider books that will fit the challenges I haven't finished yet.
- Sometimes I just crave the experience of reading a favorite author (Elizabeth George or Michael Connelly).
- I always try to read a series in order, to get maximum enjoyment from character development. I use the FictFact website to keep track of what book is next in each series.
- I choose a book that is currently available @ the library, or on a TBR shelf in my house.

--Susan Zates, (smzates@qwest.net)

In the spirit of the above article, here are some mysteries that might go well with a glass of your favorite. No endorsement of these titles is implied.

Wine and Winemaking Mysteries

Series:

Wine Countries mysteries by Ellen Crosby

Merlot Murders

Chardonay Charade

Bordeaux Betrayal

Riesling Retribution

The Viognier Vendetta

The Sauvignon Secret

Babe Stern mysteries by Peter Lewis

Dead in the Dregs

Sunny McCloskey Napa Valley mysteries by Nadia Gordon

Sharp Shooter
Death by the Glass
Murder Alfresco
Lethal Vintage

Nikki Sands Mysteries by Michele Scott

Murder Uncorked
Murder by the Glass
Silenced by Syrah
A Vintage Murder
Corked by Cabernet
A Toast to Murder

Vengeance in the Vineyard by Janet Hubbard

Champagne, The Farewell
Bordeaux, A Wise Old Wine

Sam Levitt Mysteries by Peter Mayle

The Vintage Caper
The Marseille Caper
The Corsican Caper

Verlaque and Bonnet Mysteries by M.L. Longworth

Death in the Vines
Death at Chateau Bremont
Murder in the Rue Dumas

Standalone books:

Blood on the Vine by Donald Bain
Death of a Wine Merchant by David Dickinson
The Dark Vineyard by Martin Walker
In Vino Veritas by J. M. Gregson
Murder Will Travel by Emily Toll
Grape Expectations by Tamar Myers
A Ton of Trouble by Lynne Murray
Here Today, Dead Tomorrow by Cynthia Baxter

Reviews

Rob's Random Shots

May Case File Number One

Killer Miracle by Laura F. Sanchez, ABQ Press, 2013, 264 pp, TPB

This mystery novel was written by a debut author, but it most resembles *The Milagro Beanfield War* meets the four Sonny Baca detective novels of Rudolfo Anaya. Ms. Sanchez wisely chose to set her mystery in territory not yet overrun with either sleuths or novelists, the northern New Mexico small towns south of Chama, near Tierra Amarilla.

Here's the set-up: Elderly Emilio Cordova, a popular and prolific *santero* (carver of wooden saints), is discovered shot to death one morning just outside his workshop. Enter the cast of investigators: Albuquerque architect and renovator Gwen Callendar, Emilio's niece Elena, and local Police Chief (force of two) Ruben Lopez. Suspicions point to an outsider and fingers point at Gwen's lover, Mack Wilson, who came into town late the night of the murder. Ruben quickly arrests Mack, but Gwen is able to spring him when she finds out Mack spent most of the night with his estranged wife. She is not happy about his alibi.

Then we get to see evidence as it's uncovered. Ms. Sanchez carefully doles out the clues and red herrings between Gwen, Elena, and Ruben. Since we follow each of the three in chapters from their points of view, we learn what each of them learns, some of which seems contradictory, and we have to wait to see them share findings with the others. Along the way, small town secrets are turned up, from affairs to unscrupulous land dealings. There's romance between Elena and Ruben, a funny scene where a nude Elena is stranded in the laundry room of a house of a former boyfriend and overhears a conversation that will not become relevant for more than a hundred pages.

The story is punctuated delightfully by explanations of more than 20 carved *santos* from written explanations by the murder victim. It's not clear whether Ms Sanchez will return to this locale and her colorful characters in her

next book, but if you read this entertaining and engrossing mystery, you'll be urging her do so, just as I will.

Key:

PB=Paperback

TP=Trade Paperback

NC=Hardcover

May Case File Number Two

China Trade (A Lydia Chin Mystery) by S.J. Rozan, 1994, St. Martin's, 263 pp, PB

From finding a new friend in Laura Sanchez' debut mystery, I took this from the book box at the February meeting to renew acquaintance with an old friend. I met S.J. Rozan at Left Coast Crime in El Paso back in 2005 and have since read some of her mysteries. And she's in the headlines recently, having won the 2014 Edgar for Best Short Story.

One book I hadn't read was the first in this series. Here's disclaimer of sorts. Ms. Rozan's mysteries in this series are unique. New York Chinatown resident Lydia Chin is a PI partnered with Anglo (and older) Bill Smith. Many authors use pairs of sleuths. Margaret Coel does; I do. Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch goes through partners quickly, every other book, sometimes more often. Ms. Rozan tells one novel from Lydia's point of view and the next one from Bill's. Each is featured in the other's stories (they are partners). I know of no other author who does this, although the late Ed McBain used a stable of police detectives in his 87th Precinct novels.

This one, as I said the first in the series, starts out modestly. There's been an apparent robbery of Chinese export porcelains from a local non-profit, Chinatown Pride, whose head asks Lydia to investigate. Throughout the series, Lydia's mother and brother disapprove of her vocation and want her to marry some nice Chinese boy or get into a more respectable career. We get to find out about Chinatown gangs and police friends of Lydia, all of whom,

like her mother and brother, also wish her to drop the case. Although the porcelains are not individually valuable, their loss (non insured) will cause loss of face for Chinatown Pride, so the pair pursue any possible leads. This "leads" to Lydia being beaten up by gang members and a murder of a potential witness. How Lydia and Bill sift the right clues to wrap up the thieves (and a killer) makes a great story and I was disappointed to have the book end.

Now I have to find more Rozan mysteries to read. You won't have to search very far. I returned this volume to the book box.

--Rob Kresge, rkresge777@comcast.net,
ww.robertkresge.com

Susan's Reviews

The Haunted Hotel by Wilkie Collins, Wildside Press, 2008 (reprint; first published 1878), 228 pp (HC).

I selected this mystery specifically for its Venice setting, as a "Venice in February" annual reading challenge, but I was disappointed. Venice itself is not a key part of the mystery, which could easily have been set in a different city without any changes to key elements. The story is entirely about sinister events taking place inside a hotel, not outside in the city.

I was also disappointed with the writing compared to the author's great novel *The Moonstone*. The main characters didn't reveal personality, just served as stereotypes or caricatures. The countess was far too melodramatic for my taste—and I usually really enjoy a Gothic mystery. Part of the solution was obvious early on, but not all of it.

This was a quick read, not memorable. I still plan to read Collins' famous work *The Woman in White*.

SERIES MYSTERIES:

Off Season by Philip R. Craig, Avon, 2005 (reprint), 214 pp (PB), Book Five of his mystery series set on Martha's Vineyard in the 1990s.

Protagonist J.W. Jackson is a former Boston police detective, now living the good life as a year-round islander. His great love is fishing (early in the story he describes in detail how he caught the biggest bluefish of his life). J.W. makes ends meet by working as a handyman and a caretaker, and he is well known to fellow islanders.

When island resident Chug Lovell is killed, lawyer Heather asks J.W. to investigate unofficially. He deduces more from the deceased's home than the off-island official investigators did, and he eventually solves the case. In this book especially, I enjoy the protagonist, his irreverent personality and descriptions of the island much more than the mystery, clues or solution.

The Martha's Vineyard mystery series is the late author's loving tribute to life on the island with his wife Shirley Prada Craig. Together they published a cookbook, *Delish! The J.W. Jackson Recipes* (still in print). The author's son Jamie Craig maintains the website <http://www.philiprcraig.com> in his father's memory.

Quilt or Innocence by Elizabeth Spann Craig, Obsidian/NAL, 2012, 281 pp (PB), Book One of the Southern Quilting Mystery series set in a contemporary small town in North Carolina.

Beatrice has just retired from her career as an art museum curator in Atlanta. She chose Dappled Hills because her daughter Piper lives there. Beatrice imagines she will spend her retirement quietly and peacefully relaxing in a hammock in her garden, reading fiction and sipping mint juleps.

She finds out on her first day in residence that it will not be quiet or peaceful. Her next-door neighbor, Meadow, literally pulls her by the arm to visit her house. Meadow introduces Beatrice to her friends from the local quilt guild and assumes Beatrice will join them and learn to quilt. Beatrice is not interested, but Meadow doesn't hear "no." Beatrice soon finds herself at the guild's quilting bee, where most quilters are warm and friendly.

However, all is not perfect in their little town. One of the guild members, Judith, stirs up hostility with several quilters. When Judith is murdered, many of the quilters seem to have motives. Beatrice decides to investigate, to hurry the case along because the local police don't seem to be making any headway. Of course, as Beatrice comes closer to the truth, she becomes a threat to the killer.

It's pleasant and easy read and it's not difficult to figure out the killer. I originally selected the book because I like to quilt. I did not like the setting, characters or plot enough to continue with the series. Beatrice's pushy next-door neighbor really got on my nerves.

Fall into Death by Emily Toll, Berkeley/Wheeler Large Print 2004, 424 pp (HC) Book Four of the Booked for Travel contemporary mystery series.

After middle-aged Lynne Montgomery was widowed, she purchased a travel agency in her home town, Floritas California (a fictitious small town in San Diego County). The first two books of the series, *Murder Will Travel* and *Murder Pans Out*, are set on travel tours Lynne leads in California. In *Fall into Death*, Lynne and her adult daughter Jenna travel to New England to visit Lynne's mother and aunt.

Lynne's mother Priscilla has just purchased a B&B in New Hampshire. Her Aunt Abigail (Priscilla's sister) asks Lynne to check into the finances, as she suspects Priscilla is a victim of shady dealing. Lynne and Jenna plan a week-long trip in October, at the peak fall foliage season.

On their first day at the B&B, Lynne discovers human remains in the basement. The police start an investigation of the crime scene. Lynne, Priscilla and Jenna get out of town for a while, partly to escape the press and also for Lynne to check out potential stops for her tours. Lynne adds stops for sleuthing, including trying to track down the elusive man who financed the inn.

There are three major storylines: 1) the mystery, as clues are revealed and additional killings occur; 2) the family bonding and

reminiscing about loved ones in earlier times; and 3) the beauty of fall foliage and the huge variety of historic sites to see in New England. Point of view changes between Lynne, Jenna, Priscilla, and, to build suspense, the killer.

The places they visit, and the beautiful scenery described, are bound to make you want to plan your own fall foliage tour in New England.

The next and final book of the series is *Keys to Death*.

The Good Thief's Guide to Paris by Chris Ewan, Minotaur Books 2008, 280 pp (HC), the second book of the Good Thief's Guide mystery series set in modern-day international cities.

The series premise is clever and unusual: Protagonist Charlie Howard writes a mystery/thriller series about a high-stakes international art thief—as a cover for his own career as a high-stakes international art thief. Charlie has an engaging personality seasoned with wry humor. He has a close friendship with his editor Victoria, although we learn in this second book that they have never met in person.

Charlie's Paris caper is filled with double-crosses, surprises and betrayals. He is duped into a demonstration of his lockpicking skills, hired to steal a painting, and then a woman is murdered in his apartment. Since he is the main suspect, and the police don't look into other possibilities, Charlie has to investigate the victim's life to find the killer. He finds evidence of a plot to steal a Picasso. From this point on, the plot gets quite complicated—I completely lost the plot by the middle of the book, and my interest waned as a result.

As a result, I didn't enjoy this book as much as the first book. But I like the main premise of the series enough to read one more. Book Three of the series is *The Good Thief's Guide to Vegas*.

Repair to Her Grave by Sarah Graves, Bantam 2001, 320 pp (PB), Book Four of the Home Repair Is Homicide mystery series set in contemporary Eastport, Maine.

Jacobia “Jake” Tiptree used to be a financial investment wizard in New York City, married to a selfish, arrogant surgeon who tyrannized her life and their son’s. One day she ran away from it all, buying an old rambling house with decades of history in the easternmost city of the U.S. Her life and her son’s life changed dramatically on the spot. Now she is familiar with a toolbox and hand tools, making endless repairs, and he is a strong and resourceful young man. Their lives are enhanced by Wade, her strong-silent-type live-in boyfriend.

Jake is tired of working around and catering to guests all summer, so this year she didn’t invite any. An unexpected guest shows up anyway, apparently an invitation she forgot about, so she tries to put up with him. When he falls off the pier and drowns, his distraught girlfriend comes to town for answers.

For the first time, Jake and her best friend Ellie discuss the haunted nature of Jake’s house just might make it impossible to live there. It’s surprising; up to now in the series I thought the random movement of objects in the house was part of its charm for Jake. This installment of the series suggests the house is trying to get Jake to solve a mystery related to its former owner, so it (the house) can rest easy.

Jake finds a treasure map with invisible ink inside a wall, and so begins a pirate-adventure subplot. There’s also a subplot involving a slightly-dishonest antiques dealer, another subplot with a gabby old fart publishing a tell-all book that reveals the town’s shady secrets. Jake travels throughout the town snooping, and compares notes with Ellie. Plot twists and turns abound; it’s a bit hard to keep track, especially if you put the book down and don’t get back to it for a few days. No worries; it doesn’t seem to matter if you miss a detail here and there in this chatty tale.

Jake solves it all in the end, after a tense race against the tide flowing into ocean-front caves. All malefactors get the fates they deserve. Loose ends are all tied up quite nicely. It’s pleasant light entertainment. Next book in the series is *Wreck the Halls*.

A Stranger in Mayfair by Charles Finch, Minotaur Books 2010, 308 pp (HC), Book Four of the Charles Lenox mystery series set in Victorian London.

Charles Lenox is a well-born amateur detective, recently elected to Parliament, newly wed to his longtime neighbor and best friend Lady Jane Grey. This book covers the very beginnings of both his marriage and his career in Parliament. Although both events are the greatest joys of his life, they also bring new challenges. Serving as an MP requires a full-time commitment, and he is now expected by many (including Jane) to give up his detective hobby. He wonders if he is a bad fit as an MP, more suited to detection. He cannot bear to give detection up, so accepts when Ludovic Starling, a fellow MP, requests his help.

Starling’s young footman was murdered in an alley near the Starlings’ home. Charles is heavily burdened with “blue books”—required reading for MPs—so he decides he must offload some investigation to his apprentice, John Dallingham, and finds for himself a worthy cause to champion in Parliament. As evidence is discovered of the footman’s parallel life, and red herrings abound, Charles is repeatedly drawn back into the murder investigation.

The history of Parliament and its traditions is lovingly described, including all the pomp and circumstance of opening day as experienced by “newly minted” Charles. Fascinated with the traditions and rituals of Parliament, I was much less interested in the murder mystery. His colleague Starling is not a sympathetic character, for one thing. Charles’ soul-searching about his true vocation is the real heart of the story.

Plum Island by Nelson DeMille, Grand Central Publishing 1998, 608 pp (HC), Book One of the John Corey series.

John Corey is an NYPD homicide detective wounded in the line of duty, convalescing in his uncle’s summer home on modern-day rural Long Island, New York. It’s an idyllic setting for an enjoyable summer recuperating by the

water—until the local sheriff asks for John’s help with a double homicide.

The victims were two biologists who researched animal diseases at Plum Island, a secure bio-research site. John had become good friends with them during the summer, so he is personally motivated to find the killer. At the crime scene, their private dock where they were shot upon return from sailing, John notices their cooler is missing (they always took it with them sailing). Due to the nature of the Plum Island research facility, the scary possibility is raised of stolen disease samples for germ warfare. Representatives from multiple federal agencies take over the case. John’s irreverence and verbal sparring with the by-the-book Feds is entertaining and enjoyable.

Early into the book, I decided I like this protagonist and want to read the whole series. John works most closely with a local detective, and they come to respect one another’s abilities. John independently researches the biologists’ social contacts and learns a local legend that pirate treasure is buried on Plum Island. He discovers the biologists purchased a plot of land there, presumably to search for treasure. During his local history quest, he meets a local woman and falls in love. Their new romance and the time they spend together is a sweet interlude.

John begins to suspect the truth about the murder, and the killer strikes again. During a fierce storm, John sets out on the water in a suspenseful chase to catch the killer. This is a long book; even the final confrontation is a long episode. But it is all very enjoyable reading. The next book in the series is *The Lion’s Game*.

--Susan Zates, smzates@qwest.net

†**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 Rob Kresge at rkresge777@comcast.net, with “Nooseletter” in the subject line.

The *Nooseletter* is distributed to all members electronically. □ —*Rob*

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Summary of Findings

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

Upcoming Meetings

Tuesday, May 27, 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, June 24, 7:00 p.m.

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

Meetings are free to the public.

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

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

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

Cliff Hanger by Philip R. Craig, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993, 227 pages, HC

This is book four of the Martha's Vineyard mystery series set in the 1990s. The first three books of the series have been set on Martha's Vineyard, but half of this one is set in Durango, Colorado.

J. W. Jackson, retired from Boston PD in his mid-thirties with a bullet near his spine, lives a vacation lifestyle on Martha's Vineyard. Besides fishing, he does handyman work, occasionally works for the police, and takes care of vacation homes for friends.

"Books, beer, fish, and fresh veggies on Martha's Vineyard made a winning combination, one which had made an islander (howbeit a transplanted one) out of me."

For me, a "*muy simpatico*" facet of J.W. is his fondness for the public library, where he checks out books by the armful. He says: "Libraries are some of my favorite places. They're filled with books and information and give you the good feeling that no matter how much you've read, there's an endless amount of reading material still ahead of you, so you never have to worry about running out. It's a nice certainty in an uncertain world."

I also enjoy J.W.'s occasional understated humor: "I tacked in past a crowd of people on the Edgartown town dock, waved at some waves I received, slid past the yacht club, and fetched my stake with an eggshell landing. I looked around. No one was watching. There are hundreds of observers when I come in too fast or too slow or otherwise screw up my landings,

but never anyone there to see me do it right. It's a law of the sea."

J.W. takes care of the summer home and boat belonging to a professor in New England, who suddenly and mysteriously becomes the target of a hit man. The hit man is shooting at J.W. to start with, thinking he's the professor, clearly not knowing his target. J.W. goes out west to Durango to warn his friend, after J.W.'s address book is copied by the hit man.

J.W. is impressed by the completely different landscape and climate out West. He is somewhat mesmerized by a strong and resourceful young woman, but also pines for his ladylove, Zee. His future with Zee is completely in doubt. Zee is off to New Hampshire for the summer, to decide if and how she would like to re-invent her life.

Rather than fishing and piloting a boat, J.W. is riding a horse and hiking most days. He tries to let local law enforcement to handle the case, but the killer outsmarts them. J.W. stages a dangerous confrontation in the mountains to keep his friends safe.

Reading this pleasant series is like being on vacation. For the first time in the series, as J.W. cooks his fresh gourmet dishes he gives the quantities of ingredients as a recipe, and he first uses the exclamation "delish" to describe his satisfaction with his home cooking. Both foreshadow Craig's cookbook *Delish!* that contain his recipes from the series.

--Susan Zates, smzates@qwest.com

Summary of the Board Meeting Minutes of Sisters in Crime

Croak and Dagger Chapter, ABQ, NM, May 19, 2014

Board members present: President Jan Bray, Vice President Joan Saberhagen, Secretary Olin Bray, Treasurer Fred Aiken, Program Chair Rita Herther, Membership Chair Pat Wood, Nooseletter Editor Rob Kresge

President Jan Bray called the meeting to order at 7:15. Minutes from the March 17 meeting were approved.

The Treasurer reported that as of May 19, our checking account balance was \$2,660.21. Membership report: Our paid up membership is now 49.

The next three programs (May, June, and July) will be Judith Van Gieson, Steve Marshall with the FBI on firearms, and possibly an ER physician for July.

Announcements: Fred Aiken is doing his class on the business of writing for Southwest Writers on June 8, 15, and 29. Talk to Fred for details. (FAAiken@AOL.com)

Old business: Rob reported that an event at a shooting range is not possible. They are not prepared to deal with a group, since most of their interactions are one on one with their students/new gun owners. However, our June speaker will be an FBI firearms expert, Steve Marshall, who has spoken to our group before.

We will do another event at the Albuquerque Little Theater production of *Anatomy of a Murder* (Jan 23 – Feb 8). We will plan a dinner and play sometime during that period.

We are getting closer to a possible wine tasting event probably at Total Wines just south of Coronado probably in September. At the May meeting we will survey the attendees to see if there is enough interest. Fred is checking on some final details. Since there are several mystery series set in various wine areas, the *Nooseletter* will have reviews of a number of them in the May issue before the wine tasting. Board members will each try to read and review one of them for the next *Nooseletter*.

New business: None

The next board meeting will be at 7:00 at Jan's home, 10801 Lagrima de Oro. The July meeting will be July 14 – the second rather than the third Monday, so we will have some time between the board meeting and our regular meeting on July 22.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30.



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.